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# Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice

by RONALD J. SIDER

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*The fundamental question of our time is: What is Salvation? Attempts to understand and re-interpret the mission of the Church in the world and, in particular, the relationship of world evangelisation to social service and justice in society has become the pre-occupation of all traditions of the Christian Church in recent years. The World Council of Churches Department of World Mission and Evangelism Conference at Bangkok in January 1973 on 'Salvation Today' adopted a holistic view. In November of the same year a group of evangelicals promulgated the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern. In July 1974, the Lausanne International Congress of World Evangelisation offered the Lausanne Covenant. During the same year the Third General Assembly of the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops discussed the issue in Rome, and Orthodox churches held a consultation on 'Confessing Christ Today' at Bucharest. The WCC, in the Fifth General Assembly in Nairobi 1975, took up the issues raised at Bangkok, especially in the sections 'Confessing Christ', 'Seeking Community—the common search of people of various faiths, cultures and ideologies', and in 'Structures of Injustice and Struggles for Liberation'. Then on the 8th December 1975, two days before the conclusion of the Nairobi Assembly, Pope Paul, in response to a request by the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, issued Evangelii Nuntiandi, his apostolic exhortation on 'evangelisation in the modern world'. Since Lausanne, several regional congresses on world evangelisation have been held. At the All-India Congress at Devlali in 1977, co-operation in cross-cultural evangelism and Church-planting and the relationship of evangelism to social action were the central concerns of the participants*  
Editor. [p. 71](#)

DR. SIDER opens his essay by contrasting four conflicting views in evangelism and social justice:

1. Evangelism is the primary mission of the Church and is distinct from social action. He cites Billy Graham as the best known representative of this view. The Lausanne covenant and its exponent John Stott also belong to this category, although Sider notes that these representatives also have a passionate concern for justice.

2. The primary mission of the Church is the corporate body of believers, a view which might be called 'radical Anabaptist'. 'By their words, deeds and life together, Christians announce the Good News that by grace it is now possible to live in a new society (the visible body of believers) where all relationships are being transformed.' The Church is part of the content of the Gospel. As John Howard Yoder puts it: 'The primary social structure through which the Gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community.'

3. The conversion of individuals and the political restructuring of society are equally important parts of salvation, a view most common in ecumenical circles. Dr. Sider comments: 'Since struggles for economic justice and political freedom are part of salvation, those at Bangkok could say that "salvation is the peace of the people in Vietnam, independence in Angola and justice and reconciliation in Northern Ireland". Given this definition of salvation, it is obvious that one can speak of evangelizing social structures as well as individuals.' While this definition includes the justification and regeneration of the individual, Sider notes that greater emphasis is generally given to the political reconstructing of society in the interests of greater socio-economic justice. He notes that Richard J. Mouw assumes that since the redemptive work of Christ has cosmic implications, therefore all political activity is a part of evangelism. He expresses surprise that some non-conciliar evangelicals, such as Latin American Orlando E. Costas, have adopted this broad set of definitions.

4. Evangelism is politics because salvation is social justice. This definition 'removes the transcendent element of salvation completely and simply equates salvation and social justice'. It is the view of secular theologians such as Gibson Winter and Harvey Cox. [p. 72](#)

## NEW TESTAMENT TERMINOLOGY

### 1. The Gospel

What, according to the New Testament, is the Gospel? It is the Good News about the Kingdom of God ([Mark 1:14-15](#)). It is the Good News concerning God's Son, Jesus the Messiah, who is Saviour and Lord ([Romans 1:3-4](#); [II Corinthians 4:3-6](#)). It is the Good News about the historical Jesus—his death for our sins and his resurrection on the third day ([I Corinthians 15:1-5](#)). And it is the Good News about a radically new kind of community, the people of God, who are already empowered to live according to the standards of the New Age ([Ephesians 3:1-7](#)).

Stated more systematically, the content of the Gospel is (1) justification by faith through the Cross; (2) regeneration through the Holy Spirit; (3) the Lordship of Christ and (4) the fact of the Kingdom.

That the Gospel includes the wonderful news of justification by faith in Christ whose death atoned for our guilt before God need hardly be argued. It is central to the argument of both Galatians (see especially [1:6-17](#); [2:14-21](#); [3:6-14](#)) and Romans (see especially [1:16-17](#)). Nor need we argue the fact that the Good News also includes the fact that the Risen Lord now lives in individual persons who believe in him, regenerating and transforming their egocentric personalities.

Anyone who proclaims a gospel which omits or de-emphasizes the justification and regeneration of individuals is, as Paul said, preaching his own message, not God's good news of salvation in Jesus.

One aspect of justification, however, requires a further comment. Justification never happens apart from repentance from sin. And sin according to the Bible is both personal and social. (The essence of sin, of course, is rebellion against God, but that rebellion has both personal and social manifestations). In the vast majority of cases, the sins of which theologically conservative preachers urge their people to repent are personal: lying, adultery, stealing, pride. Far less often do ministers who are preaching the Gospel call on their listeners to repent of their sinful involvement in institutionalized racism and unjust economic structures. But surely such one-sidedness [p. 73](#) is unbiblical. If anything is clear from the prophets, it is that God abhors unjust economic structures as much as sexual

misconduct or drunkenness (e.g. [Amos 2:6-7](#); [Isaiah 5:8-12](#)).<sup>1</sup> A Biblical presentation of the Gospel must include a clear summons to repent of all forms of sin.

In the third place, it is Good News that this Jesus who justifies and regenerates is also Lord—Lord of all things in heaven and earth. Paul reminded the Corinthians that the Gospel he preaches is that Jesus is Lord:

‘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*’ ([II Corinthians 4:3-5](#)).

Paul makes the same point in [Romans 10](#). Although he does not use the word *evangelion* until verse [16](#), Paul is clearly thinking of the Gospel in vv. [8-9](#):

‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because if you confess with your lips that *Jesus is Lord* ...’ (cf. also [Philippians 2:9-11](#)).

Seldom, however, do we appropriate the full implication of the fact that Jesus’ Lordship is a fundamental element of the Gospel. Positively, the fact that Jesus is Lord means that nothing else can lord it over and dominate our lives. We are liberated from ancient religious taboos, from oppressive cultural patterns, from the principalities and powers. Jesus, not Caesar, Chairman Brezhnev or President Carter, is Lord. Jesus, not parental dreams or ancestors, is Lord. That is exhilarating, liberating Good News.

But there is another side to this aspect of the Gospel. If Jesus’ Lordship is a fundamental aspect of the Gospel, then the call to that radical (i.e. unconditional) discipleship which this Sovereign demands is simply inseparable from the summons to accept the Gospel. [p. 74](#) Acceptance of a costly discipleship dare not be a second stage separated from acceptance of the Gospel.

Jesus repeatedly and pointedly emphasized the cost of discipleship to those, who were contemplating becoming his followers.

‘Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple ... For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”’ ([Luke 14:25-28](#)).

In another statement, Jesus makes it clear that a costly commitment to unconditional discipleship is necessarily and inevitably linked to the appropriation of the saving Gospel:

‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.’ ([Mark 8:45](#); cf. also [10:29](#)).

Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man ([Mark 10:17-31](#)) shows that he never hesitated to emphasize the demands of discipleship. It is simply unbiblical to present only that part of the Gospel which corresponds to a person’s felt needs. If we present the Gospel to, say, a businessman who yearns for forgiveness from the guilt he feels for sexual infidelity, we dare not fail to point out that accepting Jesus’ forgiveness will also

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<sup>1</sup> See further my ‘Mischief by Statute’, in *Christianity Today*, 16 July, 1976, pp. 14–19, and *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press 1977), ch.6.

necessarily entail repentance from involvement in sinful economic structures and unconditional acceptance of Jesus as Lord of his business practices.

The Gospel is inseparable from costly discipleship. The one who justifies and regenerates also demands that we forsake all other lords and live a transformed lifestyle after the pattern of his perfect life. Accepting the evangelistic call necessarily and inevitably entails accepting Jesus as Lord of our personal lives, our family life, our racial attitudes, our economics and our politics. Jesus will not be our Saviour if we persistently reject him as our Lord. [p. 75](#)

That does not mean, of course, that genuine Christians live perfectly surrendered, sinless lives. We continue to be justified by grace alone in spite of ongoing sin. But it does mean that conscious, persistent rejection of Jesus' Lordship in any area of our lives is, as Calvin taught, a clear sign that saving faith is not present.

Too often Christians (especially evangelical Protestants in the West) have proclaimed a cheap grace that offers the forgiveness of the Gospel without the discipleship demands of the Gospel. But that is not Jesus' Gospel. There is only one Biblical Gospel. And that is the Good News about one whose demand for submission to his Lordship is as total and unconditional as his mercy is free and unmerited. Since Jesus' Lordship is a central aspect of the Gospel, the summons to a radical discipleship in which Jesus is King of one's entire life is inseparable from a Biblically sound proclamation of the Good News.

The fourth element of the Gospel is less widely perceived to be part of the Good News—in spite of its centrality in the teaching of Jesus! According to the gospels, the core of Jesus' Good News was simply that the Kingdom of God was at hand. [Mark 1:14–15](#) reads: 'Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God and saying, "the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the ... Gospel" '. Over and over again the gospels define the content of the Good News as the Kingdom which became present in the person and work of Jesus ([Mark 1:14–15](#); [Matthew 4:23](#); [24:14](#); [Luke 4:43](#); [16:16](#)). The Kingdom is a central part of the Gospel.

But what was the nature of the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed? Was it an invisible kingdom in the hearts of individuals? Was it a new political regime of the same order as Rome? One hesitates to simplify difficult questions about which many scholars have written learned tomes. But let me risk presumption. The Kingdom comes wherever Jesus overcomes the power of evil. That happens most visibly in the Church. But it also happens in society at large because Jesus is Lord of the world as well as the Church. As Professor Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary suggests, the 'Kingdom of God' is a dynamic concept which refers to the kingly reign or rule of God which broke into history decisively in the [p. 76](#) Incarnation and will come in its fulness at our Lord's return.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Church is the most visible manifestation of the Kingdom, the Church is not identical with the Kingdom. The New Testament makes it very clear that the Risen Jesus is Lord of *both* the Church *and* the world ([Matthew 28:18](#); [Ephesians 1:20–22](#); [Revelation 1:5](#)). Furthermore, Colossians teaches that Jesus' death did more than accomplish atonement for believers. Jesus' death was also a decisive victory over the disordered, rebellious structures of our socio-historical existence. At the cross, [Colossians 1:15](#) says, God 'disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him'.

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<sup>2</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), chs. 3–8, especially pp. 111–118.

At this point our analysis inevitably touches on the complex issue of the Pauline concept of the principalities and powers.<sup>3</sup> There is a growing consensus, however, that the principalities and powers are not just angelic beings which inhabit the heavens. The powers are also 'religious structures (especially the religious undergirdings of stable ancient and primitive societies), intellectual structures 'ologies and 'isms), moral structures (codes and customs), political structures (the tyrant, the market, the school, the courts, race and nation)'.<sup>4</sup> The powers are the ordered structures of society and the spiritual powers which, in some way we do not fully comprehend, lie behind and undergird religious, intellectual, socio-economic and political structures.

Paul makes it very clear that the powers were created through Jesus Christ. 'For in him are all things created, which are in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, dominions, principalities, powers; all things are created through him and for him' ([Colossians 1:16](#)). The powers are part of God's p. 77 good creation. Unfortunately, sin has invaded this good creation and the powers have been corrupted to the point where they are now hostile towards God. At the cross, however, God disarmed the principalities and powers ([Colossians 2:15](#)). The risen Lord is now Lord not just of the Church but also of all rule and authority and power and dominion. Ultimately, at his return—and here the breathtaking scope of the cosmic redemption Paul envisaged comes into view—at his return, the Lord will complete his victory over the powers and reconcile all things to God ([I Corinthians 15:24–6](#); [Colossians: 20](#)).

Does this cosmic Pauline view of the work of Christ mean that it is legitimate to apply the word 'salvation' to the improvement of social structures? To answer that question, we must answer another: When are the powers reconciled to God?

The victory over the fallen powers has already proceeded so far that members of the body of believers are freed from the tyranny of the powers. This is the revolutionary message of [Colossians 2](#). Paul refers to the powers who still try to tyrannize believers as 'philosophy', 'human tradition' and 'elemental spirits of the universe' (v. [8](#)). These powers foolishly demand adherence to legalistic dietary regulations and petty religious festivities (vv. [16–23](#)). Paul's response is that precisely because Jesus is Lord of all things (and therefore Lord of the powers) and precisely because he disarmed the powers at the cross, Christians are not subject to their mistaken, tyrannical demands (vv. [9–10](#), [14–15](#)).

One hardly needs to add, however, that Christ has not completed his victory over the powers even though the Church now has the power through Christ to resist their tyranny. Not until Christ's return will Christ totally dethrone every rule and every authority and power thereby completing his victory over sin and all its consequences including death itself.<sup>5</sup> This final, cosmic restoration is so sweeping and all-encompassing that Paul can

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<sup>3</sup> The most important texts are: [Romans 8:38f](#); [I Corinthians 2:8](#); [15:24–28](#); [Ephesians 1:20f](#); [3:10](#); [6:12](#); [Colossians 1:16](#); [2:15](#).

<sup>4</sup> John H. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 145. See also Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1962); G.B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1956); Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1956); Clinton Morrison, *The Powers that Be* (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, 1960); Cyril H. Powell, *The Biblical Concept of Power* (London: Epworth, 1963); Albert H. van den Heuvel, *Those Rebellious Powers* (London: SCM, 1966). Richard J. Mouw's *Politics and the Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1976) has an excellent overview and brief analysis in ch.5.

<sup>5</sup> [Corinthians 15:20–26](#). This only happens 'at his coming' (v. [23](#)). See Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, p. 34, for the view that the best translation of *katarchein* in v. [24](#) is 'dethrone'. The powers are not destroyed, they are dethroned. Thus the reconciliation of all things discussed in [Colossians 1:20](#) is an eschatological reconciliation that occurs only at our Lord's return insofar as the powers are concerned. V. [20](#) does not mean that the powers are now reconciled or even that they are being reconciled even though God's ultimate



use the word [p. 78](#) ‘redemption’ in connection with it. In the breath-taking passages in [Romans 8](#), Paul envisions the day when the entire creation through which sin has rampaged like a global hurricane will be liberated from its bondage to sin and its consequences and will obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. At that day, we will attain the *redemption* of our bodies ([Romans 8:23](#)). Presumably one can by extension speak of the eschatological *redemption* of the entire creation. But it is important that the only time Paul used language about salvation and redemption, for anything other than the justification and regeneration and reconciliation occurring now in the Church, is when he discussed the *eschatological* restoration at our Lord’s return. Sin is far too rampant to justify the use of this language in connection with the tragically imperfect human attempts to introduce social justice in the interim between Calvary and the Eschaton.

This does not mean that Christ has nothing to do with the powers now. He is Lord of the world as well as the Church ([Ephesians 1:22](#)). As the sovereign of the universe, he presumably is now at work doing precisely the things the prophets tell us the Lord of history does—namely, destroying unjust societies and creating more just ones. But sin is still too all-pervasive to warrant the application of ‘salvation’ language to the limited, imperfect, albeit extremely important, social justice that does emerge in the time before the Eschaton. Paul reserves ‘salvation’ language for the redemption occurring in the Church.

This discussion of the Pauline view of the principalities and powers shows that one fundamental part of the Good News of the Kingdom must be the exciting announcement that the Reign of God has invaded the distorted social structures of human society. The invasion has proceeded so far that the decisive victory has occurred even though the principalities and powers persist in their sinful, destructive rebellion. But they have been disarmed both in the sense that the Church need not fear or submit to their tyrannical demands and also that the Lord of history is now at work overcoming the injustice created by their rebellion. That is Good News!

But that is only one part of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Obviously the reign of the God is manifested most clearly and visibly where people confess their sins, acknowledge the Lordship of [p. 79](#) Jesus Christ and experience the justifying, regenerating and sanctifying presence of the Risen Lord. The Church is the sphere where the reign of God becomes most apparent. Accordingly, the New Testament says that the Church is part of the Gospel. That the Church is not just an invisible spiritual abstraction peopled with ethereal, justified souls is very clear in the New Testament. Jesus not only forgave sins; he also healed the physical and mental diseases of many who believed. He called together a visible community of disciples joined together by their unconditional submission to his total Lordship over their lives. He summoned this new community of believing disciples to live an ethic and lifestyle sharply different from the rest of society (e.g. [Matthew 5–7](#)). His disciples shared a common purse. The early Church engaged in massive economic sharing ([Acts 4:23–5:16](#); [II Corinthians 8](#)). The new community of Jesus’ disciples was and is (at least it ought to be) a visible social reality sharply distinguished from the world both by its belief and its lifestyle.<sup>6</sup>

Several important N.T. passages show that the fact of this new visible community of God’s people is part of the content of the Gospel. [Ephesians 3](#) is particularly important. In the immediately preceding section, Paul had shown how at the cross Jesus had broken

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plan is total reconciliation at Christ’s return. Hence [Colossians 1:20](#) does not justify the use of ‘salvation’ language for the emergence of social justice now.

<sup>6</sup> For a more extensive discussion, see my *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, chs. 4, 8; and Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, ch. 2.

through the hostile dividing wall separating Jews and Gentiles, thus creating one new person, one new visible body of Gentile and Jewish believers ([2:13–16](#)). Now in chapter [3](#), Paul proceeds to show that his special mission has been to make known the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ is precisely the feet of the new multi-ethnic body of believers: ‘That is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel’ (v. [6](#)).

Paul is a minister of the Gospel (v. [7](#)) and his task is precisely to preach the ‘Gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God’ (vv. [8f](#))—i.e. he proclaimed the Good News that since the cross brought peace with God for Gentiles as well as Jews, therefore the Church is a new visible community where ethnic barriers are already transcended. (Cf. also [Colossians 1:24–27](#); [Romans 16:25–26](#)). The fact that a new visible community now exists [p. 80](#) because of the Cross where ethnic (as well as cultural, sexual, etc.) hostilities are already overcome is a fundamental part of the Gospel.

There is a striking clause that pertains to our discussion in Paul’s plea for a generous collection for the impoverished Jerusalem church. Paul informs the Corinthians that their economic sharing with the Jerusalem church is both an act of fellowship and a submission to their confession of faith in the Gospel ([II Corinthians 9:13](#)). Since the fact of the Church is part of the Gospel, the Corinthians submit to and validate that confession of the Gospel by giving practical economic expression to the oneness of the new people of God. The Biblical Gospel includes the Good News that by faith in Jesus one can join the new visible body of believers where the brothers and sisters are so one in every way that they joyfully accept unlimited economic liability for each other ([Acts 2:42–47, 32–37](#); [II Corinthians 8–9](#) (especially [8:8–14](#))).

The Church of course is still imperfect. Even in the Church the reign of God will be fully perfected only at our Lord’s return. But right now because justification by faith alone frees believers from paralyzing guilt and regeneration and sanctification infuses believers with a powerful new dynamic for a life of costly discipleship, people can enter this new society where all social and economic relationships are being transformed. That a radically new kind of life together in Jesus’ new peoplehood is now available to all who repent, believe and obey is Good News. The Good News of the Kingdom which Jesus announced then pertains not just to a future event. It also pertains to the present reality of the new community. The Church is a fundamental part of the Gospel.

Thus far we have seen that the content of the Gospel is justification, regeneration, Jesus’ Lordship and the fact of the Kingdom. But is there not a ‘secular’ or ‘political’ dimension to the Gospel? Since Jesus said in [Luke 4](#) that he came to free the oppressed, release the captives, and evangelize the poor, is not political activity designed to free the oppressed also evangelism?

[Luke 4:18–19](#) is a crucial text. Reading from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus defined his mission as follows:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (*evangelasathai ptochois*). [p. 81](#) He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’

In this text Jesus identifies several aspects of his mission. He says he has been sent to release the captives, heal the blind and free the oppressed. That this is a fundamental part of his total mission is beyond question. But he does not equate the task of helping the oppressed with preaching the Gospel to the poor. Nor does he say one task is more important than another. They are both important, but they are also distinct.



The same point is clear in other passages. In [Matthew 11:1–6](#), Jesus responded to John the Baptist’s question: ‘Are you the Messiah?’ by saying:

‘Go and tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them (are evangelized).’

Again Jesus does not equate preaching the Gospel to (evangelizing) the poor with cleansing lepers. He does all these things. And they are all important but the one activity cannot be merged with the other.

A twofold mission is also apparent when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples. He commissioned them to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal ([Luke 9:2](#); [Mark 6:12–13](#)).

One final example is important. In both [Matthew 4:23](#) and [9:35](#), the evangelist summarizes Jesus’ ministry as follows: ‘And he went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and infirmity among the people’ (see also [Luke 9:1–6, 11](#)). Here there are three distinct types of tasks: teaching, preaching the Gospel, and healing sick people. They are not identical tasks. They should not be confused. None dare be omitted. All are crucial parts of the mission of Jesus. But for our purposes the most important conclusion is that none of these texts equates healing the blind or liberating the oppressed with evangelism. These texts in no way warrant calling political activity evangelism. There is [p. 82](#) no New Testament justification for talking about ‘evangelizing’ political structures.<sup>7</sup> According to the New Testament, then, evangelism involves the announcement (through word *and deed*) of the Good News that there is forgiveness of sins through the cross; that the Holy Spirit will regenerate twisted personalities; that Jesus is Lord; and that the Kingdom has already broken into history even though it will come in its fulness only when our Lord returns.

## 2. Salvation

What is the meaning of the word ‘salvation’ in the New Testament? Perhaps the best New Testament argument for adopting a broad definition of salvation can be developed from the use of the word ‘save’ (*sozo*) in the synoptic Gospels. In about one of every four descriptions of Jesus’ healings, the synoptic accounts use the word ‘save’ to describe physical healing by Jesus.<sup>8</sup> In [Mark 6:56](#), the text says: ‘As many as touched (his garment) were healed’ (*esozonto*).<sup>9</sup> One could cite other similar illustrations. It is quite clear of course, that the verb ‘save’ connotes more than physical healing. Whereas in [Mark 10:52](#) Jesus told the blind man whom he had healed, ‘Your faith has saved you’, in [Luke 7:36–50](#) he spoke identical words to the sinful woman who anointed his feet even though he had not healed her body.

It is not entirely implausible to argue that since the gospels apply the word ‘save’ to physical healing, it is also legitimate to extend the word to cover all kinds of activity done

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<sup>7</sup> One might try to argue from [Luke 4:43](#) (‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom to the other cities also’) that cities (political entities) were ‘evangelized’. But surely the text means that he wanted to *preach* to *persons* in those cities. [Matthew 28:19](#) calls on Christians to ‘make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ...’ Is that a call to disciple or evangelize political structures? I think not. The text reads *matheteusate panta ta ethne, baptizontes autous*. The shift from the neuter *ta ethne* to the masculine *autous* indicates that he is calling on us to disciple *persons*. Only individuals can respond to the Gospel.

<sup>8</sup> *Sozo* is used 16 times in this way; *therapeuo* 33 times; *iaomai* 15 times. See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 9 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964–74), VII, 990 (hereafter *TWNT*).

<sup>9</sup> So too [Mark 5:28–34](#), [10:52](#), etc. So too occasionally in Acts ([4:9](#) and [14:9](#)) and once in James ([5:15](#)).

in the name of the Lord to liberate sick and oppressed persons. If there is a New p. 83 Testament justification for using the word 'salvation' to apply to political liberation, it is here.

But one must immediately point out that the usage just noted is by no means the primary usage of the terms 'save' and 'salvation' in the New Testament. These words in fact are not key words in the synoptic tradition.<sup>10</sup> When they do appear elsewhere in the synoptics, they refer to entering into the Kingdom or following Jesus. When Jesus informed his disciples that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, the startled disciples asked: 'Then who can be saved?' Being 'saved' and entering the Kingdom are synonymous.<sup>11</sup> In light of this and similar passages, we can say that someone is saved as he enters the new peoplehood of God where all relationships are being transformed.

The story of Zaccheus is striking in this connection ([Luke 19:1-10](#)). After his encounter with Jesus, Zaccheus repented of his sins. As a rich, corrupt tax collector who had profited from an oppressive economic structure, he repented of his 'social' sins and promptly gave half of his ill-gotten gain to feed the poor. Jesus immediately assured him: 'Today salvation has come to this house.' This text does not mean that wherever economic justice appears, salvation is present. Since Jesus had come to save the lost, he had sought out lost Zaccheus (v. 10). But it was only after Zaccheus had submitted to Jesus' message and repented of his sins that Jesus assured him of salvation. Salvation means repentance, submitting to Jesus, and entering the new community of Jesus' disciples where all relationships including economic relationships are being redeemed.

In Paul the usage is unambiguous. One is saved as one confesses that Jesus is Lord and believes that God raised him from the dead ([Romans 10:10-13](#)). We obtain salvation as we hear the Gospel and believe that we are justified by faith rather than works ([Romans 1:16-17](#)). Salvation for us sinners is freedom (through the Cross) from the just wrath of God: 'While we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since therefore we are now justified by his p. 84 blood, much more shall we be saved by his life.'<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere in the New Testament, the connotation is similar. The usual meaning of salvation in Acts is the forgiveness of sins.<sup>13</sup> In James, the verb 'save' connotes deliverance from divine punishment at the final judgment.<sup>14</sup>

The author of the lengthy article on these words in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* summarizes his findings in this way:

'New Testament *soteria* does not refer to earthly relationships. Its content is not, as in the Greek understanding, well-being, health of body and soul. Nor is it the earthly liberation of the people of God from the heathen yoke as in Judaism .. It has to do solely with man's relationship to God ... In the New Testament ... only the events of the historical coming,

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<sup>10</sup> 'Elsewhere in the core of the synoptic tradition *sozo* and *soteria* are very much in the background.' *TWNT*, VII, 991.

<sup>11</sup> See also [Luke 13:22-30](#) where an eschatological entry into the Kingdom is clearly in view. Cf. also [Mark 13:13, 20](#).

<sup>12</sup> [Romans 5:9](#). Quite frequently, as here, Paul speaks of salvation as something which is still partly future (cf. [Ephesians 2:5-8](#); [Romans 11:11](#); [II Corinthians 6:2](#)).

<sup>13</sup> See *TWNT*, VII, 997. Frequently too it is a general term used to describe what happened as the Church proclaimed Jesus' death and resurrection (e.g. [Acts 4:12](#); [13:26](#); [16:30-31](#)).

<sup>14</sup> *TWNT*, VII, 996. See [James 5:20](#); [4:12](#). The words 'save' and 'salvation' are used hardly at all in the Johannine literature (*TWNT*, VIII, 997).

suffering, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth bring a salvation from God's wrath by the forgiveness of sins.'<sup>15</sup>

One must conclude then that the dominant connotation of the words 'save' and 'salvation' throughout the New Testament does not encourage the adoption of a broad definition of salvation. The use of the verb 'save' with reference to physical healing in one quarter of the synoptic accounts of Jesus' healing offers the only substantial New Testament warrant for expanding the word 'salvation' to refer to social justice brought about through politics. The vast majority of the New Testament passages point in the other direction.

### 3. Redemption

Does the New Testament use of the term redemption (*apolutrosis*) offer any additional help? Should Christians think of political p. 85 activity producing 'redeemed' social structures? Paul told the Christians at Rome that they were justified by God's grace through faith by means of the 'redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith' ([Romans 3:24–25](#)). Paul also explicitly equated redemption with forgiveness of sins. After reminding the Colossian Christians that they had been delivered from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son, Paul added that it is in Jesus that 'we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins' ([Colossians 1:13–14](#); [Luke 21:28](#); [Romans 8:23](#)).

There is also an important eschatological dimension to redemption. We are sealed unto the day of redemption ([Ephesians 1:14](#); [4:30](#); [Luke 21:28](#); [Romans 8:23](#)). Especially important is the fantastic Pauline vision of eschatological restoration in [Romans 8:18ff](#). At our Lord's return, the entire creation will be set free from sin and all its consequences. Even our bodies will experience 'redemption' (v. [23](#)). At the Eschaton, the whole creation will be redeemed.

When then is redemption? It is the forgiveness of sins offered to persons who believe that Jesus' cross is the expiation of their sins. And it is also the total reversal of all the evil consequences of sins which our Lord will accomplish at his return. Redemption then is not something that happens to secular economic and political structures now. It is something that happens to persons as they are in Christ.<sup>16</sup>

### A FIFTH OPTION: DISTINCT YET EQUAL (SUMMARY)

In the light of New Testament usage, Ronald Sider argues that 'evangelism and social action are equally important, but quite distinct, aspects of the total mission of the Church'.

He states: 'Evangelism involves the announcement (through words and deeds) of the Good News of justification, regeneration, p. 86 the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the fact of the Kingdom. Only individuals can respond to this Good News. Hence it is confusing nonsense to talk of evangelizing political or economic structures. He adds: 'Social concern involves both relief for those suffering from social injustice and also the political

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<sup>15</sup> *TWNT*, VII, 1002.

<sup>16</sup> F. Buchsel in *TWNT*, IV, 354: '*apolutrosis* is bound up strictly with the person of Jesus. We have it in him, [Colossians 1:14](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Romans 3:24](#). By God he is made unto us *apolutrosis*, [1 Corinthians 1:30](#). Redemption cannot be regarded, then, as a fact which he has established, but which then has its own intrinsic life and power apart from his person, so that one can have it without being in personal fellowship with him. To give to redemption this objective autonomy is to part company with Paul. For him here is redemption only within the circumference of faith in Jesus.'

restructuring of society for the sake of greater social justice. To label this increased social justice “salvation” however is confusing. Until our Lord’s return, all attempts to restructure society will at best produce only significantly less imperfect societies tragically pockmarked by the consequences of the Fall.’ In discussing the debate between evangelism and social action Sider says, ‘The time has come for all Biblical Christians to refuse using the sentence: “The primary task of the Church is ..” ’ Jesus is our only perfect model and he engaged fully in both without defining which was primary. Sider concludes with a very brief discussion on several aspects of their inter-relationship. Sin is both personal and structural. Evangelical Protestants who regularly preach coming to Jesus meaning ‘forsaking pot, pubs and pornography’ often fail to add that coming to Jesus necessarily involves ‘repentance of and conversion from the sin of involvement in structural evils such as economic injustice and institutionalized racism. Biblical evangelism will call for repentance of one’s involvement in both individual and structural sins’. He thinks that where the Church practises social and economic equality among the body of believers it will in fact constitute a challenge to the political *status quo*: ‘The mere existence of the Church as a new community where all social relationships are being redeemed can have a significant impact on society if the Church offers a visible model of the way people can live in community in more loving and just ways.’ Social action sometimes facilitates the task of evangelism though not necessarily so. ‘Biblical social action will contain, always implicitly and often explicitly, a call to repentance.’ Sider argues that it is not helpful to use the words ‘the Great Commission’ to connote evangelism and ‘the Great Commandment’ to connote social concern. Each obligates and involves the other.

#### *A Response by John R. W. Stott*

John Stott was invited to respond to Ronald Sider’s essay, which, [p.87](#) because of the importance of the subject and as a personal friend, he was grateful to do. Having listed the points of agreement, he calls for further reflection on three issues raised by Dr. Sider:

1. The relationship between evangelism and social action. He defends the Lausanne Covenant’s affirmation that ‘in the Church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary’. Arguing that *if one has to choose*, he believes eternal salvation is more important than temporal welfare, but adds that one *should not normally have to choose*. John Stott asks for a threefold recognition:

- a. That the two are distinct but equal partners, each existing in its own right as an expression of Christian love, and that both should normally be included to some degree in every local Church’s programme.
- b. Every Christian is a witness and also a servant. The existential situation will often determine the priority: for example, ‘the good Samaritan’s ministry to the brigands’ victim was not to stuff tracts into his pockets but to pour oil into his wounds. For this was what the situation demanded’.
- c. God calls different people to different ministries and endows them with appropriate gifts. ‘Although we should resist polarization between evangelism and social action, we should not resist specialization’. Some are called to be evangelists, others social workers and others political activists. Within each local Church, which is an expression of the body of Christ, there is a place for individual specialists and for specialist groups.

2. The Kingdom of God and the Lordship of Christ. John Stott argues for a stronger recognition of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the Lordship of Christ. Against the danger of emphasizing only their ethical demands, he suggests that they both mean total blessings as well as total demand. ‘For, Biblically speaking, to preach one is to

preach the other; they are inseparable.’ He asks for clarification of Sider’s statement: ‘Jesus’ death was also a decisive victory over the disordered, rebellious structure of our socio-historical existence’. Stott wants to insist that ‘the Kingdom of God in the New Testament is a fundamentally [p. 88](#) Christological concept and it may be said to exist only where Jesus Christ is consciously acknowledged as Lord’.

3. The principalities and powers. John Stott questions the increasingly popular view that Paul’s principalities and powers are not personal angelic or demonic agencies so much as structures of thought, tradition and society. He traces this view from Gordon Rupp’s *Principalities and Powers* (1952) to today. He suspects its origin goes back to the embarrassment of accepting Biblical angelology and demonology. He asks: ‘When Paul refers to the creation of principalities, is he really talking about the divine institution of structures?’ He questions Sider’s interpretation of [Ephesians 3:10](#), since the context is ‘in the heavenly places’.

He concludes with a note of appreciation for the initiative and leadership that Dr. Sider gives in understanding the partnership of evangelism and social action.

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# Community and Mission: the Moravian Model

by Professor J. M. VAN DER LINDE

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*Does the Moravian movement founded 250 years ago have any relevance for the renewal of our contemporary mission theology and methods, and point to a more Biblical way to social service and justice for the poor and oppressed? This article makes illuminating reading.*

Editor.

COUNT NNICOLAUS LUDWIG VON ZINZENDORF, born in 1700 and who died in 1760, was descended from high Austrian nobility. His grandfather sided with the Reformation and had to emigrate to Germany. As a boy, Zinzendorf was brought up and educated in the best Lutheran pietistic circles. Philip Jacob Spener was his godfather and he attended a boarding school in Halle led by another spiritual giant, namely August Hermann Francke. As pastor, professor and practical organiser, Francke inspired the young Zinzendorf deeply.<sup>1</sup>

Zinzendorf’s rank as a count of the Empire proved to be both a help and a hindrance to his calling. His family would not allow him to become an ordinary theologian, pastor or missionary. He had to devote himself to the service of the State, and accordingly he

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf* (New York-Nashville, 1956). Erich Beyreuther, *Zinzendorf*, 3 Vols, 1957–1961.