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Concerning the Church

Context

Today's Church & Today's World

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Section III

One of the facts of life in any truly international Christian gathering today is that the western church is presented on many fronts with strong challenges from the third-world churches. The forceful challenge from Latin America to the North American evangelical establishment at the Lausanne Congress in 1974 is well known, as is the impression made at the WCC in Nairobi 1975. It is true that the Lambeth Conference does not sound the sort of place where the establishment will be rocked or where non-European and non-white voices will largely prevail, but it is difficult to see how any Christian gathering nowadays can be said to reflect accurately the international Christian world unless this is so. The eight essays gathered together in the third section serve as a useful introduction to the possibility of Lambeth as a creative interface between the Third World and the West.

1 Decline in the West

In the first essay in this section, 'Directions in Church Growth', Tom Tuma of Kenya makes what might well be the most radical statement for Lambeth to consider: 'The Third World has no choice but to assume the leadership role in the Anglican Communion.' (p 102) His convincing use of statistics shows clearly that the centre of Christianity has shifted from Europe and North America to Africa and Latin America.

It is evident how this shift is being recognized (organizationally) in the World Council of Churches by the increasing presence of third-world leaders in both the Council and Secretariat. The question for the Lambeth Conference is: Will the Anglican Communion reflect this shift? The historical fact of Anglicanism being a European creature makes this more difficult. It is easy for the WCC to appoint a secretary from the Third World; it is just conceivable that a Pope could in the future come from a non-western church; but a non-English Archbishop of Canterbury seems too much to hope for! [But see Stephen Neill *The Churchman* vol. 90 no. 3 (1976) pp 198-200 Ed.] Anglicanism must respond to this challenge by giving the greatest weight in its international councils and commissions to third-world countries—and the overwhelming and disproportionate number of bishops at Lambeth from the United States shows the extent of the change needed.

Although Tuma writes on church growth and, as further reading, recommends the works of Donald McGavran, his approach in this essay is not

bound by the particular stance of the American Church Growth Institute. He is aware, however, of the criticism by many church leaders of the interest in statistics, an interest which he shares with McGavran. It may well be that in the West many church leaders criticize the statistics of church growth because for most of their leadership (and episcopates) they have been presiding over numerical decline (tactfully, perhaps, the essay omits to make this point!). Statistics, as Tuma admits, must not be seen as the whole picture but they do reveal trends—particularly is this so when used globally as in this essay. Statistics act ‘as a thermometer, they enable us to identify both the “hot” and “cold” areas in the church(es).’ (p 96)

He points to the four major statistical trends in the Anglican Communion: numerical decline in Europe and North America; a static situation since 1965 in Hong Kong, Japan and Latin America; rapid growth in Africa and Papua/New Guinea; and the fact that the majority of people baptized into the Anglican Communion are infants. This latter point may not seem very significant for a church which universally practices infant-baptism! It does, however, reveal where the Church is most gaining ground; for Kenya and Uganda are the only places in the Anglican Communion where there were more adults than infants baptized in 1977.

He hints at the rationalizations which enable the West to cope with these statistics. Western leaders claim ‘that the loss of some of their members is a blessing in disguise because it serves to separate the tares from the wheat.’ (p 97) He notes that while the western churches keep records of entry into the church (largely by infant baptism) they fail to count those who leave (through death, apathy, defection). Consequently ‘they remain under the illusion that all is well when in fact, the number of their flock is steadily declining.’ (p 97) This particular comment seems the wrong conclusion to draw from western leaders’ reactions to statistics. Many are only too aware of the shrinkage. The fashionable answer given in the ‘60s was the assertion that numbers of converts are not our concern: ‘To seek success in terms of numbers gathered in or of churches planted is to deny Christ’s way of service and suffering. As long as we hold before ourselves the objective of church extension, we are deliberately planning not to die; we are devoting our energies to ensuring our own survival. We thus replace self-giving by self-aggrandizement, acceptance of the cross by self-sufficiency.’ (J. G. Davies, *Dialogue with the World*, London 1967, p 42) This negative reaction to seeking converts arose out of the era when evangelism was seen by many to be the only important concern of mission, when numerical increase of converts automatically seemed to exclude involvement in socio-political action. The increasing growth in the third world of the number of converts, together with their concern for socio-political involvement, presents the western church with a more wholesome yardstick against which to measure its decline. The signs are, and hopefully this will be reflected in the Lambeth Conference, that we in the West are prepared to look honestly at ourselves when the mirror is held up by third-world Christians and furthermore are prepared to learn from them.

In this section the essays from Latin America and from India provide exciting possibilities for the West as well as for the third world.

But before turning to specifically third-world insights it is necessary to follow up Tuma's conclusion about the western church: 'The main reason for the loss of members in the older churches is the failure of those churches to respond effectively to a situation in which secularization is predominant and secularism is rapidly gaining ground.' (p 97)

2 Approaches to secularization

David Jenkins takes up the challenge of secularization in his essay 'Evangelization'. He writes in an evidently urgent, almost passionate, way about evangelism: 'I do not see how what are still received as the normal methods of evangelization and preaching the gospel can possibly bring a hearing of the gospel to the masses of men and women who live in and are shaped by our present urbanized, industrialized and secularized culture.' (p 115) He is convinced that the church's present record in evangelism is very poor.

His first and major concern is that evangelism is 'primarily thought of as a message which has to be got over in certain set forms or with a fixed verbal content.' (p 118) His fear about the words of the gospel is that they have become slogans and that people inside the church as well as those outside rarely know the human and spiritual experiences and possibilities behind these words. The continuing use of such words that have become mere slogans hides from people the realities of God to which they originally referred: 'For words become slogans and slogans trigger off patterns of behaviour which are then gone through because of their inevitability for, and familiarity to, the group of people concerned. The words, actions and attitudes which make up the behaviour have very little to do with the powerful experiences which originally caused the now slogan-words to be used.' (p 112) His hope is that the Lambeth Conference, as an international and intercultural gathering, will help by getting behind the slogans to the realities beneath. His concern about words becoming slogans is of particular relevance in a culture like ours where the gospel is no longer seen as good-news but as a tired, worn-out system connected with an established order which belongs to yesterday. Not only do the words of the gospel convey little reality to so many but such meaning as they do have is often quite contrary to the original. To many in Northern Ireland, for instance, 'to be saved' means to believe certain truths and to give up drink, a far cry from the wholeness of salvation as an eschatological reality!

Jenkins' aim, however, is not simply to make preachers and others more careful in what words they use in communicating the gospel. He doubts whether they should preach at all: 'The fact that one of the things that Christian people (including New Testament people) have "done about the gospel" is to "preach" or "proclaim" it is not necessarily either helpful or decisive for us today.' (p 115) He is not at all clear or precise about the alternatives but is sure that these must involve a deep awareness of the

social, political, psychological and economic pressures upon people, for it is at these points that the gospel must have its impact. It is difficult to see whether, or in what way, he would allow any verbalizing of the good news when these needs are more fully understood. No doubt this is because he believes we are very far from understanding what the evangelistic task *is* in our world. In the end his most assertive comment about evangelism is that 'the messages, presentations, and sharings of the gospel will be as various and as pluralistic as the circumstances which shape us in our diverse humanity and the experiences which enable us to apprehend God as a contemporary presence and promise.' (p 118) This assertion gives the scope of the task and he leaves the bishops with three concluding questions which ask them to start way back at first principles. The last of these questions asks 'how then to set about sharing both the realities and the unrealities with our neighbours so that God may be discovered, and may discover himself to all of us?' (p 118) His aim is to convince the bishops of our widespread failure to understand the evangelistic task and commits to them the responsibility of starting us off in the right direction. If the rethink needed in evangelism is as extensive and radical as he suggests the conference will need to devote its whole time to this part of its agenda!

The church's ineptitude in evangelism is certainly a major failing but, without wanting in any way to quench the urgency of Jenkins' concern, it would seem that his pessimism about contemporary evangelism is marginally more gloomy than it need be because of his jaundiced view of evangelicals – both here and overseas. He sees evangelism as the preserve of evangelicals and blames them for this fact. He also criticizes the Department of World Mission and Evangelism as part of the WCC for making the task of evangelization separate from the other activities of the church. This is surely unfair! Movements and organizations that uphold the importance of evangelism exist because the church fails at this point and needs this distinctive witness to its evangelistic task. John Stott expressed this well in his concluding remarks at the Nottingham Congress in 1977: 'Certainly we should not retain the designation evangelical because we are awkward customers . . . we retain the designation because there are certain distinctive convictions that we cherish which we must on no account surrender, and to which we must bear faithful witness so long as there is anybody left who does not share them with us.' (*What is an Evangelical?* Falcon, London 1977, p 5)

His main criticism of evangelicals is that evangelism is more or less equated with specific campaigns, imposed by the vicar and employing a team from outside. Some, it is true, may place all their evangelistic hopes in this one basket, but one wonders whether David Jenkins has looked at many churches, here or overseas, where people are being converted in significant numbers. He would no doubt be surprised that the majority find Christ through contact with individual Christians and the ongoing life of the local congregation.

Evangelism is the obvious response to secularization; to attack is the

best way of defence. But as Bryan Wilson pointed out in his book, *Religion in Secular Society* (1966) the other response is 'ecumenism', and not because these two (viz evangelism and unity) are linked together in Jesus' high priestly prayer (John 17). His hypothesis is that, as it is weak organizations that seek amalgamation, ecumenism is a feeble church's response to the marching tide of secularism; it is the reduction of competing units and the organization of the decreasing market among those who remain. This view of ecumenism which portrays a church engaged in rationalization and self-preservation is flatly rejected by Ian Fraser, the Dean of Mission at the Selly Oak Colleges, in his essay 'Ecumenism'. He is against any form (which in fact is the usual form) of ecumenism which is concerned with interdenominational unity alone. He defines ecumenism, as is becoming more common, in terms of the kingdom rather than the church: 'What is the ecumenical movement in this time but the whole inhabited earth rising with fresh determination to combat the chaos which continually threatens it in ever-new forms, and reaching out to a larger destiny; the whole inhabited earth lifting up its head, daring to have new hopes and aspirations; exposed, through them, to fresh sufferings.' (p 103) Ecumenism must be a world-wide enterprise, released from the confines of the church; yet, he says, 'in many ways we are like old-style Communists, scared of shaping communities of freedom which will participate in the ecumenical movement of humanity in ways which will be difficult to contain or control.' (p 110) In many respects this way of using 'ecumenism' is akin to the same approach of the last decade, when the watchword was 'God provides the agenda'. It is a call for us to discover where God is acting and, uniting with others who will, to co-operate in God's activity in the world. As such it is a call open to similar questions levelled at general ecumenical understandings of mission over the last decade. But as a definition of ecumenism it does issue a warning against the over-domestic concerns most normally associated with church unity. There is, however, a middle definition which is the best of the three: the church should seek unity within itself, not for its own sake, but for the sake of, and in the way best suited to, the needs of the whole world. That would be ecumenism with a truly oecumenical dimension.

G. W. E. Ashby, the Dean of Grahamstown, South Africa, in his essay 'Pentecost and the Church Today', presents another set of insights into what is happening to renew the church for its mission in the modern world. He is convinced that the charismatic movement is a gift of God—naturally he expresses this particularly clearly in relation to the South African experience where it has had such an impact on the Anglican Church, from the Archbishop 'downwards'. 'It is perhaps significant that at a time of diminishing hope for peaceful development in South Africa the Renewal movement has reawakened hope and love in many unexpected places . . . As a whole there is a massive and very strong conviction, particularly in South Africa, that the spirit has been poured upon Christians of different strata and race, so that they may find each other as Christians

and together witness to their nation.' (pp 132, 135) If this movement is of God then it must be taken seriously, and consequently Ashby calls on the church to discuss openly the New Testament evidence for the baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit. He believes there is still the danger of people taking up entrenched positions in opposition to each other.

It is worthy of note that English evangelicals came to terms with charismatic renewal in an enthusiastic manner (with certain doctrinal provisos) at the Nottingham Congress in 1977. By way of contrast, the Loughborough Anglo-Catholic Congress seemed officially unaware of its existence (apart from Bishop Michael Marshall). There is to be an International Anglican Charismatic Conference for leaders at Canterbury just before the Lambeth Conference. The concern is to discover what God is seeking to do through the renewal movement and to discern what are the particular priorities for the future as the movement specifically affects the Anglican Communion. A fair sprinkling of bishops will be at this conference, and presumably we look mainly to them to ensure that the open discussion, for which Ashby asks, takes place at Lambeth.

3 The vitality and challenge of the Third World

The three essays at the end of this section turn our thoughts to signs of new life outside the tradition and theology of the western church: ('Theology under Re-appraisal: an Indian View', by S. Amirtham; 'Theology under Re-appraisal: a Latin American View,' by Andrew Kirk; and 'Theology under Re-appraisal: Black Theology,' by Warner Traynham). Many similar concerns emerge in each of these essays and our response on each occasion needs to be twofold: we need to understand the nature of the task facing the particular church, which at many points is so different from our own, and also to ask what we ought to be learning from their experience. The Indian views poses these questions from a distance as they struggle with a cultural and religious environment totally different from our own. The Latin American views pose the questions more urgently as they are worked out in a culture dominated by a history of western religion and imperialism. The views of black theology bring the challenges to the very heart of western Christian civilization as they are worked out in the heat of the North American scene.

One suspects that Andrew Kirk has an easier task writing on Latin American theology than does Amirtham dealing with India. Liberation theology, born and bred in the sociological ferment of Latin America with its praxis orientated approach, has been like a breath of fresh air in the West during the last few years. This is understandable, for it speaks out of and into a situation where the Marxist analysis of society is central. Many in the West have welcomed this as a refreshingly new opportunity to look at the relationship between Christianity and the world powers. Its adoption implies a radical break with the past because it is not just a new method of doing theology, different from the classical western approaches, but a

challenge to the whole stance of Christianity in relation to the socio-economic structures. Liberation theology is often hostile to western Christianity because it sees that the latter's 'pretended neutrality is just another way by which much western theology refuses to acknowledge its own subservience to a particular political and economic order which maintains the world dangerously divided into the possessors and the dispossessed.' (p 150)

For many, even those attracted to Latin America, Indian theology has a remote appeal. It speaks to a religious tradition very different from our own; it is not at heart grappling with the problem of secularism; it does not offer the insight into the socio-political field which we get from Latin America; it is usually seen as a specialist interest, even a detached academic subject. Amirtham mentions in passing (it is all that can be done in an essay of this length) the various attempts to speak of Christ in a Hindu fashion: Brahmabandhab's use of the Advaitic concept of *Saccidananda Brahman* to explain God, Chenchiah's interpretation of the Christ-event as emergence of life not bound by *Karma*, Chakkarai's exposition of Jesus as the *avatar*, and Sunder Rao's description of union with Christ in terms of *Ananyatva*. After such passing reference he remarks that these 'are known sufficiently well not to need any discussion at length here.' (p 139) Well known to whom? One suspects that the majority of Christian leaders, scholars, and not a few Anglican bishops in the West are not as conversant with the emerging Christian theology of India as Amirtham imagines. As one of the earth's largest nations, India, and the concerns of the small Christian church in its Hindu environment, should be high on the agenda of the world-wide church and of gatherings like the Lambeth Conference. From a western point of view, an understanding of how to interpret Christianity to the Indian religious mind becomes increasingly important as the numbers of our countrymen who are Hindu and Buddhist by immigration or conversion continue to increase. The ability to be a Christian apologist in the face of Indian beliefs is even more important when we realize that the traditional Indian and European views of religion are very similar. Together with the Greek view, they have a dualism foreign to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the biblical view of history centring on the historical particularity of the Incarnation is distinctly different. Increasingly we find people adopting beliefs in re-incarnation and holding monistic views quite foreign to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and finding notions of the uniqueness of Christ far less acceptable than the idea of repeated incarnations so central to the circular view of history at the heart of Indian religion. The ease with which many in Britain turn to pre-Christian and Indian world views shows how thin was the veneer of the Judaeo-Christian tradition or how unacceptable it is as a world-view outside of the community of biblical faith. Zaehner, a leading authority on Hinduism, writes: 'Western civilization is essentially not Judaeo-Christian but Greco-Roman, and Christianity only became acceptable to the pagan civilization of the Roman Empire once it started to express itself not in terms of Judaic

prophecy but in those of Greek philosophy. Our civilization is rooted not in the prophetic tradition of Abraham and Moses but in those first attempts in the Greek world to find a rational principle behind the universe at large and the phenomenon of man in particular. These first thinkers are known as the Presocratics and the manner of their thinking is strikingly, almost uncannily, similar to that of the Indian philosopher-sages who were their contemporaries.' (R. C. Zaehner, *Our Savage God*, Collins, London 1974, p 12.) As a church living in a society which increasingly owes many of its beliefs and philosophical assumptions to the Indian tradition, we need to give the indigenous church of that country far greater attention.

The questions raised by black theology are of course immediately relevant in any multi-racial society where there is some degree of racial inferiority within the structures of society. In Britain, however, it is still easy to distance ourselves from its impact, believing that it is essentially America's problem reflected only minimally in this country. As they say, it depends where in this country you live! Two facts are worth noting to highlight its relevance for the home church. First, many black Britons still feel deeply the psychological effects of a slave-past when they were bred with feelings of inferiority: 'The gospel preached to the slaves in the course of their evangelization during the first half of the nineteenth century, is a clear case of theology edited by one class for the consumption of another.' (p 155) With this as part of folk-memory and the incessant reminder from certain groups, such as the National Front, that racist attitudes are still part of British society, the seedbeds of black theology in this country are well prepared. Secondly, in England black Christians are largely to be found in black churches. They have found this a necessary move in the face of white-Christian inhospitality. When its own distinctive theology emerges, it is bound to reflect in some way the note of separation on the basis of colour and culture. It will be different from the North American varieties, as South African black theology has its own particular distinctiveness, but we need to get used to the emotional shock of hearing a black Christian say, as many do in the USA: 'No fellowship and reconciliation before liberation.' When Christian virtues are seen from the other side of the fence they often take on a wholly different perspective—love, for instance, seems much more militant and aggressive:

Blacks can show Christian love to whites only by asserting their integrity in the face of its denial and struggling against them in so far as they support or are supported by the structures of oppression. The first stage or precondition for Christian love then, is justice. Any other relationship of love in such a context which leaves that context unaffected is a sick, distorted and un-Christian love...From the perspective of black theologians the question is not—is violence ethically permissible to the Christian in the context of the liberation struggle? The question is rather—is the violence of liberation permissible in the face of the ongoing violence inbedded in the system of oppression? (p 159)

The emotional shock of being called an oppressor (at least by historical, genetic and uncritical association if not in active domination) is the first

impact of black theology. It comes from a background whose most famous and infamous prophet said: 'Christianity is the white man's religion. The Holy Bible in the white man's hands and his interpretations of it have been the greatest single ideological weapon for enslaving millions of non-white human beings' (Malcolm X in his *Autobiography*, Penguin, London 1970, p 241). Will Lambeth, as did the WCC, hear the full-blooded cry of the liberationists, typified in their slogan 'God is not dead, she is black!'

All three essays share the concern to indigenize Christianity. This necessitates that the western church accept the relativity of its own theological tradition: 'There is no plain theology then, the black theologians say there is only black theology or white theology or European theology or Oriental or African theology etc.' (Traynham p 155); 'In Latin America there has been a radical shift of emphasis in comparison with the method, content and purpose of classical theology and a resolute bid for theological independence.' (Kirk p 144); 'The affirmations about Christ in India are therefore bound to be different from those made for example in Europe.' (Amirtham p 138)

For the Anglican Communion, and for the Lambeth Conference in particular, this call to accept basic differences in theological affirmations is a challenge that has bite to it. If we in the West are wanting to reinterpret the Chalcedonian formulae into the thought forms of our culture, how much latitude will we allow the emerging theologies of the third world? Will we seek to impose the formulae of western classical theology, particularly as Africa, Asia and India search for an indigenous theology? There must surely be a preparedness to watch (and enable, where asked) these churches to go through the processes of theological formation as did the West in the first centuries of the Christian era: 'The Hindu pre-understanding would demand that Jesus Christ is affirmed in Hindu categories, and that Hindu reasons are offered to consider his claims. But then, in this process the concepts and categories themselves may need transformation to contain the input of the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The inadequacy of categories will continue to pose a problem, offering no final answers. Tentative solutions will have to be tried and then changed to more adequate ones.' (Amirtham p 138) The demand of these essays is that we accept that the privileged position of western classical theology is over; there is no necessary difference in authority between Chalcedon and Serampore, or Niceea and Nairobi. It gives added urgency as well as a new dimension to the questions of orthodoxy and heresy. The Western tendency is to allow enormous flexibility (e.g. *The Myth of God Incarnate*) without bringing in the category of orthodoxy/heresy; yet when, for instance, African independent churches apply for membership of the WCC, we emphasize very clearly the need for Trinitarian orthodoxy.

Secondly, the emerging theologies described in these three essays share a common concern to be 'market place' theologies: 'Throbbing through all the writings of the liberation theologians is the burning conviction that the *raison d'être* of theology is negated as and when it becomes a mere academic

discipline removed, for the sake of a pretended objectivity, from personal and communal commitment to a transforming mission in history.' (Kirk p 147) Indian theology is a living theology which arises directly out of the mission of the church in Hindu society and consequently the source-books for much of this theology are not always books on theology but frequently songs, liturgies, sermons and dialogues in church, and occasional bulletins and reports. That such theology is evolved by those active in mission is not seen merely as a necessary accident of history but as something good in itself: 'Weak involvement produces weak theology, cool involvement produces cool theology, hot involvement produces hot theology.' [Amirtham (p 140) quoting from *Theology in Action*, EACC 1972, p 25] Liberation theology is not only so called because its central theme is the liberation of the oppressed but because, as a way of doing theology, it is liberating itself from the dominant Western academic method. The method as well as the content makes true theology.

Should not Lambeth ask whether the West has gone wrong in its over-commitment to an academic approach to theology? Is the tradition that produces *The Myth of God Incarnate* not seriously brought into question? As speakers at the recent Anglican Conference for Catholic Renewal delighted to point out, western theology is weak because of the practice of doing theology 'six foot above the ground'. They pointed, with approbation, to the Orthodox tradition where the theologians are the holy men. As allies, the theology of the holy men and the theology of the action men must surely win substantial ground from the theology of the academic men.

Thirdly, we see how in Latin America and India theology is earthed by the newly-emerging patterns of ministerial training. In both sub-continents there is a growing emphasis on training men in their own environment—Theological Education by Extension (TEE) is a system where groups of local trainee-leaders are taught by visiting tutors while they continue their normal occupations. It may well be that theological education largely detached in residential institutions (though there are ways of making these less remote than often they are) is the greatest factor in promoting the gap between theology and the ordinary church member. In Latin America 'theology in a real sense is becoming the concern of the whole *ekklesia* . . . The resulting theological reflection is more integrated and less specialist than the normal 'academic' variety, which, though it may achieve a high level of detailed precision and rational proficiency, often either ignores or sidesteps the real issues which Christians face in the path of daily obedience. . . . The aim of TEE is to produce 'thinkers' who are capable of reflecting theologically out of their daily experience not 'academics' whose training has largely consisted in amassing theoretical knowledge.' (p 149)

Future training in the West will increasingly include such patterns being evolved in the Third World, perhaps with a creative mix wherein some of a person's training is done by extension and part is residential.

Finally, all have a burning concern for liberation in its socio-political

as well as its spiritual dimension. This is, however, less evident in India, whose Hindu tradition has always been slow to adopt militancy (e.g. its stance under both Muslim and Christian imperialism was not, for the most part, markedly hostile). In the church in India the emerging engagement with socio-political factors is coming through 'contextualization', the attempt to see a living theology in dialogue with, and in response to, socio-economic reality: 'Contextualization does not mean that theology adapts the gospel to the context. It means it is in the mutual impact of the gospel and the context that the gospel can be truly understood and interpreted.' (p 140) In Latin America contextualization is important both in the largely Roman Catholic approach to liberation theology and in the evangelical approach centred upon theology of the kingdom as a radical commitment to God's agenda which often implies judgement on the structures of society now. But the note of liberation is perhaps heard most urgently in the black theology from North America. A basic assertion is that the Old and New Testaments offer liberation to the oppressed. Therefore, in any given society, the gospel and theology must be seen in terms of the liberation of the oppressed in that society: 'It is because of these convictions and because in America blackness and oppression, a racial and class phenomenon are so closely identified that a black theologian can make the claim that in America the only Christian theology is black theology and not be peremptorily dismissed as hopelessly chauvinistic and racist.' (p 155)

There are two ways in which we in Britain can react privately to the liberation motif. The first is to applaud the new method, to learn from it, and support (for instance) the North American blacks' cry for freedom. While this is an advance from theological insularity, it is perhaps not an authentic enough response to the phenomenon. The second response is the one demanded by liberation theology: 'What does it mean in our society; what conclusion would the same method reach if done in the market places of London and Birmingham?' It would certainly pose two questions: Is the Church in judgement on the anti-kingdom structures of society, or is she embarrassingly and almost inextricably intertwined with them? By our acquiescence to the international economic order do we realize that we are perpetuating and encouraging the increasing social and economic deprivation of the world's oppressed? Perhaps no church is in a more sensitive situation when these questions are asked in the West than is the Established Church in England.

The other essay in this section from the third world concentrates on this socio-political dimension. 'Liberation and Social Change' by José Miguez Bonino of Argentina is an excellent introduction to the challenge facing the western church in the light of five hundred billion who live (or merely exist) on our planet on the borderline of starvation: 'There is a condition in which human life in any meaningful sense of the word, ceases to exist. What is the meaning of being "father" when you have no protection to offer, no food to provide, no wisdom to transmit because your brain

and your heart are damaged, and your eyes look without light or tears at the newborn baby lying on the floor?' (p 120) Faced with this situation, social change, which will radically affect the world economic imbalance, is crucial; yet, as Bonino traces so well, the history of the church has elevated the stable order of society as a greater good over the alleviation of deprivation and poverty. As a basis for thinking and action in this inherited situation he isolates four central facts: (1) social change is a necessary precondition for a humanizing of the conditions of a great majority of the human race; (2) the Christian basis for responding to this challenge is given in the prophetic-dominical tradition of 'the fundamental right of the poor'; (3) the Christian churches have an unavoidable responsibility for the structures of society—the question of power; (4) the poor, in several forms have themselves become active subjects of social change—liberation. It is a well-argued essay, the force of which would surely impel any council of bishops to urgent and revolutionary action, but Bonino tacitly admits that such a result is unlikely and consequently ends what has been a cool, logical argument by an emotive sermonic appeal: 'How can a church which has for a long time sat at the table of the rich and powerful really cast its lot with the poor? How can the rich enter the kingdom of God? "With God nothing is impossible". What God can do is not to smuggle a rich church into the kingdom, but to convert it to him . . . the first question for the church is not an ethical but a spiritual question: repentance and conversion.' (pp 128-9)

So the challenge which the third world gives to us in the western church and to the Lambeth Conference in particular, is total and radical—'Be converted'. Or, to return to Tuma's words: 'The Third World has no choice but to assume the leadership role in the Anglican Communion.'

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