Planning Mission: Design in Context

"Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context—a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan." Such was the advice of Eliel Saarinen, renowned Finnish architect.

The missionary task is not identical with that of an architect, to be sure. Our concern in mission is with people rather than things—and the design is ultimately God’s. Yet Saarinen’s counsel is relevant. As missionaries “we are fellow workers for God” (1 Cor. 3:9, RSV); that involves intelligent planning, heedful of the “next larger context.”

Ted Ward insists that the very survival of today’s Christian missions will depend upon courageous and visionary change—a “reconstruction of thought . . . that cannot be accommodated by the older and simplistic distinctions between liberal and conservative, fundamentalist and modernist, Catholic and Protestant.”

In “Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church,” Charles W. Forman identifies two tendencies in the worldwide phenomenon of pluralism: relativism and civil religion on the one hand, and encystment and isolation on the other—both tendencies contrary to the missionary outlook and a formidable challenge to effective planning.

The Committee for East Asia and the Pacific in the Division of Overseas Ministries, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., offers guidelines for missionary involvement in social-justice and human-rights issues. W. Dayton Roberts of the Latin America Mission and Simon E. Smith, S.J., of the United States office for Jesuit Missions comment on these guidelines from the background of their own missionary experience.

Planning for present and future is never unrelated to the past. Robert Streit (1875–1930), Johannes Dindinger (1881–1958), and Johannes Rommerskirchen (1899–1978) were true pioneers in modern Roman Catholic missiology. Willi Henkel, O.M.I., their current successor as director of the Pontifical Missionary Library and editor of Bibliografia Missionaria, describes and evaluates their legacy.

C. René Padilla takes a hard, biblical look at the homogeneous unit principle in relation to church unity. He concludes that the New Testament writers regarded Christian fellowship across cultural barriers “not as an optional blessing to be enjoyed whenever circumstances were favorable to it . . . but as essential to Christian commitment.”

Mission planners cannot afford to overlook what their most thoughtful contemporaries have to say. We commend, therefore, our editors’ selection of fifteen outstanding books for mission studies published in 1981.
Christian Missions—Survival in What Forms?

Ted Ward

When survival depends on change, human institutions often tend perversely toward suicide. In times of social upheaval, clinging to yesterday’s images provides solace. For modern Christian missions to survive, it will take brave and visionary change, not just solace.

The realm of “modern missions” shows inadequate willingness or capacity to adjust to the conditions requisite for its own survival. This institutional creature of two centuries of Western imagination hangs in the balance. To argue that the mission of the church will continue, no matter what, is beside the point. The institution of missions as we know it today—in North America, Europe, and among the planted churches of the world—comes out of a unique moment of sociopolitical history. The conditions that gave it birth (spiritual zeal and profound moral conviction, coupled with entrepreneurial wealth, colonial expansion, a vast-but-reachable globe, controllable others, and paternal perceptions of other cultures) are less characteristic of our times. The church in North America, at least, is coming to be motivated by other values.

Pessimism grows out of the apparent unwillingness to invent anew. The mission of the church has no less meaning, motive, and message in the 1980s, but the end of old models is in sight. Even as the vision of the house-top in Joppa shook Peter into a state of openness for the “unthinkable” invitations to eat forbidden meats and to visit an inquiring Gentile army officer, a new vision is all that stands between the present stalemates and an exciting future. The limited perceptions of what God intends to do can easily give way to fresh, invigorated, Spirit-filled renewal whenever getting on with the work of Jesus Christ becomes more important than holding onto old forms. Thus optimism is free for the asking.

The present transitional scene is full of object lessons. Shrinkage of the economy suggests that people will be forced to become more discriminating about where they put their money. The organization that cannot give convincing evidence of its bang-for-the-buck ratio will be hurting. Church people are already asking questions about who should be sent overseas to do what.

The object lesson of vast fund-raising by certain media-convinced con-scientious relief and development organizations will not go forever unheeded. The me-too tendency will soon emerge. Some mission organizations will copy one part of this apparent formula for success: the use of television and research-based direct mail for fund-raising. Others will copy the other part: the emphasis on doing comprehensible deeds of kindness. Some may even get both parts together—but they will likely need new constituencies, because some of their donors will be quite convinced that the emphasis on verbal proclamation has been compromised.

The closing of borders to missionaries will surely continue to force mission organizations into three classes: Type A—missions that concentrate more and more of their missionaries in already evangelized centers where access is relatively free; Type B—missions that concentrate their resources (and if they continue to send them, their missionaries) in places where the frontiers of outreach demand creative, new ways to get in and validate their presence and purpose; Type C—missions that limit their activity to the supporting of national Christians and whatever else can be done to encourage and assist, short of sending missionaries.

In a world where every human act has a political meaning, the cloak of “apolitical” vagueness has been worn thin on the backs of missionaries. The demand for political consciousness and the thrusting of missions and missionaries into the spotlight of political conflict (e.g., Peru, Guatemala, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Zaire, South Korea) will further polarize mission organizations. Some will persist in asserting their nonpolitical nature and will thus continue to aid and abet the status quo, for good or for evil. Others will accept their political meaning and influence. They will be swept up in ever more complex webs of intrigue and decision-making about matters they would far rather leave alone. There are no easy choices; one wonders if, after all, the naive may inherit the world of foreign missions. If so, the era will soon close.

Now that Western thought is able to entertain the countermechanistic proposition of “appropriate technology,” can the discussion about appropriate institutions be far behind? Considering the large and still expanding proportion of missionaries sent out to take posts in ever larger and more costly institutions, has the point of diminishing returns not already been passed? As the emphasis on “unreached people” increases, the inappropriateness of large and costly institutions (Western-style hospitals, schools, pastoral accreditation schemes, radio, aviation networks, and the like) will be far easier to challenge. As they are, inappropriate institutions almost always depend on (1) outside money, (2) alien know-how, (3) government cooperation, (4) expatriate leadership, and (5) rejection of folkways by local Christians. When these challenges become vocal the schisms will force all sorts of new alignments.

The illustrations above suggest an upheaval and reconstruction of thought within the “missionary-minded” people of God that cannot be accommodated by the older and simplistic distinctions between liberal and conservative, fundamentalist and modernist, Catholic and Protestant, or the ever so slightly more sophisticated trichotomy: evangelical, conciliar, and Catholic. The new alignments, while varying in one axis according to view of the Scriptures, may vary in dozens of other axes according to temporary resolutions of the issues above. The hopeful possibilities for constructive change depend on a shift in Christian consciousness about what is truly important.

A recent paper by Larry Horton1 suggests that the important schisms among mission organizations at the evangelical core may be best explained as a choice among three options: (1) to become more withdrawn, isolationist, and exclusive, (2) to follow in the footsteps of the social-activistic and politically liberal missionary experiments (especially associated with Latin American trends), or (3) to join forces with other organizations bent on a politically conservative and zealously dogmatic preservation of manipulative forms of missionary presence. (The accumulation of all these not-so-nice descriptors into this third option does not do justice to Horton’s treatment, but does suggest the easier choices that may be made by those who reject and those who accept the proposition of verbal proclamation as the ultimate issue in missions.)

Seven “camps” of North Americans and Europeans seem to be pitching their tents along the trail: (1) the persistent—those who hold to a belief that God will continue to honor the approaches that have served well in the past; (2) the overseers—those who believe

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Notes


2. "Missionaries of the clerical sort": Bible college or seminary trained, often ordained or working within a community where the leadership people are ordained, describing their primary occupation and identity as "missionary."
THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY

By COLIN CHAPMAN


Starting from basic human questions, this popularly
written and richly illustrated handbook makes available
in practical, manual form, a wealth of information to
help people understand how Christianity provides the
essential key to the meaning and value of life.

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compared with alternatives in a helpful ‘directory’
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An initial look at basic human questions about
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2. CHRISTIAN ANSWERS TO HUMAN
QUESTIONS
A presentation of basic convictions which enables
the reader to start working out answers to the
questions considered in Section 1.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE CHRISTIAN
WORLD VIEW
Fundamental Christian beliefs about God, Man,
The Universe, Truth, and Salvation are explored.

4. TESTING THE CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW
The verification of truth in History, Philosophy,
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5. UNDERSTANDING AND TESTING THE
ALTERNATIVES
Alternative claims to truth are considered in this
examination of different religions, philosophies,
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6. FOCUSING ON JESUS OF NAZARETH
The importance of Jesus Christ as the center of the
Christian world view becomes clear.

7. SEEING AND BELIEVING
A powerful conclusion to this inquiry into the truth
of Christian faith.

Supplementing the text are dozens of photographs
— both color and black-and-white — and over
1,000 quotations from the Bible as well as other
writers and thinkers.
Religious Pluralism and the Mission of the Church

Charles W. Forman

The rapid spread of religious pluralism is one of the most noticeable signs of our times. Of course, when the world is considered as a whole, there has always been religious pluralism, but a pluralism of religions in every part of the world is the thing that is new and the thing that will concern us here. We are faced with what may be called a desegregation of religions. No religion is confined to a particular continent or country any more. What were once called the “religions of the East” are vibrantly alive in the West. Even a so-called national religion like Japanese Shinto is with what may be called a desegregation of religions. No religion is but a pluralism of religions in every part of the world is the thing that is new and the thing that will concern us here. We are faced with what may be called a desegregation of religions. No religion is confined to a particular continent or country any more. What were once called the “religions of the East” are vibrantly alive in the West. Even a so-called national religion like Japanese Shinto is spread to other lands and among non-Japanese people. Hans-Werner Gensichen in his overarching study of the theology of missions makes it clear that this is a fact that needs to be recognized by Christian missions and needs greater thought from missionologists.

It is strange that in the past students of mission have not paid attention to the phenomenon of religious pluralism, since missions were creating the phenomenon wherever they went. Pluralism did not spread to the West in past generations, but it was part of the missionary impact on the East. As a result of mission work Christianity began to appear alongside the traditional religion of each land and created a pluralist situation where there had previously been none or increased pluralism where it already existed. Only in some of the South Pacific islands can it be said that the result of Christian missions was other than pluralism, that a unified traditional faith was replaced by a unified Christendom. Yet elsewhere the pluralism that accompanied missions was not clearly recognized, nor its implications explored. Foreign mission theory in America, for example, paid no attention to what happens in a pluralist situation and how it can affect our understanding of religion, except perhaps for some indirect reflections during a brief and atypical period in the 1920s. The reason for the indifference is doubtless that pluralism was thought of as only a transitional phase. There would be a temporary pluralism in various lands as a stage in the process of conversion of entire peoples, but that stage did not in itself merit attention.

Today, however, it is becoming apparent that what was thought of as a temporary stage is in fact the long-term prospect and that the pluralism which Christians introduced into the East and the South is being introduced by other religions to the West and the North. As a result Christian scholars are at last having to pay attention to the situation and examine what Christian attitudes toward it should be.

The stance taken by Christian scholars is decidedly favorable to pluralism. Edward Jurji has edited a book, Religious Pluralism and World Community, in which the writers stress the values of pluralism and offer the support that their various religions can bring to it. Most of the contributors are not Christians, but those who are support the pluralizing trend and press for the development of a more ecumenical spirit, which will help the religions live peacefully together in the various societies. Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his work The Faith of Other Men reminds us that the new world coming into being is a pluralistic world and that we must set our faces deliberately and joyously in that direction or we shall be unable to deal creatively with it. Kenneth Cragg has provided a chapter on “A Theology of Religious Pluralism” in his Christianity in World Perspective, where he makes the basic point that we must recognize the pluralistic reality before us, whatever our sense of the providential purpose in it may be, and urges us to a hospitality toward other religions that clearly implies a positive stance with regard to this reality.

These authors are thinking primarily of pluralism in the world as a whole rather than pluralism within each society. W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, however, in his essay “Pluralismus—Versuchung oder Chance” clearly has in mind the situation within pluralistic societies. He recognizes that this situation creates temptations to relativism and syncretism in religion or, alternatively, to isolationism, but he believes that Christians should affirm pluralism as a good situation for the church to live in, despite its temptations. It is good not only when the church is weak but also when the church is strong and might be able to dominate the society. He affirms this because pluralism makes evident the real nature of the church’s life which, in imitation of its master, is to be carried on in humility and not with forceful domination.

Two scholars have given more extensive consideration to the grounds for favoring pluralism. Karl Rahner’s consideration begins on a different note with the statement that from the Christian point of view pluralism is a fact which, in part at least, should not exist. But he goes on to remind us that according to the gospel, opposition to Christ will endure till the end of time and that in this day of world unity such opposition cannot be limited to certain areas but must be found everywhere in a truly pluralistic way. All this, however, is subordinate to his main effort, which is to show that there is a legitimate place for the variety of religions—what he calls lawful religions—during this epoch and a salvific function that they can perform in their pluralistic presence.

A. Th. van Leeuwen is another author who has tried to build a foundation for the appreciation of pluralism. He does this not by way of legitimating the various religions as Rahner does, but by way of emphasizing the gospel’s judgment on all human structures, including religious structures, and the consequent desirability of a secular society where people with different world-views can work together for the common good but without any common, overarching unity of religious outlook.

The weight of opinion, then, is clearly in favor of a positive evaluation of pluralism. Yet the question should not be regarded as excluded from further consideration. It may be that a more balanced verdict is called for, which would not give such wholehearted approval to this new phenomenon. Professor Gensichen stresses the point that the mission must maintain the unconditionality of its hope and not let itself be tied to any world pattern in a final way, even though it must behave responsibly toward the world. This warning needs to be applied to our thinking about pluralism before we embrace it unconditionally. There is much to be said by way of negative as well as positive evaluation and both sides need to be faced in making any overall assessment.

An evaluation of pluralism must start with some evaluation of the old pattern of religious uniformity, especially as that was dis-
John Wesley, and Adoniram Judson are among the names that have been a part of Christendom, partly in contrast to the evils of the era. Louis IX, Saint Theresa, John Milton, Jonathan Edwards, and Abolitionists have lived long enough with Christendom to be well aware of its evils. All of these evils of the old Christendom are well known and they enhance the attractiveness of pluralism.

Perhaps we need to be reminded, however, that there were also positive values in Christendom that need to be set over against these evils. Though it is true that much Christianity tended to be unreflective because there was no real choice involved, it is also true that a great deal of critical reflection on Christian faith was carried on. All the great theologians from the fourth century to the nineteenth are evidence of that critical reflection on the faith. Though it is true that the purely formal and superficial acceptance of the faith was widespread, it is also true that there was an amazing record of profundity and devotion evidenced in the endless number of great Christians of medieval and modern times. Louis IX, Saint Theresa, John Milton, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and Adoniram Judson are among the names that come quickly to mind. It is certainly dubious whether our pluralistic age, which should, theoretically, produce more profound and devoted Christians, since they are Christians by choice rather than by social pressure, is in fact producing or is likely to produce people of comparable depth and quality.

Furthermore, it can hardly be said that the social pressures for Christian conformity succeeded in stifling the prophetic protest contained in Christianity. Movements like the Cluniac and Cistercian reforms, the Lollards, Hussites, Anabaptists, Puritans, Quakers, and Abolitionists testify to the continued vitality of the prophetic tradition through all the centuries of Christendom's dominance. The pluralistic world will do well if it can maintain that tradition as strongly and effectively as Christendom did.

An evaluation of pluralism, therefore, cannot be based solely on a recognition of the shortcomings of the previous pattern. Though there were indeed weaknesses in the past, there were also strengths. So pluralism will have to be evaluated in terms of its own strengths and weaknesses and not simply as the necessary cure for the evils of Christendom.

The positive values of pluralism immediately strike the eye. It provides for greater freedom in religion with real choices, not just theoretical choices, placed before people. It makes for a more worldwide outlook among people because they no longer live in religiously segregated areas that would narrow their viewpoints. From the perspective of Christian faith it accords well with the way in which God has come to humanity in Jesus Christ, not overwhelming us with force or irresistible evidence, but appealing to us in love and freedom. Under pluralism there can be no imposition of Christian faith, and this fits with the Christian understanding of faith as something that by its nature cannot be imposed. It is partly because of these facts that contemporary Christian thinkers have been so appreciative of pluralism, and there can be no denying that they have profound reasons for that appreciation.

Nevertheless, the negative side must also be recognized. Pluralism has its own inadequacies and evils, which we must note. Most obviously there is a weakness in the social fabric that is created by pluralism. People are not united at what they feel to be fundamental levels but only at practical, operational levels. The constant concern of those who write about pluralism is to find ways by which people of different faiths can live together harmoniously and create a society to which all can be loyal. Visser 't Hooft speaks of the difficulties of ruling a people without a common ethos. These difficulties have become more obvious in more recent years and it is evident that many young people are therefore drawn toward societies that assert greater unity and authority even at the price of nearly all liberties. This may be an adumbration of the demise of pluralism. George Lindbeck has warned that where people have no commonly agreed standards of what is ultimately real or good and no filling of their daily life with a sense of ultimate purpose and meaning, they are likely to fall into hedonism leading to social disintegration, or else to turn to tyranny in order to establish a common world-view. That tyranny may not be explicitly religious but it will have to have implicit religious elements if it is to serve its purpose. Religious pluralism may turn out to be a short-lived phenomenon.

Further, religious pluralism pushes people toward a relativistic view of religions. Visser 't Hooft recognizes this as a temptation of pluralism, and Cantwell Smith warns us against it. But in light of past experiences with this phenomenon it is hardly likely that relativism will be avoided. It is not so much a temptation as it is an inherent defect of pluralism. This relativism must almost necessarily be combined with some kind of civil religion that is to be accepted by all and that is to fill the need for a common world-view if the society is not to follow the road toward disintegration and tyranny mentioned above. The Roman Empire with its multiplicity of faiths showed this pattern. Relativism was generally assumed. In Gibbon's famous words: "The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful." But above this relativism there stood the cult of emperor worship, which was a kind of civil religion in which all were required to join.

The same sort of thing has happened in East Asia where Buddhism and Confucianism and Taoism or Shintoism have dwelt together peaceably for many centuries in pluralistic societies. The religions have adopted relativist attitudes as part of their common doctrine. It is said that "all roads lead to the top of Mount Fuji," that individuals have their chosen paths of religious belief and devotion, but that in the end they all lead to the Absolute. Contemporary Buddhist and Confucian writers on world pluralism stress the long experience their faiths have had with this type of social situation and the contribution that they are therefore peculiarly prepared to make to it. That contribution turns out to be a relativist point of view on all religion, a sense of the complementary of opposites—the Yin and the Yang—into which all truth claims can be absorbed.

Yet, as Joseph Kitagawa has shown, underlying all these relativistically viewed religions is a basic, common religion, which all must accept. In Japan, under the Shinto-Confucian synthesis, everyone pledged ultimate loyalty to the throne and the nation. There was an assumption of the unity of religion and government. In the seventh century the government even assigned particular roles to Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Later, Buddhism was established as the state religion. In China Confucianism was part and parcel of the whole government system, linking the hierarchies of earth to heaven and providing an overarching framework within which Taoist, Buddhist, and Confucian religious rites and beliefs could be maintained.

Hindu India, which has always been something of a congeries of religions with very different doctrines and practices, has also always been the very heartland of relativism in religion. Not only Hindu scholars but the ordinary Hindu believers have consistently
maintained a conviction that each religion was helpful or useful to its own group of followers but that in the end it did not matter which was taken as long as it was accepted conscientiously and followed faithfully. Again, with this relativism there was a kind of civil religion represented by the belief in karma, rebirth, and the divinely ordained caste system. Caste rules were iron-clad and people were required to adhere to them meticulously at the same time that they were free to follow the beliefs of their choice regarding any transcendent reality or ultimate salvation.

It is interesting to note that Thomas More when he was drawing the picture of his Utopia arrived at a similar result. He envisioned a society in which people worshiped different deities, the stars or the sun, with most believing in a single being they called Father. They thought that God might desire worship and that if any one religion were true its truth would finally be perceived by all. Yet their rulers also declared that none should believe that the world was the sport of mere chance or that there was no punishment or reward after this life. Such a nonbeliever would be ostracized and would not be allowed to present his views before the public worship in the temples, which fitted with what all held in common. It is easy to discern here a relativism with regard to the many religions and also the establishment of a civil religion over them all. This is hardly what would be expected from the pen of a sixteenth-century Catholic. It must be recognized that More may have been more interested in ridiculing the ways of sixteenth-century Europe than in depicting his ideal for society.

The United States has often been looked to as a pioneer for the Western world in the sphere of religious pluralism, not in this case an interreligious pluralism but a pluralism of Christian churches with no ecclesiastical establishment. It is significant therefore that in America there has developed most fully a relativism regarding Christian denominations. Except for the Catholics and some strongly ethnic groups, most Americans have regarded denominational choice as a matter of individual preference, or even convenience, being quite ready to change denominations and feeling that it did not really matter much which denomination a person might belong to. This was not the common attitude in the early history of the United States but has become increasingly the attitude as the people have lived longer in a pluralist situation. Along with this there has grown a civil religion with its own saints and heroes and special days and sacred writings. In fact the very term “civil religion” has been used most frequently in reference to the American scene.

With such a uniformity in historical experience there would seem to be very little doubt as to the direction in which we will be going in our religious beliefs as our societies become more and more pluralistic. We will in all probability shift toward relativism and some kind of “civil religion.” However, there are examples in history of an alternative form of adjustment to pluralism which is less common and therefore less likely for us, but still important to note. This form is that of isolation and encystment of a religious group. Those few religious people who refuse to adopt the common relativism gradually shut themselves off from the general culture. They stay within their own circle and build walls around their group. Where the religions that are living together are particularly averse to relativism, this alternative pattern is more likely to be adopted. In the Middle East, Islam and Christianity have lived together for centuries and both are religions that resist relativism.

The result has been the encystment of the minority community, the Christians. They have lived to themselves in their own church groups. From the time of Caliph Omar (634–44) to the twentieth-century Turkish Empire, their ingrown ecclesiastical bodies were recognized as legal entities, called millets, which operated the religious institutions, the schools, and the hospitals of their particular sects under the control of their officially recognized religious heads. Christians to preserve their faith and their identity in a society where conversion could go only one way, toward Islam, strengthened the walls around themselves and resisted any suggestion of contact with their neighbors.

One may see evidence of the alternative impacts of pluralism already among Christians. The main body of church people, those who are fully part of the larger culture, are showing signs of increasing relativism in their thinking. Contemporary dialogues between important representatives of different faiths and discussions among Christian scholars both reveal a relativizing trend. On the other hand, those groups of Christians who are less in touch with the larger cultural arena and who want to keep pure “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude, vs. 3), are tending to form a subculture of their own in isolation from the wider currents, meeting only with each other and suspicious of the larger group of Christians.

Pluralism then, it would seem, has its own inadequacies as Christendom had its own. And each has its values and strengths. What then should be our stance toward it? Clearly simply approbation is unsupportable, and outright condemnation is equally to be avoided. We may, by some tour de force, be able to strike an acceptable tentative judgment somewhere between these extremes, but the facts to be judged are so broad in their sweep and so indeterminable in their long-range effects that even this seems doubtful. Only a person in the position of God himself would be able to balance the various considerations fairly and deliver any final judgment on them. Perhaps then it is more fitting for us to refrain from any overall judgment on pluralism. Perhaps it is sufficient for us to recognize the basic fact that each age has its distinctive patterns, which present their own possibilities and their own problems and that in the course of rising to those possibilities and meeting those problems new things are to be learned about God, about the world, and about the Christian faith. We can therefore, without reaching any overall judgment, welcome the patterns of our time as offering much to us by way both of opportunity and of challenge that comes from the goodness of God. Insofar as pluralism is the pattern of society that is likely to flourish in our time we should, as Cantwell Smith says, set our faces deliberately and joyously in that direction and not pine for the patterns of the past. But this is not the joyousness of facing a picnic; rather, it is the joyousness of facing an opportunity to be seized and a challenge to be met. We accept pluralism heartily—but not wholeheartedly—convinced that our calling under God is to bring out the values and to minimize the evils that it offers.

If this is the stance we take, then there are very clear and important consequences for Christian missions that we need to recognize. Once we are committed to bringing out the values and minimizing the evils of pluralism, it is missions that emerge as the most effective way of doing both those things. To be sure the pluralist situation will produce difficulties for missions and we should not blink that fact. Both the tendencies within pluralism that we have described, the major one toward relativism and civil religion and the minor one toward isolation and encystment, are contrary to the whole outlook of missions. It should not surprise us, therefore, that we can see a decided weakening of mission efforts in recent years. The weakening is partly the result of economic difficulties and political pressures, but it is also the result of changing perspectives within the Christian faith, changes brought on by growing relativism or isolationism. Yet mission is especially needed in this time when it is especially difficult.

First, let us see the ways in which mission can accentuate the benefits of pluralism. We have noted that one of those benefits is the religious liberty that pluralism makes possible. It makes
choices real that otherwise would be only theoretical even in a free society. Mission, too, means living in terms of freedom of choice. The whole missionary appeal to people makes no sense if they have no freedom of choice. Missions have normally pleaded for religious freedom, as early missionaries to British India were wont to do and as the worldwide study of religious freedom sponsored by the International Missionary Council made clear.24 In this respect mission is designed to support and strengthen one of the great values of pluralism. It will work to maintain and develop religious freedom in every society.

A second benefit of pluralism that is strengthened by missions is the cross-cultural, world-embracing outlook that it fosters. Pluralist societies have, as we have noted, a tendency to cosmopolitan contacts and interests rather than parochial concerns and limited horizons. Missions likewise are concerned to transcend parochial mentalities and to foster an interest in all humanity on all six continents. Thus they will enhance this tendency in pluralism. True, the six-continent philosophy of missions is something that has been articulated only in recent years, but in reality Christian missions have been working on all six continents as long as those continents have been known to Christians, and the fact that some of these missions have been called “home missions” and some have been called “foreign missions” should not disguise the reality. Here too, then, mission accentuates the benefits of pluralism.

But mission also counteracts the evils of the pluralistic society. Mission obviously means a refusal to withdraw into isolation and encumstment. A minority church that does not follow the prevailing trends of culture will always be tempted to turn in upon itself. The missionary forces in the church should be the antithesis to that tendency. Some of the leaders of Asian churches that are tiny minorities in their countries have been serving as excellent guides in this respect. They have frequently stressed that their small churches can have very little significance if they stay to themselves, but they can be of great significance if they devote themselves to serving their fellow human beings of all faiths, if they take the role of the suffering servant, helping the poor and resisting the tyrannies and hatreds that grow in their societies. A missionary church cannot, by definition, be isolated and encysted.

Furthermore, mission counteracts the opposite danger of pluralism, namely, relativism. It assumes that there are important choices to be made in the realm of religion. It involves the proclamation of good news, which is essential for all people. Insofar as mission can be maintained in a pluralist society the tendency to relativism will be weakened. One of the tasks that missionary Christians will constantly be required to perform in a pluralist environment will be to defend their missionary activity when people around them commonly assume that “it is enough that everyone has his or her own religion” and “it doesn’t matter what you believe, it only matters that you believe.” Many Christians already, because of these relativist assumptions, regard missions as illegitimate, and the numbers of such Christians can be counted on to increase as pluralism spreads. A missionary outlook will be harder to maintain, but it will be more important and more socially significant than it has been in the past. By it the relativist tendencies of the majority will be continually challenged.

That other tendency of pluralism, to move toward some kind of civil religion, should also run up against resistance in the operation of missions. People feel the need for a civil religion in order to hold their society together, to make it easier to work together, and to make decisions together where there is a variety of religious assumptions. This is an understandable need and missions should be able to appreciate it. In the process of working in multicultural societies they have at times had to recognize the importance of certain common principles that could be appealed to in the effort to secure fair treatment and protection from discrimination.25 So they can acknowledge a modest role for something like civil religion. But they will also be a force that helps to keep that religion from becoming all-absorbing and oppressive. Since they represent a nonrelativistic type of Christian faith they cannot allow any final authority for the civil religion or offer any final loyalties to it even in earthly matters. This can be a crucial contribution to keeping the pluralist society open and humane.

The long experience that Christian missions have had in cooperative work with people of other faiths suggests that they have already developed a pattern of pluralist life without relativism and without civil religion. In mission schools, hospitals, rural programs, development efforts, and other services Christians have found themselves cooperating continually with people of other religions in serving the common good. This experience is not so useful for future pluralist situations, however, as might appear. The pattern has too often been one of Christian domination rather than real cooperation. Missionaries have all too often claimed that their work was “Christian” because it was planned and paid for and led by Christians, and they have ignored the fact that it was only the steady help and participation of many other people that enabled the work to go forward. The spread of religious pluralism, where the voices of all groups are heard, should awaken Christian missions to the realities of their work and make them recognize and treat the non-Christians as the partners that they really are. Pluralism at this point will render a special and needed service to missions, but missions will also at the same time be rendering a special and needed service to the pluralist society by steering it away from some of the allures of civil religion.

The challenge of the coming years will be to maintain missions at all in the face of the powerful tendencies of pluralism. They can hardly expect to be the popular expression of Christian life that they have been in the generations just passed. But if they can evoke commitment from even a dedicated minority in the church they will make it clear that the pluralizing of the world need not mean, in Professor Gensichen’s words, a “total relativism or syncretism for all people,” nor a destruction of “the certainty of belief nor the missionary conviction of truth.”26 In this they will have rendered a signal service.

Notes

6. Ibid., p. 108.
The Development of Guidelines on Missionary Involvement in Social-Justice and Human-Rights Issues

Presented by the Committee for East Asia and the Pacific, Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., as a step in the development by particular churches and mission agencies of their own guidelines.

I. Introduction and Rationale

Today missionary involvement in issues of social justice and human rights would seem to call for some kind of guidelines. Here we define guidelines as those principles on the basis of which we choose between various concrete possibilities.

One common understanding of the involvement of missionaries in human rights matters or in the political process is that missionaries should remain “apolitical” or maintain a position of political neutrality. Those who hold this position say that the inner and individual transformation automatically leads to changes in society. The consequence of an attitude of political neutrality is that missionaries, thinking they have remained “neutral,” may in fact be backing an existing unjust order. In the name of not wanting to get involved, missionaries have often acquiesced to the way things are, and in this way shared in the responsibility for the perpetuation of injustice, corruption, and social sin. There may, therefore, be no way to avoid involvement.

The best guidelines for social and political involvement are perhaps those that have been drawn up on the basis of concrete experiences of missionaries themselves. Most of what is presented in this paper is taken from statements of missionaries themselves and the reflections of local Christian churches.

What follows does not claim to be the last word on this complex matter but it is hoped that it will contribute to a process of developing guidelines for the future which may also result in policy statements by those involved in the missionary enterprise in one way or another. Further reflections and feedback on this paper are to be encouraged, which will contribute to the process of developing future guidelines based on reality.

II. Some Current Situations

Country #1: Where a regime identifies the government with the state and suppresses by force any speech and any action which is critical of government policies; in the name of the communist threat or national security a controlled harmony is imposed on the people and the rights of the poor are violated; in the name of “separation of church and state” the church is under surveillance; the content of sermons is interfered with, and proclamations of justice on the basis of conscience of faith are all suppressed.

Country #2: Where under martial law human rights are violated; in the name of “separation of church and state” the church is under surveillance; the content of sermons is interfered with, and proclamations of justice on the basis of conscience of faith are all suppressed.

Country #3: Where an alleged secret plan of the local government succeeded apparently in dividing the church. Conservative elements in the church are given special awards and progressive elements attacked. The plan also called for the quiet expulsion of troublesome missionaries, with reason for the ouster being given to the local church after the fact.

Country #4: Where between 1970 and 1975 over 15,000 “disappearance” cases have been chronicled by a committee of relatives of the disappeared persons. It seems that government security
country to defend themselves or to know the precise nature of the forces were in some way involved in 75 percent of the cases. Most are presumed dead at the hands of the National Police’s death squads. In that same country 11 missionaries were accused of having favored the opposition party but were not given the opportunity to defend themselves or to know the precise nature of the charges against them. The national bishops lamented this in relation to two of the missionaries who were actually expelled.

Country #5: Where a freely elected democratic government was overthrown by a military fascist junta after United States covert intervention in that country and an economic blockade carried out against the former government. Where presently blatant violations of the most basic human rights are well known worldwide and the present regime is being condemned on this basis by freedom-loving peoples around the world.

III. Theological Considerations for Social Involvement as Christians

1. Human rights are given by God and belong to God. The human person is an image of God and therefore precious. A person cannot be used as an instrument or one’s basic human rights violated.

2. “All powers that be come from God” (cf. Romans 13:1ff.) expresses the limits of political power before it speaks of obedience to it. Political power is not absolute. The political ruler is commissioned to preserve life and freedom; the exercise of political power should be within this limit. The political power that violates the life and freedom of persons is in rebellion against God. Christianity understands that if a relative thing is absolutized it becomes an idol. Therefore, loyalty to a nation does not necessarily or automatically imply loyalty to a particular regime. There is the need to consider both love and justice in relation to particular governments and systems.

3. The church is universal and therefore not restricted to any one nation. A Christian is responsible as a citizen of a nation but is also a citizen of the total human family. Since governments exist to protect human rights and establish social justice, when a government ignores the appeals of conscience and faith in order to perpetuate power of a repressive regime, then the Christian feels a strong responsibility before God to resist actively such a regime.

4. At the core of Christian mission is the Word of salvation and liberation. “The Lord has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, preach freedom to the imprisoned, give sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed, and spread the grace of the Lord” (Luke 4:18). Therefore, basic to the mission of the church is the liberation of humankind and the establishing of social justice and peace in the world.

5. Prophetic words and actions are to be of service to the world. They should be directed not only to persons but also to social systems. The transformation of society into the family of God, which is integral to the Gospel, is effected as much through prophetic words and actions as through acts of mercy. The missionary is called to be involved in the affairs of the common life, including political activity. This involvement is to be seen as a prophetic witness calling the church to its mission in the world. The church, for its part, may not be expected always to agree with its prophets or fully condone their actions, but it needs to protect their right to prophesy. Prophetic actions by Christians within the context of the political process are based on the Christian awareness of sin in the world and its operation in a particular social situation.

6. In light of the fact that people in general, including foreign missionaries, often act on the basis of unexamined assumptions and attitudes, they might ask themselves such questions as the following:

a. What are some of the ideological overtones of the operative theology on which our missionary endeavors are based? Do we believe, for instance, that
—religion and politics should never mix?
—the Bible supports capitalism and democracy?
—the Bible encourages oppressed people to seek liberation?
—socialism and communism are incompatible with Christianity?

b. To what extent does our interpretation of faith affect our involvement in the economic, social, and political issues?
—Faith can be interpreted as a resource to endure the hardships of this life while awaiting the full manifestation of our salvation in heaven at Christ’s second coming; or as an incentive and a resource to join in the liberation process in every realm of life as a witness of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Can the faith include both interpretations?

c. To what extent are we, as American missionaries, prepared to engage in a process of self-criticism in relation to the value and symbols of United States society?

IV. Practical Considerations Regarding Involvement as Foreign Missionaries in Social Issues

1. Reasons for Involvement

It is sometimes asked, “By what right do missionaries become involved in the social issues of another country?” Some reasons that missionaries themselves have offered are the following:

a. Christians, including missionaries, are under the command of God to speak for and act for justice and human love in any situation in which they find themselves. Many missionaries have spent a number of years in a particular country. Therefore, when their brothers and sisters are denied human rights, missionaries cannot dissociate themselves from their sufferings merely on the grounds that they hold a foreign passport.

b. The struggle going on in the Third World is not merely an affair of those particular people but is the same struggle for freedom and human rights which is being waged all over the world.

c. Missionaries are not “guests” merely of a particular government but of the people they go to serve. In light of this, they ask themselves: Guests of whom? Of a repressive government or of the people that it represses?

d. Local Christians, as well as foreign missionaries, are in search of a definition of the role of the church in society in terms of preaching a Kingdom of justice, truth, love, and peace. These same Christians are often the ones who educate the foreign missionary regarding his or her role in their lives. The integral nature of the Gospel has political implications, and when missionaries get involved with the people of a country they begin to identify with all the aspirations of the people, including their sociopolitical ones.

e. Local Christians, believing that missionaries speak out of pure motives, often encourage missionaries to take prophetic stands on social issues. This may also be due in part to the fact that under a repressive regime local Christians have less freedom to speak out on social issues than do foreign missionaries. In this way, the missionary becomes a voice for those whose voice has been silenced.
2. Difficulties Regarding Involvement

When missionaries get involved in the sociopolitical issues of another country, they may face such problems as the following:

a. Missionaries, because they are foreigners, may encounter difficulties in dealing with a political situation overseas. For instance, the local people know the ins and outs, whereas foreign missionaries may easily get unwittingly embroiled.

b. The expulsion of a foreign missionary could cause a serious drain on the local church and a lessening of support from outside that the people may both want and need under an oppressive government. Also, the involvement of individual missionaries in social-justice and human-rights issues could lead to the eventual expulsion of a whole group because of those actions.

c. In any given country there may be missionaries of a variety of nationalities and denominations involved in social issues. Some may be on the side of a repressive government, some may remain superficially on good terms with the army or the repressive regime in order to be able to influence their actions, particularly on behalf of the local Christians. Oftentimes political differences among missionaries are not faced, not discussed, not brought to light. This may be due to their inability to come to grips with delicate issues or because the facing up to such issues in a reflective way may be painful. In practice, there may be the failure of missionaries to develop a continuing process of reflection on social issues.

d. Missionaries may respond to crisis situations too late rather than begin with an integral vision of the Gospel and its implications. Too often missionaries relate to human-rights matters on the secondary level and react to a crisis situation after human rights have been violated instead of at the primary level, which touches on the aspirations of the people in terms of the economic, social, and political context in which they live. Missionaries may also tend to respond to problems of human-rights violations merely in terms of persons, without sufficient attention’s being paid to an analysis of systems and structures that cause those violations.

e. Difficulties may also present themselves regarding the missionary’s knowing when to be silent and when to speak out on a particular matter. Part of the problem may center around the question of how much our actions are determined by prudence and how much by cowardice. The decision about when to “engage in politics” is not an easy one. Related to this is the problem of balance between knowledge and action on social issues. To have knowledge without action means to remain inactive, but to act or speak out without the necessary knowledge of the situation makes the action less credible. Because knowledge and action are interrelated, sufficient homework on an issue is necessary before acting in the political sphere, but ultimately, “not to decide is to decide.”

f. Another difficulty in the political sphere is that missionaries may attach different meanings to the term “politics.” Basic concerns for social justice, the defense of human rights, and actions to promote the common good should be distinguished, for instance, from particular approaches and/or actions. Basically, the problem of political involvement goes beyond the realm of politics in any narrow sense of the world. At the bottom is not politics but justice, humanity, and the Gospel.

One test of whether or not a particular political activity is a liberating influence may be the effective participation that the people have in what is going on. Therefore, it may be necessary for the missionary to find the pace at which the people are going and accompany them. Strategy and tactics which look toward efficacy without running undue risks could serve as a possible guideline.

Regarding the effective participation that the people have in what is going on, a question that may arise is the following: Are missionaries to tell the people what their rights are and serve as the “critical conscience of the society” or merely be supportive of them in their aspirations? It may be helpful for missionaries to do what they can to enable people to develop a critical conscience, but they are not to be the critical conscience for the people, not even for the oppressed. It is well to shy away from paternalism—from either the left or the right.

g. There may be situations where the missionary, along with local Christians, speaks out on questions of injustice but the national church leaders remain silent because of fear or special interests. What then? Some missionaries feel that they should stay close to the national church leaders in terms of positions taken, but others see the need to promote and encourage countervailing trends in the local churches which are more socially oriented, even if the national church leaders do not do so. Also, the question is asked: Is it possible that the church needs both those who keep their heads down so as to go on serving the church and people, and those who through dramatic action or speech denounce injustices? In any case, it would seem important to recognize and listen to prophetic voices within the church. Also, it might be helpful to distinguish between actions taken for social justice which are winnable and those that are not winnable. Some non-winnable actions are prophetic actions and may need to be taken anyhow.

h. Situations of violence may present practical difficulties in relation to missionary involvement overseas. Granted that institutionalized or installed violence may already exist due to an oppressive situation, to what extent or in what way could missionaries participate in a revolutionary struggle? Many missionaries feel that for them to take up arms would be inappropriate, but at the same time there may be situations in which missionaries find themselves in the middle of a revolutionary situation and may have to react to it in some way. The dilemma itself is primarily due to the sinful situation in which they find themselves. The ideal would be non-violence. In the kind of ambiguous situation that often occurs during violence, missionaries will be expected to respond according to their conscience illuminated by their identification with the people in their struggle for liberation.

V. Considerations Concerning the American Missionary and International Sociopolitical Involvement

1. Missionary Groups and Unjust Situations

   a. Two questions:

      1) Should a foreign missionary group withdraw from an unjust
An Evangelical Comment on the “Guidelines”

W. Dayton Roberts

The “Guidelines on Missionary Involvement in Social-Justice and Human-Rights Issues” constitute a positive contribution to every missionary’s grid of social ethics. Most of the major points are touched upon, and in a helpful, competent way. I am honored to be asked to offer comments, but feel I should first clarify my own perspective.

I was born and raised on the mission field and have served forty years in Latin America with the Latin America Mission, an agency of service and evangelism oriented to the stance of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association. Obviously, therefore, I reflect a conservative-evangelical approach characterized by the following theological premises (I refer only to those that probably affect my social ethics grid).

1. My Premises

Re sin. I agree with all who would include the sins of oppression and dehumanization in the Pauline roster of personal vices (cf. Gal. 5:19ff.). This makes any violation of human rights to be wicked, whether it is wife-beating or profiteering or detention without due process of law.

Re salvation/liberation: However, while sin is altogether of this world and is therefore “here and now,” salvation, by contrast, is a long-term process that begins here, to be sure—marvelously, su-
permanently, gloriously—with spiritual rebirth by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is not completed until we stand transformed in his presence in heaven. Sin is of this present world. So is salvation, but it is also of the world to come. It is both now and future. It is a process: “I am the way, the truth and the life.” I can scarcely overestimate the importance to the evangelical Christian of what in Spanish we would call the *viacrucis* element of the faith experience. Individual regeneration is the key miracle in God’s gracious acts of salvation/liberation. Evangelicalism rejoices in the centrality of this supernatural experience. And in the light of its centrality, evangelicalism’s priorities are correspondingly adjusted.

Re the *kingdom of God*: This concept—like salvation/liberation—also has strong eschatological roots. To the evangelist, the kingdom today is but a sign—not the complete realization—of that kingdom of God that is yet to be fully experienced. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not [yet] of this world.” And the author of Hebrews affirmed: “There remaineth yet a rest to the people of God.” The kingdom *has* indeed come, but as a *token* or *sign*. We see only flashes of it. It has not yet arrived as a total, social reality. For the Christian today the kingdom therefore is the sign/*token* of his or her efforts, not the goal/*end* of activity. Our purpose as missionaries is not primarily to change social structures, but rather, to release in society a new regenerative dynamic.

2. My Comments (in the light of these premises) on the “Guidelines”

I was helped by the distinction made between local politics and the underlying issues of human rights. I confess to have found it easy sometimes to hide behind my status as a foreign “guest.” But while perhaps the guest should abstain from involvement in routine politics, the issues of human rights are of more universal concern and demand a moral response on the part of every Christian.

My experience would indicate that the missionary is wise to conform largely to the “pace” set by national leaders. Foreigners often fail to recognize how much their reactions to political situations are determined by their own temperament, culture, and upbringing. I have often heard Costa Ricans (who are a more patient, deliberative people) complain about Christian leaders from other countries who are resident in Costa Rica and who get noisily involved in local affairs in a way that often makes their native brethren cringe.

I would have liked the paper to take a stronger stand against violence. I know this creates a dilemma if the political situation heats up to revolutionary temperatures. But it is a biblical alternative. I recently heard a Salvadoran priest sigh: “I know it sounds unreasonable, but I can only follow Jesus Christ—protest injustice and refrain from violence!”

While a missionary may indeed feel led to speak up appropriately in defense of human rights, it is not incumbent that he or she speak up on every issue or in every case. Several years ago I became involved in the defense of four neighbor-farmers who, because they were illiterate, had been cheated out of their land and were arrested for trespassing on their own property! We fought at every level of the judiciary and the government—clear up to the Supreme Court and finally, a presidential pardon. But these were only four families out of hundreds—maybe thousands—who have suffered the same kind of oppression. But it was my responsibility as a Christian neighbor to get involved in their particular struggle.

I question the implication of the paper that the mission agency perhaps should become involved in the issues of social justice and human rights. Just because they are so delicate, and because agencies do not have acute consciences, nor are they usually sensitive to the specific direction of the Holy Spirit, I believe these matters are best left to the individual missionary to wrestle with. I would agree, however, that discussion and dialogue within the mission would be highly desirable.

I also think it is important to recognize missionaries’ pastoral (as well as prophetic) responsibility to all people—not just to the oppressed. As a matter of fact, their middle-class background may bring them naturally into contact with the landowners, the politicians, and the “movers” of society. To all of these they are gospel debtors—to use the Pauline term—and to each they must seek to minister the Word of God. I was recently impressed by the attitude of a godly Nicaraguan pastor who told me he ministered to Somocistas and Sandinistas alike. Although his own sympathies were with the rebels, he insisted that his obedience to Christ could not be tilted by political prejudice. Christ died for all people.

In conclusion, it seems evident that each local situation is different, and among sincere Christians there are differences of perception of the issues. Therefore, we must refrain from assuming judgmental attitudes. At the same time, we must be lovingly supportive of those in distress and oppression and seek the illumination of the Holy Spirit concerning our own involvement in the defense of justice. If this is our base of Christian sympathy, God will call out those who are his chosen prophetic voices. May none of us be deaf to his summons.

A Roman Catholic Comment on the “Guidelines”

Simon E. Smith, S.J.

Just before he was assassinated, Archbishop Romero of San Salvador, in one of his Sunday homilies, addressed the Salvadoran troops and begged them to “Stop the massacre,” to stop killing their brothers and sisters. He urged allegiance to the higher law of God, which states, “Thou shalt not kill.”

The following day, in the corridors of the United States Senate, a State Department representative, vigorously waving a televised copy of Romero’s homily, was heard to say, “This is outright treason!”

Whether this tale is true or not, it points up sharply the very problem with which church people are concerned, whether they be archbishops or catechists, whether foreign nationals or citizens of the country under consideration: a conflict of loyalties. What is perceived by one viewer as resolute prophetic action or denunciation is perceived by another as treason.

The situations outlined in the “Guidelines” persist and in many cases will likely become worse. Not only has El Salvador lost its archbishop to an assassin’s bullets, but in the same country four United States women missionaries were gunned down and 10,000 citizens, mostly poor, lost their lives in 1980 alone. And El Salvador is not unique. In neighboring Guatemala, the situation is almost as bad. On June 10, 1981, Father Luis Pellecer, S.J., a native Guatemalan, was kidnapped by armed men, severely beaten about the head, and has not been seen since. On July 28, 1981, Father
Stanley Kother, an American missionary, was murdered in Guatemala. He was the ninth priest—and first American—to die in 1981 in Guatemala’s political turmoil. A Maryknoll priest was recently expelled from the Philippines. Jesuits and Maryknollers have been refused entry into Honduras. The situation for missionaries in Korea remains precarious. The Presbyterians in Taiwan have suffered for their prophetic stance.

All of these situations are indeed not the same. But in each of them there has been the need for church people, whether foreign missionaries or local nationals, to stand up and be counted on the side of justice and freedom. And no one does that in such countries without taking enormous risk.

What is at issue in the “Guidelines” and in the lives of church people is the need to set priorities for one’s loyalties. The first loyalty of church people is to the gospel and its being lived out in the real situation. And when it cannot be lived out, when conditions prevent men and women from living together as brothers and sisters, then the need arises to take some action to change the evil situation.

That primary loyalty to the gospel cannot be allowed to take second place to other loyalties, not even loyalty to one’s country. The two loyalties need not be in conflict, but they must be very clearly and unmistakably set in priority relationship one over the other.

In situations of obvious injustice or conflict, such as those mentioned in the “Guidelines,” missionaries need hard, factual information (which they often already possess). But they also need adequate tools of social analysis to help them to determine the causes of the situations in which they find themselves and also to decide on what actions are appropriate and possibly effective. The questions in the “Guidelines” itself are a good start for such analysis. Another help would be Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice, by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J.¹

It would be irresponsible simply to trust the analyses of United States government personnel in the country where the missionaries work for the reason that their sources of information are often at variance with those of the missionaries and also because, despite pious rhetoric to the contrary, they are not operating out of concern for the people “at the base,” the poor peasants, laborers, students, and others who are the victims of the injustices and most often the primary flock of the missionaries.

So some independent social analysis is required. Ideally that should be done in teams made up of competent nationals and concerned missionaries. Such is indeed already the case in many countries. Beyond analysis is the need to decide on a course of action. And here the trusting collaboration between nationals and missionaries becomes even more necessary and acute. As is quite clear in the “Guidelines,” the same actions are not appropriate in every situation, and a careful process of discernment must precede the decision to act.

Last, it is becoming increasingly obvious that prophetic actions are costly. Missionaries and those with whom they work must be prepared to pay the consequences of the prophetic actions they undertake. To say more on this point would be to belabor the obvious. Martyrdom is a contemporary phenomenon.

Two good indications that the “Guidelines” are no dead letter should be mentioned. First, the careful and critical distancing between missionaries and governments which the “Guidelines” calls for may indeed be heard by missionaries, but it does not seem to be heard yet by government. During the congressional hearings on the nomination of Ernest Lefever for the Human Rights desk of the State Department, it became clear that he saw nothing at all wrong with the CIA using missionaries as sources of information, nor even with CIA agents disguising themselves as missionaries.

A second indication is that other groups than the National Council of Churches have been trying to create guidelines for their personnel. Thus, Rome’s Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes published in January 1981 a document on “Religious Life and Human Promotion,” which treats of four main areas of concern: (a) the option for the poor and for justice, (b) social activities and works of religious, (c) involvement in the working world, and (d) involvement in politics.² In addition, the Council of International Ministries, which serves Mennonite and Brethren in Christ mission and service agencies, has lately published two pamphlets of related interest: “Christian Conduct in Situations of Conflict” and “Christian Conduct and Intelligence Agencies.”

As indicated above, and as is also clear from all these documents, there is no universal formula to solve the dilemmas about involvement in human rights and social-justice issues in different countries where missionaries serve.

But missionaries have no right to escape the responsibility to engage in critical social (and self-) analysis that will lead to taking a responsible position, no matter what the risk.

Notes
2. For the text, see Origins, Feb. 5, 1981.
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The Legacy of Robert Streit, Johannes Dindinger, and Johannes Rommerskirchen

Willi Henkel, O.M.I.

I. Robert Streit, O.M.I.

R

oman Catholic missiology as such did not exist at the beginning of this century, and even the theological courses and textbooks then included very little material about the missionary expansion of the church. Robert Streit, along with Joseph Schmidlin, pioneered in Catholic missiology, and it was Streit in particular who initiated the development of missionary bibliography through the publication of Bibliotheca Missionum.

Early Life and Education¹

Streit was born October 27, 1875, in Fraustadt (Posen), Germany, and grew up in Stendal (Sachsen), a town of 20,000 inhabitants. His father, the president of the parish council, put special emphasis on the boy’s early training in singing and music. Robert enjoyed religious pilgrimages with his pious mother, but it was the parish priest who discovered his priestly and missionary vocation, making the first contacts on his behalf with the Mission Secondary School in Valkenburg, Netherlands. A medical doctor refused to declare the boy healthy enough to undertake studies there, but the necessary certificate was finally obtained from another doctor. The school, directed by the Oblates, had about 120 students at that time and maintained a high standard of studies and religious discipline. Streit enrolled in the fall of 1889, and the teachers soon recognized his intellectual capacity and diligence.

After completing undergraduate studies, Streit began his novitiate at St. Gerlach, Netherlands, on August 14, 1895, and completed it on August 15, 1896. He then enrolled for philosophical and theological studies in Liège, along with students from Belgium, France and Ireland. He stayed in Liège very briefly, however, before going to Hünfeld in the fall of 1897, where the newly organized German Province of the Oblates was opening its own scholasticate. There, together with his fellow students, he helped in the construction of the new study center. Streit took final vows as a member of the Oblate order on August 15, 1897, and was ordained to the priesthood on April 28, 1901.

Streit’s Early Writings²

While still a student, Streit had published some poems under the penname “Bruder Eris.” His talent in composition was such that J. Classen, editor of Maria Immaculata, the monthly review of the German Oblate Province, asked the provincial to assign Streit to collaborate in that publication. He became a member of the editorial team in February 1902 and served as editor-in-chief from October 1905 to September 20, 1912.

Throughout those years Streit collected rich materials from all the Oblate missions: Canada, with the Eskimo and Indian missions, South Africa (Transvaal, Natal, Free State, South West Africa), and Ceylon. In many letters he encouraged the missionaries to write about their work, and he himself wrote numerous articles on the missions. He also published the following books: Das Opfer der Hottentoten (Victim of the Hottentots), 1907; Der letzte Franziskaner von Texas (The Last Franciscan from Texas), 1907; Das Opfer: Historische Erzählung aus dem Zululand (The Victim: An Historical Account from Zululand), 1912; Die Portugiesen als Pädagogen nach Ostindien (The Portuguese as Discoverers of East India), 1909; Madhu (a Marian Shrine in Ceylon), 1912.

During this period, the Hereros of South Africa rebelled against the German colonists. Streit’s interest in colonial matters was reflected in his writings and in the conferences he held. In the summer of 1912, for example, the Colonial Institute in Hamburg invited him to lecture on missions with particular reference to the German colonies.

Streit and the Development of Roman Catholic Missiology in Germany

His contacts with the missions enabled Streit to note the failure of Roman Catholic church historians to deal with missionary issues in more than a very limited and superficial way. Scholarly periodicals did not mention such issues, and Streit showed that the existing mission literature was quite disproportionately of a popular rather than scientific nature.³ He developed his thought on that subject in a series of articles published from 1907 to 1910 in various journals. The articles dealt with exegetical, patristic, historical, and contemporary issues related to Roman Catholic missions, and also with Protestant missiological literature.⁴ Catholics had largely ignored or even despised Protestant missions,⁵ ever since Count de Maistre had described the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary enterprise as fruitless. Gustav Warneck’s Protestantische Beurteilung der römischen Angriffe auf die evangelische Heidenmission (Protestant View of Roman Attacks on Evangelical Missions) had provoked no reaction on the part of Roman Catholics. However, Streit’s articles deploring the lack of scientific mission studies found a considerable echo in German academic circles, thus preparing the way for a Catholic missiology. The primary need, he reasoned, was to provide an extensive bibliography of mission materials that lay buried in various libraries.

Following his inclination, Streit began collecting bibliographical notes, beginning with an examination of bibliographies of the old orders—Franciscans, Augustinians, Carmelites, Jesuits. He also studied classical bibliographical works by such people as Golubovic, Garcia Icazbalceta, Beristain, and many others mentioned as sources in the later volumes of Bibliotheca Missionum.

The financial resources for such an undertaking had still to be found. In 1909 at the Katholikenkongress in Breslau, Furst zu Löwenstein gave a memorable speech on “German Catholics and Foreign Missions.” A mission committee was formed as a result, and a conference took place on January 22, 1910, in Berlin.⁶ Streit was invited to speak at that conference on the duties and tasks of theology with regard to the missions. He declared the necessity of introduc—

Willi Henkel, O.M.I., is a German Oblate and successor to Streit, Dindinger, and Rommerskirchen as Director of the Pontifical Missionary Library and Editor of the Bibliografia Missionaria.
ing missiology into seminaries and universities as a part of the curriculum,7 and he made three concrete proposals: to deal with the missions in theological lectures and textbooks, to train missiologists, and to establish a chair of missiology at a university.

At the committee's request, Streit wrote a subsequent memorandum, emphasizing the importance of bibliographies for mission studies (a need ultimately met by the publication of Bibliotheca Missionum), and proposing the publication of a missiological journal. Professor Joseph Schmidlin at the University of Münster, in a further memorandum on the scholarly means of promoting mission studies,8 suggested academic mission associations, lectures, and a missiological review. Both memoranda were submitted to all German bishops, missionary societies, and professors in the Catholic theological faculties and seminaries.

The matter was again considered at the Katholikenkongress in Augsburg in 1910, where the committee decided to launch a missiological journal, to ask Streit to present a plan for missionary bibliography, and to put Schmidlin in charge of developing guidelines for the publication of archival materials. More mission associations, academic lectures, and seminars, comparable to those Schmidlin had already begun in Münster, were recommended. In 1911 the first Roman Catholic chair of missiology was established in the Catholic Theological Faculty at the University of Münster, with Schmidlin as professor.9 The International Institute for Missiological Research was founded at Mainz on August 11, 1911. On October 4 Schmidlin was elected president of the institute and Streit was named its secretary, a position he held until 1924 when he was called to Rome.

Streit Is Called to Rome

On May 3, 1923, Cardinal Van Rossum, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith (Propaganda Fide), addressed a circular letter to the superiors of the missions, asking them to send books and objects of missionary interest for an exhibition to be held in the Vatican during the 1925 Holy Year. Streit, together with other experts, was called to Rome in February 1924 for the preparatory work. On January 5, 1925, the prefect put him in charge of the literature section. Some 30,000 books, many of them in non-European languages, had been collected,10 providing a unique opportunity for a survey of missionary literature. Pope Pius XI, himself a former librarian with special interest in missiology, and Dindinger read them with enthusiasm. Streit, in turn, greatly appreciated Dindinger's linguistic abilities and wide knowledge, and introduced him to the art of compiling bibliographies. The two became increasingly close collaborators.

During the years he was at Hünfeld, Dindinger completed the three volumes of his Institutiones Cosmologiae et Psychologiae. And from the early years of his experience there, he became acquainted with such pioneers of missiology as J. Schmidlin, A. Huonder, S.J. (the editor of Katholischen Missiomen), and F. Schwager, S.V.D.

Dindinger in Rome

When Streit moved to Rome he asked his superiors to assign Dindinger there also, so that the two men might continue to collaborate on Bibliotheca Missionum (originally planned as a four-volume work only) and in building up the Pontifical Missionary Library. After Streit's untimely death in 1930 Dindinger became the editor of that publication and director of the library. From 1932 to 1948 he served also as professor of mission history at the Missiological Institute of the Propaganda Fide Athenaeum. After 1948 he devoted major attention to the ongoing volumes of Bibliotheca Missionum, but also collaborated in the Bibliographia Missionaria, which had begun publication in 1935 under the direction of his assistant, Johannes Rommerskirchen.

Dindinger's Character

Dindinger, a kind and helpful person who would interrupt his own work to assist another with translation, had an unusual linguistic talent and an excellent memory. As a professor he was demanding, one who carefully weighed every word in his lectures and would not tolerate carelessness in the students' examinations. His students, in turn, were proud to be "disciples of old Dindinger."

Basically, he was an intellectual, whose piety was entirely un-
He had great respect for scholarship, regarding intelligence and virtue as closely related. His judgment was prudent and sharp, but sometimes too critical and stubborn. Yet his readiness to help others was such that even the youngest student felt free to call upon him at any time. The surest way to become his friend was to ask his advice.

Dindinger died on July 31, 1958, having been able to continue his work until only eight days before his death.

III. Johannes Rommerskirchen, O.M.I.

Rommerskirchen's Youth

Rommerskirchen, the son of a teacher, was born in Neuenhoven (Aachen) on January 5, 1899. Like Streit and Dindinger before him, he had his secondary schooling at the St. Charles Mission School of the Oblates in Valkenburg and took his novitiate (1915-16) at St. Gerlach. His studies in philosophy and theology at the Scholasticate in Hünfeld were interrupted by military service during World War I.

As a student Rommerskirchen lived in the community with Streit and Dindinger. He was ordained an Oblate priest on June 2, 1923. After completing his studies in 1924, his superiors assigned him to the editorial staff of the Oblate periodical Monatsblätter der Unbefleckten Jungfrau Maria. In the same year he began the study of missiology at the University of Münster, and missionary bibliography was to become for him also a lifelong vocation. From 1926-33, under the guidance of Professor Schmidlin, his first bibliographical works were published in Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft. Under Schmidlin he completed his doctoral degree in 1930, with a dissertation on the Oblate missions in Ceylon.

Rommerskirchen in Rome

Following Streit's death in 1930, Rommerskirchen was assigned to Rome to assist Dindinger in editing Bibliotheca Missionum and in strengthening the Pontifical Missionary Library. From 1933 to 1955 he also taught the history of missions at the Missiological Institute of the Propaganda Fide Athenæum. It was in Rome that he established Bibliografia Missionaria, a working bibliography of current scholarly literature for mission studies. The first volume of the latter appeared in the 1935 issue of Guida delle Missioni Cattoliche, but it became an independent annual publication of which forty issues had been published by 1978, the year of Rommerskirchen's death.

Rommerskirchen's greatest achievement was the completion of Bibliotheca Missionum, to which he contributed increasingly from volumes 6 to 30. (His own bibliography indicates the extent to which he was preoccupied with missionary bibliography as such, a task that left him little time for writing other kinds of articles and books.) It would be difficult to determine the precise extent of his collaboration throughout the history of that publication, but he became its editor-in-chief upon the death of Dindinger in 1958. He was assisted by N. Kowalsky, O.M.I., for volumes 13 and 14, and by J. Metzler, O.M.I. for volumes 22 to 30. From 1930 onward Rommerskirchen also made a considerable contribution to the development of the Pontifical Missionary Library, and was its director from 1958 to 1972. During the forty-two years of his association with that library, it became an increasingly important collection for missiological research.

Rommerskirchen, the Man

From the time of his doctoral dissertation and earliest publications, Rommerskirchen showed a real talent for writing. He was able to present the missionary cause in an attractive, understandable way to ordinary people. But in giving full attention to missionary bibliography, a task he regarded as his particular vocation, the mastery he achieved in that field was at the expense of time for more writing he might have done. He summarized the spirit of this self-dedication in the words of the Oblate rule: Ferventi dilectandi fidei desidero (rendered by English-speaking Oblates as “an ardent desire to spread the gospel of Christ”). A hard worker, he nonetheless enjoyed recreation and cultivating friendships among his confreres and other colleagues and students. Satisfied to have seen the completion of Bibliotheca Missionum, and the firm continuation of Bibliografia Missionaria in which he took active interest to the end of his life, Rommerskirchen died in Rome on February 24, 1978.

IV. The Nature of the Bibliographical Publications and of the Missionary Library

Bibliotheca Missionum

Robert Streit said, “The task of a bibliography of missions is to present mission literature according to the modern, scientific requirements of bibliography, in such a way as to provide all who study about the missions with a reliable, handy, and rapid orientation to the available documents, and to reflect the current situation with regard to missiologic writings.” This is precisely what Bibliotheca Missionum does. The first volume lists a number of collaborators, along with the rules and procedures Streit had specified in the interest of uniformity.

The publication as a whole includes African mission history from the tenth century, Asian from the twelfth, and that of the Americas from the European discovery of those continents. Volume 1 introduces the general literature on theory, pastoral concerns, and law with regard to the missions; volumes 2 and 3 are devoted to missions in the Americas; volumes 4 to 14 to Asian missions; volumes 15 to 20 to African missions; and volume 21 to the mission literature on Australia and Oceania. Streit had expected to terminate the series with volume 21 (1909), because that is the beginning date of Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, a journal that adopted the publication of missionary bibliography as one of its aims. However, Bibliotheca Missionum was continued for nine more volumes (22 to 30) supplementing and updating the literature from 1909 to 1940 for Africa, 1950 for Australia and Oceania, 1960 for America, and 1970 for Asia.

This bibliography presents Roman Catholic mission literature in categories of various theological disciplines. First is material about the missionary objective among non-Christians, and missionary cooperation in achieving that objective. A second category involves catechisms, Bible translations, prayer books and other Catholic literature, dictionaries, grammars—all written by missionaries. A third category has to do with missionary writings on geography, ethnology, and religions.

Streit did not want to produce a mere catalogue of books. On the other hand, he considered it too expensive to reproduce lengthy abstracts from the books themselves. The “middle way” he chose was to add an annotation of a few lines to each title, enabling readers to understand its format and contents, and listing whatever materials are known to have been written about it. Insofar as possible, the place in which each book may be found is also indicated. Where the compiler was unable to locate a given document, he gave the source of his information about it.

The contents of Bibliotheca Missionum are arranged chronologically through volume 18. In volumes 19 and 20 (Africa), Dindinger found the material so vast and complex that he arranged it in alphabetical order of the missionary institutes instead, listing anonymous works at the end. Rommerskirchen thereafter continued Dindinger’s arrangement. Each volume has five indexes: authors;
persons; subject matter; places, countries, and nations; and a linguistic index. The combined index in some of the volumes exceeds 100 pages. Bibliotheca Missionum, from the first volume onward, has been widely appreciated. Schmidlin termed it the discovery of a new world, previously unknown to both Catholics and Protestants, and regarded it as an indispensable tool for the study of missions. According to Johannes Beckmann, the volumes on the Americas and Asia have special importance, and Beckmann notes that many outstanding scholars such as Kenneth Scott Latourette, Charles R. Boxer, Antonio da Silva Rego, and others have made extensive use of the publication. People doing research in such related fields as anthropology, history of religions, and linguistics have also profited from it. Thus Beckmann, in his review of volumes 19 and 20 says: "As one examines the long series of volumes of the now-completed bibliography of African missions, with its approximately 6,000 pages, one can be proud of a production for which the scholars in any other science may justifiably envy our young missiology. We express heartfelt thanks to the editor and his collaborators for the immense amount of detailed work, dedication, and effort reflected in these pages."22

Bibliografia Missionaria

This publication may be described as the counterpart and complement of Bibliotheca Missionum. It has been published annually since 1935 by the librarians of the Pontifical Missionary Library as a current bibliography on the missions.

The material in each issue of Bibliografia Missionaria is divided into four parts, following an introduction that lists special bibliographies and new periodicals: articles and books about the different branches of missiology—theology, law, history, the current situation of the missions and pastoral concerns (sections 2–6); auxiliary studies, such as dialogue, anthropology, religions, atheism, development (sections 7–11); missionary personnel, institutions, cooperation, spirituality (sections 12–15); finally, the various mission lands (sections 16–25). The arrangement thus moves from general to particular, from the principles of mission theology to the implementation of those principles in actual practice.

Since Vatican II the material in Bibliografía Missionaria has become more ecumenically oriented. It now includes missionary literature in the major languages: English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, the Scandinavian languages, and Polish. A glance at the index (in Italian) is sufficient to note the wide coverage of missionary experience, problems, and discussions. The linguistic publications of missionaries are still listed but, with the growing importance of the local churches, locally produced bibliographies have an increasing usefulness for missionary literature today. That is particularly true of materials written in the languages of the Third World.

The Pontifical Missionary Library

As indicated above, Pope Pius XI prompted the establishment of a mission library when he encouraged a missionary exhibit during the 1925 Holy Year.3 The wealth of material collected on that occasion was placed under care of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. It was located in the same building and in close proximity to the congregation's archives in order to make it readily available to mission scholars and to facilitate missionary research. We have already noted the succession of Streit, Dindinger, and Rommerskirchen as directors of this library, and it is largely through their efforts that it has become so useful an instrument for the study of missions.

In 1979 the library was moved to a new facility near the Urban University and merged with that university's library. It now houses 100,000 volumes, 3,416 periodicals that have ceased publication, and more than 500 periodicals that are still current. In addition to the author/subject catalogues, there is a catalogue of books in 530 non-European languages (including some 270 African languages along with important collections in Chinese, Japanese, other Asian, and Native American languages). A microfiche section has been recently initiated, containing archival material on missions. Thus the Pontifical Missionary Library, building on the vision of Streit, Dindinger, and Rommerskirchen, seeks to promote and serve the study of missiology.

Notes

3. R. Streit, Führer durch die katholische Missionsliteratur, (Freiburg: Herder, 1911), xi, 146 pp.
Select Bibliography of Robert Streit, O.M.I.

Books


Articles and Brochures

1903 "Für Gott und König. Eine Episode aus der Eroberung Mexikos durch die Spanier," Maria Immaculata 10 (1902/3).

Bibliographical Works

1916-29 Bibliotheca Missionum publications:

Articles about Streit


International Bulletin of Missionary Research
Select Bibliography of Johannes Dindinger, O.M.I.

Books

Articles
1938 "Bibliografia sull'adattamento dell'arte indigena agli usi liturgici," ibid. 10: 164-85.

Select Bibliography of Johannes Rommerskirchen, O.M.I.

Books

Articles
1956 "From Archive to Action. Do Missionaries Learn from History?" Worldmission 7: 31-39.

Bibliographical Works

Articles about Rommerskirchen

(Rommerskirchen’s complete bibliography is published in Bibliografia Missionaria 41 [1977]: 6-12.)
Source Materials for Research into British Missions from EP Microform Ltd.

The following publications taken from Archival sources are currently available on 35mm positive unperforated silver halide microfilm:

**BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY:** Minutes of the Committee 1807-1914

**BLANTYRE MISSION:** Journal 1888-1911, 1918-19 (British Central Africa)

**CATHOLIC COLONIAL MISSIONS:** Archival Material for the period 1803-1827

**CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY:** Africa and the East, Proceedings 1801-1921

West Indian Mission, Records 1819-1961

**NEW GUINEA MISSION:** Occasional Papers 1905-1980

**SOUTH AMERICAN MISSIONARY SOCIETY:** Manuscript Diaries, Minutes of the General Committee 1844-1919

SAMS Magazine 1867-1919

**UNITED SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL:**

**Africa:**

Index to the African Archive, African Letters 1839-1896

Gold Coast: Select Records 1753-1933; Voyages of Rev. Thomas Thompson 1748-56; Letters of Rev. Phillip Quaque 1765-1811

Madagascar: Select Records 1866-1900

South Africa: Archives 1820-1900 comprising annual reports and letters from the field with Diocesan Records

UNIVERSITIES' MISSION TO CENTRAL AFRICA: Reports 1860-1900;

'A' Series Letters 1857-1920

**Asia:**

India: Calendars 1815-1859; Records (C/IND Series) 1751-1835,

(E/PRE Series) 1840-1861, (E/V Series) 1856-1900

Sri Lanka: 'C' Series 1827-1856, 'D' Series (Columbo) 1857-1859/1860-1867,

'CLR' Series 1845-1928

**North America:**

American Letterbooks: Series 'A' 1702-1737, Series 'B' 1701-1786,

Series 'C' 18th Century

Rev. G. Keith Missionary Travels 1702-1704

Canada: 'C' Series, a comprehensive collection of records relating to USPG missionaries 1759-circa 1855

**West Indies:**

Bahamas: 'C' Series 1726-1853, 'D' Series 1856-1900, 'E' Series 1850-1900

Barbados: Codrington College Papers, 18th and 19th Centuries

Diocesan Correspondence Received, 1802-1853

Suriname: Notebooks of the Voyage of Henry Riddell 1778

West Indies: General 'C' Series, together with those for Antigua,

British Guiana, Jamaica and Trinidad 1714-1908

SPG Journal 1707-1850

SPG Annual Reports 1702-1845, reflecting the fact that the bulk of the Society's work lay in the American Colonies in the early days.

**PERIODICALS:**

Central Africa 1883-1964 (UMCA Magazine); Church Army Gazette 1888-1914; Church Missionary Intelligencer 1849-1927; Christian Mission Magazine 1877-78; Mengo-Uganda Notes (CMS) 1900-1921;

Salvationist 1879; Taveta Chronicle (CMS) 1895-1901; War Cry 1879-1940

A Forthcoming Publication: The William Wilberforce Papers, an EP Microform project in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse, comprising: Writings, Speeches, Correspondence, Diaries

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The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle

C. René Padilla

Throughout the entire New Testament the oneness of the people of God as a oneness that transcends all outward distinctions is taken for granted. The thought is that with the coming of Jesus Christ all the barriers that divide humankind have been broken down and a new humanity is now taking shape in and through the church. God’s purpose in Jesus Christ includes the oneness of the human race, and that oneness becomes visible in the church. In the first part of this article we shall examine the New Testament teaching on the oneness of the church in which God’s purpose to unite all things in Jesus Christ is expressed. In the second part we shall examine the historical unfolding of God’s purpose of unity in apostolic times. Finally, in the last part, we shall evaluate Donald McGavran’s homogeneous unit principle, according to which “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers,” in the light of our previous analysis of scriptural teaching and apostolic practice.

I. God’s Purpose of Unity in Jesus Christ

The Bible knows nothing of the human being as an individual in isolation; it knows only of a person as a related being, a person in relation to other people. Much of its teaching is colored by the Hebrew concept of human solidarity, for which H. Wheeler Robinson coined a well-worn label—“corporate personality.” Accordingly, the church is viewed in the New Testament as the solidarity that has been created in Jesus Christ and that stands in contrast with the old humanity represented by Adam. The Adam-solidarity is humankind under the judgment of God. Its oneness is a oneness of sin and death. But where sin abounded, grace has abounded all the more. As a result, the Adam-solidarity can no longer be viewed in isolation from Christ’s world, in which God has justified sinners. Over against the darkness of death that fell upon humanity through the first Adam, the light of life has broken into the world through the last Adam (Rom. 5:12-21). By means of the first Adam, the kingdom of death was established among humankind; humanity as a whole slipped into the void of meaningless existence out of fellowship with God and under his judgment. By means of the last Adam, a new humanity comes into existence, in which the results of the fall are undone and God’s original purpose for humanity is fulfilled.

The letter to the Ephesians assembles a number of insights regarding the new humanity brought into being by Jesus Christ. It opens with a doxology (1:3-14) in which the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church is viewed in the light of God’s eternal purpose, which includes the creation of a new order with Christ as the head. The whole universe is depicted as intended by God to be “summed up” or “recapitulated” in Christ, moving toward an ana·kephalaiosis—a harmony in which “all the parts shall find their centre and bond of union in Christ.” In that context, the unity of Jew and Gentile (vv. 13-14) can only be understood as a proleptic fulfillment of that which God is to accomplish in the “fulness of time” (v. 10).

Both Jews and Gentiles may now receive the seal of the Spirit by faith. Circumcision, which in former days was the sign of participation in the Abrahamic covenant, in the new order becomes irrelevant—it is merely an outward sign and it has been superseded by the “circumcision made without hands” (Col. 2:11). With the coming of Christ, “neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15; cf. 5:6). God has brought into being a new humanity in which the barriers that separated the Gentiles from the Jews are broken down (Eph. 2:11ff.). Out of the two large homogeneous units whose enmity was proverbial in the ancient world God has made one; two enemies have been reconciled in “one body” (v. 16). In his death Jesus Christ removed the wall that stood between the two systems under which “the people” (am) and “the nations” (goyim) had lived in former days. Now both Jews and Gentiles stand as equal in the presence of God (v. 18), as members of a new fellowship that may be described as a city, a family, and a building (vv. 19-20). Thus the unity that God wills for the entire universe according to the first chapter of Ephesians becomes historically visible in a community where reconciliation both to God and to one another is possible on the basis of Christ’s work.

Further on, in chapter 3, Paul claims that God’s purpose of unity in Jesus Christ has been made known to him “by revelation” (v. 3). He is a steward of a “mystery” that was hitherto faintly perceived but that has now been revealed, namely, that in Christ “the nations” have a share in the blessings of the gospel, together with “the people,” on the common ground of God’s grace. Unmistakably, the unity of Jew and Gentile is here said to be the gospel—not simply a result that should take place as the church is “perfected,” but an essential aspect of the kerygma that the apostle proclaimed on the basis of Scripture (vv. 8-9). Furthermore, it is conceived as an object lesson of God’s manifold wisdom, displayed for the instruction of the inhabitants of the celestial realms, both good and evil (v. 10).

The unity resulting from Christ’s work is not an abstract unity but a new community in which life in Christ becomes the decisive factor. The only peoplehood that has validity in the new order is that related to the church as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9). Although made up of Jews and Gentiles, the church is placed together with Jews and Greeks (non-Jews), as a third group (1 Cor. 10:32). It is viewed as “the seed of Abraham” in which, since one is incorporated without any conditions apart from faith in Jesus Christ, “there is neither male nor female, neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor freeman,” for all are one (keis) in Christ (Gal. 3:28). No one would, on the basis of this passage, suggest that Gentiles have to become Jews, females have to become males, and slaves have to become free in order to share in the blessings of the gospel. But no justice is done to the text unless it is taken to mean that in Jesus Christ a new reality has come into being—a unit based on faith in him, in which membership is in no way dependent upon race, social status, or sex. No mere “spiritual” unity, but a concrete community made up of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women, all

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of them as equal members of the Christ-solidarity—that is the thrust of the passage. And, as Donald Guthrie puts it, “Paul is not expressing a hope, but a fact.”

A similar idea is conveyed again in Colossians 3:11, where Paul states that for those who have been incorporated into the new humanity created in Jesus Christ, the divisions that affect the old humanity have become irrelevant: “Here there cannot be Gentile and Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” Race loses its importance because all the believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, belong to the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). Religious background is neither here nor there because “the true circumcision” (Phil. 3:3) is made up of Jews who are Jews inwardly, whose circumcision is “real circumcision . . . a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal” (Rom. 2:28–29).

Social stratifications are beside the point because in the new humanity the slave becomes his own master’s “beloved brother” (Phil. v. 15); the slave is called to serve the Lord and not mankind (Col. 3:22) and the free person is to live as one who has a Master in heaven (Col. 4:11). Here—in the corporate new human, in the new homogeneous unit that has been brought into being in Jesus Christ—the only thing that matters is that “Christ is all and in all.” Those who have been baptized “into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13) are members of a community in which the differences that separate people in the world have become obsolete. It may be true that “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers,” but that is irrelevant. Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of incorporation into a new humanity under the lordship of Christ. Whether a person likes it or not, the same act that reconciles one to God simultaneously introduces the person into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or sex, and are consequently reconciled to one another. “The unifier is Jesus Christ and the unifying principle is the ‘Gospel.’”

God’s purpose is to bring the universe “into a unity in Christ” (Eph. 1:10, NIV). That purpose is yet to be consummated. But already, in anticipation of the end, a new humanity has been created in Jesus Christ and those who are incorporated in him form a unit wherein all the divisions that separate people in the old humanity are done away with. The original unity of the human race is thus restored; God’s purpose of unity in Jesus Christ is thus made historically visible.

II. The Unity of the Church and the Apostolic Practice

A cursory examination of the New Testament shows the way in which the teaching on the new unity of the church developed in the foregoing section was implemented by the apostles. Furthermore, it brings into focus the difficulties that the early church faced as it sought to live in the light of God’s purpose of unity in Jesus Christ. The breaking down of the barriers between Jew and Gentile, between slave and free, and between male and female, could no more be taken for granted in the first century than the breaking of the barriers between black and white, between rich and poor, and between male and female today. But all the New Testament evidence points to an apostolic practice consistent with the aim of forming churches in which God’s purpose would become a concrete reality.

Jesus’ Example

The apostles had no need to speculate as to what a community in which loyalty to Jesus Christ relativized all the differences would look like; they could look back to the community that Jesus had gathered around himself during his earthly ministry. True, he had not demanded a rigidly structured uniformity, yet he had attained the formation of a community that had been held together by a common commitment to him, in the face of which all the differences that could have separated them had been overcome. Members of the revolutionary party (like “Simon who was called the Zealot,” Lk. 6:15) had become one with “publicans”—private businessmen in charge of collecting taxes for the government of the occupying power (like Matthew, in Mt. 9:9–13; cf. Lk. 19:1–10). Humble women of dubious reputation (cf. Lk. 7:36–39) had mixed with wealthy women whose economic means made the traveling ministry of Jesus and his followers possible (Lk. 8:1–3). Women had been accepted on the same basis as men, despite the common view, expressed by Josephus, that a woman “is in every respect of less worth than a man.”

To be sure, Jesus had limited his mission to the Jews and had imposed the same limitation to his apostles before his resurrection. Yet, as Jeremias has demonstrated, he had anticipated that the Gentiles would share in the revelation given to Israel and would participate in God’s people. Accordingly, he had commanded his disciples to proclaim the gospel to “all nations”; the Gentile mission was to be the means through which the Gentiles would be accepted as guests at God’s table (Mt. 8:11; cf. Isa. 25:6–8).

The Jerusalem Church

On the day of Pentecost, the gospel was proclaimed to a large multitude of pilgrims that had come to Jerusalem for the great Jewish Feast of the Weeks (Acts 2:1–13). The heterogeneous nature of the multitude is stressed in the narrative by reference to the variety of languages (vv. 6–8) and lands and cultures (vv. 9–11) represented among them. Granted that the “devout men” (andres eulabes) mentioned in verse 5 should be taken as Jews rather than as Gentile God-fearers, the fact that Luke wants to press home upon us is that “every nation under heaven” was represented and that the mighty works of God were proclaimed in the indigenous languages and dialects of many lands. The worldwide proclamation of the gospel—the proclamation to be portrayed in the succeeding chapters of Acts—was thus anticipated in one single event in which even the linguistic barriers were miraculously broken down for the sake of the spread of the gospel “to the end of the earth” (1:8). The point here is that at Pentecost people became Christian with people from “every nation under heaven” (2:5), including “visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” (v. 10). Accordingly, Peter understood Pentecost—the gift of the Spirit—as the means whereby the promise of the gospel (that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,” Gen. 12:3) was extended not only to those present but also to their descendants as well as to “all that are far off” (v. 39).

The Christian community that resulted from Pentecost was, of course, made up mainly of Jewish Christians. What else could be expected before the Gentile mission? Yet it would be a great mistake to conclude that it was in their Jewishness that they found their identity. No racial homogeneity, but Pentecost, was the basis of their unity. Only in the light of the outpouring of the Spirit are we able to understand how it was possible for the early Jerusalem church to include in its constituency “unlearned and ignorant men” (agrammatoi . . . kai idiotai, Acts 4:13; umme ha-arez, “people of the land,” according to rabbinical terminology), and educated priests (6:7), and, at a later stage, Pharisees (15:5; cf. 11:2); poor people in need of help and wealthy landlords (2:44–45; 4:32–37), possibly members of a well-to-do foreign community; Jews (Aramaic-speaking, most of them natives of Palestine), “Hellenists” (Greek-speaking Jews from the Dispersion) (6:1ff.), and at least one Gentile from Syrian Antioch (v. 5).
Luke’s record shows that the basic ecclesiastical unit for both preaching and teaching was the house church (Acts 2:46; 5:42; cf. 12:12, 17; 21:18). But there is nothing in Acts to support the view that “the mixed church at Jerusalem divided along homogeneous unit lines,”8 or to lead us as much as to imagine that there were different house churches for the educated and for the uneducated, for the rich and for the poor, for the Palestinian Jews and for the Jews from the Dispersion. All the evidence points in the opposite direction. One of Luke’s main emphases as he describes the church growing out of Pentecost is, in fact, that the believers were “together” (πις το αυτο, with a quasi-technical sense; cf. 2:44); that they had “all things in common” (2:44; 4:32); that they were “of one heart and soul” (4:32). The burden of proof lies with anyone who, despite Luke’s description, continues to hold that the early church in Jerusalem was organized according to homogeneous units.

A problem that soon arose in the early Jerusalem church was due precisely to the heterogeneous nature of the community—the “Hellenists” complained against the “Hebrews” because their widows were not receiving a fair share from the common pool that had been formed (Acts 6:1). No clearer illustration of the way in which the apostles faced the problems of division in the church can be found than the one recorded here. A modern church-growth expert might have suggested the creation of two distinct denominations, one for Palestinian Jews and another one for Greek Jews. That would have certainly been a practical solution to the tensions existing between the two conflicting homogeneous units! We are told, however, that the apostles called the community together and asked them to choose seven men who would be responsible for the daily distribution (vv. 2–6). The unity of the church across cultural barriers was thus preserved.

The Church in Syrian Antioch

Following Stephen’s martyrdom, a great persecution arose against the Jerusalem church, apparently mainly against the Hellenist believers with whom Stephen had been identified (Acts 8:1). A result of the persecution, however, was that the first large-scale evangelization outside Palestine was launched by exiles who traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (11:19).

According to Luke’s report, these exiles, aside from a few, shared the gospel with “none except Jews” (v. 19). Why so, one may ask. No explicit answer is given in the narrative, yet this statement is used by Donald McGavran to support the claim that in the years following Pentecost the church made “early adjustments” that favored the spread of the gospel and resulted in “one-race congregations” that “arose by the dozens; perhaps by the hundreds.”9 Luke’s record, however, does not substantiate the thesis that the apostles deliberately promoted the formation of “one-race congregations” and tolerated Jewish prejudices against the Gentiles for the sake of numerical church growth. In order to claim that it does, one needs to come to Scripture with the preconceived idea (1) that the apostles shared the modern theory that race prejudice “can be understood and should be made an aid to Christianization,”10 and (2) that the multiplication of the church invariably requires an adjustment to the homogeneous unit principle. Without this unwarranted assumption, one can hardly miss the point made by Acts that the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles was such a difficult step for the Jerusalem church that it took place only with the aid of visions and commands (8:26ff.; 10:1–16) or under the pressure of persecution (8:1ff.; 11:19–20). No suggestion is ever given that Jewish Christians preached the gospel to “none except Jews” because of strategic considerations. All the evidence points to the fact that restrictions placed on the proclamation of the gospel even by Greek-speaking Jews was due to scruples that would have to be overcome (as in Peter’s case when he was sent to Cornelius) if the Gentiles were to receive the Word of God and if the Jews were to see that “God shows no partiality” (as in the case of those in Judea who heard that Cornelius and his kinsmen and friends had believed). As long as Jewish Christians allowed inherited prejudices to persist, probably because of their fear that this contact with Gentiles might be interpreted by fellow Jews as an act whereby they were “traitorously joining a strange people” (to borrow McGavran’s expression), they could only preach “to none except the Jews.” Who would have thought that their approach, based on such a limited outlook, would be used as a pattern for evangelism in the twentieth century?

The evangelists who took the new step of preaching the gospel to Gentiles in Syrian Antioch were unnamed “men of Cyprus and Cyrene” (11:20). The importance of this step can hardly be overestimated. Antioch was the third largest city in the world, “almost a microcosm of Roman antiquity in the first century, a city which encompassed most of the advantages, the problems, and the human interests, with which the new faith would have to grapple.”11 Soon the church there would become the base for the Gentile mission.

There is no evidence that those who received the gospel in Antioch were relatives to the exiles coming from Jerusalem. Perhaps they were, but this is merely a conjecture and lends no solid support to the idea that “in Antioch for both the Jerusalem refugees and the resident Christians we have bridges of relationship into the Greek people.”12 Furthermore, nothing is said by Luke to lead us to the conclusion that the evangelization of Gentiles in this city took place in the synagogue. That might have been the case, but if the correct reading in verse 20 is helenes rather than hellemistas, Gentiles of Greek culture would be meant. Floyd Filson may be right in believing that the evangelized were “Gentiles who had had no previous contact with the synagogue.”13 The message that was preached to them was centered in Jesus as Lord (Kyrios) and was thus cast in terms not entirely unfamiliar to people living in a cosmopolitan city where salvation was being offered by many cults and mystery religions in the name of other lords. God’s power was with the evangelists and as a result many believed. Unless we are to assume that for the sake of numerical growth the “greater number” of those who believed were immediately separated into homogeneous unit house churches,14 the clear implication is that the church that came into being was embraced both Jewish and Gentile believers on an equal basis and that there was no thought that the latter had to accept Jewish practices as a prerequisite. At a later stage, as we shall see, the question of the place of Jewish ceremonial law in the church was to become a matter of debate. But there is no evidence that at the start of the Antioch church the evangelists resorted to the homogeneous unit principle in order to accomplish their task. How was unity preserved when there were many members who did not keep the Jewish ceremonial law and there were others who did? We are not told. We can imagine that difficulties would arise. “But,” as Adolf Schlatter has commented, “the early church never shirked difficulties; it attacked bravely. So nothing more is said about these difficulties, and we do not hear how intercourse in the mixed communities was secured.”15

An insight into the degree to which people from a variety of backgrounds worked together in the Antioch church is found in the list of leaders provided by Luke in Acts 13:1: “Barnabas, Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” A more homogeneous group could hardly be suggested! Barnabas was a Levite, a native of Cyprus (4:36). Symon, as his nickname Niger (“Black”) suggests, was a Jew (or proselyte?) apparently of dark complexion, perhaps to be identified with Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus’ cross. Lucius was a Gentile (or a Jew with a Roman name?), a native of the African city of Cyrene, perhaps one of the men who
had first preached the gospel in Antioch. Manaen was a “foster-brother” (synthiares) to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, with whom he had been reared. Saul was an ex-Pharisee, a “Hebrew of Hebrews” and (as a Roman citizen) a member of a small privileged minority in the eastern Mediterranean. What could glue these men together aside from a common experience?

The Early Gentile Churches and the “Circumcision Party”

As long as the church was made up mainly of Jews, apparently it was not a great problem for Jewish Christians to accept Gentile converts as full members of the church without demanding that they become Jews. Peter’s report on the way Cornelius and his household had received the Word of God was enough to silence the criticism that the circumcision party in Jerusalem had raised against the apostle (Acts 11:1–18). Later on, the news concerning the numerical growth of the church in Syrian Antioch was welcomed in the mother church, which then sent one of its most outstanding leaders with the commission to instruct the new believers (11:22ff.). When the leaders of the Gentile mission (Barnabas and Saul) visited Jerusalem in connection with the relief sent from Antioch for the brethren in Judea (11:27–30), they had a meeting with James (Jesus’ brother), Peter, and John, as a result of which they were given “the right hand of fellowship”; the understanding was reached that “we,” says Paul, “should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (Gal. 2:9). The presence of a young Greek convert, named Titus, with the delegation from Antioch at that time could be taken as a further confirmation that the Jewish Christian would not expect Gentile converts to be circumcised (Gal. 2:1–3).

The spread of the gospel throughout south Galatia brought about by the travels undertaken by Paul and Barnabas, with the resulting increase of Gentile converts, finally raised the whole issue of the basis on which the Gentiles could participate as full members in the People of God. Was faith to be regarded as sufficient, as the missionaries were preaching? Granted that the gospel was meant to be preached to all men and women, whether Jews or Gentiles, should not the Gentile converts be circumcised? Should they not be required to conform to Jewish ceremonial laws and food regulations? Should they not be expected to “take upon themselves the yoke of the commandments,” like the proselytes to Judaism? The issue was pressed by a circumcision party within the Jerusalem church, made up of people who had previously been associated with the Pharisees (Acts 15:1, 5).

It is likely that the episode that Paul narrates in Galatians 2:11–14 should be viewed in connection with the visit that according to Acts 15:1 these members of the circumcision party made to Antioch. Before their coming Peter had felt free to share a common table with Gentile Christians, for he had learned in Joppa not to call anything “common” (or “unclean”) if God had purified it. When they came, however, “he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (Gal. 2:12). His attitude can best be understood when it is viewed in the light of a historical context in which those Jews who sat at a table where food would not be kosher thereby opened themselves to the accusation of “traitorously joining a strange people.” According to Paul, those who induced Peter to act inconsistently with his Gentile brethren had been sent by James. Paul’s words need not mean that they had been personally commissioned by James to spy out the Jewish-Gentile relations, but from all we know the conservative party may have forced James to take action against a practice that went against their own taboos. T. W. Manson’s suggestion therefore carries weight, that a message from James was brought to Peter, couched more or less in the following terms: “News has come to Jerusalem that you are eating Gentile food at Gentile tables, and this is cause-
Bruce has rightly observed:

The Jerusalem decree dealt with two questions—the major one, “Must Gentile Christians be circumcised and undertake to keep the Mosaic law?” and the subsidiary one, “What are the conditions with which Gentile Christians should comply if Jewish Christians are to have easy social relations with them?” The second question would not have been raised had the first question been answered in the affirmative. If Gentile Christians had been required to follow the example of Gentile proselytes to Judaism, then, when these requirements were met, table-fellowship and the like would have followed as a matter of course. But when it was decided that Gentile Christians must not be compelled to submit to circumcision and the general obligations of the Jewish law, the question of table-fellowship, which had caused the recent trouble in Antioch, had to be considered.

The decision reached was that the Gentiles would abstain from practices that were particularly offensive to Jews, namely (according to the most probable reading), from the flesh of animals that had been offered in sacrifices to idols, from meat with blood (including therefore the flesh of animals that had been strangled), and from “unchastity” in the sense of the degrees of consanguinity and affinity contemplated in Leviticus 18:6–18. If the Jerusalem “Council,” having set out to deal with the question of circumcision, ended with regulations related to table fellowship, the obvious explanation is that, once the matter of principle was settled, the effort was made to provide a modus vivendi for churches in which Jews and Gentiles would continue to have table fellowship together. And it is quite likely that the regulations included in this arrangement were basically the same as those that had always provided a basis for intercourse between Jews and “God-fearing” Gentiles in the synagogues throughout the empire.

According to Alan R. Tippett, the Jerusalem Decree “against the forcing of the cultural patterns of the evangelizing people on the unevangelized, is written into the foundation of the Church and cries aloud today at the expressly westernizing missionary.” True. But a closer look at the historical situation shows that the Jerusalem Decree also cries aloud at every attempt to solve the conflicts arising out of cultural differences among Christians by resorting to the formation of separate congregations, each representing a different homogeneous unit. The regulations given by the Jerusalem conference were formulated on the assumption that table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians was to continue despite the difficulties. Unity in Christ is far more than a unity occasionally expressed at the level of “the supracongregational relationship of believers in the total Christian body”; it is the unity of the members of Christ’s body, to be made visible in the common life of local congregations.

The working arrangement represented by the Jerusalem Decree was entirely consistent with Paul’s attitude expressed later in 1 Corinthians 8:7ff. and Romans 14:13ff. There was no compromise on a matter of principle, but the Gentiles were asked to forego their freedom with regard to practices that caused offense to their Jewish brethren. At least for Paul the way to solve the conflicts in the church was neither imperialistic uniformity nor segregated uniformity but love, for love alone “binder everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).

The Theological Mission

A well-attested fact regarding evangelism in the early church is that almost everywhere the gospel was first preached to both Jews and Gentiles together, in the synagogues. Luke provides no evidence to support McGarvan’s claim that family connections played a very important role in the extension of the faith within the Roman Empire, but there is no doubt that the “God-fearers” on the fringe of the Jewish congregation served in every major city as the bridgehead into the Gentile world. That these Gentiles who had been attracted to Judaism should be open to the Christian message is not surprising. If (according to the Mishnah) even the proselytes could only refer to God as “O God of your fathers,” how much less would the “God-fearers”—who were not willing to be circumcised and to comply with food laws—be regarded as qualified for membership in the chosen people. In F. F. Bruce’s words:

By attending the synagogue and listening to the reading and exposition of the sacred scriptures, these Gentiles, already worshippers of the “living and true God,” were familiar with the messianic hope in some form. They could not inherit this hope and the blessings which accompanied it until they became full converts to Judaism, and this was more than most of them were prepared for. But when they were told that the messianic hope had come alive in Jesus, that in him the old distinction between Jew and Gentile had been abolished, that the fullest blessings of God’s saving grace were as readily available to Gentiles as to Jews, such people could not but welcome this good news just as every ancestral instinct moved Jews to refuse it on these terms.

A cursory study of the Pauline mission shows that time after time on arriving in a city the apostle would first visit the synagogues and then, when the break with the Jewish authorities was produced, he would start a Christian congregation with the new Gentile believers and a handful of converted Jews (Acts 13:5, 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). Such an approach had a theological basis—the offer of the gospel was to be made “to the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10; cf. Acts 3:26), according to a conviction going back to Jesus himself, that the Gentiles could only be incorporated into the kingdom after Israel had had the opportunity to return to the Lord. But it also made it possible for the church to start almost everywhere with a nucleus of believers who already had the background provided them by Judaism, with all the obvious advantages that this background implied. From that nucleus the gospel would then spread to Gentiles with a completely pagan outlook.

It would be ridiculous to suggest that Jews and Gentiles heard the gospel together in the synagogues, but then those who believed were instructed to separate into segregated house churches for the sake of the expansion of the gospel. Such a procedure would have been an open denial of apostolic teaching concerning the unity of the church. It would have also meant that the door of the church was made narrower than the door of the synagogue, where Jews and Gentiles could worship together. The suggestion is so far-fetched that it can hardly be taken seriously. All the New Testament evidence, however, points in the opposite direction, namely, in the direction of an apostolic practice whose aim was the formation of churches that would live out the unity of the new humanity in Jesus Christ. The apostles knew very well that if the acceptance of “people as they are” was to be more than lip-service acceptance it had to take place at the level of the local congregations. Accordingly, they sought to build communities in which right from the start Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, poor and rich would worship together and learn the meaning of their unity in Christ, although they often had to deal with difficulties arising out of the differences in backgrounds or social status among the converts. That this was the case is well substantiated by a survey of the dealings of the apostles with the churches in the Gentile world, as reflected in the New Testament. For the sake of brevity two examples will suffice.

The Church in Corinth: It is in the context of a chapter dealing with the diversity not of homogeneous unit churches but of the members of the church that Paul states: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12–13). The emphasis
Jews and Gentiles heard the gospel on the nature of the oneness of Christians representing various racial and social groups can be best explained when it is viewed in relation to the situation of the church in Corinth.

According to Luke's report in Acts, the initiation of the church in that city followed the pattern characteristic of the Gentile mission. Paul began his preaching ministry in the synagogue, where Jews and Gentiles heard the gospel together (Acts 18:4). Later on he was compelled to leave the synagogue, but by then there was a nucleus of converts, including "God-fearing" Gentiles like Gaius Titus Justus (Acts 18:7; 1 Cor. 1:14) and Stephanas and his household (1 Cor. 1:16; according to 16:15, "the first converts in Achaia"), and Jews like Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and his household (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14). Gaius' house was located next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7) and it became the living quarters for Paul and the meeting place for "the whole church" consisting of Jews such as Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, and Gentiles such as Erastus and Quartus (Rom 16:23, 23).

There are other hints regarding the constituency of the Corinthian church given in 1 Corinthians. The clear inference from 1:26 is that the majority of the members came from the lower strata of society—they were not wise, or powerful, or of noble birth “according to worldly standards.” At least some of the members were slaves, while others were free (7:21-22). On the other hand, the community also included a few well-to-do members, notably Gaius (presumably a Roman citizen), Crispus (the ex-ruler of the synagogue), Erastus (the city treasurer, Rom. 16:23), and possibly Chloe (as suggested by the reference to her "dependents," who may have been slaves, 1 Cor 1:11).

It would be absurd to take Paul's exhortation to each Corinthian Christian to remain "in the state in which he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20) as lending support to the idea that each one was to belong to a homogeneous unit church representing his or her own race or social class.30 The whole point of the passage (1 Cor. 7:17-24) is that in the face of God's call both race and social status have become irrelevant; the only thing that really matters is faithfulness to Jesus Christ. The apostle is teaching here neither that slaves should remain in slavery nor that they should take freedom, should the opportunity for manumission come, but that the Christian's existence is no longer determined by one's legal status but by the fact that he or she has been called by God. The slave's slavery is irrelevant because the slave is "a freedman of the Lord"; the free man's freedom is equally irrelevant because he is "a slave of Christ" (v. 22). This is not a piece of advice to reject or to accept manumission—to leave or to remain in one's homogeneous unit—but an exhortation to see that, whatever one's social status may be, he or she is to "remain with God" (v. 24). In Bachtin's words, "Since God had called the Corinthians into koinonia with his crucified Son, it was this fellowship and not any status in the world which determined their relationship to God."31 This relationship to God was in turn to be the basis for the relationship among Christians.

The racial, social, and cultural diversity among the people that made up the church in Corinth goes a long way to explain the problems of disension that Paul addresses in 1:10ff. Although the Corinthians continued to meet together at Gaius' house (Rom. 16:23), they tended to divide into at least four groups, each claiming to follow a different leader (1:12). We cannot be certain regarding the distinctive claims made by each group, but the least we can say is that the Petrine party was made up of Jews who insisted on the food regulations formulated by the Jerusalem Council (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1ff; 10:25ff), while the "Christ party" was probably made up of Gentiles who regarded themselves as "spiritual men," opposed Jewish legalism, and denied the Jewish doctrine of the resurrection.30 To complicate things even further, the communal meals, in the course of which the believers participated in the Lord's Supper, had become a sad picture of the division of the church according to economic position. C. K. Barrett is probably right in inferring from the text that "the members of the church were expected to share their resources, the rich, presumably, to bring more than they needed and to make provision for the poor."31 Instead of sharing, however, the rich would go ahead and eat their own supper and even get drunk, while the poor would go hungry. The natural result was that the poor felt ashamed and the supper became a display of unbrotherliness (1 Cor. 11:20-22). It seems clear that, despite the divisions, the whole Christian community in Corinth continued to come together regularly in one assembly (11:17; 20; 14:23, 26; cf. Rom. 16:23). There may be some exaggeration in Johannes Munck's description of the Corinthian church as "The Church Without Factions,"32 but it is undeniable that all the evidence points in the direction of disunity and bickering, but not of separate churches representing the various positions in conflict.

The important thing here is to notice that the whole epistle exemplifies again the apostolic practice in the face of problems of division caused by racial, cultural, or social differences among the members of the church. Not the least suggestion is ever made that the solution to such problems is to be found in homogeneous unit churches that would then seek to develop "intercongregational activities and relationships."33 Again and again the emphasis falls on the fact that the believers have been incorporated into Jesus Christ, as a result of which all the differences deriving from their respective homogeneous units are now relativized to such a degree that in the context of the Christian community they can be viewed as nonexistent. Indeed the call to unity is central to the whole epistle.

The Church in Rome: This church, in contrast with the one in Corinth, seems to have broken up into separate groups, some of which may have been made up of people representing diverse homogeneous units in society. In Bruce's words, "Perhaps some local groups consisted of Jewish Christians and others of Gentile Christians, and there were few, if any, in which Jewish and Gentile Christians met together."34 It may well be that it was because of this situation that Paul addressed his epistle to the Romans "to all God's beloved in Rome" (1:7) rather than "to the Church of God which is at Rome." A better sign of this situation, however, is the mention made in chapter 16 of at least five house churches, associated with the names of Prisca and Aquila (v. 3), Aristobulus (v. 10), Narcissus (v. 11), Asycritus (v. 14), and Philologus (v. 15).

If this reconstruction of the situation of the church in Rome is correct, are we then to conclude that it lends support to the theory that the apostolic practice was aimed at the formation of homogeneous unit churches? So to conclude would be to disregard completely what was undoubtedly Paul's main purpose in writing the epistle. A better sign of the situation, however, is the mention in chapter 16 of at least five house churches, associated with the names of Prisca and Aquila (v. 3), Aristobulus (v. 10), Narcissus (v. 11), Asycritus (v. 14), and Philologus (v. 15).

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Paul's approach to the problem in Rome was consistent with the apostolic practice with regard to churches threatened by division. There is no evidence that he would have approved of the modern device to solve the problem of disunity, that is, the forming of segregated congregations open to communications with other segregated congregations. All his letters make it overwhelmingly clear that he conceived oneness in Christ as an essential aspect of the gospel and therefore made every effort to see that Christians would together "with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5).

Other New Testament writings reflect the same apostolic concern for church unity across all the barriers separating people in society. And no research is necessary to verify that the congregations that resulted from the Gentile mission normally included Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, rich and poor, and were taught that in Christ all the differences derived from their respective homogeneous units had become irrelevant (cf. Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-24; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Philem. v. 16; Jas. 1:9-11, 2:1-7, 4:13; 1 Pet. 2:18; 1 Jn. 3:17).

The impact that the early church made on non-Christians because of Christian brotherhood across natural barriers can hardly be overestimated. The abolition of the old separation between Jew and Gentile was undoubtedly one of the most amazing accomplishments of the gospel in the first century. Equally amazing, however, was the breaking down of the class distinction between master and slave. As Michael Green comments, "When the Christian missionaries not only proclaimed that in Christ the distinctions between slave and free man were done away as surely as those between Jew and Greek, but actually lived in accordance with their principles, then this had an enormous appeal."39 In F. F. Bruce's words, "Perhaps this was the way in which the gospel made the deepest impression on the pagan world."40

III. An Evaluation of the "Homogeneous Unit Principle"

How are we to evaluate the use of the homogeneous unit principle, advocated by Donald McGavran and his followers, in the light of the foregoing discussion of the apostolic teaching and practice regarding the unity of the church?

Before attempting to answer that question, two observations are necessary for the sake of clarity. In the first place, it cannot be denied that from a biblical perspective the (quantitative) growth of the church is a legitimate concern in the Christian mission.1 If God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), no Christian is in harmony with God's desire unless he or she also longs to see all coming to Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is clear that this longing will have to be expressed in practical terms (which may well include the use of anthropological and sociological insights) so that the gospel is in fact proclaimed as widely as possible. The issue in this evaluation, therefore, is not the employment of principles that can help in the expansion of the church. In the second place, it is a fact that hardly needs verification that the growth of the church takes place in specific social and cultural contexts and that people generally prefer to become Christians without having to cross the barriers between one context and another. This, again is not the issue in this evaluation.

The real issue is whether church planting should be carried out so as to enable people to become Christians without crossing barriers; whether this principle is "essential for the spread of the Gospel" and biblically and theologically defensible. Enough has been said in the two previous sections on the apostolic teaching and practice bearing on the subject for me to draw the following conclusions, all of which are amply supported by exegesis:

1. In the early church the gospel was proclaimed to all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, rich or poor, without partiality. More often than not during the Gentile mission Jews and Gentiles heard the gospel together. The New Testament provides no indication that the apostolic church had a missionary strategy based on the premise that church planting would be "more effective" if carried on within each separate homogeneous unit and was therefore to be conducted along racial or social lines.

2. The breaking down of the barriers that separate people in the world was regarded as an essential aspect of the gospel, not merely as a result of it. Evangelism would therefore involve a call to be incorporated into a new humanity that included all kinds of people. Conversion was never a merely religious experience; it was also a way of becoming a member of a community where people would find their identity in Christ rather than in their race, social status, or sex. The apostles would have agreed with Clowney's dictum that "The point at which human barriers are surmounted is the point at which a believer is joined to Christ and his people."43

3. The church not only grew, but it grew across cultural barriers. The New Testament contains no example of a local church whose membership had been taken by the apostles from a single homogeneous unit, unless that expression is used to mean no more than a group of people with a common language. By contrast, it provides plenty of examples of how the barriers had been abolished in the new humanity.

4. The New Testament clearly shows that the apostles, while rejecting "assimilationist racism," never contemplated the possibility of forming homogeneous unit churches that would then express their unity in terms of interchurch relationships. Each church was meant to portray the oneness of its members regardless of their racial, cultural, or social differences, and in order to reach that aim the apostles suggested practical measures. If "authentic unity is always unity in diversity,"44 the unity fostered by the apostles could never be one that eliminated plurality in the membership of local churches. Unity was not to be confused with uniformity either among local congregations or among individual church members. In Ignatius' words, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the whole Church." Each local congregation was therefore to manifest both the unity and the diversity of the body of Christ.

5. There may have been times when the believers were accused of traitorously abandoning their own culture in order to join another culture, but there is no indication that the apostles approved of adjustments made in order to avoid that charge. They regarded Christian community across cultural barriers, not as an optional blessing to be enjoyed whenever circumstances were favorable to it or as an addendum that could be left out if deemed necessary to make the gospel more palatable, but as essential to Christian commitment. They would have readily included any attempt to compromise the unity of the church among those adjustments to which Christian orthodoxy objects as "adjustments which violate essential Christian teachings."45

If these conclusions are correct, it is quite evident that the use of the homogeneous unit principle for church growth has no biblical foundation. Its advocates have taken as their starting point a sociological observation and developed a missionary strategy; only then, a posteriori, have they made the attempt to find biblical support. As a result the Bible has not been allowed to speak. A friendly critic of the "Church Growth" movement has observed that "lack of integration with revelation is the greatest danger in Church Growth anthropology."46 The analysis above leads us to conclude that the "Church Growth" emphasis on homogeneous unit churches is in fact directly opposed to the apostolic teaching and practice in relation to the expansion of the church. No missionary methodology can be built without a solid biblical theology of mission as a basis. What can be expected of a missiology that exhibits dozens of books and dissertations dealing with the
“Church Growth” approach, but not one major work on the theology of mission.

We must admit that at times “the witness of separate congregations in the same geographical area on the basis of language and culture may have to be accepted as a necessary, but provisional, measure for the sake of the fulfilment of Christ’s mission.” But the strategy of forming homogeneous unit churches for the sake of (quantitative) church growth has nothing to say in the face of “the fear of diversity and the chauvinistic desire to ignore, barely tolerate, subordinate or eliminate pluralism” which, according to C. Peter Wagner, “has perhaps done more to harm church life in America than has heretofore been recognized.” Because of its failure to take biblical theology seriously, it has become a missiology tailor-made for churches and institutions whose main function in society is to reinforce the status quo. What can this missiology say to a church in an American suburb, where the bourgeois is comfortable but remains enslaved to the materialism of a consumer society and blind to the needs of the poor? What can it say to a church where a racist “feels at home” because of the unholy alliance of Christianity with racial segregation? What can it say in situations of tribal, caste, or class conflict? Of course, it can say that “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic and class barriers.” But what does that have to do with the gospel concerning Jesus Christ who came to reconcile us “to God in one body through the cross”?

The missiology that the church needs today is not one that conceives the People of God as a quotation taken from the surrounding society, but one that conceives it as “an embodied question-mark” that challenges the values of the world. As John Poulton says, referring to the impact of the early church on society: “When masters could call slaves brothers, and when the enormities of depersonalizing them became conscious in enough people’s minds, something had to go. It took time, but slavery went. And in the interim, the people of God were an embodied question-mark because here were some people who could live another set of relationships within the given social system.” Only a missiology in line with the apostolic teaching and practice with regard to the extension of the gospel will have a lasting contribution to make toward the building of this kind of church—the first fruits of a new humanity made up of persons “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” who will unitedly sing a new song to the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:9).

Notes

7. C. Peter Wagner, Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), pp. 122–23. If both Jews and Gentiles were divided into “numerous important homogeneous units” (ibid., p. 114), why does Wagner argue that the Jerusalem church was divided into only two groups, the Hellenists and the Hebrews?
15. Judge, Social Patterns, pp. 52, 58.
18. Ibid., p. 132.
19. F. F. Bruce, New Testament History (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 169. C. Peter Wagner recognizes that “most synagogue communities in the Roman provinces were made up of a core of Hellenistic Jewish residents, some Gentile proselytes who had converted to Judaism and been circumcised, and a number of so-called God-fearers who were Gentiles attracted to the Jewish faith but who had not wished to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law” (Our Kind of People, p. 127). If that kind of pluralism was possible in a Jewish context, Wagner’s thesis that “New Testament churches were homoge­neous-unit churches” (p. 117) can be discarded a priori as an unwarranted assumption.
21. Ibid., p. 223ff.
29. Wagner, Our Kind of People, p. 150.
34. Ibid., p. 33.
38. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, pp. 198ff.
40. Wagner, Our Kind of People, p. 147.
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Book Reviews

Christ's Lordship & Religious Pluralism.


This is a lively discussion among Christians of different traditions about the way to understand other religions and relate to their adherents. It seems to be easier to promote dialogue between (at least some) Christians and people of other faiths than it is to get different kinds of Christians to discuss the subject with each other. That is why Wilfred Cantwell Smith can claim that this volume "marks something of a milestone."

It embodies papers given to a conference in 1979 by theologians from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Conservative Evangelical, and Ecumenical Protestant traditions. There are five main sections, each consisting of a presentation from one of these traditions, responses from two others, and a reply by the original essayist. There are admirable Bible studies by Krister Stendahl, four contributions to a panel discussion, and "an attempt at summation" by Professor W. Cantwell Smith.

One cannot comment in a short review on twenty-two separate papers. The value of the book lies in the interaction. I found myself asking: "Who is really listening to the others?" To my surprise I found most of the high marks for this going to the conservative evangelicals. This is worth pondering. Some of the contributors seem to confuse religious pluralism with cultural pluralism and to identify Christianity with one culture. Some are so overwhelmed by their (vicarious) repentance for the sins of nineteenth-century missionaries that all other issues are crowded out. And none seems to have been forced to think about Barth's famous word: "Religion is unbelief." At the end I found myself asking: "Is the root of our trouble that we see ourselves in the judge's seat rather than on the witness stand?"

But this is an important discussion that will start many fruitful lines of thought in the mind of a concerned reader. I warmly commend it.

—Leslie Newbigin


Dr. Fredrick Holmgren, professor of biblical literature at North Park Theological Seminary, has profitably utilized a sabbatical leave to produce this volume. It is designed to serve the Christian community as a positive setting forth of the values of the Jewish religious-theological vision for life.

The author himself describes the book as an "attempt to erase the caricature of Judaism that has existed in Christian circles for centuries" (p. 130). On this score the author must be commended for accomplishing in a measure what he set out to do.

The very title of the book, The God Who Cares, captures the most prevailling theological accent of the book. The God of the Hebrews is the God who seeks after men and women, and who seeks for them to walk before his face as covenantal partners. God has created them in the very image of God, and therefore God holds them responsible before him.

The law which God has given to Israel is to be seen not as a curse or a burden, but as an expression of that caring stance of God in regard to human beings. And that law sets forth not only the self-revelation of the heart of God, but also his guidance for the person who will live in relationship with such a God. As such the law is to be treasured as God's gift of life.

For those persons who err, for those who penitently seek his face, there is forgiveness with this God. In this book the faith and peace of the saints of the old covenant come alive. But is that person of faith still to be found in Judaism, and is the New Testament portrayal of the Jewish community reliable?

Holmgren makes a beginning at answering these questions, and for that we are thankful. But he does not sufficiently grapple with the most basic questions: Why does the messianic expectation lie so pervasively embedded in the Old Testament documents? And, What is the meaning of the coming of Jesus of Nazareth who is the very core of the New Testament documents? Christianity developed out of the Jewish tradition not because God did not care enough, but because the Jews did not care enough. And the coming of Jesus in pristine fashion revealed that God does care!

—R. Recker

R. Recker, a graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, served for fifteen years as a missionary in Nigeria. He presently serves as Associate Professor of Missions at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.


First issued in 1968 as All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Mission, R. Pierce Beaver's classic has become a primary source book for anyone interested in the history of women in the nineteenth century. Women's missionary societies were among the first places where women exercised their talents outside the home and gathered leadership experience to be used in a host of reform activities.

To the 1968 edition Beaver has added a new chapter on "The Decade of the 1970s," the time when "women's liberation" swept the country and the church again. Unfortunately, laments Beaver, the movement does not seem to have affected missions. Power and policy-making still appear to be almost exclusively in male hands. About the only mission boards that have women presidents are those founded by women.

Beaver also notes the marked decline of single-women missionaries. While married-couple missionaries have more than tripled in number since 1950, the number of single women has not even doubled. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth single women far outnumbered married and were often the backbone of the missionary enterprise. He could find only six boards that employed more than 100 single women and only two small faith missions that still numbered more single than married women on their rolls.

Beaver concludes with a plea for more single women, citing their special contributions to the missionary enterprise, and couples that with the realistic observation that women need to be admitted to "full partnership in the making of policy, strategy, and promotion in the homeland and field councils."

Eerdmans Publishing Co. is to be commended for reissuing this matchless book.

—Nancy A. Hardesty

Jesus in Indian Paintings.


The value and importance of this book, written by an American Methodist missionary on the staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, is much greater than most people would imagine or expect. It contains a wealth of information and can be of great help to seasoned scholars as well as to students starting in this field.

Taylor's work is trustworthy—the best available to date on the subject. For instance, his chapter on Christian art in the Mogul period gives a fascinating account and analysis, dealing

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Christian artists began around 1930" as Indian Christian art "must be his­
with those of Muslim and Hindu faith . white man with blond hair and blue
not only with Christian artists, but also
as Indian Christian art "must be his­
Christian community . . . the Chris­
situation" (p. 172) . Hence all things -Arno Lehmann
understanding of Christ must be
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were joined by Sisters, whose work won special commendation.
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Endurance the foundations of the Roman
Catholic Church in the area were laid .
The mission carried on in the face
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by the Salesians of Don Bosco, who are
Michael Neill was for twenty years an Anglican
missionary and then bishop in South India. Now re­
tired and resident at Wy lifecycle Hall, Oxford, Bishop
Neill is writing a major history of Christianity in

After many years of labor in the hills
and among the tribal groups of Assam
(present Northeast India), Mgr. Becker
published in 1923 a work entitled
Sstromtal des Brahmaputra, which was
widely read in mission circles in Ger­
many. Now almost sixty years later a
complete English translation of the
book has appeared. The question may
be raised whether the needs of the
readers today would not have been
better served by a much shortened ac­
count of these events of nearly a cen­
tury ago.

The German Salvatorians arrived
in Shillong in 1890. They were not pio­
ners. The Welsh Calvinistic Method­
ists had long had a flourishing work
among the Khasis, and the American
Baptists were at work in the Brahmaputra valley. The newcomers were able
to build on the excellent linguistic
work of their predecessors in reducing
writing the languages of the area and
laying the foundations of Christian lit­
erature. But the relations between the
two branches of the church were not as
happy as they might have been.

The mission carried on in the face
of frustrations and even of disasters.
The Fathers were joined by Sisters, whose work won special commendation.
By 1914 they had built up a
church of about 5,000 members. Then
the tragedy of World War I broke upon
them. No less than fifty-seven pages
are devoted to the story of the deporta­
tion of all the German missionaries by
the British authorities. Perhaps these
sad events of long ago could have been
left to rest in silence.

The Salvatorians were never al­
lowed to return; their place was taken
by the Salesians of Don Bosco, who are
glad to acknowledge their debt to the
earlier missionaries, through whose en­
durance the foundations of the Roman
Catholic Church in the area were laid.
—Stephen Neill

Stephen Neill was for twenty years an Anglican
missionary and then bishop in South India. Now re­
tired and resident at Wy lifecycle Hall, Oxford, Bishop
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dous asset for study groups that want to
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Hunger for Justice is a journey for its readers from the anguished question, "Why does God tolerate poverty and suffering?" to the realization that "In the suffering of the poor, God is . . . screaming . . . at us and at our institutions and social systems that cause and perpetuate hunger, poverty and inequality."

It is a journey that the author himself is making and so he deals head-on with the comfortable myths that keep justice, hunger, and salvation unrelated in mainstream North American Christianity: "The problem is over-population." "Christians should be apolitical." "A good war will solve our economic problems." Step by step, Nelson builds an alternative worldview by exposing the links between hunger and underdevelopment in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the policies and strategies pursued by the United States government and the multinational corporations.

Nelson uses the prophet Amos' commentary on the roots of hunger in eighth-century B.C. Israel in order to establish the link between faithfulness to God and justice. The economic situation in Israel—food exported while poor people went hungry, foreclosure on debts of the poor, monopoly control over food supplies by merchants—bears remarkable parallels to our world today.

The countries most seriously affected by the world food crisis have some common characteristics. Their economies are integrated into the international free-enterprise system, their economic production is geared to international markets, and their domestic economies are free-enterprise economies.

An alternative would be economic self-reliance (the path chosen by China in 1949) with an emphasis on providing basic goods and services for all the citizens rather than providing luxury items for export. Nelson demonstrates how American foreign policy has helped to discourage agricultural and industrial self-sufficiency among developing nations.

Americans, Nelson says, have been "mesmerized by a corporate definition of freedom (. . . freedom of access to raw materials, freedom to invest and trade) and development (. . . process whereby foreign economic interests and privileged groups in underdeveloped countries enrich themselves at the expense of the great bulk of their populations) to the point that we hardly notice that poor countries most open to U.S. economic penetration, that is those who encourage free enterprise, are military dictatorships."

Thus the food-crisis picture is brought back to America and linked to our military spending. Military security alone cannot be the guarantor of human security in the face of global injustice. Those concerned about world hunger will also have to concern themselves with the powerful American military establishment.

Nelson reminds us that, as sons and daughters of God, our security is ultimately linked to faith and justice. Religion that is used to excuse or perpetuate injustice is idolatry, the worship of false gods. In his reshaping of an economic and social world-view, the author calls us back to knowledge of the true God. To know God is to do justice.

The reader, faced for the first time with an interpretation of economic and political issues that runs counter to mainstream American religion will begin to appreciate the tremendous difficulties Israel had in extricating itself from the dominant values (idolatries) of the neighboring nations.

Jack Nelson, the national co-ordinator of the Politics of Food program of Clergy and Laity Concerned has written this book especially for North American Christians. From the worldview he builds, new directions for solutions emerge, which take seriously the power and energy of ordinary people linked together.

In a time when many missionaries include some economic development as part of the mission approach, this book is especially valuable. There is a need to be "wise as serpents" in choosing an appropriate and biblically integrated course of action.

—Dorothy Friesen

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Dorothy Friesen worked in Southeast Asia with the Mennonite Central Committee for three years. Under the auspices of Mennonite Voluntary Service, Newton, Kansas, she recently completed a North American speaking tour, linking Asian, North American, and biblical concerns.

January, 1982
It is always difficult to assess a book about the thought of a person because one has to assess the work of the author of the book as well as the work of the subject of the book. To take the latter first: Robert Charles Zaehner was a convert to Roman Catholicism and from 1952 he was Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at All Souls’ College, Oxford. As Spalding Professor he was the immediate successor of Dr. Radhakrishnan, later president of India. I must have been one of his last research students before he died in 1974 while walking home from Mass. At that time I was still in the middle of my research work. Zaehner was known to be a highly eccentric person both in his work and in his personal habits. For example, he was conservative enough to argue for the priority of Matthew’s Gospel on the basis that the church taught it! At the same time, he made a remark, in my presence, to the Dalai Lama that he (Zaehner) was a crypto-Buddhist! It is important to remember (and it is doubtful that Schebera always does) that “East” and “West” for Zaehner often simply meant “the Sub-Continent of India” and “West Asia” respectively. He was once asked to lecture on Eastern religions by a leading American university. He wrote back asking them which Eastern religions they were thinking of, since, in his view, all of them were Eastern! Zaehner would not have agreed with Schebera’s recurring assumption that Christianity is predominantly Western. He was all too acutely aware not only of Christianity’s Asian origins but also of the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches of the East. He knew also that by the close of this century the majority of Christians would be in the southern hemisphere.

As for Schebera’s assessment, it is good as far as it goes but it does not take into any great account the complexity of Zaehner’s personality. For instance, scant attention is paid to the problem of Zoroastrianism as far as Zaehner’s Semitic-Indian divide is concerned. Is Zoroastrianism Indian or is it Semitic? If it is, as one must say, influenced by and influencing both traditions, then what becomes of Zaehner’s claim that only in Catholic Christianity is the Semitic-Indian or the mystical-prophetic divide overcome? Again, the place of Islam in Zaehner’s work is not given enough attention. Also, Zaehner’s assessment of Sufism was much more complex than the book suggests. For example, Schebera mentions the fact that Zaehner thought that Sufism was influenced by Vedanta. This is too simplistic. Zaehner thought that certain monistic and pantheistic Sufis were influenced by Vedanta and/or Neoplatonism, but he was equally aware of the theistic tradition within Sufism which, he admitted, had strong roots within the Qur’an, though he did not discount the influence of Eastern Christian monasticism. Schebera points out that Zaehner turned against Teilhard toward the end of his life. This is true, but what is also true is that the result of giving up Teilhard’s vision was, for Zaehner, bitterness and pessimism as far as humankind’s religious destiny is concerned.

Although, on the one hand, one may say that Zaehner’s view of Jesus Christ is fundamentalist and does not take into account the very great deal of work that has been done on the relation between the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith, Schebera’s, on the other hand, empties the word “Christ” of all particularity and makes it possible for the word to be used to denote almost any and everything.

Finally, I agree that the “fulfillment” model cannot easily be used in formal dialogue with people of other faiths. Still, it has a more limited use in discussion with those who are conscious of the unfulfilled aspirations within their own religious tradition and may be willing to see Christ as the fulfillment of these aspirations.

The book is a reasonably competent survey of certain aspects of Zaehner’s thought and could be useful if one is able to get used to the rather academic jargon, which is, nevertheless, combined with an informal, journalistic style.

—M. J. Nazir-Ali

Michael J. Nazir-Ali is Senior Tutor at the Karachi Theological Seminary, Church of Pakistan. He has studied, done research, and taught at Cambridge and Oxford universities.
This learned study consists of 14 selected papers from a symposium held in 1975 in Stuart, Florida, on missionary activity in Oceania by the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania. It is ASAO Monograph No. 6, has notes, 32 pages of references, figures, tables, general introductions and conclusions. Unfortunately, however, it has no index. What prompted this publication "is a growing consciousness among students of society and culture ... that the missionary contribution both in action and in reflective scholarship should be reevaluated" (p. 1).

The missionary reading this book will become exasperated when he sees how often his work is presented as if nonreligious factors alone, like social benefits and political power, prompted Oceanians to convert. However, it is a chastening experience to see how one's work is looked upon by another profession and to learn how varied and perhaps unsuspected the motives of converts may be. Lest a missionary feel from the outset that his work is misunderstood and misrepresented, let him begin by reading the papers of Counts, Forman, and Hughes.

Hezel and Arbuckle show the salutary impact on indigenization by Vatican II's teaching, but this teaching is not new, as it would seem from the text. Rome in 1659 instructed missionaries going to China: "Use no effort and take no steps to persuade those peoples to change their rites, customs and morals, provided they are not very evidently contrary to religion and good morals. .. Bring them not your country, but your faith, which neither rejects nor harms the rites and customs of any nation, but wishes rather that they be kept safe and sound, provided they are not perverse" (Collectanea, Rome, 1907, p. 42).

This basic missionary principle has been insisted upon down through the centuries and was simply confirmed by Vatican II. I would suggest that its implementation is particularly difficult for missionaries because of the great pressure exerted on them by the peoples to whom they are sent, peoples so eager to share on every conceivable level what they recognize as goods in the culture of the missionaries. There might well have been a paper devoted exclusively to this problem.

The existence of such pressure is mentioned, of course, in the papers on Western Samoa by Tiffany (p. 425) and on Tonga by Dektor Korn (p. 419), with whom I agree one hundred percent when she says, "I suggest that we might more productively view missionization as a dynamic process in which local people themselves are active agents and manipulators." This book is a deliberate step by anthropologists in that direction; it is an incentive for missionaries to continue the process of indigenization.

—Ralph D. Wiltgen, S.V.D.
Dr. David J. Bosch, a former missionary, is currently a member of the theology faculty of the University of South Africa in Pretoria. This book, one of the few in the area of missionary spirituality, originated as lectures given at the Mennonite Missionary Study Fellowship in 1978.

After noting the problems that missionaries have in their devotional lives, Bosch develops a spirituality which attempts to avoid any action-contemplation dualism. As he sees it, spirituality is a life of involvement that leads to a deepening of dependency upon God which, in turn, draws one to increasing involvement in the world. He focuses his reflections on 2 Corinthians, "the best case study in mission-spirituality that has ever been published" (pp. 12-13).

The missionary lifestyle, he says, must avoid the triumphalism of the hawker, the militancy of the crusader, and the success orientation of the capitalist. The missionary is servant and ambassador of Christ. The missionary is like a chauffeur, like a spare tire (B. Joinet), or like a beggar who tells other beggars where to find bread (D. T. Niles). Missionary spirituality is a spirituality of the cross, which possesses conviction with modesty, sees power in weakness, and feels joy under affliction. The missionary is neither superperson nor miracle worker, but a common Christian chosen by Christ to work on the borderline between the already and the not yet and to be sustained by the conviction: This is where I belong.

Two temptations for missionaries are overactivity and loss of discipline. The former is Pelagian in thrust, since it neglects the central doctrine of justification by faith. The latter involves succumbing to easier standards than one would have to face at home. The book also discusses other difficulties such as extreme individualism, self-inflicted misery and martyrdom, and the inability of some Westerners to accept other races as equals.

This is a worthwhile book. Some may wish to complement Bosch's exclusive attention to 2 Corinthians with other scriptural passages important for missionary spirituality, for example, Matthew 9:35 to 11:1 or Romans 8 to 10. More attention might also have been given to the themes of hope, confidence, and joy that flow from participation in the mission of God and faith in the resurrection.

What Bosch has done, however, he has done well. The book is interesting and inspiring. It is of value to Roman Catholics as well as to Protestants. Finally, it is short enough to be easily available to the busiest missionaries in the field.

—Michael Collins Reilly, S. J.
The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa.


How shall we interpret the vitality of African churches saddled with the legacies of mission Christianity? Independence has not swept the field in Kenya, for example. Despite their internal conflicts, Western-style churches in Africa are still growing at a phenomenal rate of 5 percent a year.

Robert Strayer in this volume analyzes the development of Anglican mission communities in Kenya from 1875 to 1935. It is based on thorough archival and field research. The study includes detailed analyses of the freed slave communities of Freretown and Rabai, the scramble for missions in Kikuyuland, the mission/church tensions over decision-making and self-support, mission/state relations under colonialism, the challenge of African politics, and the crisis over female circumcision.

Strayer, who is associate professor of history at the State University College in Brockport, New York, argues that mission communities enabled Africans to adapt to a changing society. Many viewed Western-style churches as "highly important mediators of modernity, a means to overcoming the power and status gap between Europeans and Africans" (p. 157).

Furthermore, he argues that they became the arena for the making of a new African culture. Admittedly sharp conflicts existed, but over missionary absolutism, not Christianity. Often, however, missionaries were flexible and responsive to local demands. Consider, for example, Strayer's analysis of the circumcision crisis among the Kikuyu. While most missionaries found the practice of female circumcision abhorrent, many listened intently to local opinion. It is significant that independent churches today have little strength in those districts in which the Church Missionary Society (CMS) bishop permitted "local option" for female circumcision if conducted privately and with no physical injury.

In this book Strayer challenges the assumption that "indigenous" Christianity can be studied only in African

Fifteen Outstanding Books of 1981 for Mission Studies

The Editors of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research have selected the following books for special recognition of their outstanding contribution to mission studies in 1981. We have limited our selection to books in English since it would be impossible to consider fairly the books in many other languages that are not readily available to us. We commend the authors, editors, and publishers represented here for their continuing commitment to advance the cause of the Christian world mission with scholarly literature.


independent churches. He argues that "both individuals and societies found on occasion in the immigrant religion symbols, techniques and ideas which seemed appropriate to meeting old needs and which could facilitate their adjustment to the new and wider world increasingly impinging upon them" (p. 2).

Strayer focused in this monograph on the impact of one missionary society (CMS) in one country (Kenya).

That is its major strength. Yet readers may wish that some comparisons had been made between the CMS and other mission communities in Kenya, or between Church Missionary Society approaches in various African countries. It is to be hoped that Professor Strayer will use his well-honed research and analytical skills in future in comparative studies.

—Norman E. Thomas

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In his autobiography Abel T. Muzorewa, bishop of the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and recent prime minister of his country, chronicles his long struggle with the white racist regime of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. As readers follow the flow of events, the conferences and numerous consultations, they are aware that they are getting the perspective of only one participant in the struggle. One needs to go elsewhere for other interpretations. However, the bishop has given a straightforward, honest account of his own pilgrimage.

The style is simple and engaging. One feels keenly the poverty, the injustice, the suffering of indignities, the cruelty, the frustrations of powerlessness, and the anguish of difficult decisions. There are moments that are touching, but the author does not play on the emotions. The reader rejoices as victories are achieved and progress toward liberation is made.

The incredible blindness and obstinacy of the Ian Smith government, the infighting of competing nationalist leaders, the interference and sometimes intrigue of leaders in neighboring countries, the attempts of Britain and the United States to "solve" the issues, including pressures, foot dragging, proposals of various kinds, the many conferences, etc., are all a part of the story. In the 1978 agreement, made in Salisbury between Smith and the blacks led by Muzorewa, Smith finally conceded the key issue: one man—one vote. A plan for an "interim government" looking toward full black autonomy, called the "Internal Settlement," was set in motion. The blacks, however, had to make concessions, which in the view of many compromised Muzorewa's position. The agreements are included in the appendix.

William M. Pickard, Jr. is Chairman of the Religion and Philosophy Department, Huntington College, Montgomery, Alabama. From 1954 to 1970 he served as a missionary of the United Methodist Church in the Philippines, working in the pastorate, in general evangelism, and as professor at Union Theological Seminary near Manila.
Ecumenism in India. Essays in Honour of The Rev. M. A. Thomas


It is now almost expected that a reviewer will react negatively to a Fest­schrift: But I am going to break that habit. This volume has several virtues. It is brief (the longest contributions run to only fifteen pages), it has thematic unity, the authors are capable and distinguished, and several of the chapters will merit careful study in the future.

The book has five sections of unequal length. In order, their subject matter is roughly as follows: Christ and India’s religions; the Indian response to ecumenism; church unity in India; reflections on the Bangalore meeting of the Faith and Order Commission; and the life and ministry of Madathethu Abraham Thomas, whom the volume honors. The role and significance of the Indian churches in many facets of ecumenism is beyond question, and it is an appropriate tribute to one of their major leaders that this kind of attention should have been given to the issues involved.

I have space here only for a few comments on individual articles. Father George Soraes-Prabhu has written a very useful study entitled “Jesus Christ amid the Religions and Ideologies of India Today.” The inclusion of ideological movements is especially valuable, and his observations about such matters as the fate of Gandhian sarvodaya in contemporary India are illuminating. The section on church unity in India, with pieces by Russell Chandran, Sam Amirtham, and T. V. Philip, offers substantive commentary on an area in which Indian Christianity has been notably in the vanguard. Then finally the reactions of M. M. Thomas and Lucas Vischer to the Bangalore Faith and Order meeting are full of interest. M. M. Thomas’s analysis of Wolfhart Pannenberg’s view of the meeting is one of the highlights of the book. At Bangalore, Pannenberg was apparently part of an attempt to have participants sign a statement defending the North American system of power and values against the criticism of Robert McAfee Brown and others. M. M. Thomas’s critique is measured and makes good reading.

—William M. Pickard, Jr.

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George Peck is Dean and Judaism Professor of Christian Thought and International Mission at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Massachusetts. An Australian, he served as a missionary on the faculty of Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, India, from 1958 to 1963.

January, 1982


Living More Simply contains papers five key papers were read. William Pannell, assistant professor of evangelism at Fuller Theological Seminary, opened the conference with "a call to a simpler lifestyle." He raises the disturbing question: "If as American evangelicals we have not found a way to translate our theology into eth­

ical activity, so that the little people of the earth can discern our solidarity with them, how much longer can we preach Christ with integrity?"

Biblical foundations for living more simply were dealt with. Frank Gaebelein, headmaster emeritus of Stonybrook School, reviewed the Old Testament teachings, and Peter Davids, assistant professor of biblical studies at Trinity Episcopal School, reviewed New Testament concepts. One reminder from Davids was: "A biblical lifestyle will necessarily recognize itself as being in opposition to the prevailing values and lifestyle of its culture."

Gladys Hunt, lecturer and author, associated with InterVarsity, brought a practical paper on "Evangelicalism and a Simpler Lifestyle." The practical issues raised by Hunt are important. Many of the points seemed to speak past the subject rather than directly at it. With her conclusion there can be no argument: "Our obsession with the material world can paralyze our best interests."

The concluding chapter of the book is the fifth paper, written by George Monsma, professor of economics at Calvin College. The section on "Influences of International Institutions and Lifestyles" and these influences on "Lifestyles within Low Income Countries" are among the more valuable parts of this volume of papers.

A series of testimonials, presenting specific models of simple lifestyle were given each morning. The thirty-nine suggestions of "space and share" presented by the Mennonite Central Committee are particularly helpful.

Ronald Sider, editor of these papers and the leader of this consultation, teaches theology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also was the convenor of the unit on Ethics in Society of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship, which was a part of an international consultation on simple lifestyle in London in March 1980. These papers were a part of the preparation for the international study.

Virgil A. Olson

Virgil A. Olson is Secretary, Board of World Missions, Baptist General Conference, Evanston, Illinois. Previously he taught church history and mission at Bethel Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, and served as vice president and academic dean of Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota.
A Christian Approach to Muslims: Reflections from West Africa.


How does a Christian meet a Muslim? What does a Christian need to know about a Muslim? What does a Christian invite a Muslim to? Is it belief? Is it faith? Is it community? Is it lifestyle? What are the tensions in the encounter between Muslims and Christians, and how does one deal with them? These are the kinds of questions Dretke addresses as he relates to Muslims in West Africa. He is general advisor of the Islam-in-Africa Project, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. He worked with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Nigeria and Ghana from 1957 to 1977.

Dretke uses a format of fictitious characters, both Christian and Muslim, who live in an urban neighborhood in Ghana, West Africa. Both Christian and Muslim characters portray a diversity of religious beliefs and practices, and represent a wide spectrum from religious orthodoxy to nominal religious affiliation. Prejudices and stereotyping are aired intermittently between Christians and Muslims. Relationships over time are seen to change as interaction is taken seriously in everyday-life situations. Dretke attempts to demonstrate that when Christians and Muslims take each other seriously the gospel has the most favored opportunity for acceptance among Muslims.

A Christian meets a Muslim by being an initiating neighbor in dialogue and discipleship. One listens to and learns from his Muslim neighbor while at the same time one shares the Christian experience and lifestyle. Dretke points out that the greatest similarity between the two is the belief in and worship of one and the same God; the main dissimilarity is the Muslim understanding of law (Shariah) and the Christian understanding of grace (Christ).

A Christian needs to know the mind-set and the religious lifestyle of a Muslim for effective communication. Dretke indicates that the Muslim forms of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, as well as Muslim belief in prophets and sacred Scriptures, are points of contact for the Christian approach. In fact, Dretke surmises that if numbers of Muslims enter the church, it could change the day of worship from Sunday to Friday; fasting might be taken seriously; and a new emphasis upon regular times of prayer might occur.

This book poses questions and posits orientations in Christian-Muslim communication that are universal in scope. Resources of biblical data and theological reflections are presented as Christians and Muslims encounter one another in everyday life. This Christian approach to Muslims may be a primer for other encounters in neighborhoods around the globe.

—George W. Braswell, Jr.
at which time the homogeneous unit approach to indigenous mission efforts was adopted. The motivation at that time was, of course, admirable, but the net effect was that this strategy, combined with a complex set of social factors, gave rise to the separation of races. This reviewer cannot help wondering if this is not a real danger in the homogeneous unit principle, which seems so attractive on paper but is so far from the biblical norm in its separation of people. Here is the first warning for the church in the remainder of the world.

Another root cause of the dilemma is the extent to which Afrikaner nationalism and Christianity merged into one world-view, which embodied a theology of racial separation. Today many in the Afrikaner camp point to biblical justification for the policy of apartheid. Obviously this is a serious distortion of Scripture, but here is another case of what can happen when the Bible is used as justification for strongly nationalistic and secular tendencies. Isn’t there some parallel presently in the West, where evangelism and middle-class American values are virtually seen as being one? Here, then, is another serious lesson for the Western world.

There is still a third area in which a principle emerges that needs to be heeded by the church worldwide. The South African Afrikaner government claims to have its roots in the Word of God, especially in that it is an expression of common grace. The Dutch Reformed Church sees its role as expressing itself only in the spiritual realm. Therefore, it has not had a strong theological perspective from which to enter into a severe attack on unjust and unfair governmental practice. The English-speaking church, on the other hand, has not been so hampered. This has led to severe conflict between churches themselves. What has happened here in the Dutch Reformed Church is a distortion of its role, leading to a practice of avoiding the secular and spiritual. This very same tendency is seen in evangelicalism elsewhere in the world, which seems all too often to embrace similar tendencies.

This reviewer likes to dream that Afrikaner theologians and others in the camp of maintaining the status quo will read de Gruchy’s book. I doubt that they will do so, because it will make their position altogether untenable and decidedly uncomfortable. De Gruchy has served as a true prophet for today, and his analysis may provide the kind of rational thinking upon which solutions can emerge.

—James F. Engel

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1970

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This list of doctoral dissertations was prepared by David J. Bosch, Professor of Missiology at the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Dr. Bosch is also Editor of Missionalia and General Secretary of the South African Missiological Society.

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