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The Relationship of Evangelism to Social Justice and Community Development

by BRUCE J. NICHOLLS

EVANGELISM, SOCIAL justice and community development have always been central to the Great Commission and to Christian mission. They are implicit in the action of Jesus when he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal ([Luke 9:1-2](#)). During the Middle Ages in Europe, communities of monks through their monasteries preached, taught and started medical and agricultural work. During the last 150 years, evangelical Protestant missions have pioneered throughout the Third World humanitarian services and developmental programmes alongside evangelism and church planting. Through the faithful preaching of the Gospel, social justice has been brought to many individuals and communities. However, during the last three decades the relationship of evangelism to the wider mission of the Gospel has once again become an acute issue. Population explosion, the effect of radical economic and political changes and the drift of rural people into the cities, have confronted the Church with an estimated three billion people who are still unevangelised. At the same time the escalation of poverty and social and political oppression has awakened the evangelical conscience to the agony of a vast suffering humanity. United Nations sources calculate that on a conservative estimate more than 500 million people are suffering from hunger and near starvation. On the basis of present statistics, approximately 10,000 people in Africa, Asia and Latin America died of starvation during the last 24 hours. Tomorrow another 10,000 will die. With our meagre resources of people, skills and finance what are our priorities? Must we keep evangelism separate from the struggle for justice and community development lest the goal of conversion and church planting is lost in the pressures of meeting human need? Or can they be [p. 237](#) held together in a marriage relationship without weakening the priority of each?

The Lausanne Covenant affirmed: '... we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ.'

In India, the growing awareness of the need to relate these different elements of the Church's mission clearly surfaced at the All-India Congress on Evangelism at Devlali in January 1977,¹ where it was emphasised that if these ministries were not related both in the villages and in the urban and industrial cities with their massive problems of depressed communities, Christians forfeit the right to be heard. India, like many countries in the Third World, is in the process of choosing between the political options of turning to culturally religious oriented political parties, to a dictatorship, or to radical Marxist socialism. We affirm that the hope of India and of any nation lies in a spiritually dynamic Church which manifests in its message and lifestyle, a radically new society of human relationships which has power to change human nature, to offer a new worldview and new motives for caring and serving of the poor and the oppressed. This does not mean

¹ *Go Forth and Tell* (New Delhi: AICOME, 1977).

that the Church becomes an alternative political party, but that it becomes a spiritual and moral force in society, rebuking evil, proclaiming personal and community freedom and being the light and salt to whatever system of political rule is in power. It is a tragedy that the Christian Church has become so secularised that many of her leaders have lost faith in the power of the Church in the world and are turning to secular and to Marxist methods to liberate the poor and achieve justice in society.

The call to evangelicals is to formulate a Biblical Theology of Mission that relates the Church's mission of evangelism and Church nurture to the wider ministry of social justice and development in [p. 238](#) the context of a given historical situation, and to work out its practical implications for the Church's own community life and the nature of its influence on the religious and secular pluralistic society. This is a task that must be undertaken in context but also at a supra-cultural international level. Churches and aid and development agencies responsible for the stewardship of vast resources of money and people are seeking such guidelines. The Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship recently decided to establish a Study and Encounter group to work on this theme. This article is an exploratory introduction to the subject.

FROM SOCIAL SERVICE TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The concept of community development is not new. It has been with us since the founding of the social and cultural structures of society ([Genesis 4](#)). During the relatively stable and static societies of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Christian missions concentrated on social service and caring ministries. Through service programmes, they sought to meet the needs of individuals and families. They did many things *for* people. They educated their children, ran hospital and health clinics for their sick, cared for their orphans and gave them employment in Christian institutions. The New Testament churches functioning in the somewhat similar stable society of the Graeco-Roman world also cared for the orphan, the widow and the sick. and so established a model that is inherent in the Church's wider ministry. However, new factors in our contemporary world have focused attention on the need to go beyond this form of service ministry. The radical changes that have taken place since 1945—population explosion, advance in technology, the widening gap of rich and poor, the wave of politically oppressive governments, cannot be compared with those of other periods in history. Human survival is at stake. The causes and not just the symptoms of human alienation and suffering need analysing and correcting.

The concept of community development goes beyond relief and social service to an understanding of the total well-being of any given community. Its goal is to enable people to become economically self-reliant, to establish community harmony, to achieve [p. 239](#) social justice for the poor and oppressed, and to ensure moral integrity among the rulers. It aims for freedom of the people through participation in the decision-making processes of economic and political power so that all in the community may achieve that human dignity that belongs to the true nature of man. Development is a total social process in which the people themselves. and not the elite managers and technicians, control the development process. The crucial question becomes: How can people be helped to create more just anti human relationships between rich and poor societies, and to become aware of their true human dignity and place in society?

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Through Economic Growth

During the last two to three decades, stress has been laid on massive assistance to ensure economic growth. Donor agencies have shifted their emphasis from financial aid to the poor to assisting community development. In India, since the Bihar famine of 1967–68, development aid poured into the country from foreign governments and United Nations sources and from numerous private agencies, particularly those with Christian motivation. The question that is now being asked by both donor agencies and the receiver groups is: 'Have these new programmes succeeded?' Professor C. T. Kurien of Madras Christian College cites the Government of India document entitled *Towards An Approach to the Fifth Plan* (1972), which stated: 'Economic development in the last two decades has resulted in an all-round increase in *per capita* income. The proportion of the poor, defined as those living below a basic standard of consumption, has slightly come down, yet the absolute number of people below the poverty line today is just as large as it was two decades ago. And these people living in abject poverty constitute between two-fifths and one half of all Indian citizens.' Dr. Kurien then observes: 'And so the cliché has come true in our case: two decades of planned economic development has led to the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.'²

The lesson of these two decades is that economic development p. 240 by itself is not enough. John Staley of OXFAM notes that it is becoming clear that the expectation of that time was unrealistic. More aid does not necessarily lead to more development. More loans for wells do not necessarily lead to more water for irrigation. An agency may lend money for wells but the farmer is under great pressure to offer a high dowry and an expensive feast for his daughter's wedding and so the immediate pressure of social status takes priority and the money is misappropriated. Such factors in practice are extremely difficult to control. The issues are basically moral.

The theory of economic growth has been based on the free flow of supply and demand and the profit motive. It has resulted in a high standard of living for a few developed nations and for a minority in the undeveloped nations. The hope that in time the prosperity resulting from industrialisation and technology will trickle down to the masses and so reduce the gap between the rich and the poor is more an utopian dream than a reality. The wealth of the industrialised nations is growing out of all proportion to that of the poor nations who depend on their primary products for development growth. The fluctuation of the law of supply and demand and unjust tariffs work against the poorer countries. For example, although Brazil's coffee exports increased 90% between 1953 and 1961, the total revenue earned from coffee dropped by 35%. The effect of the serious decline in the relative prices of primary products exported by developing countries, as against the rising costs of manufactured articles from the developed countries, is well illustrated by the fact that in 1954 it cost Brazil 14 bags of coffee to buy one US jeep; by 1968 that one jeep cost Brazil 45 bags of coffee.³ Less than 6% of the world's population who live in the United States consume approximately one-third of the minerals and energies consumed worldwide each year. The effect of the drastic Arab oil price rise has been to cripple many poorer countries by forcing them to spend most of their precious foreign exchange in payment for imported oil.

Through International Agencies

Many political leaders are turning to the United Nations agencies, p. 241 such as FAO, WHO, UNDP, UNCTAD, to ensure a better distribution of wealth, just international trade

² *Poverty and Development*, (Madras: CLS, 1974), p. 14.

³ R. Sider, *Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IV P, 1977), p. 141.

and more assistance in economic development. Without doubt, these agencies have contributed to community development and have been able to put pressure on the economically and politically powerful nations to regulate their trade and aid on a more just basis. But these agencies in the end are powerless to change the bureaucratic and elitist political power structures, or to reduce corruption and bribery at the level of distribution.

Through Marxist Socialism

It is not surprising that both intellectuals and the masses are seeking liberation through more radical alternatives. Marxist socialism, through constant propaganda, political and military coups and by creating internal unrest, has in recent years succeeded in gaining control of several under-developed nations. The Marxists promise to change the economic power structures by distributing ownership and by promising the masses participation in national planning and in the decision-making process of political rule. But the record of communist rule in Eastern Europe and in Fast Asia suggests that the Marxist alternative succeeds at the price of one form of oppression being replaced by another. Human dignity and freedom is still an eschatological hope.

Development through economic growth alone continues to remain a myth which is believed by both the affluent and the poor, the capitalist and the Marxist.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Community development is ultimately a spiritual and moral issue involving people, their motives, work-ethics and integrity in handling development resources. U. Thant defined development as economic growth plus social change. This has been the hope of the Gandhian idealism of selfless service. Chairman Moo Tse-Tung also recognised that economic development was not enough. His goal was nothing less than to change human nature, and his 'thoughts' were to become the standard for judging what is just and unjust, good and evil. He castigated self as the root cause of all social and economic evils. The partial success of the [P. 242](#) development programme in China has raised a fundamental question: 'Has Maoism been able to produce a classless new man?' A Chinese Christian who left China legally in the early 1970s wrote: 'Under Maoist political and social regimentation the more visible social and economic vices are effectively suppressed, and human endeavours are channelled to the approved goals. Maoist teaching through persuasive indoctrination has influenced to varying degrees the minds of the people. The Maoist thought reform has hardly touched the soul of the people, or brought a true conversion and rebirth in the image of the Maoist selfless man, which the Chairman himself is not. The Maoist revolution has changed the face of Chinese society and has greatly weakened the traditional Chinese ideas and values, but it has not changed the individual to any great extent.'⁴ A group of Chinese researchers living in Hong Kong recently shared with me their observations of the deepening spiritual vacuum that is emerging in mainland China, as evidenced by a return to astrology, palmistry and spiritism among the common people.

The Gospel demands a total spiritual and moral revolution. Mark O. Hatfield, the evangelical U.S. Senator, stated at the national prayer breakfast in January 1976: 'What is required at this juncture in our history is a new revolution—a spiritual revolution that

⁴ 'New Man in China: Myth or Reality?', *Christianity and a New China*. (Pasadena, California: Lutheran World Federation, William Carey Library, 1976), Part II, pp. 46–8.

transforms our values and reshapes our corporate life.⁵ This spiritual revolution, to be effective, must be a total revolution changing every level of culture and behaviour—worldviews, value systems, social institutions and outward behaviour and lifestyle. It demands a total revolution of:

(a) *Love towards God*: The Gospel is good news of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself and justifying the rebel sinner by grace through faith. The Gospel is good news that if any man is in Christ he is a new creature, and the hope of the Gospel is our re-creation in the image of Christ ([II Corinthians 5:17–18](#); [Ephesians 2:8, 16](#)). The result of this spiritual revolution is to restore the priority or true worship in the community and a [p. 243](#) new motivation for accepting the role of servanthood in the Church and in the world. Without a radical conversion to God in Christ, there is no salvation now or in the age to come. Evangelism may not always be the starting-point of mission but it is always the centre of mission.

(b) *Love towards one's neighbour*: Jesus summarised the second commandment as 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' ([Matthew 22:39](#)). True love of oneself is not an inverted form of selfishness but a witness to human dignity and to creation likeness in the image of God. It is a denial of self-centredness but not a denial of self-hood. Thus to love one's neighbour as oneself is to develop a level of interpersonal relationships which respects others as equal to oneself. There is no place for racial discrimination or sexist superiority or cultural arrogance. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus made it clear that the neighbour is the stranger or enemy who is in need. Only the grace of God can enable a person to cross cultural barriers and love the unlovable either ethnically or socially. To love one's neighbour is inseparable from the first commandment of total love for God. Unless there is the restraint of love, the emphasis in liberation theology of conscientizing the oppressed masses through the dialectic of corporate reflection and corporate action can easily become the pretext for the use of violence to achieve social justice. It becomes a secular method to achieve a spiritual goal. In the social ethic of Jesus as he expounded it in the Sermon on the Mount, unjust means cannot be justified by just goals. Justice for the disciple of Christ flows from the over-plus of love which does not retaliate ([Matthew 5:31–40](#)). Nor will the disciple demand that the unbeliever accept his spiritual or moral principles. He will continue to act in love even when the recipient rejects his action or shows no gratitude. Christian social action stems from a deeper motive than human compassion. Therefore Christian service must always be 'in the name of Christ', whatever the response. To silence the *Name* in giving economic assistance is to betray the Gospel and to deceive the receiver. In certain religious or political situations it may not be possible to verbalise the *Name* in the sense of preaching, but the giver, by his commitment to Christ and lifestyle, bears witness to the *Name*. Conversely, to preach the Gospel but not to express human compassion is dead faith (I [p. 244](#) [John 3:17](#); [James 2:14–16](#)). Dr. Visser 't Hooft, in his retiring address at the WCC Uppsala Assembly, rightly said: 'A Christianity that has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt, and is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world. But a Christianity that would use the vertical dimension as a means to escape from the responsibilities for and in the common life of men, is a denial of the incarnation of God's life for the world manifested in Christ.'⁶

(c) *Stewardship towards nature*: Good news is a spiritual revolution towards the renewal of nature. At the end of the sixth day of creation, 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' ([Genesis 1:31](#)). In creation, God commissioned man, male

⁵ Cited by C. Rene Padilla, 'God's Word and Man's Myths', *Themelios*, September 1977, p. 7.

⁶ Cited by George Hoffman, 'The Social Responsibilities of Evangelism', *Let The Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Worldwide Publications, 1975), p. 698.

and female, to subdue and have dominion over creation, to till and keep the garden of Eden. God created man to be a steward of the created world. Consequent to the Fall. God gave to the covenanted people of Israel just and humane laws and made them obligatory. God purposed that his people should enjoy to the full the fruits of nature, but that they should do so with thankfulness to the Lord God, the giver of all life ([Deuteronomy 8](#)). 'The earth is the Lord's' ([Leviticus 25:23](#); [Psalm 24:1](#)). The judgement of God falls on those who abuse their stewardship. The principle of the Jubilee Year ([Leviticus 25](#)) was to declare that the land and its fruits belong to the Lord and that property rights are subordinate to the needs of the poor. While many of the Levitical laws may no longer be directly applicable in a technological age, their principles remain valid. For example, the maintaining of the balance between the use and replenishing of the soil, typified in the sabbatical law of fallow ground ([Leviticus 25:1-7](#)), is very relevant in Asia where the abuse of the 'green revolution' threatens the future fertility of the land. The selfish greed of man in the wasteful use of the nonrenewable resources, such as Fossil fuels and minerals, also comes under the judgement of God.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God stands at the centre **P. 245** of the preaching, teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ ([Matthew 4:23](#); [9:35](#)). In the Incarnation, the bearer of the Messianic Kingdom came. Jesus acknowledged this in his self-identification with the Messianic hope of [Isaiah 61](#) ([Luke 4:18-21](#)). He began his ministry by saying: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the Gospel' ([Mark 1:15](#)).

The relationship of the Lordship of Christ to the Kingdom of God is fundamental to understanding the relationship of evangelism to social justice. In the Old Testament, the Kingdom is used for Yahweh's Lordship over the whole universe ([Psalm 103:19](#)) and in a particular sense over his chosen people Israel in a covenant relationship of grace that extended to the whole of their personal and community life ([Exodus 19:5-6](#); [Deuteronomy 7:6-9](#)). The reign of God demanded total obedience to the commandments of God. The Kingdom looked for its fulfilment in the promise of a Messianic King.

Jesus pointed to his own Lordship as a 'sign' of the Kingdom. In his power to cast out demons he witnessed to his victory over the Kingdom of Beelzebul ([Luke 11:14-20](#)), in his power to heal the paralytic he proclaimed his right to forgive sins ([Matthew 2:5-12](#)), and in his power to heal the blind, the lame, and the leper and to raise the dead, he acknowledged to the disciples of John his Messiahship ([Matthew 11:2-5](#)). These signs witness to his Lordship over the whole of creation. They are pointers to the dynamic nature of his reign.

The Lordship of Christ over principalities and powers is also crucial to understanding the nature of the Kingdom.⁷ On the Cross, Christ disarmed these powers and triumphed over them ([Colossians 2:15](#)) and 'delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son' ([Colossians 1:13](#)). However, total victory still awaits the triumphal return of the King ([1 Corinthians 15:24-26](#); [Revelation 20:7-15](#)). It is now popular, along with John Howard Yoder,⁸ to interpret principalities and powers in terms of evil socio-political structures of society. While his exegesis may

⁷ See 'The Kingdom and Cosmic Battle' by Anthony Stone, *TRACI/ETS Journal*, New Delhi, May 1975, pp. 17-20.

⁸ *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972).

be questioned, his emphasis on p. 246 social and institutional evils (along with personal sins) as visible manifestations of demonic evil is valid.

Jesus taught that when people repent, believe the Gospel and acknowledge his Lordship by doing his will they 'enter the Kingdom' ([Matthew 5:20; 7:21](#); etc.). As John Stott, Ronald Sider, Rene Padilla and others have shown, salvation in the New Testament is always a God-related term, and while it is not to be confused with changed ethical behaviour and social justice, salvation cannot be isolated from ethical behaviour. Only those who confess Christ as Lord enter the Kingdom.⁹

Some implications of this theme include:

(a) Evangelism and social action flow from a common source, the confession 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.

(b) Christ alone can bring the Kingdom on earth. It is his act of saving grace. It is a fatal error to assume that we can establish the Kingdom by our own power, either through evangelism or socio-political action. Since the battle against principalities and powers is cosmic, victory is to be gained through prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray: 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven' ([Matthew 6:10](#)).

(b) When the consummation of the Kingdom takes place at the final Day of the Lord, the whole of creation, now in bondage, will be liberated ([Romans 8:19-23](#)). Mao Tse-Tung is as much a servant of the Lord as were Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Through the destruction of false religion and unjust social structures, and through physical and spiritual suffering, the sovereign Lord is now preparing the people of China to hear the Gospel, repent and enter the Kingdom. On the basis of growing evidence, I, for one, believe that one day the Church in China will emerge as possibly the strongest Church in Asia.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

The crisis in the worldwide Church today is one of self-identity. This is especially true of small and socially weak churches with a minority or communal complex, such as many of the churches in p. 247 India. Is the Church just a sociological mirror of the Western missionary movement, or can she with humble confidence claim to be 'the people of God'? Before the Church can discover her function in the world she must rediscover her relationship to the Kingdom of God.

The Lausanne Covenant stated: 'The Church is the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the Gospel.' The Church therefore stands in a unique relationship with the Kingdom. History has shown the mistake of either identifying the institutional Church with the Kingdom (the traditional Roman Catholic view) or of reducing the Church to a culturally conditioned human society (the radical liberal view). The New Testament never identifies them as co-terminous, but without the Church there is no Kingdom. As Peter Beyerhaus aptly said: 'The truth is that the Messianic Kingdom presupposes a Messianic core unity.'¹⁰

Insofar as Christ is Lord of the life and activity of the Church, to that extent she is the visible manifestation of the Kingdom—visible because the redeemed members have 'entered the Kingdom, and are visible! The Church is a pilgrim Church, on the way to becoming the people of God, a consummation that will not take place until Christ returns

⁹ See the author's article 'The Kingdom of God, The Church and the Future of Mankind', *TRACI/ETS Journal*, New Delhi, January 1976, pp. 33-8.

¹⁰ 'World Evangelization and the Kingdom of God', *Let The Earth Hear His Voice*, p. 288.

and establishes his Kingdom on earth. Christ created the Church as his agent of the Kingdom.

Orlando Costas points to four characteristics of the Church.¹¹ She is the community of God's people ([1 Peter 2:9-10](#)), the body of Christ ([Romans 12:5](#), etc.), the temple of the Holy Spirit ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#), etc.) and a visible and structured fellowship ([Acts 2:42](#)). Central to these images is that of a covenanted community which expresses its lifestyle in worship, fellowship, witnessing, compassionate caring and selfless serving. Christ meant the Church to be a community of reconciliation ([Ephesians 2:11-22](#)), a community in which each gives according to his ability and receives according to his needs ([Acts 2:45, 4:34-35, 20:35](#)), and a community without racial or cultural distinctions ([Galatians 3:28](#)). The Church is meant to be a model of redeemed relationships in the world. When the Church fails, as alas! she so often does, she p. 248 comes under the judgement of God but is renewed in hope. Christ is the model of the Church's ministry in the world: 'as the Father has sent me, even so I send you' ([John 20:21](#)). This calls for 'a similar deep and costly penetration of the world'. The Great Commission sets a balanced goal of evangelism, Church planting and social service and Pentecost offers the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Without these, there is no motive for witness, no power for establishing just human relationships, and no work-ethic for service.

There is a general awareness today of the need to recover the prophetic function of the Church's mission in the world. Alas! many churches do no more than join with secular organisations in protesting against social injustice, whereas the true prophet of God, speaking in the name of God with divine power, rebukes sin and evil in the Church and in the world. The Church ought to be the conscience of the nation, exposing the deeper nature of sin and calling the people to repentance and faith. The prophet uncovers the hidden sins which society conveniently ignores. This was preeminently true of the Old Testament prophets. Amos, for example, rebuked the rich, including their wives, for their disproportionate wealth ([3:13-4:1](#); [6:4](#)) and their oppression of the poor ([2:6](#); [6:1-7](#)). He rebuked the judges for accepting bribes ([5:10-15](#)) and the people as a nation for their syncretistic worship ([2:4](#); [4:4-5](#); [5:21](#)).

Evangelical prophets have also been strong in rebuking individual and personal sins against God and one's neighbour, but weak in discerning the nature of social sins covered up by the acceptable structures of society. An earlier generation rebuked the social evil of slavery and child abuse in factories. Somehow today evangelicals continue to have an 'uneasy conscience' about the institutionalised evils of their consumer society—racial and sexist discrimination in employment, unjust trade tariffs against weaker nations, unfair monopolies of multi-national corporations, police brutality in rightist dictatorships, and so forth. Many good-living Christians are just not aware of their corporate responsibility for these social evils. To maintain the *status quo* and to leave the plea for justice to secular Christians or the Marxists is to deny the Gospel. In his ethical manifesto, Jesus spoke of the Church's prophetic ministry as being salt and light in the world (Matthew p. 249 [5:13-16](#)), metaphors which speak of the Church's moral power to expose evil, restrain it, and to preserve what is true and good in every culture and society.

This raises an important issue. Can the Church impose its Christian ethical standards on a pluralistic society? If the Church understands her role in the world as comparable to the suffering servant role of her Lord, then the answer is clearly no. Her power lies not in the use of force but in the moral power of suffering love that does not retaliate. Jesus exhorted his followers to take up their cross daily and follow him ([Luke 9:23](#)). The positive role of the servant is well illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan and in

¹¹ *The Church and its Mission: A Shattering Critique from the Third World*, 1974, pp. 21-35.

the sensitive awareness of human need by the righteous, whereas the severity of judgement on the insensitive is almost unbelievably severe ([Matthew 25:31–46](#)).

Some implications of this theme include:

- (a) As a visible sign of the Kingdom, the Church as the new community of God's people ought to be a model of just and humane relationships, of sacrificial caring and service, which draws the world to the Saviour. The goal of all evangelism and development programmes ought to be the establishing of such models. This presupposes the priority of revival and Church renewal, for the Holy Spirit is the true agent of Church growth.
- (b) Local churches must break out of 'ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society' with the whole Gospel with all its social, economic and political implications. If the churches are not the conscience of their communities, then they have lost their saltiness and deserve to be trodden under foot by men.
- (c) An over-institutionalised Church often lives in the security of its wealth and in the fear of losing its institutions, and so is unable to exercise her prophetic voice. A special committee appointed to study the life and work of the Church of South India confessed the Church's silence during the days of the Emergency 'because of the fear of losing the institutions and the sense of security.'¹²
- (d) The greatest need in the churches is for her members joyfully to assume a servant role in society. The Lausanne Covenant noted: 'A Church which preaches the Cross must itself be marked by the Cross', and again: 'Those of us who live in affluent circumstances p. 250 accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute more generously to both relief and evangelism.'

TOWARDS AN APPLIED THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In the contextualisation of a theology of evangelism, social justice, and community development, a number of operational principles emerge.

1. Priority should be given to diagnostic research

The response of Christians to the appeals of evangelical aid and development agencies, such as World Vision, TEAR Fund, and the World Relief Commission, continues to expand each year. The responsible stewardship of these resources of people and money suggests that greater attention should be given to research and the evaluation of development projects. Areas suggested for research include:

- (a) *Theological reflection on the Biblical basis for mission.* The findings of the Church of South India Special Committee are significant: 'We need a better and more adequate theological basis for our social action, a basis that is founded in the total gospel and its implication for society.'¹³ Theological colleges and study centres, especially those in the Third World such as TRACI, New Delhi and KAIROS, Buenos Aires, should be encouraged to give priority to this area of research.
- (b) *Diagnostic analysis in context of the causes of poverty, injustice and oppression.* Dr. E. F. Schumacher has suggested that two phenomena which foreign aid has failed to alleviate are mass unemployment and mass immigration to the cities.¹⁴ The Five Year plans of countries, notably India and Turkey, regularly show a greater volume of unemployment

¹² *The Church of South India After Thirty Years* (Madras: CLS, 1978), p. 29.

¹³ *The Church of South India After Thirty Years*, p. 78.

¹⁴ *Small is Beautiful* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 163.

at the end of each plan.¹⁵ Further, Schumacher notes that in nearly all developing countries there is emerging a 'dual economy' of the 15% modern section, confined to the big cities, existing side by side with the 85% who live in the villages and small towns.¹⁶ How should these factors affect the policies of mission and development agencies? p. 251 (c) *Visiting Evaluation Teams*. Competent and experienced teams are needed to evaluate existing projects and those requesting help. Areas of evaluation should include: the degree of success in achieving goals, the effective participation of local people in the management of the project, the degree of benefit to the poorer section of the community, the increase in employment index, the promotion of more just and humane relationships, and the degree of involvement of local churches in the project.

2. Projects ought to be people-oriented

Schumacher suggests: 'Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organisation and discipline.'¹⁷ The success of a project is in relation to its effectiveness to create new motivation for work and mutual caring, and in bringing about a change of worldview that restores dignity of personhood and hope for the future. George Hoffman referred at Lausanne to a rehabilitation programme in Bangladesh led by New Zealand missionary, Peter McNee, in which the local people rebuilt their own homes devastated by civil war with the help of timber and corrugated sheeting purchased by TEAR Fund. Twenty young Bengalis were given on-the-job training in carpentry for the building of these 1,200 houses.¹⁸ The Church of South India report states: 'Our social action is not merely aimed at the physical aspects such as school buildings and workshops or latrines and hospitals, but to build a people who are self-confident, organised, caring and united, working together to achieve a common goal of development.'¹⁹ The 'Faith and Farm' project in Nigeria is another excellent example of an evangelical project geared 'to train African Christians to teach other farmers and their families to recognise that Jesus Christ is Lord of every part of their lives.'²⁰ Other projects that are people-centred include village co-operatives which provide fertilizers, improved hybrid seeds and where necessary cash, such as the one in the village of Otterhotti in India.²¹ Taylor also describes an effective Credit Union scheme for a poultry farm set up by church leaders in Kampala, Uganda, p. 252 to help solve the problem of poverty and unemployment. One of the findings of the All-India Congress on Evangelism at Devlali in 1977 that attracted wide attention was the need for churches to establish employment exchanges for unemployed youth.

3. Projects ought to be labour-intensive

In the past, emphasis has been placed by development agencies on capital-intensive projects—building schools, hospitals, orphanages, and even power stations and factories.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁷ *Small is Beautiful*, p. 168.

¹⁸ Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 705.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

²⁰ Hoffman, *op. cit.*, p. 703.

²¹ John V. Taylor, *Enough is Enough* (London: SCM, 1975), p. 96.

In certain economic and political situations, this has been a necessary base and will continue to be so. However, in others there ought to be a shift to more labour-intensive projects that provide greater employment and wider participation in community life. The Church of South India report is critical of church-controlled institutions which in general are an unnecessary burden on the Church, requiring large resources of personnel and money. Some are neither technically competent nor Christian and generally are contributing to the increasing number of educated unemployed. The report calls for a moratorium in building new institutions, asks how a selected number can again play a pioneer role in society and suggests a rethinking of the place of hostels in developing men and women to act as leaven in society.²² Schumacher's call for the effective use of intermediate technology using local resources, appropriate to the people in their own environment, is being given increasing priority by governments and development agencies. This was very evident in the government-sponsored *Agri Expo '77* in New Delhi. Asha Handicrafts, aided by TEAR Fund, is an example of a successful attempt by Christians at pioneering village arts and crafts and developing competently run marketing channels throughout the world. Christian churches have a unique opportunity for this type of development programme.

4. Local Churches ought to be the appropriate agents for community development

If the basis for effective community development is a change in human nature and new worldviews, more just and humane relationships and an ethically motivated work-ethic, then the local community **p. 253** of the people of God must be the agent for this change. As witnessing models, they alone can take the whole Gospel to the whole world. The emerging concept of small labour-intensive projects is particularly appropriate to the service ministry of local churches. By mobilising the total resources and skills of her members, a local church, whether urban or rural, should be able to undertake one or more projects. These might include child care centres for working mothers, or health and family planning centres, if there are doctors or nurses in the congregation who are willing to give their voluntary services. Areas of education might include adult education classes, training in basic vocational skills for slum and depressed children, small technical training projects in carpentry, welding, or cycle and radio repair, where there are members of congregations skilled to teach others. In rural churches, small projects in assisting farmers to grow better crops, raise poultry, begin fish farming or start co-operatives, are appropriate. Where the Church is small or non-existent or spiritually ineffective, it may be necessary for extension para-church agencies to pioneer such projects. The ACRA project in central India, led by a dedicated and well educated Christian couple, is pioneering new areas of comprehensive rural development integrated with evangelism and church planting. Such models will motivate local churches to new levels of service. Mission and development agencies should major on making skilled and culturally sensitive personnel available for this type of ministry.

In summary, the concluding remarks of the Church of South India report are worthy of serious reflection and prayerful action: 'A change in our commitment rather than financial resources is the priority of the day. Ultimately it is God's mission and we are His instruments. It is He who sends us continuously into the world even when we hesitate or feel reluctant. Justice, peace and dignity are not mere human concerns. They are the on-

²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 34–6.

going concerns of God. We are asked to share in His concerns and make it possible for the people to realise them.’²³

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The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20—A Missionary Mandate or Not?

by PETER T. O’BRIEN

I. THE CURRENT DEBATE

OVER THE past two decades there has been a critical re-examination, by many Christians, of the place and significance of Christian missions and missionary societies. In some quarters at least there has been a fresh appraisal of the Biblical basis of missions and a reaction to a lack of theology of mission evidenced in some quarters by the quoting of proof texts

The Great Commission of [Matthew 28:18–20](#) is one such passage and its use in this connection has been regarded by some as illegitimate on the grounds that it has nothing to do with missionary activity at all beyond the apostolic age. The words, it is argued, were addressed to the eleven disciples (v. [16](#)) and to them alone. A further refinement of this view is that the commission was given to Jewish Christians who were to make disciples among their Fellow Jews of the first century AD that they too might believe in Jesus as Messiah. But either way the passage is said to have no immediate application to the 20th century, or, if so, then only after considerable qualification.

II. THE GREAT COMMISSION IN EARLIER TIMES¹

During the last decade of the 18th century William Carey made his powerful plea for missionary endeavour in the non-Christian world. His urgent call to witness, as is well-known, marked the [P. 255](#) beginning of the great century and a half of missionary proclamation.

In 1792. Carey had published his now-famous booklet entitled *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*. In it he argued that Christ’s command of [Matthew 28](#) was as binding on men of his day as it was on the

²³ *Small is Beautiful*, p. 36. pp. 34–6.

¹ Note the treatment of H. R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids, 1961), pp. 15ff., to which I am indebted.