Mission as End and Beginning

In his comments on John’s Gospel, William B. Frazier reminds us, in the lead article in this issue, of “the massive role [Jesus’] death plays in his access to the nations and theirs to him.” This theme of the crucial significance of death in God’s plans for the life of the nations is an old one in the Scripture, and echoes from the Old Testament in the life of Abraham. Frazier’s “foundational probe,” as he calls it, as to where mission begins, reminds every participant in mission that the pathway to new beginnings for individuals and for groups may lead through the doors of death. It is indeed time for Christians in mission to gain some new perspective on death and eternal life in relation to the catholicity of God’s people.

The doctrine of the church has always been a battleground between the old and the new, and C. René Padilla examines some of the revolutionary implications of a new ecclesiology that has been developing throughout Latin America, particularly through the experiences of base ecclesial communities. Not only for Roman Catholics but for Protestants as well, these new stirrings have challenged traditional mindsets as well as church structures. Does this new ecclesiology mean the end of the church as many have known it, or does it portend a new beginning? As a Protestant, Padilla notes the irony that “most Protestant churches today fear the kind of movement that gave them birth or revitalized them along the way.” In ecclesiology as in life itself, some dying may be the prelude to new beginnings.

Africa has been the scene of burgeoning movements of church growth, as Norman E. Thomas points out, and there are factors at work in that continent that are significant to Christians around the world. Thomas’s article examines some of these factors, and how they may cast more light on movements for evangelization and church growth elsewhere.

This issue contains Harry R. Boer’s contribution to our continuing series, “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” as well as Dana L. Robert’s presentation on the work of A. J. Gordon, in our legacy series. Although they worked in different generations and circumstances, both men display a remarkable ability to experience the essence of the missionary task and to communicate their enthusiasms to others in significant ways.

In addressing the question as to where preaching the gospel begins, William B. Frazier replies: “Nowhere but in coming to terms with death does the preaching of the gospel begin. This is the way Jesus himself finally breaks through to the nations, and there is simply no other way open to his followers.” Therein may lie a new beginning for all of us.

A New Haven for OMSC

After sixty-five years in Ventnor, New Jersey, the Overseas Ministries Study Center—publisher of this journal—has moved to New Haven, Connecticut. Please note the new address of our editorial office as indicated in the masthead of this issue.
Where Mission Begins: A Foundational Probe

William B. Frazier, M.M.

What gives rise to mission may be the most important window we have on what mission itself is all about. Origins have to do not only with starting points, but with the meaning and destiny of things. This principle, which is taken for granted in the creation stories of Genesis and the infancy stories of the Gospels, has yet to be applied with full consistency to missiological reflection. The considerations that follow are motivated by this need.

To approach directly where mission begins is to ask about the global orientation of the gospel message. What is behind the irrepressible Christian belief that the good news is intended "for all the nations" (Mt. 28:19)? If we can do justice to an answer, we shall find ourselves at the headwaters of the missionary enterprise, better equipped than before to deal with the issues it raises in the combined areas of policy and practice.

Beginning with the Bible's sense of its universal audience, I shall consider the flowering of this instinct in what Christians have come to know as the catholicity of the church. I shall attempt to engage this datum on successively deeper levels, not for the sake of catholicity itself, but for the seeds of missionary identity enclosed within it. Finally, I shall point to some general implications for the conduct of missionary activity and for the shaping of missiological education.

Through Catholicity to Mission

The church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the gospel, but through the universality of the gospel it proclaims. This is one of the first and most important things we discover when we approach the understanding of mission through what might be called the missionary mark of the church, its catholicity.

In its cumulative expression, the Judeo-Christian vision is unmistakably catholic. It finds in its own essence the answer to the deepest longings of every human heart, whenever and wherever it happens to be. Albeit with subdued emphasis, this point of view is solidly in place in the Old Testament tradition, especially during the period centered in the exile. With the ministry of Jesus the theme intensifies, due less to his explicit teaching than to the expansiveness of his person, his God, and the kingdom he came to announce. As for the New Testament itself, the reality if not the language of catholicity must be regarded as a dominant motif.

Our first evidence of Christians actually calling themselves catholic is no earlier than Ignatius' Letter to the Smyrneans, written within the first decade of the second century. Some forty years later a certain Marcion uses the same designation in his Martyrdom of Polycarp (ca. 156). By the end of the century, with the inclusion of "catholic church" in an early creedal formula, the vocabulary of catholicity was well on its way to the universal scale. Before attempting to pursue this matter in detail, we must see that the line between catholicity and mission is clearly drawn.

If qualitative catholicity refers to the expansiveness of Christ welling up within the church, surg ing and pulsing in the direction of the nations, missionary activity is simply what this dynamic looks like in practice. "Through missionary endeavour," writes Avery Dulles, "the Church continually strives for a fuller realization of its catholicity." This is close to the very first thing Vatican Council II had to say about mission: 'The Church has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be the universal sacrament of salvation.' Acting out of the innermost requirements of her own catholicity and in obedience to her Founder's mandate (cf. Mk. 16:16), she strives to proclaim the gospel to all men. These commentaries recall and confirm the working principle of this investigation: mission begins where catholicity begins! They also provide an agenda: the way to missionary insight and identity winds through the "innermost requirements" of what it means to be catholic.

Where Catholicity Begins

The church begins to be catholic, not through any initiative of its own but through the abiding presence of Christ. As John Meyendorff remarks, "Christ alone renders the Catholic Church catholic." The unique wedding of divinity and humanity in Jesus stirs with universal implications. It is God's way of saying, indeed shouting, that he desires to live in incredible intimacy with all created things, and that one day the loose ends of the galaxies themselves will be tied together. As mentioned earlier, this is Christian catholicity in its most concentrated form, and the best explanation we have of the global and cosmic orientation that fuels the missionary activity of the church. Although Dulles rightly refers to this presence as "the catholicity of Christ," it is clear that the Lord's catholic fullness has "innermost requirements" of its own. These are best described, again in the words of Dulles, as "the catholicity of God . . . and of grace," categories that we must now examine more closely.

The catholicity that belongs to Christ, and through him to the church, depends in its turn on the plenitude of God and his gracious giving. It embodies and mediates the unsurpassable gift that God intends his personal presence to be for every human spirit. Through his word and in the power of his Spirit, God has determined to be not only creator, but father and mother to all who are willing to share his life as adopted sons and daughters. The theological categories commonly invoked here are various local congregations. This is catholicity in its most obvious and available form. And it is this meaning that gradually came to dominate, without serious interruption, the entire history of catholic consciousness in the Christian community, except for the early period already mentioned. The appropriate terms for this brand of catholicity are quantitative, geographical, or extensive.

Only in relatively recent times, measurable in decades rather than centuries, do we find Christian attention shifting back again to the mysterious dynamics of qualitative catholicity. At least in part, this development seems to have been occasioned by the emergence of rival catholicities on the quantitative level, aggressive political and industrial competitors for the global supremacy once an exclusive prerogative of the church. In this context, Christians began asking themselves if their own catholicity was anything more substantial than the counting of countries and cultures and peoples. They began to search beneath the spatial universality of the church for what might be called the condensed catholicity of the Christian mystery itself, its primordial impetus toward global expansion.

Because the quantitative catholicity that developed gradually in the course of time is simply the historical unfolding of its counterpart on the qualitative level, the priority of the latter is not only temporal but normative. Qualitative catholicity not only tells us where quantitative or extensive catholicity comes from, it also explains what makes the gospel message capable of speaking to and attracting the human spirit on a universal scale. Before attempting to pursue this matter in detail, we must see that the line between catholicity and mission is clearly drawn.

If qualitative catholicity refers to the expansiveness of Christ welling up within the church, surg ing and pulsing in the direction of the nations, missionary activity is simply what this dynamic looks like in practice. "Through missionary endeavour," writes Avery Dulles, "the Church continually strives for a fuller realization of its catholicity." This is close to the very first thing Vatican Council II had to say about mission: 'The Church has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation.' Acting out of the innermost requirements of her own catholicity and in obedience to her Founder's mandate (cf. Mk. 16:16), she strives to proclaim the gospel to all men.' These commentaries recall and confirm the working principle of this investigation: mission begins where catholicity begins! They also provide an agenda: the way to missionary insight and identity winds through the "innermost requirements" of what it means to be catholic.

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Soteriological Troubles

The mysteries of sin and salvation, in which the universality that requires the church to be missionary is centered, are victims of a long history of theological miscalculation and neglect. For centuries, especially in the West, Christians never seriously examined the saving work of Jesus for traces of what might be called overt universality, the kind that is directly accessible to human experience. There was simply no inclination to do so as long as the reigning view of salvation located its essence in something that transcended directly between Jesus and his Father, and only indirectly, if at all, between Jesus and the sinners he came to save.

The infinite love and obedience embodied in the death of Jesus made infinite satisfaction to a God infinitely offended by the reality of sin. In this context, universality has more to do with the way God and Jesus experience sin and salvation than with the way human beings do. The universal predication is reduced to a divine requirement for infinite reparation, which is something sinners in need of deliverance can never know very much about. In other words, the universality of sin and salvation in the satisfaction theory is tied to divine infinity in such a way that whatever it may say to the actual longings of finite spirits (what I have called overt catholicity) is hardly worth the saying. Neither is there any real consolation in the fact that satisfaction is no longer the ruling principle of soteriological reflection today, foundering as it has on the rocks of historical-critical exegesis. Having rightly marginalized a theory no longer adequate to the mystery it defined, Western Christians seem to have nothing to put in its place. The result is what can only be called a soteriological vacuum.

Accordingly, many Christians find themselves today in a state of lethargic illiteracy when it comes to soteriological matters. Except in a very general sense, they don't really know what salvation means, and, for a variety of reasons, they don't really care. This is true not only on the popular level, but in professional theological circles as well. Gustavo Gutiérrez complains of this situation in his Theology of Liberation:

One of the great deficiencies of contemporary theology is the absence of a profound and lucid reflection on the theme of salvation. On a superficial level this might seem surprising, but actually it is what often happens with difficult matters: people are afraid to tackle them. It is taken for granted that they are understood. While the concern expressed here probably flows from the intimate bond between salvation and liberation, and from a suspicion that amorphismness in the one may neutralize the other, a similar result seems to attend the link we have just considered between salvation and catholicity. If sin and salvation remain for most of us little more than vague generalities,
how shall we ever be able to identify and utilize for the sake of mission what explains their global significance?

Before catholicity can relate to mission in fact in the way we have been suggesting it does in principle, we must overcome the soteriological obstacles just described and press our way far enough into the saving ministry of Jesus to discover the very substance and shape of its universality. If what he accomplished really could not be confined within the borders of Palestine, within Jewish culture and language, and within the time frame of the first century, we should be able to talk about it in other than sweeping statements and meaningless slogans. We should be able to show, without prejudice to the influence of time, place, and culture, that what Jesus did to deliver the world from the bondage of sin addresses the human predicament on a level that all people can recognize and respond to simply because they share human existence. In sum, we have to be still more concrete and specific about the soteriological dimensions of catholicity’s “innermost requirements.”

The following section of this essay addresses the need I have just described. It attempts to make more explicit sense of catholicity itself by forcing to the surface what is innately and overtly catholic about the biblical understanding of sin and salvation. This will, it is hoped, prepare the way for a more realistic and effective anchoring of missionary initiatives in qualitative catholicity.

Thanatological Catholicity

The route we have been traveling brings us now to this rather elusive if not repulsive heading, which might be expanded in the following way: the essentials of Christianity are universal in their focus and appeal prehistory of Israel, looking specifically for what recommends them to the nations, the role death plays in Yahweh’s approach to his people is one of the first things we find. Abraham and the Servant of Yahweh are prominent illustrations of this pattern. It is, I submit, beyond coincidence that in these central characters of the biblical drama the saving presence of God, the appeal to the Gentiles, and the mystery of human death come together in creative unity.

The Catholic universal significance of Abraham is easy enough to establish. When we first discover him in the pages of Genesis, he belongs to that part of humankind the Jews will later call Gentile. From here, from the nations themselves, that is, Yahweh calls him forth not only to father a new people, but to bless “all the communities of the earth” (Gen. 12:3). Later on, as pressure builds against his faith, Abraham hears the promise once again: not only Jews, but “a host of nations” (Gen. 17:4–5) will be counted among his children (cf. 18:18). A third and final reminder of this orientation follows directly upon the sacrifice of Isaac: “in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing” (Gen. 22:18). When Paul takes up these data in his letters to Rome and Galatia, he attends not only to the fact but to the explanation of Abraham’s catholicity. What is behind the patriarch’s impact on the teeming millions who dwell beyond the Promised Land? Paul’s answer is very clear: Abraham is a man of faith. He is catholic because his faith is catholic. And his faith is catholic because in some mysterious way it reproduces itself on a universal scale. In and through the faith of Abraham, all believers come to birth. His belief explains his fatherhood: “Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3).

As a result of this faith, there came forth from one man, who was himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands of the seashore . . . . By faith, Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac; he who had received the promise was ready to sacrifice his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your descendants be called.” He reasoned that God was able to raise the dead, and so he received Isaac back as a symbol [Heb. 11:12, 17–19].

If, as in the case of Paul, our way of looking back at Abraham is paschal and, therefore, cruciform, we too shall take as more than a passing curiosity the fact that the patriarch was for all practical purposes a dead man as he went through his long struggle to be faithful. In recent theological history, no one has made more of this than the eminent dogmatician Karl Barth. His commentary on the chapter of Romans that we have just examined is an extended portrait of Abraham in terms of what we may now be ready to call thanatological faith. Barth is convinced that the living death of the patriarch is present to his faith, not as a mere accident but as an essential ingredient. “If the line of death . . . . be removed from Abraham’s faith, its whole significance is removed . . . .” Abraham ceases to be Abraham, if his life is not the consequence of his death.”

With this perspective in place, the Abraham narratives themselves yield new depth and meaning. From the barrenness of Sarah (Gen. 11:30) to the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1–18) we notice, perhaps as never before, the relentless mortal density of the drama. That death is center-stage, however, is not something arbitrary or incidental. Behind it a consistent if paradoxical pattern can be found: God seems to have selected Abraham not in spite of but because of his disability. The childlessness and advanced age of the patriarch were not things Yahweh discovered post
factum and then decided to live with. Rather, they seem to have been essential to what God had in mind for him from the very beginning. The predicament of Abraham, therefore, did not block the way; it was the way. This is why, until the very end of the narrative, Yahweh does more to aggravate than to alleviate the living death of the patriarch. He asks Abraham to leave behind his sole surviving claims to a future, his land and his family (Gen. 12:1); he prolongs the agony of his affliction for twenty-five years (17:17; 18:9-12); and, finally, he requires that the promise itself, in the person of Isaac, be reduced to ashes (22:1-18). It is one thing to call such behavior instrumental to what Yahweh intended to achieve through Abraham; it is quite another to mine the narratives for hints and traces of the mystery that makes it so.

A familiar explanation of Abraham's plight and its complication from on high is based on the idea of testing or trial. The patriarch was required to prove the quality of his faith before receiving the benefits of the promise. What this position can be defended in principle (Gen. 22:1), in fact, it often leads to a superficial reading of the narratives. While this position can be defended in principle (Gen. 22:1), in fact, it often leads to a superficial reading of the narratives. It is quite another to mine the narratives for hints and traces of the mystery that makes it so.

We know this because the living death of the patriarch could have been remedied without recourse to the excruciating postponement of the promise. For them, death can be overcome only by asserting the constructive power of life. By contrast, the way Yahweh offers Abraham depends so thoroughly on the power of God that overcoming and going through death paradoxically coincide. What contaminates the building of the city and the tower is the exact reverse of the death-accepting or thanatological faith that secures an immortal future for the patriarch. The death-resistance of Babel translates directly into faith-resistance. Thanatological sin blocks the way to thanatological faith. There is no indication of sin and death-resistance in Abraham are the following:

Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky, and so make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth [Gen. 11:4].

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing, ... All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you [Gen. 12:2-3].

Common to both texts is the importance of perpetuating a name, which, as we have already seen was tantamount to the perpetuation of life itself. What makes this death-resisting goal reprehensible, on the one hand, and acceptable, on the other, gets back to the question of means. The Babelites settle for a project depending entirely on their own resources and efforts. For them, death can be overcome only by asserting the constructive power of life. By contrast, the way Yahweh offers Abraham depends so thoroughly on the power of God that overcoming and going through death paradoxically coincide. What contaminates the building of the city and the tower is the exact reverse of the death-accepting or thanatological faith that secures an immortal future for the patriarch. The death-resistance of Babel translates directly into faith-resistance. Thanatological sin blocks the way to thanatological faith. There is no indication

### Announcing

The next meeting of the International Association for Mission Studies will be in Rome, June 29-July 5, 1988, on the theme: “Christian Mission Toward a Third Millennium: A Gospel of Hope.” This will be followed immediately (July 6-8, 1988) by an IAMs consultation on Documentation, Archives, and Bibliography for Mission Studies at the same location.

The general secretary of the IAMs is Dr. Joachim Wietzke, Protestant Association for World Mission (EMW), Mittelweg 14, D-2000 Hamburg 13, West Germany. The editor of the IAMs journal, Mission Studies, is Dr. Thomas Kramm at the Institute of Missiology in Aachen, West Germany. The Rev. Paul Rowntree Clifford in England continues as treasurer, and Sister Joan Chatfield, M.M., is president.
defense is that I have tired of watching the patriarch’s universal impact, this enormous missionary datum, consistently passed over, whether by not being explained at all or by being reduced either to an arbitrary divine appointment or to a vague and amorphous common faith of which he is the equally vague and amorphous progenitor. Convinced as I am that such accounts leave so much to be said about the catholicity of Abraham, I have pointed to his massive engagement with the mystery of death as a new possibility for moving the discussion forward. It remains to be seen if this initiative will be massively engaged or confirmed by the data we have yet to consider.

The role of death in Abraham’s catholicity would be easier to ignore were it not for a vigorous repetition of the pattern in the Servant envisioned by Second Isaiah (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). Here again, the embrace of unmerited suffering and death is instrumental in a divine saving initiative that reaches the ends of the earth. There are, of course, differences. In the case of the Servant, it is not necessary, as it was with Abraham, to unearth the thanatological soil of his faith, for suffering and death clearly characterize his ministry from beginning to end. The two afflictions also originate differently. Abraham’s is due to the unexplained sterility of Sarah; the Servant’s, to a tidal wave of premeditated malice. The only other variation is that the bond between death-acceptance and salvation of the Servant is one that the Servant perhaps has not fully achieved in the portrait of Abraham. If we are to take the Servant corpus seriously, we must assume more than a casual connection between his two major foci: voluntary suffering and the universality of deliverance. It is because he is “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isa. 53:7) that he will be able to establish justice in the earth and that the coastslands will wait for his teaching (42:4; cf. 42:1-4). This explains why the light that the Servant is meant to be for the nations (Isa. 49:6) will be received by them with a mixture of attraction and aversion (49:7; 52:15). For the light of one “who walks in darkness and has no light” (Isa. 50:10) will seem not to be light at all, even when, in the case of the nations, there is no other way of seeing.

As with Abraham, we must do more than merely trace the universality of deliverance back to the Servant’s free embrace of death. We must ask once again how it can be that something as bizarre as death-acceptance can deliver anyone from anything, much less Israel and all the nations from the universal bondage of sin. The best answer I can find is utterly simple, obvious, and direct. It maintains that what the Servant did by way of deliverance is the precise reversal of what transpires on the deepest level of all destructive behavior. The malignancy he turned inside out by walking freely into the jaws of death (Isa. 50:5-7; 53:7) is nothing other than our frantic, calamitous inclination to run in the other direction. His death-defeating death-acceptance targets our death-dealing death-resistance, much in the same fashion as Abraham. The Servant and the patriarch witness to the same pattern, but neither gives it final expression.

The biblical bonding of catholicity and death culminates in New Testament reflection on the person and message of Jesus. Like his Old Testament counterparts, the crucified and risen Lord of the gospel mediates the universal deliverance of God, not in spite of but through his affliction. This idea is a commonplace in the letters attributed to Paul. The Son, whom God handed over for the sake of all (Rom. 8:32), gave his life so that all might be saved (Rom. 5:6-19; cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:4-5). Through the blood of his cross he brings the Gentiles near (Eph. 2:11-18), justifies sinners without exception (Rom. 3:23-25; Heb. 9:28), and heals the divisions that threaten every level of existence everywhere (Eph. 1:7-10; Col. 1:19-20).

The sheer expansiveness of the cross is to be found also in the Gospel of Mark and its Matthean parallels. Undoubtedly the evangelists have all in mind when they describe the death of Jesus as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45; Mt. 20:28). 15 The same applies to the many for whom the blood of Jesus is poured out in the eucharistic formulas (Mark 14:24; Mt. 26:28). What these texts illustrate is confirmed and concretized in the unlikely incident of Jesus’ “embalming” at Bethany. The curious ending of the accounts is particularly instructive for our theme: “She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her” (Mark 14:8-9; cf. Mt. 26:12-13).

This is no mere attempt to give a woman’s generosity wider audience. What demands the inclusion of her story in the message that will be preached throughout the world is not so much that she did Jesus a favor, but that the favor she did him spoke directly to the universal scope of his messianic task. By pointing with marvelous spontaneity to his passion and death she bore witness to their connection with a gospel intended for all the nations. Accordingly, the conclusion Ferdinand Hahn draws from Mark 14:9 seems difficult to dispute: “the announcement of Jesus’ death and the proclamation of the gospel in the whole world belong indissolubly together.” 16

Catholicity and death are coupled once again in the tradition of Luke-Acts. This bond is one of the things Luke implies when he insists that the passion and death of Jesus were necessary (Lk. 17:24; 18:31-34; 24:7, 26, 44), and when (following Mark) he unifies his account of the Lord’s affliction around his journey to Jerusalem (Lk. 9:51; 13:33). For the Holy City is at once the place of the cross and the place of departure for those who will bear the gospel to the nations (Lk. 24:44-48). This portion of Luke’s concluding chapter, along with a parallel passage in Acts (26:22-23), are the evangelist’s most explicit references to the universal significance of Jesus’ death. I shall return to these important texts in the following section of this study.

What we have gathered so far from the Pauline and Synoptic traditions is that the inspired writers and their addressees were aware of the bond between thanatology and the universal deliverance of God, not in spite of but through his affliction. This insight, however, did not dawn suddenly and evenly on the Christians of the first century. Their initial response to the death of Jesus was to link it with the end of what he stood for rather than with its universal significance (Lk. 24:21). It was only gradually, and for the most part through their own experience, that suffering and death began signaling catholicity. This happened in a purely extrinsic and superficial way when Christians fleeing persecution became unexpected messengers of the gospel (Acts 5:40-42; 8:4-5; 11:19-21). Paul was one of those who began to read this phenomenon on a deeper level. He began to see in his own afflictions and those of the churches he founded not only occasions for fleeing with the good news to new apostolic endeavors, but paradoxical points of entrance into the very hearts of those he evangelized. He found he was succeeding in his work as an apostle, not in spite of but because of the deaths he found himself dying every day (1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 12:10). What seemed to be the offensiveness of the gospel turned into its appeal. Paul discovered this in dramatic fashion as he preached the gospel at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). There was something about the doctrine of the cross that broke through the boundaries of his own race and culture and spoke directly to what might be called the catholic hunger of his audience. The word that comes to mind here is “revelation.” Is this the “something” that finally explains the bond between thanatology and catholicity? Are suffering and death essential to the universal language spoken by the God of truth? Without something like this in mind, it is difficult to see how Paul could have addressed the following words to the Corinthians:

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyman’s conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; al-
always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh [2 Cor. 4:2–11; cf. Rom. 3:25–26; Gal. 1:16].

Despite this exquisite weaving of Jesus’ death and his own into the very fabric of revelation and its inherent catholicity, Paul does not develop this theme at length and is never associated with its classic New Testament expression. This distinction belongs to the author of the Fourth Gospel.

Revelation is what gives the death of Jesus universal status in the Johannine version of the good news. For the incarnate Word is depicted there as the one who makes the unseen God known (Jn. 1:18), not only to the children of Israel, but to all who open their hearts to receive him (1:7; 9, 12; 17:6). Light and glory are the images John favors in making this revelational claim for the Son of Man (1:4–9, 14, 3:19; 12:46), always with the proviso that what he illuminates is not merely the Jewish nation, but the world (8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Although the many things Jesus said and did make their contribution to this theme, there can be little doubt, as Senior reminds us, that it culminates on Calvary: “For John the most intense moment of Jesus’ mission to reveal God comes at the moment of death.” We know this from the following descriptions of the cross as an image raised high for all to see:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life [3:14–15].

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me” [8:28].

“Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show by what death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?” [12:31–34].

In the hour of its coming, this cross with its pitiful, powerless burden will show the glory of God in its full radiance (Jn. 12:23, 27–28; 17:1). If we ask about the content of the revelation that peaks in the Crucified, the answer will lead sooner or later to one of the most familiar passages of the fourth Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” [3:16]. What John has Jesus reveal from the cross, however, should not be reduced to the loving divine motive behind the event. The raw material of the revelation, both in this verse and in the two that precede it, is that in Jesus, God employs death to defeat death. This paradoxical message, in itself and in its universal implications, may be disputed as to where and how it is given textual expression, but not as a principle in its own right. In his intriguing commentary on the charge Pilate attached to the cross (Jn. 19:19–20), Aelred Lacomara underlines the importance of this distinction: “By telling us that the written proclamation of Jesus’ kingship was in three well-known languages, John may intend to convey that this kingship was universalized at Jesus’ death. Whether this is the intention of the verse, there is no doubt that it is the teaching of John.”

The main lines of this teaching unfold gradually in chapters 11 and 12, where John charts the Lord’s journey toward death and glory. The sequence begins at Bethany with the raising of Lazarus (11:1–44). While this miracle seems to deal only with Jesus’ friend, and merely with life in spite of death, in fact, it points to the life Jesus will attain and make universally available through the cross. We gather this from the way John ties Bethany and Calvary together. For he assures us that the Lazarus affair was behind the Sanhedrin’s decision to destroy Jesus (11:45–53; 12:9–11), and that such is the miracle’s connection with his glory (11:4), “not so much in the sense that people will admire it and praise him, but in the sense that it will lead to his death, which is a stage in his glorification.” The universal implications of the raising of Lazarus remain incomplete until we can view them in light of the Lord’s entry into Jerusalem. Then it will be easy to see that Jesus rejects and reverses the crowd’s nationalistic interpretation of this miracle that gained him an enthusiastic reception in the Holy City. What Jesus did for Lazarus, therefore, signifies not merely life instead of death extended to one person, but life because of death extended to all. Near the end of the chapter, this theme reappears with the unwitting prophecy of Caiaphas (11:49–52).

The revelation John finds in the death of Jesus reaches full expression with the interplay of thanatology and catholicity in chapter 12. The opening scene itself anticipates the cross if we accept that Jesus was not merely anointed at Bethany, but ritually embalmed (12:1–8). While this account lacks the explicitly universal reference we saw in Mark 14:9, Brown, invoking a sample of rabbinic imagery, suggests that the whole house, which the aroma of the ointment filled, may stand for the whole world.

This brings us to the nucleus of our theme (Jn. 12:9–36) and to the following estimate of its revelational shape: as the life of the Johannine Jesus narrows down, its impact paradoxically broadens out. Something like this explains the way John deals with the initial incident of the passage, the Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem (12:9–19). That the Holy City gradually becomes a symbol of mortal danger for Jesus and his followers can be assumed from the warning articulated in John 11:7–8 (cf. 10:22–31). And given John’s reminder that on the eve of the Jerusalem visit the chief priests were planning to kill Lazarus too (12:10–11), one might be tempted, as I am, to think of the gates of Jerusalem as the jaws of death (cf. Mt. 16:18), and of the Lord’s progress toward them as a preview of the mortal journey he would soon undertake. Temptations aside, however, there are clear thanatological overtones to the entry narrative and it remains to indicate the traces of catholicity with which they converge.

This is not the easiest of tasks because the event, as John describes it, seems anything but universal in scope (12:12–15). The best interests of the city and the nation clearly dominate the desire to make Jesus king.

"In Jesus, God employs death to defeat death."

This attitude, however, applies only to the crowd. Brown assures us that Jesus himself not only rejects this narrowness of vision, but symbolically replaces it with the gesture John describes in verses 14–15. By mounting the donkey Jesus assumes the prophetic role given the Messiah in Zechariah 9.9. Unlike Matthew 21:5, however, John does not focus on the humility of Jesus, since he omits that part of the Zechariah text. What John finds in the donkey incident is Jesus’ attempt to universalize the nationalistic expectations of the crowd. He does so by prefacing Zechariah’s words with a globally negative borrowing from Isaiah (3:16, 9, 10). The subtext of this interpretation explains why the disciples do not understand it until after the resurrection (Jn. 12:16), and why John, in the interim, leaves it to the Pharisees to articulate: “Look, the world has run after him” (12:19). The Johannine entry scenario is now complete: as Jesus passes into the jaws of the city that will soon devour him, his enemies spontaneously voice the universality of his appeal, although, as Brown reminds us, “in a wider sense than they intend.”

What the raising of Lazarus, the embalming at Bethany, and the entry into Jerusalem have been building toward, John brings clearly to the surface in verses 20–36, which is the remaining portion of our theme’s nucleus in chapter 12. Here the thanatological roots of Johannine catholicity are exposed for all to see, mainly in the decisive role the Gentiles play in bringing Jesus to the hour of his death and glorification. This is really the only sense we can make of John’s reference to the several Greeks who express the desire to see the kingly figure so recently arrived in the city and, presumably, in the precincts of the Temple (12:20–22). The fact that they are neither heard from nor dealt with again in the rest of the narrative is good reason to assume that they are referred to at all for theological rather than historical purposes. John needs these inquisitive foreigners, not for the integrity of his story but for the expression of his belief that what happened on Calvary reaches to the ends of the earth. It is not by accident, therefore, that John has Jesus recognize the arrival
of his hour immediately after he learns of the Greek initiative (vv. 23–24). In fact, the two incidents are discrete moments in a soteriological continuum. Since, in John’s mind, it is the cross that finally makes the difference between a localized deliverance and one intended for the world, he calls upon these “delegates” of all peoples and places to trigger, as it were, the decisive events of the new age.31 This theological insight, however, John does not leave to the unassisted ingenuity of his readers. He makes sure that the words he attributes to Jesus portray, without compromise, the massive role his death plays in his access to the nations and theirs to him. Two related parts of Jesus’ discourse are especially important:

(24) “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (25) He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. . . . (31) Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; (32) and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (33) He said this to show by what death he was to die.

Here is thanatological catholicity in one of its purest expressions. John not only ties the universal reach of Jesus’ ministry directly to his death (vv. 24, 32),32 he hints at the anthropological and pathological conditions that make this kind of deliverance necessary. The primordial problem is simply that death and eternal life must be embraced together or not at all in the Johannine vision of human destiny (v. 25). By exploiting the built-in tensions of this arrangement, satanic power establishes itself in the world. We are led to this conclusion by looking carefully at the way this power itself is said to be overcome. For if the death that Jesus freely dies is what defeats the Prince of this world (vv. 31–33), destructive death-resistance may be the best answer we have to the way his kingdom prospers. In making this suggestion I admit to having in mind not only the text of John, but the Letter to the Hebrews, which Brown, echoing others, describes as “a work with many Johannine affinities.”33 If we assume that Hebrews 2:14–15 is one of these, then what I have just attempted with John 12:25, 31–33 may have more than my personal soteriological musings behind it.

The point in all of this is that it was not enough for John, nor should it be for us, merely to connect Jesus in some vague and amorphous way with the Greeks who came looking for him one day in Jerusalem (vv. 20–22). In fact, the theological density of this encounter is worked through in the discourse we have just examined. Jesus does not change the subject after meeting with his enigmatic visitors; he deepens it. His words are a commentary on the role of death in the pressures building for centuries in the Gentile world, and now spilling over in these representative figures (vv. 24–25, 31). Standing as they do for “all men,” they are drawn instinctively to find in Jesus’ death the answer to their own (vv. 32–33). These are the hard data behind as good a summary as we have of the catholicy of John: “The gospel is a gospel for the whole world only because of the cross.”34

Although John gets into more depth and detail about thanatological catholicity than any other New Testament writer, he never points to exactly what enables the death of Jesus to captivate the human spirit on a universal scale. For this crucial datum we must return to the Gospel of Mark, ceding to its author the final word in this biblical survey. The passage in question is Mark’s account of how the Roman centurion behaves as he witnesses the last agony of Jesus (Mk. 15:16–39, esp. v. 39). What makes this individual so important is that he seems to be for Mark what the Greeks are for John: not just another actor on the stage, but a key interpreter of the drama. He stands not just for himself, but for the great masses of the Gentile world who have yet to believe in Jesus. As he gives voice to the many, Mark gives us through him our closest look at the boundless magnetism of the cross. This refinement comes with the reason behind the confession, which is not the same for Mark’s centurion and for his counterparts in Matthew (27:45–54) and Luke (23:44–47). For the latter, it is the disruptions of nature that make the difference. Their words of recognition and praise clearly derive from the dimming of the sun and the shaking of the earth. How unlike the reason given by Mark: “The centurion who stood guard over him, on seeing the manner of his death, declared, ‘Clearly, this man was the Son of God!’” (Mk. 15:39). Here is someone who believes, not because earth and sky revolt at the death of a man, but because the death itself is where the revolution really happens. This expert in the art of inflicting pain is overwhelmed and undone by one equally adept in the art of embracing it. George Monague elaborates the point:

The centurion, representative of Gentile Rome, is the first in the gospel to make the Christian confession that Jesus is the Son of God. Not even Peter did that. What brings the centurion to confess the true identity of Jesus is not the cosmic signs he sees, but how Jesus died. It is Jesus’ heroic endurance of death, not his miraculous escape from it, that proves the very issue for which he was condemned (14:61–64). Mark is telling his community of martyr-candidates that, like Jesus, they must be ready to go through death itself, and not run from it or expect a miraculous deliverance. Jesus, though a powerful healer and savior, is crucified in his weakness (2 Cor. 13:4), and that is what wins the ultimate victory and the confession of the Gentile world.35

While the centurion’s fascination with death-acceptance is a welcome detailing of the way death shapes catholicity, the idea itself, as we have seen, is as old as the portraits of Abraham and the Servant. Mark simply brings this sometimes elusive notion sharply and unmistakably to the surface. In so doing he places the finishing touches on thanatological catholicity as a biblical theme and brings us to the difference it makes for the missionary task.

Where Preaching the Gospel Begins

Nowhere but in coming to terms with death does the preaching of the gospel begin. This is the way Jesus himself finally breaks through to the nations, and there is simply no other way open to his followers. The free acceptance of death, in both its literal and its symbolic forms, relates so intimately to what God wishes to be for the human spirit, to the hungers he thereby creates within it, and to his way of subduing the forces that militate against it, that to preach the good news consistently with any other style and focus would amount to not preaching it at all. When exactly this thanatological sensitivity began shaping the way early Christians preached the gospel is difficult to say. All we know for sure is that the New Testament itself makes the connection between death-accepting Christians and the innate attractiveness of the faith. Since some of the clearest evidence of this conviction appears in the writings of Luke, I would like to examine two related samples of its development, one in the Gospel of Luke and the other in the Acts of the Apostles.

If we had Luke to interrogate about where to begin preaching the good news to the nations, I have no doubt he would say very simply but very emphatically: “Begin at Jerusalem!” This, after all, is the mandate he had Jesus give his disciples: “He said to them: ‘Thus it is written of God, and of destination for the Lord’s own saving journey into death. ‘I must proceed on course today, tomorrow, and the day after, since no prophet can be allowed to die anywhere except in Jerusalem’” (Lk. 13:33; 18:31f.).
The primary missiological sense Luke makes of Jerusalem, therefore, is that the Lord’s ministry to the nations culminates in the death he freely chooses to embrace. What did this have to do with anything related to the gospel in Jesus’ name? Is that, then, the reason he was called to preach the gospel? Luke makes it clear that he must be “prepared to embrace the Jerusalem destiny as their own.” Luke details this requirement in the Acts of the Apostles where he attributes the following words to Paul: “Yet God raised him from the dead, and for many days thereafter Jesus appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. These are his witnesses now before the people” (Acts 13:31). Here, as before, Luke is not only recording history, but interpreting it missiologically. Those who witness to the gospel as missionaries must do more than report on the Lord’s journey to Jerusalem. They must join him on the way and face the mortal threat he faced. This is why Luke insists that preaching the gospel to the world must begin at Jerusalem. Dillon writes:

The Christian mission’s “beginning from Jerusalem” is a substantive, keynoted “beginning,” not just a matter of geographical fact. His ambassadors must share the destiny of Jesus as prophet; hence they can expect the path of their mission to be defined by its origin in Jerusalem, perennial prophet-murderess, just as the Master’s path was defined by its destination in the city.

The first and most important message missionaries have for the nations, therefore, is the fact and quality of their own death-acceptance. This, however, is not the last thing Luke has to say about the preaching that must begin at “Jerusalem.” The theme is already in place as he begins the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:4; cf. Lk. 24:49).

Luke’s account of the first Christian Pentecost is an extended commentary on the meaning of “Jerusalem” preaching among the early followers of Jesus. In order to trace this development and highlight its unity, I would like to refer to a frame of reference that I believe is at least worth considering that the easiest and perhaps best solution to the problem of communication at Pentecost is to think of death-acceptance itself as the one language all recognized as their own (Acts 2:6, 8, 11). Whether or not this notion, as such, belongs to Luke, his attempt to anchor missionary preaching in “Jerusalem” and to give the idea Pentecostal expression would make little sense if he were not convinced that accepting death figures prominently in attaining the interest of the nations. This, in turn, summarizes as well as anything the Abrahamic shape that, I have suggested, Luke gives his account of the Spirit’s coming.

The New Testament seeds that make accepting death ingredient to reaching the world with the gospel come to full flower near the middle of the second century with a breakthrough in the church’s understanding of Christian witness. At issue was a growing awareness that the Greek term for witness (martyria) was not specific enough to capture what properly Christian witness was beginning to mean. In Greek usage, martyr was restricted to verbal testimony, normally in a court of law. For a hundred years or more Christians applied the term to various ways of witnessing to their faith, usually by word of mouth (Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32, 3:15; 5:32; 10:39–47; 13:31), but sometimes through the sacrifice of life (Acts 21:37; 9:16). The comprehensive meaning of martyr was what gradually faded away in Christian consciousness. Well before the century was out martyr had come to mean solely and exclusively what martyrdom as a Christian category has signified ever since, namely, the free embrace of violent death for the sake of the gospel.

But how did this gutting and remodeling of Christian witness come about? What was it that demanded the replacement of witness-at-large by witness-through-death? Nothing, it seems, but the church’s accumulated experience of how effective those who died for their faith really were in bearing witness to the wider world. One of our best commentaries on this experience dates from the eve of martyrdom’s birth as a properly Christian term. "The more we are persecuted," wrote Justin Martyr (d. ca. 162–65), "the more do others in ever increasing numbers em­brace the faith and the name of Jesus. Just as when one cuts off the fruit-bearing branches of the vine, it grows again and other blossoming and fruitful branches spring forth, so it is with us Christians." By the end of the century, after what we understand by martyrdom today had become widespread, Tertullian (d. ca. 220–23) gave what amounts to his own rationale for the change in words Christians have never been able to forget: "Yet, your tortures accomplish nothing, though each is more refined than the last; rather, they are enticements to our religion. We become more numerous every time we are hewn down by you: the blood of Christians is seed." It was the martyrs themselves, therefore, who redefined martyrdom for the church, confirming as they did the New Testament bond between accepting death and witnessing to the gospel in the world.

Unlike many other theological insights, the equation between Chris-
tian witness and witnessing through death reached maturity within the very century that gave it birth. Subsequent generations of Christians, therefore, never had to improve on what martyrdom came to mean in the second century. But they did and still do have to struggle to keep the bond between death-acceptance and Christian witness intact. Since in the following words Karl Rahner seems to have our struggle in mind, I do not hesitate to quote him in full:

To the extent that the content of witness as classifiable in terms of "this worldly" categories is in its full nature the historical event of the death of Jesus as blessed and as leading to God, it can, as a factor in concrete human life, only be realized aghast when he who bears the witness has in principle decided to accept his own death. The spirit of faith and hope that one's own death will lead blessedly into the freedom and security of God's presence constitutes the mode in which alone witness is possible. To that extent there is a real and effective connection between the act of bearing witness to the truth and "martyrdom." For that which (in terms of content) is attested in witness is (from a Christian point of view) nothing else than the belief that this death has, in Jesus, achieved its goal and the hope of the witness himself that in his own death

Beyond confirming the role of death-acceptance in Christian witness, Rahner includes something already mentioned in our study, but never before. He goes on to suggest that missionary activity, in its purest and most proper form, will involve the will to incur the risk of this death, and, moreover, he will be able to follow after the dying Jesus. Now this necessarily involves the will to incur the risk of this death, and, moreover, precisely as something occasioned by the witness itself, to take upon oneself the act of "martyrdom." The development which takes place, starting from the New Testament idea of witness which does not yet (explicitly) contain the idea of a "witness of the blood," leading to the concept of witness of the early Church in which death (as freely accepted) is itself regarded as witness, is therefore perfectly legitimate. For the truth which is attested to in the verbal witness of Christianity is precisely the truth of death as constituting salvation.44

Where Learning to Preach the Gospel Begins

Theological preparation for the missionary task originates precisely where the task itself does, that is, in the "innermost requirements" of qualitative catholicity. To appreciate what this means is to recall that qualitative as distinct from quantitative catholicity refers to the innate capacity of God's saving gift to satisfy the deepest hunger of every human spirit. Universality, in this sense, is present wherever the gift itself is present and prior to its actual reception on a universal scale. To be catholic, therefore, the church does not have to be everywhere in fact; it has only to be called to and equipped for this destiny. Henri De Lubac has given the idea classic expression:

The Church is not catholic because she is spread abroad over the whole of the earth and can reckon on a large number of members. She was already catholic on the morning of Pentecost, when all her members could be contained in a small room, as she was when the Apostles seemed on the point of swamping her; she would still be catholic if tomorrow apostasy on a vast scale deprived her of almost all the faithful. For fundamentally catholicity has nothing to do with geography or statistics. It is true that it should be displayed all over the earth and be manifest to all, yet its nature is not material but spiritual. Like sanctity, catholicity is primarily an intrinsic feature of the Church.45

On these grounds, qualitative catholicity belongs to the very nature of the church. What is gradually acquired during the course of time in the way of quantitative catholicity is simply the historical unfolding of what was operative in the church from the beginning. To suggest that missiological education must begin with the "innermost requirements" of qualitative catholicity, therefore, does not mean ignoring or compromising its quantitative or cross-cultural counterpart. The two catholicities need each other. There is nothing more urgent in the theological preparation of missionaries today than attending to the innate universality of the gospel, on the one hand, and to the call for its thoroughgoing inculturation, on the other. When either of these perspectives dominates exclusively, missiological education suffers.

The main thing qualitative catholicity requires of a missiological program is a retrieval of the universality that resides in the depths of the good news and its theological elaborations. So conceived, missiology will infuse the entire curriculum rather than provide subject matter for a special course. Teachers will share the responsibility of bringing to the surface those elements of their respective disciplines that resonate universally.

But how to get at the global dimensions of the whole range of theological concerns? Here we must look for some creative interplay between the demands of innate and cross-cultural catholicity. While it is true that the qualitative universality of the gospel would amount to a mere abstraction were it not actually received by and given expression through different peoples, cultures, and languages, it is also true that these factors do not endow the good news with the wherewithal to appeal on a universal scale. As we have already seen, the universal extension of the gospel is not the cause but the result of a universality woven into the very fabric of the Christian message. This means that the elements of qualitative catholicity are available wherever the gospel itself is available, that is, within each and every culture that has given it expression. Only by calling attention to these elements in every theological discipline can we move toward a curriculum that is properly and fundamentally missiological. This is related to but clearly not the same as adding a cross-cultural component to a study of the Christian message. For nothing can be added to this message that will make it any more catholic and therefore missionary than it already is. There is no such thing as a deficient missiological focus in the gospel; there is only a deficient awareness of the fact in those who preach it. If attempts to develop mission-centered curricula do not take this into account, the crucial first moment of missiological reflection may be swallowed up in a welter of cross-cultural data, all of which reflect but none of which explain what it is that recommends the gospel to the world. It is neither the amount nor the quality of cross-cultural exchange in a curriculum that makes it missiological in a foundational sense, any more than it is the flags of the nations that make the
chapel at Maryknoll missionary for celebrations of special Society feasts. If places of worship are not already catholic and missionary because of the sacraments and the community they house, they can never be made so by representation in fact or in symbol of all the families of the earth. There is simply no substitute for assisting students of mission to discover and understand what is inherently universal about the message they are learning to preach.

What this means in practice is that the first or foundational moment of missiological reflection should occur within rather than between cultures. This approach is both possible and necessary. It is possible because as we have already seen, the gospel, of its very nature, is qualitatively catholic and does not become such by a consensus of the culturally diverse Christianities that give it expression. It is necessary because the Catholic depths of the good news are tied so intimately to the cultural and linguistic contours of any local church that they will always be more accessible to local Christians (in this case, to local candidates for missionary service) than in any other cultural and linguistic setting, and because the much needed dialogue between churches on the question of missiological foundations depends in great part on how well each of them has succeeded in discovering these foundations on the local level. Once a mission-centered curriculum has attended to (I do not say finished and finalized) its intracultural moment, it must attend with equal care to the matter of intercultural dialogue. Ideally this should occur within the context of a field placement within a culturally and linguistically different local church, preferably where the candidate's future ministry will be exercised. Here is an appropriate place and practice for correlating cultural variations on what is foundationality catholic about the good news, and for renewing one's conversation with the Christian sources on this important question. Sound reasons for introducing elements of the intercultural moment earlier in the curriculum will ensure against co-opting or curtailing the integrity of the intracultural task.

The actual unearthing of qualitatively catholic data in a missiological curriculum falls mainly to those who design and teach its courses, but in a way that respects the differences, limitations, and methodologies of the courses themselves. These data, of course, are for the purpose of exchange. Faculty members need to learn from each other what comes to the surface when each theological discipline mines its resources for traces of foundational catholicity. What I have attempted in these pages is my estimate of what systematic theology might contribute to a conversation of this kind.

Notes

5. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrneans, 8, 2.
10. Meyendorff, Catholicity and the Church, p. 135.
12. Ibid., pp. 32, 36, 58.
20. The bond between death and revelation is not lacking in the Synoptics, as Senior attests: "The evangelists and Paul share a fundamental starting point—the most revelatory aspect of Jesus' history and the basis of his authority as the Christ, the Son of God, rest on the central issue of death and resurrection" (The Biblical Foundations for Mission, p. 216; cf. p. 246).
25. Ibid., p. 431.
26. Ibid., p. 462.
27. Ibid., p. 453.
28. Ibid., pp. 461-63.
29. According to Brown, Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem reaches its climax with the coming of the Greeks (The Gospel according to John I-XII, pp. 463, 466).
30. Ibid., p. 464.
32. “Indeed, in its [the parable of the seed’s] present sequence after the coming of the Greeks, it is meant to refer to Jesus’ death as the means of bringing life to all men (xii, 32)” (Brown, The Gospel according to John I-XII, p. 471; cf. p. 472).
34. Leon Morris, The Gospel according to John, The New International Com-
A New Ecclesiology in Latin America

C. René Padilla

The changes that have taken place in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America in the last two decades are amazing. To persons of my age, familiar with the problems of Catholic church they see today is so great that it is almost beyond comprehension. To be sure, the old church, sadly hampered by clericalized by it. The fact remains, however, that a new church is taking shape in the womb of the old and that this may rightly be called a new ecclesiology from a historical perspective; in the second section we shall consider its challenge to Protestant Christians.

1. The Emergence of the New Ecclesiology

The new ecclesiology in Latin America is clearly related to the so-called comunidades eclesiales de base (CEBs; grassroots ecclesial communities) that have emerged as the new model for the church in several countries, especially in Brazil. It is the ecclesiology of liberation theology. Its function is to articulate the communal experience of a growing number of Christians, most of them Roman Catholic, who are rediscovering the meaning of the Christian faith for practical life in a context of oppression and poverty.

The Protestant Challenge

Already at the turn of the last century, when the first plenary Latin American Council held in Rome in 1899 analyzed the dangers threatening the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism was listed together with Freemasonry, superstition, paganism, liberalism, and secularism. Evidently the seed planted by Protestant missionaries during the nineteenth century was bearing fruit; Protestant churches were rapidly gaining ground and could not be ignored. By 1955 Protestantism had become a matter of such great concern to Roman Catholic clergy that the first Latin American Council held in Rome in 1899 analyzed the dangers threatening the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism was listed together with Freemasonry, superstition, paganism, liberalism, and secularism. Evidently the seed planted by Protestant missionaries during the nineteenth century was bearing fruit; Protestant churches were rapidly gaining ground and could not be ignored. By 1955 Protestantism had become a matter of such great concern to Roman Catholic clergy that the first Latin American Council held in Rome in 1899 analyzed the dangers threatening the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism was listed together with Freemasonry, superstition, paganism, liberalism, and secularism. Evidently the seed planted by Protestant missionaries during the nineteenth century was bearing fruit; Protestant churches were rapidly gaining ground and could not be ignored. By 1955 Protestantism had become a matter of such great concern to Roman Catholic clergy that the first Latin American Council held in Rome in 1899 analyzed the dangers threatening the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism was listed together with Freemasonry, superstition, paganism, liberalism, and secularism.

The kind of challenge that Protestantism posed to Roman Catholicism is clearly illustrated by an experiment that took place in Barra do Pirai, in northeastern Brazil, in 1956, described by Jose Marins in the following terms:

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Bishop Angelo Rossi was thus encouraged to start a movement of lay catechists who acted as coordinators in “natural communities” and got people together to read the Bible, to pray, to hold “Mass without a priest,” and to discuss matters of common interest. Traditional chapels gave way to community meeting halls, which were used not only for catechetical instruction but also for other purposes (Marins, 1979:237–38).

As can be inferred from this experiment, it is obvious that at the basis of the grassroots community movement was the challenge of Protestantism with its emphasis on lay leadership. This is not surprising in light of the problems of a church chronically affected by a serious shortage of priests. Another aspect of that challenge was the Protestant (and especially congregational) emphasis on the local church. In line with the best evangelical congregational tradition, singing, praying and studying the Bible together, sharing problems and resources with one another, and making decisions and serving in a small community became essential aspects of the Christian experience of people who had previously known the body of Christ primarily as a dogma—“the Mystical Body of Christ”—or as a hierarchical society in which they were passive members. The religious aspect of the life of the grassroots communities is so important that according to Cardinal Arns, Archbishop of Sao Paulo:

People do not come to the BCC [basic Christian communities] when there is no praying and singing. They may come four or five times to organize practical things, but nothing further will come out of it. When, however, people pray and sing, when they feel themselves together, when the Gospel is read and, on this basis, concrete actions are organized and the national situation is analyzed, then the groups remain united. Along with the Gospels, this religiosity is the most valuable element in the BCCs (Shaull 1984:122).

The Socioeconomic Challenge

In his important study on the grassroots ecclesial communities, Guillermo Cook has characterized the masses of Latin American poor in terms of cultural alienation, sociocultural marginalization, and religious vitality (1985:34). “Herein,” says he, “we find the roots of the CEBs.” As a matter of fact, it is among the poor, powerless, and uneducated, whose experience of Christianity has oftentimes been reduced to participation in the rites and processes encouraged by popular Catholic religiosity, that the grassroots communities have emerged.

Concern for the formation of a powerful and educated elite to exercise political control has always been part and parcel of Roman Catholicism in Latin America. Beginning in 1929, the Catholic Action movement, inspired by the French philosopher Jacques Maritain and promoted by Pope Pius XI, was used as a means to shape a new social consciousness, especially among the upper class. It became the organizational core of several labor groups working on development projects and cooperatives to improve the situation of the poor. On the political level, the effort to produce a “revolution in freedom” was channeled through the Christian Democratic parties, which were organized in several countries. Social injustice was to be solved through “development.”

This desire to provide a way to minimize the effects of poverty on the masses was coupled with the fear that the working class might turn to communism. Yet, contrary to predictions, the development projects did very little to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor, and an important sector of the Roman Catholic clergy and laity became politically radical.

Another important development took place in the early 1960s: thousands of North American missionaries, priests, nuns, and lay people went to Latin America in answer to Pope John’s call to “re- evangelize” the continent. Gerald M. Costello has described this “modern crusade” as unlike anything else in the history of the United States Roman Catholic Church; and he notes that most of the missionaries went back home, leaving behind “the problems of Latin America [which seemed] no less staggering than they did before the missionaries arrived” (1979:1). They had found that building U.S.-style churches was far easier than getting people to participate in the life of the church. Only a few of these missionaries stayed—“a stubborn few of those non-professionals who had found their place in ministering to the tormented of this vast land—people who had spent generations as victims of one oppressor or another” (ibid.: 4–5). Then, Costello adds:

A new mission approach began to emerge, radically new. It sprang, significantly, from Latin Americans themselves, and it was the haunting specter of oppression that had spawned it. Making people aware of the oppression was part of it; another part was in encouraging them to develop ideas on how to fight it. The missionaries who remained began to learn instead of to teach, to serve instead of to lead. And, somehow, that became the operative mission approach, and it goes on—tested, hardened, imperfect, searching, committed. It has been that way in hundreds of U.S.-staffed missions in Latin America [1979:5].

Living among the poor to make them aware of their oppression—conscientization—and to encourage them to find a way out of it—liberation—had thus been adopted as the approach to the “re- evangelization” of a Roman Catholic continent where the official church had always identified itself with the rich and powerful. By the time the second CELAM General Conference met in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, this approach had become so widely accepted that the 130 prelates present condemned the “institutionalized violence” fostered by capitalism and neocolonialism, encouraged the promotion of popular education and organizations (especially through grassroots communities), and supported a definite “preferential option for the poor.” The Medellin Conclusions became the basis for social activism, and the sections dealing with justice, peace, and poverty provided the framework for the development of liberation theology and the new ecclesiology. The third CELAM General Conference, held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, ratified the preferential option for the poor and described the grassroots communities as “one of the causes for joy and hope in the church” because of their potential as “centers of evangelization and moving forces for liberation and development” (Pastoral de conjunto, no. 10). The Puebla Document did warn against the danger of grassroots communities’ growing out of control of the hierarchy and becoming “sectarian,” but at the same time it stated that:

In particular we have found that small communities, especially the CEBs, create more personal inter-relations, acceptance of God’s Word, re-examination of one’s life, and reflection on reality in the light of the Gospel. They accentuate committed involvement in the family, one’s work, the neighborhood, and the local community. We are happy to single out the multiplication of small communities as an important ecclesial event that is peculiarly ours, and as “the hope of the Church” [Puebla Document: 629].

In the grassroots communities the rejects of society are discovering their own worth. They are learning that the evils of poverty and marginalization are not their God-given fate and that they have power to change their situation through solidarity and mutual help, local initiatives, and a common struggle for justice.
The power of oppression is thus broken and hope of a better future is born because the basis is laid for power to be exercised from the bottom up, not only in the church but also in society.

Clearly the grassroots community movement has become a concrete Christian response to the socioeconomic challenge posed by the situation of the masses in Latin America. Many would agree with Shaull's estimate that "this vital religious movement is fast becoming the most powerful political force working for change in Latin America—often to the surprise of its own members" (1984:126). It is not surprising that during the last two decades the grassroots communities have oftentimes become the object of violent government repression in several countries. Beyond doubt, even the poorest of the poor become a threat to a system built on injustice, when they organize themselves and try to have a say on matters that affect their own lives.

II. Basic Tenets of the New Ecclesiology

There are pastoralists and theologians who claim that the new ecclesiology in Latin America is the theological expression of the experience of the grassroots ecclesial communities. Leonardo Boff, for instance, says: "True ecclesiology is not the result of textbook analysis or theoretical hypotheses; it comes about as a result of ecclesial practices within the institution" (1985:1). It must be recognized that the grassroots communities do not represent a unified experience but, rather, follow at least two different lines, one emphasizing the community life in small groups and another one stressing the theological and political importance of the fact that the communities are constituted by the poor (Escobar 1986:3). According to Michael Dodson the variety of types of communities is largely due to different social contacts and political histories (1986:88). It would therefore be more correct to say that the new ecclesiology is the ecclesiology that views the Latin American grassroots communities as the ideal model of the church, and then add that every concrete grassroots community will reflect certain characteristics of the model of varying degrees, depending on a number of factors. As a "model," the existing grassroots communities provide reference points for theology but do not necessarily reflect all the features of the paradigm. The new ecclesiology synthesizes the most salient characteristics of the grassroots communities and at the same time fulfills an exploratory mission of the church as the definitive one (ibid.:68).

With regard to the renewal of the church, Quiroz points out that the experience in Latin America has shown that solidarity with the poor in the struggle for liberation leads to a new way of being the church; that from the people (desde el pueblo) is born a church of the people (del pueblo), a "popular church." "Taking root among the oppressed and marginalized classes there emerges a people of God that is a true church of the people which enables all men to hear the gospel and becomes a sign of the liberation by the Lord of history" (1983:69–70).

With regard to theological reflection, according to Quiroz, liberation theology has discovered a new hermeneutic that consists in reading Scripture "from below," from the perspective of the poor; it has discovered that "the poor are a privileged mediation of the Lord's presence" (1983:70) and a means to meet him in a deeper way. For the first time in the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, common people are claiming their right to think and to speak, and showing that the gospel has a different sound when it is heard from "the underside of history."

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Catholic clergy in Brazil is taking the poor and the oppressed as the key to the shaping of the church as the people of God is the “Assembly of the People of God” in which a whole diocese meets to evaluate its progress and to make plans for the future (Libanio 1986). Liberation theologians see that as a sign that a new day has dawned for the church in Latin America. The basic communities are demonstrating that if the church is to function as the people of God in a concrete way, it has to be the church of the poor and from the poor.

Rolando Muñoz considers that, by being among the poor and marginalized of the earth, the church shows that Jesus Christ is its center, for “that is where Jesus Christ himself once became incarnate and fulfilled his ministry” (1981:153). That means that in Latin America the church has to change sides; it has to shift its social center from the side of the powerful to the side of the poor, so that the latter may find their own true home in it. Does that, then, mean that the kingdom excludes oppressors and wealthy people? It does not, says Muñoz, but “only on the condition that they detach themselves from their wealth, stop oppressing their fellow human beings, and [quoting the Puebla Document: 1156] ‘accept and take the cause of the poor as if they were accepting and taking up their own cause, the cause of Christ himself’ ” (Muñoz, 1981:154–55).

It is from its concentration on the poor and the oppressed that the new ecclesiology derives its prophetic force. At the same time, however, in this emphasis lies also its greatest weakness. Why so?

The answer is that the new ecclesiology is built on the Roman Catholic assumption that the masses in Latin America are simultaneously poor and Christian. Because of that, it does not view the grassroots communities as Christian organizations functioning side by side with other popular organizations involved in the struggle for justice. Instead, it views them as Christian communities rooted in the people’s movement, as ecclesial communities in which the lower classes organize themselves to be the “historical sacrament of liberation” through which the kingdom of God is being built (Quiroz 1983:117–20). Quiroz goes even further and says that “the church which is meant to incorporate all the human race into the body of Christ, knows that it already, in a way, includes the largest part of humanity, for through their suffering and rejection the poor are actively incorporated into a universal history of salvation that has historical realizations” (ibid.:226). Quite clearly, “the poor” here has become a category with salvific connotations. The following questions are important to consider.

In the first place, it is very difficult to avoid the suspicion that behind this way of looking at the church are presuppositions that belong to the “Christian West.” Before Constantine, Christians were a minority committed to Jesus Christ, characterized by faith, hope, and love. Since Constantine, all of society has been incorporated into the church (and thus into Christ), and salvation is possible without the “means of grace” such as the proclamation of the gospel and Christian communion. In this context it is possible to state, as does Gutiérrez, that “that man is saved who opens himself to God and to others, even without having a clear realization of it” (1972:196). If it is true that “since God became man, humanity, every man, all of history, is the living temple of the living God” (ibid.:250), then the apostolic word requiring the explicit confession of Jesus as Lord and faith in the God who raised him from the dead (Rom. 10:9) has ceased to be relevant for salvation. The place of faith is now occupied by historical praxis, the building of a more just society. “To work, to transform this world,” says Gutiérrez, “is to become man and to forge the human community is also now to save” (1972:210). If to this it is added that the poor are those who are making the new world, taking human destiny in history on themselves, a basis has been established to state that “the majority of humanity” is included in salvation history. We have here what Juan R. Stumme has described as an “inflated” concept of salvation that leaves much to be desired from an evangelical perspective (1985:64–83).

In the second place, according to the Gospel records Jesus showed special concern for the poor and conceived his mission as the ushering in of a new era in which justice would be done to them (Padilla 1985:173–78). But, can that ever be taken to mean that God’s salvation belongs to the poor in such a way that repentance and faith are either optional or unnecessary in their case? If the poor automatically have a share in God’s salvation by virtue of their poverty, does not the struggle for justice turn out to be a struggle to remove the basis for their salvation? A much more consistently biblical approach to the way in which the salvation of the kingdom relates to the poor is needed if Jesus’ call, “Repent and believe the good news!”—a call addressed to all, rich and poor, in light of the coming of the kingdom—is to be given full import.

In the third place, no justice is done to the teaching of the New Testament unless it is fully granted that one of the signs of the coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ is that “the good news is preached to the poor” (Lk. 7:22; cf. 4:18). To use Raymond Fung’s terminology, the gospel relates not only to human sin, but also to “human sinned-againstness”; it “should not only call on the people to repent of their sins, but also must call on them to resist the forces which sin against them” (1980:332). But does that, then, mean that concern for ‘human sinned-againstness’ should totally replace concern for sin? If those who are “sinned against” are by virtue of their suffering and oppression incorporated into the body of Christ, does not the struggle for justice turn out to be a struggle to remove the basis for their inclusion in the church? A much more consistently biblical approach to the way in which the church relates to the “sinned against” is needed if the church is to be the community of forgiven sinners as well as of the poor, the family of God as well as from the poor.

The Priesthood of All Believers

Of all the emphases of the new ecclesiology, perhaps none has such far-reaching consequences for the life and mission of the church as the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. At the same time, such a development has become the most difficult problem that the Vatican has to face in relation to the so-called popular church, as evidenced by the disciplinary measures taken in 1985 against Leonardo Boff, the author of Church, Charisma and Power.

Already at the second General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopal Conference in 1968 the intention had been expressed “to renew and to create new church structures in order to institutionalize dialogue and to channel cooperation among bishops, priests and lay persons” (Mensaje a los pueblos). This interest in lay persons has been encouraged by the ecclesiology of Vatican II, which, in contrast with traditional doctrine, had underlined the communal and charismatic rather than the hierarchical and institutional aspects of the church. It is now generally agreed, however, that Vatican II failed to draw the practical consequences of this ecclesiology, especially with regard to the distribution of power within the church. If all Christians are equal members in the body of Christ, how should the church be structured so that all its members exercise their ministries and have a
This question, which Vatican II left unanswered, has been taken up by the new ecclesiology in Latin America.

What we have here is nothing less than a “Copernican revolution” that, if allowed to continue, could totally transform the Roman Catholic Church from a power structure centered in Rome into a network of local communities centered in the Lord Jesus Christ, the powerless one who gave his life for the salvation of the world. Over four centuries ago, Martin Luther wrote:

All Christians belong to the priesthood and there is no difference among them except in terms of ministry. As Paul says, we all are one body, but each member has his own function with which he serves the rest. This is due to the fact that we have one baptism, one gospel, one faith and are all equal Christians, since baptism, the gospel and faith are sufficient to make Christians a nation of priests.

The new ecclesiology in Latin America is discovering the transforming power of this biblical insight that lay at the basis of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation: the priesthood of all believers. The big question is whether Rome will allow charisma to follow its course, or whether it will, once again, choose power.

The Prophetic Mission of the Church

Closely connected with the two previous emphases in the new ecclesiology is its stress on the prophetic mission of the church. If the church is of the poor and from the poor, and if all its members have been given gifts for a variety of ministries, then it is only natural to expect that in its mission the church will seek to relate faith to such problems as injustice and poverty, oppression and marginalization. According to Boff, the church institutions and officials are of service to the church and world if they favor the fulfillment of this prophetic mission; otherwise they become a fortress for conservative politics and instruments of the oppressive powers.

In line with this emphasis on the prophetic mission of the church, the new ecclesiology encourages (1) the study of Scripture “from below” for the purpose of socioeconomic and political conscientization, and (2) the development of links between the grassroots communities and the popular movements and organizations. In Libanio’s words:

The BECs (Basic Ecclesial Communities) can be born from a spiritual, or even a traditional activity, or from community action or popular struggle. But “their fundamental characteristic is that they never lose either one of the two dimensions.” They are both linked in a profound unit.

The BECs are the Word of God linked to life, to work. They are evangelization and social reality; faith and the popular struggle [1986:9].

At a meeting of local pastoral practitioners from grassroots communities in a sector of São Paulo, Brazil, three types of churches
active in the region were identified, each of them with a distinct outlook on the relationship between faith and politics: the conservative church (for which faith and politics are in competition with each other), the renewed church (for which faith and politics follow parallel lines), and the socially committed church (for which faith and politics are inseparable realities) (O’Gorman 1986:15). Needless to say, the grassroots communities are seen as belonging to the third category. They take it for granted that “the ecclesial life embraces a commitment to movements of the marginalized poor” and, therefore, helps people in their organization within the neighborhood, the school, the trade union, and so on. Mission is wherever there is need to re-create relationship within the structures that make up society, through “prophetic denunciation and justice-guided construction” (ibid.).

This view of the mission of the church is possible because the church is seen against the background of the kingdom of God and all humanity. As Rolando Muñoz has put it, “The Church is essentially eccentric, in the sense that it does not exist for itself. . . . The church exists for the world, for service to human beings. More specifically, the Church exists to serve human beings for the sake of the kingdom of God” (1981:151). When the church finds its center in the kingdom, it is delivered from itself and released for service to people in their concrete situation. It is free for mission.

The concern to keep faith and life together in the grassroots communities is translated into sociopolitical involvement “from bottom up.” The effects that this kind of involvement may have on the macro-structures must not be overestimated, but they have been significant enough to prod the conscience of those who have institutional power and to make a difference for life at the local level. A question raised by the sociopolitical involvement of the grassroots communities is whether that involvement does not entail a politicization of the faith that undermines the Christian witness. The liberation theologians cooperating with the grassroots communities seem to be aware of the problem. Libanio, for instance, writes:

A truly pastoral concern will attempt to avoid two extremes which are harmful for the life of the Church: a conservative resistance to political things and the tendency to politicize everything. . . . We cannot shy away from a political commitment. But, at the same time, we should hold back from such a total involvement in politics that we lose our religious and ecclesial identity [1986:10; see also n. 3, below].

Without denying the great potential that the grassroots community movement has as a political force working for change, the fact remains that at least in Latin America the effectiveness of the BECs will to a great extent depend on how well they succeed in rooting their ecclesiality in Scripture without being co-opted either by the power structures of the church or by a political ideology.

III. The Challenge of the New Ecclesiology

That a new church is taking shape in the grassroots ecclesial communities can hardly be denied. The new ecclesiology that is rooted in it has become the most powerful challenge to Protestant Christians in this region of the world, and it may well become the most powerful challenge to the church of Jesus Christ everywhere else in the next few years. The challenge is threefold: social, ministerial, and missional.

The Social Challenge

Anyone familiar with Protestantism in Latin America knows that a very high percentage of Protestant Christians in this continent are poor people. As Stephen Sywulka has put it, “Evangelicals have been ‘base’ and abased from the beginning. They have been historically, and vast numbers still are, the poor and powerless, the alienated and marginalized” (1986:29). Does it follow that Protestants have no reason to get excited about “a preferential option for the poor” just because they are poor? One cannot answer this question positively without ignoring the problems that the values of the consumer society pose to the church in Latin America and everywhere else today. Yet, sad to say, most Protestant churches made up of poor and oppressed people are locked into a value system that conditions them to be far more interested in social respectability and influence than in faithfulness to the gospel. Christianity is thus turned into a means to accommodate to the status quo, the biblical message is domesticated, and the church becomes a fortress of conservative politics, oblivious of the needs of the poor and the oppressed. As Cook has shown, most Protestant churches today fear the kind of movement that gave them birth or revitalized them along the way; the grassroots communities challenge them to go back to their own historical roots (1985:230–31).

The new ecclesiology is a call for us to take the poor seriously. That does not mean that we are to neglect the proclamation of forgiveness of sin through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. It does mean that we have to acknowledge that the poor are not only sinners but also sinned-against, deprived of basic material needs and human rights. As Fung has put it, “The most dwelt-upon methods of evangelism today—personal evangelism and mass evangelism—are futile among the poor because, among many other reasons, both presuppose a receiving community which is not available to the poor in most of our existing churches today” (1980:336). The challenge is to be the kind of church community that is so loving, open, and available to the poor that no one ever feels neglected or marginalized. “Anyone who does not love the alienated and the abandoned with an operative liberating love does not, in fact, believe in the gospel of God’s love and does not love God” (Barreiro 1982:33–34).

No one can tell what may happen to a traditional church when it makes itself available to the poor and marginalized in society. My own church was turned inside out a few years ago as a result of the incoming of a group of young men and women affected by drug addiction. Their presence in our midst forced us to reexamine our life and mission as we had never done before. We were a denominational, rather small church in a middle-class suburb of Buenos Aires. Then the unexpected took place—an influx of drug addicts looking for restoration and help. What were we to do? One of the leaders of the church suggested that the help given them should be restricted to holding a special weekly meeting for them, so they could hear the gospel and “get saved.” By God’s grace, we chose the way of the cross and little by little...
learned that the church is for sinners and the sinned-against. And that was the beginning of radical change in our attitudes and values and priorities as well as in our structures and methods and programs. In a true sense, the drug addicts—the poor whom God had put in our midst—became God’s call to conversion to the gospel of the kingdom, which is a gospel of holistic transformation. Perhaps this is what is meant when it is said that the poor evangelize the church.

The Ministerial Challenge

One of the secrets of the fantastic numerical growth of Pentecostal churches in Latin America is undoubtedly their emphasis on lay leadership. With little or no theological training, Pentecostal men and women are ordained as church ministers. The priesthood of all believers is thus not an abstract principle but a living reality without which Pentecostalism can hardly be explained.

From the perspective of the new ecclesiology, however, the priesthood of all believers takes on a wider and deeper meaning than in Pentecostalism, for it looks at the church in light of the kingdom of God. As Quiroz has put it, “The aim of the ministries and charismas that emerge because the church exists is that the church may continue to serve the kingdom” (1983:280). If the church is to serve the kingdom, and if the kingdom includes the totality of life, then the Spirit has to equip the church with a multiplicity of gifts related to all dimensions of life. This he does, according to the new ecclesiology; the gifts of the Spirit are being experienced within the grassroots communities in their struggle for liberation and justice. The lay person is lifted up as “a bearer of ecclesial values, either as a co-ordinator or monitor of the community, or as one engaged in several community services” (Boff 1979:49).

The rediscovery of the priesthood of all the members of the people of God challenges us at least on three levels. On the ecclesiastical level, the new ecclesiology calls our attention to the dangers of the clericism that is affecting many Protestant churches on the Latin American continent. While the traditional dichotomy between the status clericalis and the status laicalis of the Canon Law of the Catholic church is losing strength in the base communities, in many Protestant churches there is increasing emphasis on the idea that evangelization is the task of evangelists and other communicators who specialize in the use of radio and television, not the responsibility of all believers. While charismatic gifts are adopted as the basis of organization in the base communities and priority is given to the fulfillment of the mission in the world, in some Protestant circles the institutionalization of the “ordained ministry” is promoted and the ministry of “lay people” increasingly restricted. The rediscovery of the missionary character of the whole church is urgently needed.

On the hermeneutical level, the new ecclesiology invites us to read the Bible “from below” (if we can!) and reexamine the role of the grassroots members of our congregations in discerning the link between faith and life in their concrete historical situation. If the gospel is going to be firmly rooted among the poorest sectors of the population, we cannot be satisfied with the numerical expansion of Protestant churches in these sectors. As the final document on New Alternatives for Theological Education by the Latin American Theological Fraternity states:

All members of the Church need an integrated understanding of its mission and the motivation for actively participating in it. All have received gifts and ministries which they ought to discover and develop in service to God and to their neighbors. Everyone needs theological education and the possibility of being involved in theological work. From this perspective, churches will complete their teaching task to the measure that, on their own or in cooperation with others in the same area or city, they establish programs that help all their members to discover and exercise their gifts in the development of different ministries [Padilla 1986:132].

On the vocational level, the new ecclesiology challenges us to broaden our concept of ministry to include the whole range of activities that the people of God carry out by the power of the Spirit in their service to Christ. Something is wrong when the only ministries recognized as such are the pastorate and preaching! God can be served also in the shop, the office, the university, the factory, the labor union, the laboratory. In Protestant circles it is necessary to recover the ministerial significance of professions and trades in every area of human activity.

The Missional Challenge

In the last twenty years there has been a real awakening of a social conscience among evangelicals all over the world. To many of us, there is no question that the spiritual and the material, the personal and the social, the word and deed, the proclamation of justification by faith and the struggle for justice belong together. And yet, how much do our churches really know in their concrete experience the meaning of the kingly, priestly, and prophetic ministries that we have received from Christ? As Cook has put it:

Turning upside down the logic of Temple Judaism and of the present-day institutionalized Church, Jesus showed us that to be kingly is to serve (Mk. 10:42-45), to be priestly is to give away one’s life for others (Heb. 7:26-27), and to be prophetic is to become incarnate in the world to which we have been sent as God’s witnesses (Jn. 1:14) [1986:6].

The new ecclesiology in Latin America challenges us to leave the strongholds of our institutions and become involved in the adventure of Jesus’ kingly, priestly, and prophetic mission in solidarity with the poor.

The task that we have before us is not one that we can carry out in isolation from our local churches. It has to do with God’s purpose to unify the human race and to restore his dominion in all dimensions of life and over the totality of creation. In other words, it has to do with his kingdom. The new ecclesiology, rooted in the experience of the grassroots ecclesial communities, reminds us that the place to begin is the local church, a community of priests called to a prophetic mission.

Notes

1. “Basic” does not adequately translate the Spanish and Portuguese expression de base. Base is used to refer to the grassroots of a social group and, in the phrase comunidades eclesiales de base, it has social, political, economic, cultural, and theological connotations. It points to the “popular classes,” powerless, poor, uneducated, who constitute the large majority of the laity in the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America.

2. I am here indebted to Avery Dulles (1974:28-29), who makes a distinction between the explanatory and the exploratory uses of models in theology. According to him, “Because their correspondence with
the mystery of the Church is only partial and functional, models are necessarily inadequate. They illuminate certain phenomena but not others. . . . Pursued alone, any single model will lead to distortions. It will misplace the accent, and thus entail consequences that are not valid" (ibid.:32). One wonders sometimes if liberation theologians are aware of the possible distortions resulting from their model of the church as grassroots communities.

3. Boff is definitely aware of the dangers when he writes: "The limitations of this tendency are due to its strong insistence on the structural character of social sin and on the need for an equally social and institutional grace. It runs the risk of ignoring the need for personal con-

version and the search for perfection in Christian life. There is also the risk that its politics may completely hide the horizon of faith. Faith does have a political dimension and it would seem that this is the Spirit's challenge to the Church today. However, the political dimension does not cover the entire wealth of faith that must also find other expressions such as the mystical, the liturgical, and the personal within the process of integral salvation" (1985:21).

4. This is a free translation from the Spanish version of Luther's essay "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation regarding the Betterment of the Christian Estate" (1520).

**Bibliography**


Evangelization and Church Growth: The Case of Africa

Norman E. Thomas

Phenomenal Growth

In 1970 David Barrett, the preeminent researcher of church trends in Africa, startled mission scholars by predicting that by the turn of the century in A.D. 2000 there would be 351 million Christians in Africa.1

Twelve years later Barrett revised his estimate in his magnum opus, the World Christian Encyclopedia. After compiling voluminous data from a comprehensive country-by-country survey, he announced that his earlier prediction was in error. Instead of 351 million adherents to Christianity in A.D. 2000, he now predicted that there would be more than 393 million in the fifty-nine countries of Africa.2

Today we are in the midst of the second era of phenomenal growth of the Christian church in Africa. The first occurred during the early church. Barrett estimates that there were no practicing Christians on the African continent in A.D. 30. By A.D. 100, however, an estimated 2.3 percent of the continent's population had become Christian, while 52.3 percent of the population had become aware of Christ and the gospel. Rapid growth continued in the next 200 years in the discipling of these persons. By A.D. 300, 32.6 percent were Christian, although the percentage “evangelized” (aware of Christ and the gospel) had increased to only 55.4 percent. The high-water mark of church membership occurred by A.D. 500 with 40 percent of Africa’s population adherents of Christianity, although only 45 percent of the continent’s growing population by then had heard of the gospel.

Then came the onslaught of Islam, with an accompanying slow but steady erosion both of Christian profession and of knowledge of Christ and the gospel. As recently as 1800, Barrett estimates, only 1.4 percent of Africa’s population were Christian, and only 5.7 percent were aware of Christ and the gospel. It had become the “dark continent” if by that term we mean walking without the light of Christ.3

The second period of Africa’s rapid church growth began in the late nineteenth century but accelerated only in the twentieth century. By 1900 Africa contained an estimated 9.9 million Christians (followers of Jesus Christ of all traditions, confessions, and degrees of commitment); these represented 9.2 percent of Africa’s total population of 107.9 million. By mid-1970 the number of Christians had exploded to 143 million (40.6 percent of Africa’s population of 351.8 million). Thereafter, Barrett predicts continued rapid growth in absolute numbers (236 million in 1985 and 393.3 million in 2000), though with only a slight gain in the percentage of Africa’s total population who are Christians (45.4 percent out of 520.4 million population in 1985; 48.4 percent out of 813.4 million population in 2000).4 Behind these macro-statistics are thousands of stories of faithful Christian witness by word and deed. One of them follows here.

The Hambukushu people had lived for 200 years in south-eastern Angola close to the Zambian border. They had lived largely undisturbed, except when the Portuguese colonial rulers had forced the men to make roads. When guerrillas of a liberation movement entered their villages in 1967 in their fight against the Portuguese, 4,000 Hambukushu chose to flee the fighting. Hiding by day and traveling by night, they came safely to Botswana and resumed their life as skilled fisherman, hunters, blacksmiths, herders, and dry-land agriculturalists.

No church had ever come near them in Angola. They came to Botswana unevangelized, illiterate, and still living their ancestral way of life. But their new story had a dynamic equivalent in the book of Exodus. They could be addressed prophetically:

Listen to me, you people of Etsha (their new home). Incline your ear and hear, you river people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Angola. When the foremen of roads afflicted you, I heard your cry. I roused the guerrillas and sent them against your oppressors. When you fled from the war, I saved you from your pursuers. When you ran through the bush, I showed you where to find food. I delivered you out of all your troubles, and brought you to this place. I caused you to dwell here in safety and in peace. I caused you to prosper and have blessed you.5

The most perceptive recognized that they had come safely to Botswana like the Israelites to their Promised Land of old.

There followed a three-month mission by Botswana Christians, assisted by a few resident missionaries. Six times they visited each of the thirteen Hambukushu villages, presenting Christ for the first time to the people. They did it against the background of Old Testament stories already heard. During this time thousands of people in many lands prayed for this mission.

There was no well-thought-out plan, no evangelistic crusade manual. No one knew what to do in advance. What followed was for all participants the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. In one village in which religious services had been well attended, the invitation was met with a stony silence. Suddenly a young man stood up in front of the whole village and said, “I believe and I want to be baptized.” Five other young men took courage from him and were baptized, together with candidates from the next village. In another village, when challenged to accept Christ, the headman looked round and answered, “I am sure that we all believe and that we all want to be baptized.” The warmth of his people’s silent agreement spoke more than words. Within three months men, women, and children from ten villages had responded, been baptized together in the pools of the Okavango River, and formed ten new congregations.6

In the first period of African church growth, from A.D. 100–500, the percentage of Christians increased rapidly but the percentage of the population evangelized peaked and actually declined. Is this a measure of both the vitality and the predictability of patterns of religious change? I believe so.

Consider the statistics during 1970–85 for annual change of religious adherence to two major African religions—Christianity and Islam. In mid-1970 each could claim that 40 percent of Africa’s

Norman E. Thomas is the Vera B. Blinn Professor of World Christianity at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. From 1962 to 1976 he worked in church development in Zimbabwe and Zambia.
population were their adherents—about 142 million each. However, the statistics in the World Christian Encyclopedia show that Christianity grew thereafter at a faster rate than Islam. The major difference is in the percentage of new adherents who are converts. During the 1970–85 period, out of every 100 new Muslims, only six were converts, with the other ninety-four representing natural increase. By contrast in the same period, twenty-one out of every 100 new adherents to Christianity were converts.  

Any interpretation of African church growth begins with the continent's diversity within fifty-nine countries and more than 1,000 people-groups. Adrian Hastings, in his history of contemporary African Christianity from 1950 to 1975, concludes:

Perhaps the sheer complexity and degree of hard diversification now apparent in African Christianity is the best proof of its having taken root. The only safe generalization about its condition in the 1970s seems to be that one cannot generalize... The total impression of these years is one not just of expansion but of expansion into a new scale of complexity. 

You may have wondered how David Barrett arrived at his statistics concerning evangelization in Africa. They resulted from an inventory of each country or people-group of 206 factors affecting their awareness of Christianity, Christ, and the gospel. One was the percentage of the country's population who are Christian religions, and Christians being considered part of an alien category of factors concerned how indigenous Christianity had become—whether or not there were indigenous hymn-writing, by local churches, or by professional personnel. There also could be evangelism using the media—both printed materials and electronic media. A fourth category of factors concerned how indigenous Christianity had become—whether or not there were indigenous hymn-writing, theologies, new missionary societies, and renewal movements. Finally, he asked whether evangelistic outreach extended to all regions and population groups in the country. These are but a few of the factors Barrett analyzed, but they give some flavor of this comprehensive analysis. Accepting the diversity of the data, let us now examine in greater detail seven key factors, with examples from Africa of each.

**Holistic Mission**

This factor is a central characteristic of Christianity throughout Africa. Holistic mission is the recognition that witness and obedience to Christ involve not only our personal relationship to God through Christ but our total life in community. There is no dualism that would confine religion to the realm of the "spiritual." Instead, all of life is understood to be religious by its very nature if not expressed content. John Mbiti expressed it well in African Religions and Philosophy as he wrote: "There is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion." 

In a chapter in African Challenge, on evangelization in the African independent churches, Luntadila Ndala-Za-Fwa tells the story of the growth of his own church, the largest African independent church, the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth, through the prophet Simon Kimbangu. He relates the similarities of the founding of the Kimbanguists in 1921 at Nkamba, Simon Kimbangu's village, to the first Pentecost. Not only was there a powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but people shared food in common with the crowds of pilgrims. He describes the ensuing custom as "a great competition in generosity, to the benefit of the whole population, without distinction of race or creed." He goes on to tell of the church's present "huge programme of development for the benefit of the whole population, without distinction of race or creed." It includes cooperative farms, agricultural communities, a People's House at Kinshasa, a large hospital and medical school, and other schools both for pastors and for masons. The stated philosophy is that every person is one's brother or sister, and that the gospel means serving one's neighbor.

A second illustration comes out of troubled Uganda. In a 1982 interview entitled "Awesome Growth in Troubled Uganda," Bishop Festo Kivengere of the Anglican Church of Uganda, one of Africa's best-known evangelists, tells of persecution under Idi Amin: "Pressures were on. Harassments were on. Many arrests took place. Here and there people began to die. But the church grew. People realized their only hope was in the preaching of the fulness of the gospel." 

From Ethiopia also comes a story of the growth of the African church amid persecution—this time of the Lutheran Evangelical Church, Makane Yesus, during the Marxist revolution from 1974 to 1982. While the masses chanted ideological slogans ("We must destroy our enemies," "Religion is drugging the masses," and even "God is dead"), tens of thousands of Christians were imprisoned. But Christians continued to witness for their faith. They obeyed the government where they could, disobeyed where they felt they must, but accepted imprisonment for their disobedience. In 1980 the economy collapsed and famine was widespread. Without resources to keep thousands of political prisoners, the government released them. With their release came a flood tide of people into the churches, filling them to overflowing. All three of these examples illustrate our first key factor—a holistic understanding of the gospel and of the church's mission.

**Spontaneous Witness**

A second factor, that of spontaneous witness, was also a key factor in the growth of the early church. Today among the Makane Yesus of Ethiopia, it is the "vital life-stream" of the church's growth: "Witness to Christ did not have to be organized. Each new convert knew that what he or she has was good news. In a spontaneous way every Christian became a witness." 

From another source comes a parallel report from 1982 on the growth of the Kale-Heywet Church, the largest of Protestant churches in Ethiopia that grew out of the Sudan Interior Mission. A German visitor reports that the growth of the Ethiopian church was due to the intensive missionary activity of its membership. One Ethiopian pastor expressed it succinctly: "When people are converted in our country, they become an evangelist the same day." 

This also has been a major characteristic of the East African Revival Movement. Begun in 1928, it remains a powerful force for evangelization throughout East Africa. Bishop Kivengere describes it as "today a convert; tomorrow, into the market place with a message to share." The converts become the missionaries, taking it as their duty and joy to share.

**Indigenous Leadership and the Missionary Role**

Closely related to this second key factor of spontaneous witness...
WOULD YOU BELIEVE?

The following countries could fit within Africa:

- China: 3,705,387 sq. mi.
- U.S.A: 3,615,102
- India: 1,269,338
- Europe: 1,068,176
- Argentina: 1,066,296
- New Zealand: 103,736

The area of Africa is 11,706,166 sq. mi.

is the third—indigenous leadership. Several leaders stress its importance in outreach to traditionally nomadic peoples. Bishop David Gitari of Kenya, a member of the Strategy Working Group of the Lausanne Continuation Committee, related plans to reach the Gabbra people of northern Kenya. Although some Christian contact had been established with perhaps 80 percent of this nomadic people, less than 5 percent were professing Christians. The joint strategy committee agreed that the only effective plan would be to make it possible for the Gabbra Christian to remain in his pastoral life. It would require an evangelist living, working, and moving with the Gabbra—if you will, a “nomadic evangelist.”

Further to the northwest in Kenya live the Turkana people. A relentless drought from 1979 to 1983 forced many of the more than 200,000 Turkana into relief settlements. The Kenya government planned to maintain the relief feeding programs for only three years. The Africa Inland Church (AIC) believed this was a kairos time for evangelization among the Turkana. Moses Bulali is an AIC missionary within his own country. Together with thirteen lay evangelists, he has planted nineteen churches among the Turkana, mostly since the drought began. He estimates that 50,000 of the 200,000 Turkana already had heard their witness by 1983. His goal is ambitious—to multiply the number of Africa Inland Mission lay evangelists in order “to preach the gospel to every Turkana within the next three years and to multiply churches throughout the settlement camps.”

"As in contemporary China and Korea, self-support is a key factor in recent African church growth."

In the Nuba mountains of northern Sudan live more than 990,000 people of over 100 tribal groups. Isolated from the outside world, dominated politically by Muslims, some have become Muslim. Others, however, have retained their traditional religion. Missionaries of the Sudan United Mission worked among tribes representing 10 percent of the Nuba, beginning in 1920, but they were expelled in 1962.

Can these peoples be reached for Christ? David Barrett has written a case study of the Kau Nuba—a people surrounded by a sea of Islamized peoples. He sees hope, not in reintroducing Western missionarysthis but in outreach by the Sudanese church itself. He writes: "In the case of the Kau Nuba, perhaps a single evangelist willing to live among the people for a year or two would be all that is needed . . . a person at the smallest cultural distance from the people of Kau, if possible, a person from one of the other Nuba tribes."

Thus far our case studies of indigenous leadership have been drawn exclusively from Protestant literature. This same key factor, however, is present wherever churches are growing, be they Roman Catholic or Protestant or African independent. Adrian Hastings summarizes well their importance within village Christianity. For Catholics, although the Vatican may prefer hierarchical structures, clerical leadership, and sacramental worship, none of these is of great importance at the growing edges of village outreach. There you will find more often the lay catechist providing leadership. Hastings called him "the Trojan of the modern African Catholic Church," for he is central and indispensable in evangelization.

What, then, is the place of the foreign missionary in African evangelization and church growth? Lamin Sanneh of the Gambia and Harvard University believes that their role in evangelization has been overrated. He writes: "If we assess the effectiveness of Western missions by statistical standards of horizontal spread, they would fail abysmally. The most spectacular gains by Christianity occurred by other hands or after the formal withdrawal of missionaries."

A Uganda study, on the other hand, gives evidence that missionaries can assist in primary evangelism. Gailyn Van Rhee­nen relates how both Southern Baptist and Conservative Baptist missionaries from the United States entered Uganda in 1961–62 but differed in their missionary strategies. The Southern Baptists chose to work in remote districts where there were few Anglicans or Roman Catholics. In contrast, the Conservative Baptists concentrated five out of six missionaries in the capital city of Kampala, believing that the cities are the nerve centers of Africa. The results were dramatically different. Southern Baptists, reaching many people groups, grew in the first decade to 1972 to have 112 congregations with more than 5,000 adult members. In contrast the Conservative Baptists had difficulty in maintaining twenty congregations, with a membership that peaked at 900 and then declined due to the "transiency of urban life." He concludes that in this pioneer evangelism period, the missionaries did have an important role alongside the emerging Ugandan leadership.

The Self-Supporting Church

As in contemporary China and Korea, self-support is a key factor in recent African church growth. Despite their denominational wealth, the Southern Baptists held to a policy of local self-support of African churches in Uganda. Van Rhenen reports, "In almost every case, buildings were built, preachers were paid, and finances for evangelism came from the resources of the national Christians."

This has been one of the strengths of African independent churches and a secret of their growth. While serving in 1975 as dean of studies of the Mindolo Ecumenical Centre in Kitwe, Zambia, I was approached by three leaders of the Apostles of John Church in Zambia, and now reaching out to Kenya entirely with its own resources.

In 1978 I visited Angola as part of an Africa Task Force reassessing priorities for mission in Africa in the 1980s. The United Methodist Church in Angola had suffered many privations during the liberation struggle. Thirty-three pastors had been killed by the Portuguese. Missionaries had been imprisoned and then expelled. All outside funds had been cut off. We pondered how well the church had survived. To our joy we found a church vital and growing entirely by its own efforts. Each of twenty-three urban congregations in Luanda not only supported its own pastor in full but paid the salary of an evangelist engaged in church planting in northern Angola where former refugees were being resettled. Of churches visited in thirteen African countries, this was the most vigorous and also the most self-reliant.

Church Planting a Priority

Bishop Festo Kivengere calls the growth of the Anglican Church
of Uganda “natural spontaneous growth rather than planned growth.” Nevertheless, each congregation looks at itself as a missionary base intending to produce new churches. The bishop believes that each congregation should produce “at least two new congregations a year.” In one year 150 new churches were planted in his small diocese.

In Nigeria the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA), which developed out of the Sudan Interior Mission, is among the fastest growing of denominations. Panya Baba, mission and evangelism secretary for the church, tells how in the mid-1970s church leaders had set their sights on fifty new churches in the next five years, since most members lived in northern Nigeria, a stronghold of Islam. Instead they planted 200 churches, and added 300 new ones in the following five years. This meant in 1983 that one-quarter of ECWA’s 2,000 congregations had been established in less than ten years. Panya Baba says that a primary reason for such effectiveness is “a commitment to evangelism and church planting as ministry priorities. Everything else is secondary to these fundamental objectives.”

Conservative Baptists report a similar intentionality from Rwanda in Central Africa in a program begun in 1977. Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa, with most of the people living near their fields in scattered villages. Often the first church contact comes in the form of a letter from key Christians who have moved into an area. After securing a new church site from the government, the main mission thrust is launched. Missionaries, pastors, lay workers, and Bible school students meet in the new area for ten days to three weeks. They visit in every home, share the gospel, and invite persons to afternoon meetings. After the evangelistic meeting, new converts and resident Christians are invited to join the new church. In this way the Conservative Baptist’s Rwandan leaders are not stopping there. The Rwanda government has divided the country into 143 communes. Conservative Baptists already are in forty-three of them and have set a goal of planting churches in every one of the communes by the year 2000.

The Web of Community

A sixth important factor in African church growth is recognition of the web of community. In much of Africa the nineteenth-century missionary thrust took people out of their natural communities when they became Christians. Freed slaves, orphan children, women running away from forced marriages—all were converts of that type. Today the scene is different. Sometimes the decision is made to seek for group conversions. Consider, for example, the case of Vincent Donovan working among the Masai in Tanzania.

A Holy Ghost Father, Donovan believed that the missionary’s task was to proclaim the gospel and not predetermine the shape of the church that might result. “Preach not the church, but Christ” was his appeal. It was hard for him at first to understand that the real community among the Masai meant that they would act as a unit, accepting you or rejecting you altogether.

At the end of the evangelization of the first six Masai communities, Donovan relates, he began his instruction, saying:

“This old man sitting here has missed too many of our instruction meetings. He will not be baptized with the rest. These two on this side will be baptized because they always attended, and understood very well what we talked about. So did this young mother. She will be baptized. But that man there has obviously not under-

stood the instructions. And that lady there has scarcely believed the gospel message.”

Then the old man, Ndangoya, stopped him politely but firmly, “Padri, why are you trying to break us up and separate us? . . . Yes, there are ones with little faith in this village, but they have been helped by those with much faith. Would you turn out and drive off the lazy ones and the ones with little faith and the stupid ones? From the first day I have spoken for these people. And I speak for them now . . . we have reached the step in our lives where we can say, ‘We believe.’ ”

And Father Donovan looked at the old man Ndangoya and replied:

“Excuse me, old man. Sometimes my head is hard and I learn slowly. ‘We believe,’ you said. Of course you do. Everyone in the community will be baptized.”

Such a growing together in community is closely related to the development of the small Christian communities (SCCs) in the Catholic church in Africa. Unlike their Latin American counterparts, they tend to be more pastoral and less political in nature. But their purpose, as Bishop Patrick Kalilombe of Malawi stated, is that “the Church is to become deeply present in all aspects of life and activity as the salt, leaven, and light of humankind.”

Prayer and Liturgy

African Christians prefer to speak of church growth, not as their own accomplishment but as the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in their midst. In a recent book on the traditional spirituality of the Kikuyu and Meru people of Kenya, entitled Ngai, We Belong to You, James Kihara gives a closing exhortation to Christians entitled “Prayer: An Act of Evangelisation.” This is his admonition:

The Church’s presence in evangelisation has been strongly based on the witness of charity, for example, in education, social development, health, etc. While all these services are excellent, they are only one aspect and in many cultural situations, neither impress religiously nor are they a clear sign of the divine presence.

He continues:

The deep sense of prayer in non-Christian religions constitutes a challenge to the Christians. The Church must present herself, not only as an organization interested in works of charity and cultural and social development, but also, and above all, as a praying community. Prayer must not only be a companion of evangelisation, it is essentially an act of evangelisation.

Rev. Luntadila Ndala-za-Fwa picks up the same theme in his stages of evangelization in the Kimbanguist Church. The last two are prayer and the preparation of the future. At the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the church by Simon Kimbangu in his own village of Nkamba, the faithful received the body and blood of Christ for the first time. Until this time it had not been their practice to celebrate the Eucharist. Together with the spiritual retreats that followed, the faithful were to be brought to what the writer calls “a full sense of responsibility . . . till every one understands that he is a militant, an evangelizer responsible for making Christ the Saviour known to all around him.”

The Eucharist became a vital factor also in the second stage of evangelization among the Hambukushu Angolan refugees in Botswana. Ronald Wynne relates how the introduction of the Eucharist gradually both deepened the devotion of the people
and increased considerably the number of the baptized. He con-
tinued:

One Christmas, the eucharist was celebrated at the largest village, where the number of Christians was small. During that service something happened. At the offertory procession, the chief's wife (not then baptized) brought a reed basket that she had woven. She offered it with a beautiful gesture, holding it up with both hands, kneeling with her face averted. During the consecration prayer there was a stillness that could be felt. The leading headman was among those who received communion. The strong, conservative chief was overcome. The eucharist brought about his conversion and that of many others. Within two months the number of baptized had increased in that village from sixteen to 111. And since the eucharist has been introduced, the total number of the baptized has increased by more than half as much again. Truly the eucharist converts!\(^35\)

Note the openness for those growing in faith but not yet in full standing as members to the sacrament. The Eucharist had become a powerful means of inclusion rather than exclusion.

**The Task Ahead**

In 1973 David Barrett wrote an essay entitled "The Discipling of Africa in This Generation." He began his argument with the bold statement that "for one hundred years now, the most massive influx into the churches in history has been taking place on the African continent."\(^32\) But the very success of the church posed for it a new challenge—the increase in what Barrett called "the nominal fringe" as "a direct product of successful and ongoing Christian mission."\(^33\)

In the *World Christian Encyclopedia* Barrett has shown that although the numbers of practicing Christians have increased rapidly, the number of nominal Christians is growing also. Whereas he estimated that there would be 149.6 million practicing Christians on the continent in mid-1985, he estimates that there will be 158.9 million nominal Christians by the year 2000.\(^34\)

Barrett questions whether the African churches are ready for the task ahead in the "Global Discipling Era." He recalls that the criteria for being a Christian in New Testament days were few and simple: confession with the lips, belief in the heart, and some signs of active discipleship. In contrast, he finds today that the process of initiation into some African churches has become "more legalistic than at many other periods in the history of the expansion of Christianity." But he remains hopeful that the African churches will acknowledge their responsibilities for discipling and establish clear priorities to accomplish it. He concludes: "If this is done, the Church of AD 2000 in Africa may well become the most effective missionary church of any continent or era."\(^35\)

**Notes**

3. Ibid., p. 796.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 16.
23. Ibid., p. 91.
33. Ibid., p. 409.
### ORBIS RESOURCES IN MISSION EDUCATION

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My Pilgrimage in Mission

Harry R. Boer

Sometime in the middle 1960s I was teaching a course in the history of Islam in the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN). The class consisted of twenty young men. Early on came the inevitable question: “Why do our churches not allow polygamists to be members?” The following condensed dialogue ensued:

“Why do your churches not allow them to be baptized?”
“Because the missionaries taught them so.”
“Correct. But why did the missionaries so teach them?”
“Because, they say, polygamy is adultery.”
“Correct also. How many of you have fathers who have more than one wife?” Up went twenty hands.
“Do you believe that your fathers are adulterers?” The room shook to a thunderous “NO!”

Not all teaching at TCNN partook of such drama. The incident shows, however, that teaching theology in a seminary in the West is one thing; in Africa it is very often quite another. It was a memorable but also a very difficult experience in my pilgrimage in mission and I shall return to it later in this autobiographical account. For now, let me briefly relate how I came to exercise my ministry in such a context.

Fifty-seven years ago, in my last year in high school, I began to have serious thoughts about what I should do with my life. Now, at age seventy-four, I am invited to describe the pilgrimage of my work in the ministry that followed upon those youthful wondering, specifically my pilgrimage “in mission” than which nothing was further from my mind at age seventeen. Indeed, I have never done anything in my life that I had planned to do. Always there was some occasion or event that diverted me completely from what I was set to do to a wholly different order of work. As I look back on it now, my pilgrimage in mission began on the Sunday of December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and it came at least formally to an end on May 12, 1978, when I left Nigeria to enter upon retirement.

I was born in 1913 in the town of Hillegom, the tulip capital of the Netherlands, where my father was a bookkeeper in the office of a bulb-exporting firm. In 1922 our family emigrated to the United States and settled in Holland, Michigan. There we became members of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in whose service my entire ministry has been spent.

My mind was first set on following in my father’s footsteps in the gladiolus and perennial-flower nursery which he established. Early on, my horizon became more complicated by a desire ultimately to enter politics. The more I contemplated such a course the more I saw the need for a college education. This I pursued, first at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and then at Calvin College in Grand Rapids. In a way and under circumstances no longer clear to me I was in 1934 wholly diverted from both business and political pursuits by a strong desire to be a minister of the gospel. This determined the sphere of my career from which I have never wavered. But sphere must express itself in a context of task and place, in the what and the where of concrete actuality.

Pearl Harbor descended on the world on December 7, 1941, when I was in Calvin Theological Seminary and only a half year from ordination. In February 1942 the U.S. Navy opened its chaplaincy to seminary graduates. I felt drawn to apply for this by a wonderful mixture of genuine calling, love for my adopted country, and the prospect of adventure in a military context. I was accepted and after three months of training was assigned to shore duty. Eight months after this the navy did me the biggest favor ever and transferred me to the marines. I came to appreciate the simplicity, the ruggedness, and the discipline of life in the Marine Corps and, within this framework, the freedom of its lifestyle. During my time in the Pacific theater the two regiments I served with fought three major island battles.

In all these college, seminary, and chaplaincy years I had never had a thought about missionary service. The chaplaincy did something to me, however, that did not rub off. I had met America in the navy and in the camp and combat life of two Marine Corps regiments. It seemed to me that in its urban outreach my still very ethnically oriented denomination might be able to use my experience as a point of contact. I planned to look into this possibility.

One evening in early 1946 I sat at dinner next to a guest of my boardinghouse hosts. He was the president of the Board of Foreign Missions of my denomination. In the course of conversation I asked him about the progress of our work in Nigeria where a lady worked whose brother had been my high school classmate. He dutifully answered my questions. Then, at some point, looking at me with a searching intentness, he said, “The work in Nigeria is very promising. Reverend Smith is working there with his wife and four other ladies. He badly needs another man to help him. Why don’t you go?” The directness, the reasonableness and, somehow, the power of that quietly asked question overwhelmed me. I parried the probe but could hardly wait for the meal to end. When it did, I retired to my room, my heart pounding. I lay on the bed and tried to compose myself. The storm did pass, as all storms do, but it left something big in its wake. I had been considering the possibility of a missionary task in Chicago or Detroit or wherever, but in America. The answer was: a missionary task, yes, but in Nigeria. So to Nigeria I went.

Before being sent out by my board I did a year of study under the Dutch missions scholar J. H. Bavinck at the Free University in Amsterdam. My first assignment in Nigeria after a period of Hausa language study was in the area of the British-mandated Cameroons, one of the least developed colonially and least evangelized areas in West Africa. At the direction of my mission au-
In 1950 a two-month survey of an extensive area lying east and north of my outpost in a town named Baissa (meaning: it is not enough). Together with an evangelist, a medical attendant, a cook, and six carriers, we walked every foot of the 400 miles in the time-honored pioneer missionary style. Eight years later—with independence just around the corner—it was hardly possible to find carriers for such work.

Meanwhile, the synod of my church appointed me to teach missions in Calvin Theological Seminary. I was to finish my two-and-one-half-year tour on the field, pursue another year of study, and begin teaching in September 1951. I was hardly qualified for such a task, but missions was in the air in the post-World War II CRC and there was no supply of teaching talent around in which there was some sort of balance between missionary experience and missionary academic background. I studied a further year, this time at Union Theological Seminary in New York, under the tutelage of M. Searle Bates, taught a year at Calvin Theological Seminary, and then returned to Amsterdam to pursue doctoral study. The dissertation that completed my doctoral work was entitled "Pentecost and the Missionary Witness of the Church," published later as *Pentecost and Missions*.

As I approached the end of my time in Amsterdam I received an altogether surprising letter from Nigeria. It was from my former senior colleague, the Rev. E. H. Smith, who informed me that church and mission leadership in the area of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) were seriously contemplating undertaking pastoral study. The request moved me deeply and I responded affirmatively to it. In November 1955 the Christian Reformed Board of Foreign Missions sent me back to Nigeria to take up this assignment. I could not then know that fifteen years of uninterrupted work at one task now lay before me, to be followed by six more intimately related to these fifteen.

In the minds of many mission supporters in the home lands and of some among the missionaries, the ecumenical character of the proposed school was its biggest problem. Ecumenical in deed it was. Our missionary support bodies included, formally or informally, Anabaptist, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, and Plymouth Brethren traditions. Organizationally they consisted of the five branches of the British-born Sudan United Mission (from Great Britain, Denmark, South Africa, and two from the United States) and the Church of the Brethren in the USA.

Each of these had brought forth a sizable full-fledged Nigerian church. This ecumenical potpourri, far from being a restraining element in bringing the college into being, was, rather, a great facilitating factor. For decades the missions had worked together, as had the churches in the Fellowship of Churches of Christ in the Sudan, and more recently, as have churches in Nigeria. What reason could be adduced for not carrying on this tradition of united work in the theological college? Inevitably, the churches played a relatively passive role in the school’s formation. Most of their pastors had only a grade school education plus some catechist training. But church-supported student applications to enroll in the college were never wanting.

It took three years to bring the college structure into being. Not a little did we benefit from the experience of others among which the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomosho contributed a major insight. No one had the slightest doubt that the theological college would become another department of the great SUM educational facility at Gindiri consisting of a teacher-training college, a school for wives of students, a secondary school for boys, with one for girls in the planning stage, an elementary school, and a school for the blind, all of them government-grant aided. When I visited the principal of the seminary in Ogbomosho and he learned of our planned association with Gindiri, he warned me in the most solemn terms about the dangers of a church- and mission-supported institution attempting to stand on the same footing with a whole complex of government-supported schools. His own seminary, one of the largest in Africa, had gone through the agony of such a union. “We were completely overshadowed by government-supported education. . . . We came to realize that if the seminary was ever to have a personality of its own, we’d have to go it alone. . . . You have an opportunity now to become a fully independent institution that may never come again.”

I returned to my headquarters with fear and trembling that my report would not impact on my committee as the account of Dr. Poole’s experience in Ogbomosho had on me. But, as in my own case, it had only to be heard to be believed. Today TCNN stands on a large and beautiful campus fully master under God of its own life and task, and has its own name and place in the Nigerian ecclesiastical world. I was appointed principal of and teacher in the college in 1957, both of which positions I resigned in 1971 to take up other work in theological education in close but informal association with TCNN.

The story of TCNN is an intriguing one. But my missionary pilgrimage was larger than the parameters of a particular institution. I now submit a few thoughts on things I have learned over the years. While several of them are closely related to theological education, all arise in greater or less degree out of observations, contacts, study, participation in the life of the church, attendance at conferences and the like as well as out of my immediate work. They have, I believe, a sort of universal validity at least so far as the church and mission in Africa are concerned.

1. I return in the first instance to the resounding “NO!” of my students to the alleged immorality of polygamy. The belief has over the years grown on me, and is now firm, that the biggest single error of all Christian missions in Africa has been to declare monogamy a non-negotiable condition of baptism.

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"The biggest single error of all Christian missions in Africa has been to declare monogamy a non-negotiable condition of baptism."
frequently proclaimed to be "particularly suited to a less complicated form of society."

2. When at age sixty-five I retired from missionary service I had given—perhaps I should say, my church had given—three-quarters of my active ministry to the Nigerian church. That is considered a long time by many, and so it was. But my twenty-six years are of modest length compared to seniors from my own and other missions alongside of whom I served in the 1950s and 1960s. Spans of thirty, thirty-five, and even forty years were not uncommon among them. Career missionaries, all things being equal, remain jewels of great price. With them reside tradition, remembrance of things long past, enduring friendships with the people of the land, and understanding of the milieu—the changing milieu—of church and society. The value of the short-term missionary may never be discounted, but neither may the difference in value between career service and the service of a passing phase of life be depreciated.

3. My preoccupation with theological education—always in English—along with a want of inborn facility for language acquisition, kept me from being a fruitful linguistic link between the college and the churches. I could manage, but I envied the missionaries who knew, and knew well, the language of the people or the area and could pull out all the stops in synonyms, proverbs, nuance, and illustration. I therefore regard the learning and mastery of language as an indispensable instrument in missionary service. This will be appreciated by the people even more than is already the case as the career and therefore presumably linguistically proficient missionary becomes more and more the exception among Western church representatives.

4. The right wing of the conservative segment of the Christian church has never come to terms with the important question of biblical criticism. What the conservative evangelical appears to be quite blind to is that the higher-critical problem does not arise out of an unbelieving reading of the Scriptures but very emphatically out of the data of Scripture itself. In no way is it possible to harmonize Genesis 1 and 2:1–3 with Genesis 2:4–9. The manner in which Matthew in 19:16–22 modifies his source in Mark 10:17–22 is simply unconscionable by all conservative evangelical standards. True, unbelieving scholarship has used higher-critical methods to discredit the gospel. But doctrinal and exegetical exposition have been similarly abused. We have not therefore looked upon doctrine and exegesis as tools of the devil. Moreover, the same people who so greatly fear higher criticism have the highest regard for lower criticism (that is, textual criticism), an indispensable tool for Bible translation. But here sanctified rational judgment (sometimes even majority votes in Bible translation committees) is of the essence, as it is in biblical criticism. Also in this matter it is highly necessary for the younger churches to learn "rightly to divide the Word of truth."

5. As noted above, in 1971 I resigned both as principal of and as teacher in TCNN. Two reasons stood behind this decision. First, the growing administrative burden was more and more interfering with my primary task of doing rather than administering theological education. Second, in our very fine library of some 9,000 volumes (now 11,000) there was hardly a book whose author had even remotely had an African pastor or student in mind when he wrote it. I felt that books should be written that would address the African student mind.

To this task I devoted myself from 1972 to 1978. In doing so I did not try to write as an African, because I am not one. But I had noted both the students' basic strengths and limitations. I had found them capable of understanding problems in theology if only they were not confronted with eight-line sentences replete with abstract jawbreaker words and expressions. My sentences were seldom more than two-and-one-half-lines across the page; I did not use passive verbs when active could be used; I did not use words the meaning of which were not found in the first two or three definitions in the dictionary. And I got the publishers to avoid small print and narrow spacing between words and lines, and asked them by all means to use generous margins. Students (like us older ones) must be given a sense of reading achievement by turning pages.

This is strictly stopgap writing. The real thing will come when the African scholar's mind addresses the African student mind. Here, too, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."

Notes

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The Legacy of Adoniram Judson Gordon

Dana L. Robert

In April 1886, Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Seminary celebrated the sesquicentennial of Adoniram Judson Gordon's birth. The extensive celebration reminded the theological world of A. J. Gordon's legacy. As educator, pastor, and foremost American Baptist of the late nineteenth century, Gordon shaped a generation of Christian workers who witnessed the church into the leading Baptist fund-raiser and promoter of missions in New England. Co-worker of Dwight L. Moody, Gordon was one of the most influential American evangelical mission theorists of the late nineteenth century.

Background and Pastorates

Some might argue that Gordon was foreordained for mission work. Born April 19, 1836, to Baptist parents, he was named Adoniram Judson Gordon after the pioneer American Baptist missionary, Adoniram Judson. His father, John Calvin Gordon, ran a family woolen mill in the hills of New Hampshire. A. J. Gordon grew up working in the mill and playing with friends until his conversion at age fifteen or sixteen. The conversion experience convinced him that he wanted to be a minister and that he needed to pay attention to schooling, hitherto a low priority. Walking began his high school education.

In 1856 Gordon entered Brown University. Following graduation from Brown, Gordon completed his theological course at Newton Theological School (now the Baptist half of Andover-Newton Theological Seminary). An average student but promising preacher, Gordon was called to the Jamaica Plain Baptist Church in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1863. Settling into his pastorate, Gordon married Maria Hale, fathered several children, and enjoyed a successful six years as a suburban pastor. Portraits of him reveal a square-set man with a prominent jaw and large, bright eyes.

After two years of entreaty from the Clarendon Street Church of Boston, A. J. Gordon reluctantly accepted a pastorate there in 1869. He labored at Clarendon Street Baptist for twenty-five years, until his death in 1895. The congregation was "fashionable" and not in total sympathy with Gordon's commitment to missions and his concomitant hatred of "ecclesiastical extravagances" such as paid choirs, Easter flowers, and elaborate architecture. But a paradigmatic event in the life of the church occurred in 1877 when Dwight L. Moody brought his first successful American crusade to Boston. Moody arrived fresh from revival tours through Great Britain, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Chicago that had made his name a household word. He erected a huge tent within 300 feet of Clarendon Church and began several months of revival services. Clarendon Church was the site of the overflow and after-meetings. The church members began to minister to those in need, and nearly thirty reformed alcoholics had joined the church by the end of the crusade.

The Moody revivals inaugurated a new period in the history of the Clarendon Street Church. In his spiritual autobiography, How Christ Came to Church, the Pastor's Dream, Gordon reflected on the missionary outreach of Clarendon Church. Missions to Jews and to the Chinese in Boston, outdoor preaching, rescue work among women, and an industrial home for men all dated from the spiritual vitality engendered by the Moody revivals. Work with converted alcoholics made the church members realize how difficult it was to be "spiritual" if one were homeless and unemployed. Consequently, Gordon began the Boston Industrial Temporary Home as a shelter for the unemployed, often alcoholic, homeless men. In exchange for work at a woodpile that provided fuel for Boston's poor, the homeless received food and lodging. Despite financial and other difficulties, the industrial home became a fixture of Boston social service in the late nineteenth century. The attendance of alcoholics at church services led the Clarendon Street Church to substitute grape juice for wine in the communion service. Despite the disapproval of his evangelical Republican friends, Gordon became a political prohibitionist and joined the Prohibition Party in 1884. Frances Willard, president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, was one of his friends and supporters.

Clarendon Street Church's vision of mission was global as well as local in scope. The church repeatedly surpassed itself in raising money for Baptist foreign missions. In a year of special need for the American Baptists, the church raised $20,000 for foreign missions. A. J. Gordon credited his church's sacrificial activity to neither careful budgeting nor planning, but to the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Ghost, the present Christ, has been given to be the administrator of the church; and ... in these days of endless organizations and multiplied secular machinery, he will surprise us by showing what he will do if we will give him unhindered liberty of action in his own house.

His connection with Dwight Moody in 1877 changed the life of A. J. Gordon as well as that of the Clarendon Street Church. Gordon became a regular speaker at Moody's Northfield conferences. For several summers, when Moody was absent, Gordon took charge of the conferences. Gordon was one of the major speakers during the Northfield Bible Conference at Mount Hermon School in 1886 when the "Mount Hermon 100" volunteered to become foreign missionaries. The 100 young college volunteers were the core group of the Student Volunteer Movement that sent thousands of college graduates to the mission field. Many of the earliest volunteers looked to A. J. Gordon as their spiritual mentor.

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**Wider Mission Work**

In 1888 Dr. and Mrs. Gordon sailed to England to attend the Centenary Conference, convened to mark roughly 100 years of Protestant missionary work. The Centenary Conference was the most representative Anglo-American missions conference to date, and 139 mission societies from around the world sent representatives. At the conference, A. J. Gordon gained an international reputation as apologist for the missionary enterprise. Euphoric rhetoric about Christian civilization and Anglo-American superiority rang at the Centenary Conference. But Gordon found the high-flown phrases to be inadequate: because the conference talked about mission but did not take action, he met afterward with other dissatisfied evangelicals such as A. T. Pierson, J. Hudson Taylor, George Post, and H. G. Guinness to pass resolutions condemning the British opium trade, the liquor trade, and licensed prostitution in British India.

Following the historic conference, the Gordons and the A. T. Piersons set off for a European vacation. While in Rome, they received an urgent invitation from Scottish ministers in Edinburgh to hold a missionary meeting for university students. The success of the ensuing campaign was such that an interdenominational committee of Scots begged the Americans to conduct a missionary crusade throughout all of Scotland. Not since the Moody-Sankey revivals of 1875–76 were the Scottish Christians so aroused. The mission tour of Gordon and Pierson was a huge success that inspired increased contributions and numerous young Scots to volunteer for foreign missions.

A. J. Gordon returned to Boston from Scotland to find that he had been elected chairman of the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Missionary Union (ABMU). The chairmanship entailed weekly meetings and virtual responsibility for all missions of the American Baptists. The Executive Committee created policy for and administered the missions. It decided which missions would be open and it appointed missionaries and fixed their salaries. The ultimate responsibility for Baptist missions had come to rest with A. J. Gordon.

Gordon had served on the Executive Committee since 1871. He played a key role in the expansion of American Baptist missions to Africa. All eyes had turned to Africa in 1871 when Henry M. Stanley of the *New York Herald* searched through the jungles for the missionary explorer David Livingstone. The explorations of Livingstone and Stanley had proved that the "Dark Continent" was in fact penetrable, and mission societies and European governments rushed into the interior. In 1876 the Rev. and Mrs. H. Grattan Guinness, prominent English Baptists, started the Livingstone Inland Mission along the Congo River. One of the earliest Protestant missions to Africa, by 1884 the Livingstone Inland Mission had sent fifty missionaries, opened seven mission stations, spent $150,000, and reduced the Ki-Kongo language to writing; it also owned a steamboat named the *Henry Reed*.

The work of the Livingstone Inland Mission grew too large for the Guinesses, and in 1883 they proposed that the American Baptist Missionary Union take it over as their Congo Mission. The ABMU had already passed general resolutions in favor of opening an African mission, and they had surveyed the coastline of Africa to find a suitable location. The Guinesses' offer forced the issue of African missions for the American Baptists. Though the Missionary Union adopted the mission in 1884, many Baptists continued to raise their voices against it. Many feared the death rate in the Congo, volunteers were in short supply, and Baptists doubted that the Missionary Union, already hard-pressed for funds, could raise enough money for the risky venture.

A. J. Gordon lobbied incessantly for the Congo Mission and was in large part responsible for its acceptance by American Baptists. In 1886 he accompanied around the northeast the first Congo missionary to visit the United States, and Gordon arranged for him to speak to influential groups of Baptists. Among his literary work to promote the mission, Gordon wrote a pamphlet, "The Ship *Jesus*," that swayed popular opinion. In "The Ship *Jesus*," Gordon played upon American guilt over African slavery—slavery that had first come to American shores on a slave-ship named *Jesus*. Now that Afro-Americans were Christians, Gordon argued, the hand of the Lord was revealed. It was American responsibility to ensure that Afro-Americans could return to the Congo to convert their brethren: the ship *Jesus* was ready to go back to Africa. Gordon argued that Americans owed it to Africa to support missions there because their forefathers had enslaved Africa's inhabitants. "Next to the disgrace of having for centuries taken the wages of Africa's unrequited toil, will be the disgrace of refusing to refund those wages for Africa's redemption as God now calls for them." Every American who had grown rich from the work of slaves or from the industries spawned by the Civil War now owed something to every African. "The ship *Jesus* is ready to sail; the mariners are eager to depart; what will you do to furnish the outfit?" asked Gordon of American Baptists.

In August 1886 a revival broke out at the Banza Manteke Station of the Congo Mission. Within a few weeks, a thousand Africans became Christians. Upon hearing that the new Baptists needed a chapel, the Clarendon Street Church raised $2,500 and sent a complete prefabricated chapel by steamship. The African Christians divided the chapel into 700 loads and carried it piece by piece on their heads over sixty miles. The faith of A. J. Gordon in the Congo Mission had been vindicated, and its future was now secure.

Gordon remained as chairman of the Executive Committee of the ABMU until his death in 1895. He guided the Missionary Union through its centenary celebration of the Baptist missionary William Carey in 1892. Introducing a resolution against "so-called Christian nations" sending liquor into the Congo Valley, he supported the Congo Mission through thick and thin. Gordon oversaw a shift in the fortunes of Baptist missions from a time when volunteers were scarce to one in which student volunteers flooded the agency. In 1891 he added regular editorial responsibilities for missions when he became associate editor of the *Missionary Review of the World*, the leading nondenominational missions journal of the day.

**Mission Theory**

A. J. Gordon's mission theory was an outgrowth of his premillennial theology. Early in his ministerial career, Gordon became convinced of a premillennial interpretation of Scripture: he was
a proponent of the theological movement that culminated in dispensationalism and fundamentalism in the early twentieth century. Gordon was a participant in the Niagara Conferences for Bible Study, and his name appeared on the call for the first American prophetic conference in 1878.\(^{11}\)

In 1878 Gordon founded the *Watchword*, a monthly journal "devoted to the advocacy of the Primitive Faith, the Primitive Hope, and the Primitive Charity." The *Watchword* was to help believers "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."\(^{12}\) With his editorship of the *Watchword* and his leadership in the prophetic and Bible conference movements, A. J. Gordon was one of the most important premillennialists in American theology.

Men like Gordon who were both premillennialists and missions advocates were forced to defend their unpopular doctrines from denominational executives who charged that premillennialism "cut the nerve of all missionary and evangelistic enterprises."\(^{13}\) To many critics, belief in the imminent, physical return of Jesus Christ threatened the optimistic tone of much of nineteenth-century Protestantism and thus undercut Christian progress through education and social reform. Gordon defended the doctrine in the *Watchword*, notably in an article entitled "Pre-Millennialism and Missions." In the article, Gordon argued that

> "Gordon opposed mission theories that led to Christian civilization and colonization rather than to the preaching of the gospel."

when one expected the physical and literal return of Jesus Christ before the millennium, the thousand years of peace foretold in the book of Revelation, then one was an even more ardent advocate of missions than a person who did not hold the belief.

Gordon pointed out in "Pre-Millennialism and Missions" that of the fifty-four graduates of Princeton Seminary in 1864, the only eight who became foreign missionaries were the eight who believed in the premillennial return of Jesus Christ.\(^{14}\) The difference between the premillennialist and others was that the premillennialist put all mission emphasis on preaching the gospel. In addition, Gordon argued, "The purpose of preaching the gospel in the present dispensation of the Spirit, as set forth in Scripture, is the gathering out of an elect body called the Church."\(^{15}\) Such an "out-gathering" of the elect from all nations was a necessary prelude to Jesus' second coming. Premillennial emphasis on the evangelization of the world, therefore, focused on preaching the gospel to the whole world so that Jesus would return soon. Premillennialists believed that their theological position was the most plain and true interpretation of infallible Scripture. They believed it to be the faith of the early church and was thus a large reason for Christian expansion in the first centuries after Christ.

For A. J. Gordon, the focus of premillennial mission theory was the preaching of the gospel throughout the world so that the elect would be gathered into God's church and Jesus would return. The corollary of such a burning zeal for "preaching the word" was a de-emphasis on Christian civilization and its fruits. On the theoretical level, premillennial mission theory flew in the face of the optimistic, civilizing missionary crusade of the late nineteenth century—the imperial era of Christian missions. A. J. Gordon was a trenchant critic of "Christian civilization." He did not believe that the world was slowly improving under the force of Christian progress. Rather, society was approaching the low spiritual level of Sodom and Gomorrah as it waited for Jesus' return to usher in the millennium.\(^{16}\)

In an article "Education and Missions," Gordon spoke out of his premillennial mission theory when he attacked one of missions' most treasured institutions—higher education. He wrote:

> We look in vain, in the history of the ancient and the modern mission, for examples of the heathen being slowly prepared, to and through culture, for the acceptance of Christianity; while conversely there is no lack of examples that the systematic way through civilization to evangelization has been not only a circuitous but a wrong way.\(^{17}\)

Because of the innate sinfulness of culture and of human beings, Gordon believed that higher education was a barrier to Christian conversion. It undercut faith in the supernatural. Gordon pointed to critical scholarship to argue that higher education was pushing miracles, prophecy, prayer, and regeneration out of theology.\(^{18}\)

In "The Missionary's Shoes," Gordon opposed mission theories that led to Christian civilization and colonization rather than to the preaching of the gospel:

Concerning industrial and mechanical forerunners of the Gospel we may speak with equal emphasis. So ingrained is the notion that what has been called "a propaedeutic dispensation of civilization" must prepare the way for Christianity, that colonization has not infrequently been proposed as a John the Baptist to evangelization.\(^{19}\)

Gordon underscored the hypocrisy of a modern "Christian" civilization marked by whiskey and guns:

> How little apprehension of the subject does an eminent writer on the evidences of Christianity exhibit in saying that "The wisest modern missionaries admit that they must civilize heathen nations in order to make Christian institutions permanent." Nol not the sandals of law, of education, or of social science for the missionary of the Apostolic school; but "feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."\(^{20}\)

In his premillennial opposition to Christian civilization, A. J. Gordon went against much of the mission theory of the imperial era of Christian missions. In his separation of Christianity and culture, Gordon was a somewhat sophisticated social critic. But in his theology, Gordon was an ardent supernaturalist. He condemned civilizing theologies of Christian mission because he felt they left little room for preaching the word "so that the end may come." Gordon's most famous exposition of mission theory centered upon the supernatural element in Christianity. His book *The Holy Spirit in Missions*, the Graves mission lectures for 1892, remains the central statement of his mission theory.

Gordon argued in *The Holy Spirit in Missions* that the Holy Spirit had revealed and supervised the program of missions from the days of the apostles through the present: "The Holy Ghost is omnipresent in the great body of Christ; and omniscient in His oversight of the vast work of that body in evangelizing the world."\(^{21}\) The Holy Spirit revealed the program for world missions to James at the Council of Jerusalem. First, following Israel's rejection of Christ after his first advent, there would be elective redemption from the nations of the world. The responsibility of the church
would be to plant witnessing churches in every nation of the world from which the Holy Spirit could gather out the elect. The second stage of the Holy Spirit’s plan for missions would occur in the “latter days.” Then Israel would be restored in its relationship with God, and universal redemption would follow.

A. J. Gordon believed that the world was near the end of the first stage of the Holy Spirit’s plan for missions. As the recent successes for Christianity showed, the elect of all nations were being gathered out. The Holy Ghost was in active operation redeeming individuals around the world. In the context of the eschatological countdown of the “dispensation of the Holy Spirit,” Gordon reduced the primary purpose of missions to one thing: the preaching of the gospel. He stated in *The Holy Spirit in Missions*: “The Word of God carried by the man of God is the simplest statement of the missionary method.”

In his quest to get the word of God to as many people as possible in a short amount of time, Gordon believed in the decentralization of missions. In the *Missionary Review of the World* in 1882, Gordon wrote that “how to distribute responsibility for the work of evangelizing the world is the great problem to be solved in the present ‘crisis of missions.’” Though Gordon did not question the indispensability of the denominational mission boards, he believed that they created certain dangers, such as the centralization of responsibility into a few hands and undesirable uniformity in mission method. If only every local church could act as its own mission society, then the burden of mission work would be spread equitably among Christians and the work would be accomplished much faster. As a Baptist who believed the work of evangelizing the world is the great problem to be solved in the present ‘crisis of missions.’” Though Gordon did not question the indispensability of the denominational mission boards, he believed that they created certain dangers, such as the centralization of responsibility into a few hands and undesirable uniformity in mission method. If only every local church could act as its own mission society, then the burden of mission work would be spread equitably among Christians and the work would be accomplished much faster. As a Baptist who believed in congregational polity, Gordon had little fear of a divided Christendom. Rather, he believed that decentralization of missions was the most efficient use of church resources:

I believe that God designed to lay the burden of the whole world upon every church, that every church might thus find out that it has a whole Christ with whom to bear that burden. Then would it not only pray and give, but it would go and send of its own instead of depending on a central bureau to attend to all this.

One implication of Gordon’s position on decentralization was to support the new “faith missions” springing up in the late nineteenth century. Although he was head of the Executive Committee of the American Baptist Missionary Union, a denominational agency, Gordon supported the multiplication of mission-sending agencies. Faith missions such as the China Inland Mission and the International Missionary Alliance were more theologically compatible with Gordon’s thought than were some denominational organs: faith missions seemed to rely on the Holy Spirit in a direct and prayerful way. Premillennial theology like that of Gordon’s was a hallmark of the faith missions. Above all, the independent faith missions tended to stress “preaching the word” over the civilizing functions of missions.

A. J. Gordon’s fervency for evangelistic missions was perhaps best expressed in his address to the American Baptist Missionary Union in 1893:

The church which is not a missionary church will be a missing church during the next fifty years, its candle of consecration put out, if not its candlestick removed out of its place. As ministers and churches of Jesus Christ, our self-preservation is conditioned on our obedience to the great commission. Now it is: Preach or perish! Evangelize or fossilize! Be a saving church, with girded loins and burning lamp, carrying a lost world on the heart day and night; or be a secularized church, lying on the heart of this present evil world, and allowing it to gird you and carry you whithersoever it will. Which shall it be?”

### Missionary Training School

In 1889 A. J. Gordon opened the Boston Missionary Institute. The purpose of the school was to train laypersons in evangelistic methods and urban rescue work, using only the Bible as a textbook, so that they could go into the “harvest fields” and work as lay missionaries. The school was designed for those who had neither the time, money, nor opportunity to receive a seminary education, but who had a call from God to do mission work. Gordon believed that bureaucratic requirements of Greek, Hebrew, systematic theology, and ordination unnecessarily limited the numbers of missionaries needed for mission work.

In 1884 the ABMU had accepted the Livingstone Inland Mission from the Rev. H. G. Guinness; but by 1889 the American Baptists had still provided no missionaries for the Congo Mission. Guinness was distressed at the lack of progress, so he traveled to the United States to investigate the situation. Upon meeting with Gordon, Guinness suggested that Gordon begin a missionary training school to provide recruits for the Congo Mission. Guinness successfully operated his own missionary institute in London. Gordon consulted with Baptists in Boston, engaged Baptist pastor Frederick L. Chapell to organize the school, and classes began on October 3, 1889.

Nothing A. J. Gordon did stirred more controversy than opening the training school. Bitter criticism poured in from Baptists and from the religious press. Gordon was accused of doctrinal fanaticism and of abetting “short-cut” routes to the ministry. Opponents of the training school attacked Gordon’s premillennialism and lamented that “short-cut” schools were spreading the doctrine.

Gordon defended the training of lay missionaries in the press, notably in his article “Short-Cut Methods.” He felt that his school was commanded him by God so that “eleventh hour” laborers would be plentiful in God’s vineyard. Gordon did not intend for the training school to compete with college or seminary training. He encouraged those persons qualified to attend seminary to do so. But for those not so fortunate, “we will give the best practical and biblical instruction we can.”

The school had ample precedent in the Moody Bible Institute, Guinness’s Missionary Training Institute, and other schools founded in the late nineteenth century to accommodate the increasing numbers of laypersons interested in becoming missionaries.

The missionary training school took much of Gordon’s energy in the last years of his life. After two years in operation, the school moved to the Clarendon Street Church. A residence home for female students and missionaries was opened next door to Gordon’s house. The teaching staff consisted mostly of part-time visiting instructors, and financial need was a way of life for a new school that charged no tuition. Gordon donated all of his salary as associate editor of the *Missionary Review of the World* to the training school. Despite no advertising budget, no money, and only word-of-mouth publicity, students from many places, drawn to Gordon’s zeal for missions, entered the school. By the time of Gordon’s death in 1895, the school had graduated twenty-five foreign missionaries, fifteen ministers, twenty evangelistic workers, twenty home missionaries, and fifteen persons into higher theological education.

One of the most notable features of the Boston Missionary Training School was the preponderance of women. Because women were often denied seminary training and had heavy family obligations, the missionary training or Bible school was often the only theological educational avenue open to them. A. J. Gordon’s support of women’s right to preach, prophesy, and teach men in...
the church was reflected in the student composition of the school. There was even talk at one point of making Gordon's training school into a female school only.

In the context of defending women's rights to be missionary evangelists, Gordon wrote a biblical defense of an expanded role for women in the church based on examination of the seemingly most negative Pauline injunctions against female leadership roles. "The Ministry of Women" appeared in the Missionary Review of the World in 1894. In his article, Gordon argued that the spiritual equality under the current dispensation of the Holy spirit gave women "equal warrant with man's for telling out the Gospel of the grace of God." Through Greek exegesis of assorted Pauline passages, Gordon pointed to places where Scripture had been deliberately mistranslated in order to limit women's sphere. Though stopping short of arguing for the ordination of women, Gordon showed in Scripture that women acted as deacons, teachers, and even as apostles.

One significance of "The Ministry of Women" was that Gordon's "fundamentalistic" zealotry for every word of Scripture led to a more progressive role for women in the church. A generation of women responded to Gordon's concern for the theological training of laywomen and registered for courses in both Boston Missionary Training School. Gordon believed in the full utilization of women as missionaries. The need for workers to harvest God's fields in the eleventh hour extended also to women. In the political arena, A. J. Gordon fully supported the suffrage movement and believed that women should be enfranchised and given equality under the law.

After A. J. Gordon died in February 1895, the name of the Boston Missionary Training School was changed to the Gordon Bible and Missionary Training School. Gordon's close friend A. T. Pierson became the second president. Over the years, the nature of the school changed, and it became a Bible college. In 1927 Gordon College of Theology and Missions received the power to grant higher degrees, and the Gordon Divinity School came into being as the graduate department of the college. In 1970 the two departments split.

Today Gordon College, a four-year liberal arts college, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary stand a few miles apart north of Boston, the city where A. J. Gordon spent most of his life. As the graduate department of the college, Gordon-Conwell accurately reflects Gordon's intentions of providing a quick educational alternative for those who could neither afford nor qualify for a higher education.

Notes

1. Gordon served as a trustee of Brown University for fourteen years and as a trustee of Newton Theological School for twenty-seven years.


8. Ibid., p. 10.


11. The Niagara and prophetic conferences were late-nineteenth-century gatherings for “fundamentalist” Bible study. The meetings promoted premillennial dispensationalist theology, biblical exegesis, and prophecy.


14. Ibid., p. 32.

15. Ibid., p. 30.

16. Ibid., p. 31.


18. Ibid., p. 587.

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**Selected Works on A. J. Gordon**


Noteworthy

Yale Divinity School is honoring the career of Charles W. Forman by establishing an endowed scholarship in his name. Professor Forman, who served on the faculty of Yale Divinity School for thirty-four years as missiologist and historian of missions, retired in June 1987. Income from the Charles W. Forman Scholarship will provide assistance primarily to students from the third world.

Dr. Forman has chaired the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches, the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations of the Presbyterian Church, and the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia, and is a member of the Board of the Overseas Ministries Study Center.

After eight years as Director of World Vision’s MARC (Missions Advanced Research and Communications Center), Samuel Wilson has become Director of Research at Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies in Pasadena, California.

David A. Kerr has been appointed as Director of the Duncan Black Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary, effective January 1, 1988. Kerr is currently Director of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Selby Oak Colleges in Birmingham, England.
Book Reviews

Will It Liberate? Questions about Liberation Theology.


If you wish to learn something about Michael Novak's vision of democratic capitalism, this book is a must. If, however, your interest lies in exploring dimensions of liberation theology, your attention would be more fruitfully directed elsewhere.

While Latin American liberation theologians tend to welcome responsible and intelligent critiques of their work, this volume, because it does not deal essentially with the theologies of liberation, is not a critical work at all but, rather, a bound soapbox upon which the author proclaims the good news of capitalistic enterprise.

The first clue that something is awry appears in the title, Will It Liberate? Novak presumes that the liberation theologians have developed to some extent a political program for human liberation based on socialism. He then attempts to demonstrate that democratic capitalism liberates, while socialism enslaves. Yet, when the flag-waving and paens to enterprise are over, it becomes clear that Novak has overlooked a foundational point. For Latin American liberation theologians, the liberating force in history is neither capitalism nor socialism, but the gospel of Jesus Christ, as articulated to and expressed by the poor. By deliberately choosing not to discuss the theology of these thinkers, Novak misses the core of their project. As a result, we are left with a series of random thoughts and statistics on economic developmentalism that has very little to do with the theology of liberation.

All this might seem harmless enough. Yet Novak, who holds the George Frederick Jewett Chair in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., reflects in these pages some of the most disagreeable and primitive aspects of developmentalist theory, a theory given expression in the 1960s by such projects as the Alliance for Progress and the United Nations Decade for Development. Although dependency theorists and liberation theologians argue persuasively that such developmentalist initiatives have broadened, rather than curbed, poverty in Latin America, Novak readily dismisses their arguments.

He avers, along with other developmentalists, that a prime reason for indigence in Latin America is not exploitative international economics, but cultural lethargy. In a disquieting statement, he claims, "Were the Mexican economy organized as, say, the Japanese economy is organized, and if the cultural habits inculcated by its systems were more like those of the Japanese, one might be sure that there would be no more hunger in Mexico (or elsewhere in Latin America)" (p. 58). The implication is clear: if the language Latin Americans only had the organizational skill and enterprising zip of the Japanese, all would be well south of the Rio Grande. Such an unsophisticated and condescending assessment, repeated in slightly varied form throughout the book, calls into question the author's reliability and credibility concerning many of his other assertions.

Novak holds up the United States, South Korea, and Japan as stellar examples of democratic capitalism's efficacy. Revealingly, however, he fails to examine the role of slavery in United States economic history, the impact of totalitarianism on South Korea's political economy, and the disturbing number of poor persons in all three nations.

The Latin American liberation theologians are first and foremost theologians, not political scientists. Writing from their faith commitment, they are critical of all economic and political programs that engender poverty and despoil God's kingdom of life. If and when Michael Novak addresses their theology, then, perhaps, he might engage in authentic polemics rather than propaganda.

—Stephen B. Scharper

Hostage Bound, Hostage Free.


Few people have had more news coverage in recent years than the Americans taken hostage by extremist groups in Lebanon. Among those hostages was Benjamin M. Weir, a Presbyterian missionary pastor in Lebanon for thirty-one years. Throughout the eighteen months of Weir's captivity he was a special focus of prayerful concern for people within and far beyond the boundaries of his own church. In turn, his wife, Carol, became internationally recognized for her tireless efforts to activate political and religious forces on his behalf.

The book consists of twenty-five concise chapters, alternately by Ben and Carol. This fascinating record in diary format covers the period from May 1984, when Weir was taken hostage on a street near his residence in Beirut, to September 1985 when he was dramatically and surprisingly released. The final pages extend the story very briefly through November 1986. It was during this latter period that the Weirs faced the bitter sorrow of a daughter's death by accident in Egypt, the honor of Ben's election as Moderator of the Presbyterian (U.S.A.) General Assembly, and the joy of welcoming home two fellow American hostages, Fr. Lawrence Martin Jenco (released in July 1986) and
David Jacobsen (released the following November).

A tract is defined in the dictionary as “a brief treatise . . . for general distribution, usually on a religious or political topic.” By that definition Hostage Bound, Hostage Free qualifies as one of the most significant tracts of our time. It is brief (less than 200 pages); one hopes and expects that it will enjoy very wide distribution indeed; and it has to do with both religious and political issues of crucial importance today.

As a religious tract it champions a level of Christian forgiveness and understanding that is downright apostolic. Weir’s demeanor and attitude throughout his long captivity witness magnificently to that ideal. As a political tract, the book calls for a radical change in American policy in the Middle East to reflect greater understanding and more evenhanded treatment of the Arab cause on the part of our government.

The importance of this book to the current literature about international mission is evident throughout its pages. It seems best summarized in the final paragraph of the closing chapter:

What a time to engage in Christian mission! While we become advocates for the homeless, the unemployed, the disenfranchised, and the discouraged within our own borders, we are called to look beyond our own society to the world and its needs. Faith lets you know that you can’t just stand back and say, “I’m not here,” hoping the trouble will go away. We must learn to live together [p. 182].

—Norman A. Horner

Norman A. Horner, a contributing editor, is Professor of Mission Emeritus at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. He was a missionary colleague of Ben and Carol Weir in Lebanon from 1968 to 1976.

Azusa Street and Beyond: Pentecostal Missions and Church Growth in the Twentieth Century.


This book is a compilation of sixteen articles, mostly by classical Pentecostals—those who organized themselves in the early years of this century into Pentecostal denominations. There are five sections, of unequal length, to this book: “Historical Perspectives” (discussion of Pentecostal missions between about 1906-56); “Theological Motivations” (the motives were primarily eschatological and Holy-Spirit directed); “Strategic/Practical Issues” (emphasis on the Holy Spirit in evangelism, evangelistic zeal, and the importance of training leadership); Pentecostals and the Church Growth Movement” (largely ignored until Donald McGavran begin to write about it in the 1960s); and “Future Cautions and Challenges” (pictureing the dynamic Pentecostal groups facing the problems of a rigid denominationalism).

There are three valuable aspects in this book. First is the collection of articles arranged in the five sections discussed above. Second are the introductions to each section written by the editor, himself a Pentecostal and graduate of Fuller’s School of World Mission and now assistant professor of missions and church growth, Church of God School of Theology, Cleveland,
Tennessee. McClung—a former missionary to Europe and a student of Pentecostal missiology—writes succinctly and provides a good overview of each section of the book. Third is a sixty-page annotated bibliography, containing mostly books about Pentecostal missions, representative of the North American Pentecostal movement.

As in any compilation, some articles are better than others. Some of the important Pentecostal figures with essays include: David J. du Plessis, Donald Gee, Thomas F. Zimmerman, Melvin L. Hodges, Paul Yonggi Cho, and Jack Hayford. The Foreword by C. Peter Wagner and an essay by Donald McGavran show the editor’s indebtedness to the School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary.

Anyone desiring a better understanding of Pentecostal missiology will want this book. It is a bit sketchy in the selection of articles, but speaks well to the theme of “Pentecostal missions and church growth in the twentieth century.” For a more denominational approach, consider Gary B. McGhee’s, This Gospel Shall Be Preached: A History and Theology of Assemblies of God Foreign Missions to 1959 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1986).

—Jerry L. Sandidge

Jerry L. Sandidge is Assistant Professor of Church History, School of Theology and Missions, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma. For ten years (1972–82) he was a missionary in Belgium with the Assemblies of God.

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Since the development of the Pentecostal movement early in this century, as well as the more recent charismatic renewal movements in the older churches, the practice of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, has sparked considerable controversy. Watson E. Mills, professor of New Testament studies at Mercer University, has admirably compiled a wide-ranging collection of essays written by theologians, historians, linguists, psychologists, and behaviorists.

The essays represent five different methodological approaches to research on glossolalia: Exegetical Studies, Historical Studies, Theological Studies, Psychological Studies, and Sociocultural Studies. They vary from such topics as the terminology involved in glossolalia, the occurrence of the phenomenon in non-Christian religions, black Pentecostalism, Catholic Pentecostalism, and the interpretation of tongues, to psychological and sociological dimensions. The contributors include participants as well as outside observers.

Mills has written two introductory chapters to provide the uninitiated reader with a brief historical account of the rise of Pentecostalism and a survey of the available literature in English. While these are helpful, their brevity is unfortunate. In particular, a fuller account of the historical development would have better served the purpose of the book.

The intention of the editor is not to advocate a particular theological position on the meaning and significance of glossolalia through the chapters he has written or the other essays he has chosen to include. Rather, he has designed the book to assist the reader in
evaluating the various methods that have been used to analyze glossolalia. One hopes that both proponents and critics will come to a better understanding of the phenomenon as a result. For this reason and for the fact that Pentecostalism has now reached significant worldwide proportions, Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research on Glossolalia is a valuable contribution to the continuing examination of the subject.

—Gary B. McGee

Gary B. McGee is Associate Professor and Chairman of the Bible and Theology Department, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History.


The “largest national church in the world” (so Ellis, p. 454) will celebrate its millennium in 1988. These two books can serve the very timely purpose of guiding the reader through the contradictory assertions about Russian Orthodoxy that can be anticipated in the coming anniversary year.

Jane Ellis achieves two things: (1) to allow the stranger to enter into the life and thought of contemporary Orthodoxy, and (2) to give a critical history of the rise, the short flourish, and the repression of dissent from 1960–85. For believers “the sheer beauty and splendour of the worship are all windows through which they hope to catch a glimpse of heaven” (p. 13). Since worship with such high liturgical demands is central to Orthodoxy, Ellis shows how extraordinarily important a church building, a duly ordained priesthood, and other elements of an institutional church are. The power of Ellis’s imaginative use of the statistics so painstakingly compiled is to show that in spite of some beautiful moments of worship witnessed by foreigners, in spite of the crowded cathedrals in Moscow, the essential requirements for Orthodoxy continue to be eroded.

In spite of some renovations and new openings, the number of churches open for worship continues to decline. Only 6,500 working churches (1980) for an estimated 50 million worshipers represents only one church for every 7,700 worshipers. Further, the accessibility of the “working churches” is heavily biased toward persons living in the Ukraine and the Western parts of the USSR, with only twenty-nine churches open in all of Siberia. Similar inequities exist in available clergy—only 5,994 priests for the 6,500 churches.

Writing as a trained secular historian, but also as a committed layman in the Orthodox tradition, Pospielovsky discusses the major moments of change in the Russian Orthodox Church since 1917. Thanks to recent Samizdat documents that provide new detail, he is able to offer one of the most complete discussions of the major internal debates about the desired nature of Orthodoxy. At the turn of the century some bishops and lay intellectuals called for a more democratic church that would be engaged in the social question. The so-called Renovationists (Pospielovsky deals in detail with three groups) eventually lost. The conservatives opted for a patriarch in 1917, and even though the Soviet authorities favored the Renovationists initially, the common believers finally gave stronger support to

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the patriarchal church.

The most important moment for the Russian Patriarchate was not 1917, as is often thought, or the recovery of the church after 1943, but the spring of 1927. After numerous personal imprisonments, and the almost total decimation of the hierarchy, the acting patriarch, Alexei, announced a policy of full accommodation with the new Soviet power, dismissing political neutrality as futile. This has remained the policy for survival of the institutional church subsequently. Pospielovsky is particularly strong in placing the election of the present Patriarch Pimen in that context and describing how Pimen reconfirmed this policy in 1961 in spite of major pressure from other churchmen complaining about state strangulation.

Pospielovsky covers in greater detail the leftist and rightist schismatic groups and their ultimate failure to be truly Orthodox. Ellis gives greater attention to the dissenters, both clerical and lay, who hoped to get a hearing from the patriarch and other major hierarchs. At best, some of them were given personal protection by individual bishops (Pospielovsky’s sources are closer to such behind-the-scenes activity), or discussion and publicity abroad helped the church leadership wrest a few more concessions from a very unwilling state.

Considering Russian Orthodoxy’s missionary impact in an aggressively atheist state, both books come to very similar conclusions, namely that the Church in the USSR is a genuine, living and vibrant Church (almost miraculously so) and that the patriarch, at least the current one, has nothing to do with her spiritual achievements. She lives and gains spiritual victories not because of her patriarch but in spite of him—by the will of God, who tolerates the sins and lies of her leading hierarchs because of the redeeming faith and sacrifices of her flock and of her better pastors [Pospielovsky, p. 471].

Such language does not mean that Pospielovsky belongs to those Orthodox groups that have separated from the patriarchal church, for aside from the specific naming of Pimen in public, he is essentially restating the frank, public confession of Vitali Borovoi, a major representative of the Patriarchate to the World Council of Churches.

Where then are those windows to heaven that give Orthodoxy its continuing appeal? A “politically captive” (Ellis, p. 455) leadership continues to believe that assenting to state demands will keep those church buildings open or at least slow the decline. More promising are a new generation of bishops, many of them newly converted to Christianity after having received a solid secular education. With no memory of the church in power, they can be counted on to be a creative force for ministry in society, provided the authorities do not eliminate them. Above all, however, it is the “shining example of the power of the Christian faith to inspire people to overcome unprecedented persecution and suffering” (Ellis, p. 455) that continues to reveal a heaven, less colored by the imagery of royalty and wealth than by the fragrance and beauty of contemporary saints who manifest striking similarities to the suffering servant of Isaiah, the kenotic Christ of Philippians 2, or even to Dostoievsky’s Father Zossima.

—Walter Sawatsky

Walter Sawatsky, East/West Research Scholar for the Mennonite Central Committee since 1973, based in England at Keston College initially, then living in Germany until 1985, is now Director of East/West Concerns for the Mennonite Central Committee in Canada.
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