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A. William Cook, Jr., a member of the Latin American Mission, is Associate Director of the Latin American Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies (CELEP), with headquarters in San José, Costa Rica.

The Kingdom, The Church and a Distressed World

J. Andrew Kirk

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In this article, Professor Kirk was asked to respond particularly to the documents sent out in preparation for last May's Melbourne gathering of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches. "Your Kingdom Come" took place just one month before the gathering of evangelical leaders in Pattaya, Thailand, organized by the Lausanne Continuation Committee as a follow-up to the 1974 Congress on World Evangelization. At the time of writing, it was Professor Kirk's hope that among themselves and between the two groups "some consensus will develop—at least about priorities, if not about tactics …" of the Church in the 1980s. He says: "It is mainly about priorities, as I see them in my limited way, that I want to say something in this article."
(Editor)

We stand seventy years (one lifetime) on from Edinburgh, that first effervescent, and yet also sober gathering of missionary leaders who met to assess the extent to which the Church had accomplished the task of evangelizing the world 'in its generation'. And seventy years is approximately one-third of the time span which separates us from the beginning of the main non-Roman Catholic missionary movement of the modern era.

Time would not suffice to tell in intricate detail the quantitative and qualitative changes which have taken place since then. Mission 'in our generation' has to take account of a totally different set of circumstances from those experienced by our missionary forefathers. This is obvious; what is not always so obvious is the extent to which the changes have affected (inevitably and rightly) the way we view the challenge of mission today and the theological undergirding which consciously, and often unconsciously, influences our opinions.

In two important senses the modern era began in 1776. In that year the colonies of North America won their independence, and the new nation started on its way to becoming 'top nation'. The consequences of this event were to have a profound effect on the course of world history (as men like Karl Marx were swift to perceive), not least on the development of missionary activity throughout the world. In that year, also, Adam Smith published his celebrated economic tract *Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, which gave, in the words of Daniel Fusfeld, a new lease of life to 'the proposition that a private enterprise economy tends to maximize individual welfare.'[1] It has been humorously suggested that Sir Keith Joseph (Secretary of State for Industry in the present UK government) would exempt from public spending-cuts the gift of Adam Smith's book to every member of the civil service. Be that as it may, the importance of Smith's work lies in its symbolic value as the ideological promoter of the capitalist system of production and distribution, and the particular values of economic growth and consumerism which it enshrines.

American independence and the growth of free-enterprise capitalism are mutually related. Their efforts have penetrated the remotest corners of the globe, doing more to shape the kind of world we live in and the problems we face than any other comparable events of the last two centuries.

Whether we believe that these developments have been mainly beneficial, mostly disastrous, or just a mixed blessing, it is precisely this world in which the Church is called to fulfil its mission. It is a world whose daily political and commercial life is based on the assumption that man's chief end is the pursuit of happiness, to be achieved by the global maximization of goods and services.

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[1] *Economics* (Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co., 1972), p.5.

Maximum productive efficiency requires, amongst other things, political stability (achieved, if necessary, by suspending normal human rights), technological sophistication and rational management, all measured by the rate of return of profit on investment. Or so the story goes. No one on either side of the East-West divide seems able to conceive of a different kind of society, built on different goals and serviced by a different type of economic order. Living standards measured in quantitative terms is the name of the game.

Many Christians, in all honesty, are playing the game in deadly earnest, personally committed to its success, even when this may endanger our health and cause suffering to others, for we are literally and metaphorically up to our eyes in debt to the system. As a result, despite what we may claim about liberty in Christ, we are not free from bondage to a form of life based fundamentally on a non-Christian, imminent view of man and his relationship to the world. Development, progress and the whole future of man are seen in terms which relate almost exclusively to man's possession and manipulation of things. Affluence has dulled our ability to look critically at the ideology of the modern state and its political mentors, and made us vulnerable to the propaganda indiscriminately flung at us with their blessing.

On the other hand, many on the farther side of the North-South divide have been questioning for a long time the underlying philosophical and political assumptions of East and West about welfare and the meaning of existence. Among them are a number of contributors to the pre-Melbourne documents. However, these people do not count for very much, for they live on the outer edge of a world which is driven from the centre and spins on aimlessly into the future. As technology 'advances', so the world spins faster, but those on the circumference experience the unusual sensation of going backwards. But who cares? Maintaining and improving the machinery at the centre keeps those who control the vehicle more than fully occupied. It is inconceivable to them that the world might function much more humanly if the vehicle was modified, its direction changed, and its speed reduced.[2]

As I read the documents circulated for Melbourne I saw the theme 'Your Kingdom Come' transform itself into an enormous illuminated question mark which hovered over the path of the modern world, hurtling on into the 1980s and beyond. It is supremely improbable that 'the rules of the present world order' will experience such a dramatic conversion that they will begin to be concerned above everything else with the kingdom of God and its justice. But Christ's disciples, even when they offer little resistance to the order as it is, might be expected to indulge in a little reflection on what such a concern should imply in the years ahead.

As the Church of this generation takes stock of its witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ, it is faced, I believe, with three inescapable challenges: the kingdom itself; the poor and suffering; and world evangelization. On how it responds to each of these challenges depends largely its ability to be both an agent and concrete evidence for God's new order in Jesus Christ: 'If the tree bears figs next year, so much the better; if not, then cut it down' (Luke 13:9).

THE CHALLENGE OF THE KINGDOM

[2] Kosuke Koyama in his book, *Three Mile an Hour God* (London: SCM, 1979) takes up and develops this theme in relation to the ideology of technological and manufacturing imperialism of which his own country, Japan, is such a prime example.

The theme chosen for the Melbourne conference has a unique significance for the Church's mission today. The idea of the kingdom has come to prominence again in much recent theological thinking; the reasons are not absolutely clear, but one may hazard a few guesses. Firstly, the growing participation of Third World Christian leaders in the counsels of world-wide church bodies has brought to the forefront the political and social implications of the Gospel. Third World Christians have been unavoidably caught up in the political turmoil which since the war has catapulted many of their countries into full independence. At the same time the debate, begun seriously in the 1960s, about the causes of acute deprivation in underdeveloped nations, has been conducted in terms of the exercise of political and economic power. In both instances the biblical understanding of the kingdom has provided a very useful key for discovering relevant guidelines for Christian thought and action in the midst of volatile political situations.

Secondly, the western world in the last two decades has witnessed a notable 'politicization' of life. As other values get crowded out, the power of political decision to remake the world becomes increasingly alluring. Jacques Ellul, among others, has documented this trend.[3] At the same time, political intervention in normal market procedures has become increasingly necessary since the first oil crisis of 1973. Western governments are no longer able to hold the arena whilst industry plans sustained and long-term growth. Rather they have to help promote policies which will keep the advanced industrial nations from tottering over the brink into deep and catastrophic recession. Moreover, short-term political strategy seems to be fast replacing any pretence at definable political goals. This is partly due to the long, slow ebb of clear ethical values as guidelines for the use of power. As long as life's meaning is defined primarily in terms of the freedom to consume, then politicians will see their task as basically defending the standard of living against the loss of real earnings. Present economic strategies, however different they may appear (whether monetarist, protectionist, or conceivably both), are only distinct means to reach the same end. The end is not debated (except by rather fringe groups like the anti-nuclear lobby), basically, I believe, because a hedonist life-style has informed our opinions for so long now that we have lost the memory for an ethic which exalts values like generosity, self-sacrifice, restraint, equality, solidarity and personal creativity. Political debate and decision-making can only rise above majority opinion about life's meaning and an acceptable code of moral behaviour with great difficulty.

Christians in the West have been forced to become more closely involved in political discussion and action by the direct effects of both the economic crisis and present ethical bewilderment. Searching for guidelines to direct their thinking on matters formerly taken up by a few enthusiasts who felt a vocation for politics, Christians have discovered that a prolonged and deep-seated tendency to divorce faith from public life has left them naked in the grand arena of political debate. Great biblical doctrines like justification, regeneration and sanctification are not sufficient to give clear principles for social action in a political scene characterized by power struggles, pragmatism and personal amibition. The concept of the kingdom, however its relevance may be understood in detail, quite clearly gives this social and political orientation.

Thirdly, the 1960s saw the beginnings of a sizeable shift of emphasis in theological circles from concern about individual salvation and personal existential authenticity to concern about the dehumanizing effects of structures. In my judgement, the greatest single catalyst to produce this change has been a new 'humanist' Marxism. There is no space to trace this

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[3] In, for example, *The Political Illusion* (London: Vintage Books, 1973).

fascinating story, but the epic of the Christian-Marxist dialogue and liberation theology (in all its forms) is well known. Suffice it to say that Christian theology is seeking to ascertain which elements of the biblical message speak most directly to aspirations for social justice, revolutionary change and a utopian future. The kingdom tops the list of candidates.

For these reasons, and others, the category of the kingdom is once again in the forefront of our understanding of the full significance of Christ. Just as there is no chance of attaining the life of the kingdom without Jesus, so there is no way of understanding Jesus without the kingdom. I want to try and say something about its absolute centrality to our understanding of the Church's contemporary witness to Jesus. In a sense my remarks will constitute an apologia for what has come to be called 'kingdom theology' or sometimes (particularly in the USA) a 'kingdom agenda'.

We start from the universally recognized historical fact that the kingdom was the central point of Jesus' preaching, ministry and self-understanding.[4]

It has often been pointed out that Jesus does not define the kingdom, but simply announces its coming: 'The kingdom of God has drawn near' (Mark 1:15); 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God … because that is what God sent me to do' (Luke 4:43). This is true in the sense that no theoretical definition is given such as might satisfy the overdeveloped rational consciousness of the West. However, Jesus' ministry leaves many clues scattered around which, when pieced together, help us to understand what he meant by the kingdom. Were this not so, his life would be a complete enigma.

The kingdom is not an idea Jesus invented. He assumes the longstanding Jewish expectation that God would establish his kingdom in a very specific way. How one understands Jesus' preaching of the kingdom depends very largely on the degree of continuity one allows between the Old Testament announcement of the kingdom and Jesus' interpretation of the goal of his ministry.[5] Does the emphasis fall on the fulfilment of prophecy whose content and meaning is already accepted? Or did Jesus give a substantially new meaning to the original promises?

For many generations Christians have been fed on the notion that the kingdom refers firstly to an individual experience of God's rule over their lives, and secondly to a heaven of righteousness and peace to be revealed at the end of time. From where has this teaching come? From the Old Testament? From Jesus? From Paul? Or from the deep, insidious and prolonged infiltration of Greek dualistic thought into theology? To try to answer these questions we need to look briefly at some of the biblical evidence about the kingdom.

In the Old Testament the kingdom is associated with God's rule over the universe, the nations and israel. The first specific announcement is made in the song of Moses and the people after the crossing of the Sea (Ex. 15:8). It is explicitly reiterated in the famous terms of the covenant: 'You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex. 19:6).

God's kingship over everything created is closely linked to the events of the Exodus and the covenant. When, later on, the Hebrew people demand a king of their own, God reminds

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[4] In the preparatory documents there are studies on the kingdom from groups of Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians. They all emphasize this very point.

[5] The way in which we depict the relationship between the Old and New Testament is probably the key to our assessment of most 'political' theologies. I would suggest that most of us have been taken somewhat by surprise at this point and find little help from our traditional doctrinal schemes in relating to the challenges which these theologies identify.

them that they have rejected him as their king, the one who 'rescued you from the Egyptians and all the other peoples who were oppressing you' (1 Sam. 10:17–9; 8:4–9).

Indeed, throughout the Old Testament God's kingship is seen in close relationship to the exercise of authority and power by the human kings: sometimes positively, as in the case of David (2 Sam. 7:4–17), but mostly negatively. What Samuel promised would come to pass (1 Sam. 8:11–8) happened exactly as he predicted. Successive kings, acting like Pharaoh to God's people, trampled on the terms of the covenant, forced them into slavery again, and brought Israel's God into disrepute among her neighbours.

Much of the dynamic of the Old Testament experience of God can be seen in contrast to daily experience of human authority. Psalms 145 and 146, for example, remind us that it is God's nature as king to intervene to *satisfy every basic need* of man, to *uphold justice and equity*, to *watch over the circumstances of strangers, widows and orphans*, and to *liberate the poor and the prisoners*. This is the concrete reality of God's 'everlasting kingdom' and 'his dominion (which) endures throughout all generations' (Ps. 145:13). It is precisely these tasks which the kings abandoned: 'Stop doing evil and learn to do right. See that justice is done, help those who are oppressed, give orphans their rights, and defend widows' (Is. 1:17).

God's kingdom, then, is the detailed expression of his caring control of the whole of life. Because the kings whom God appointed did not recognize their responsibility to pursue a policy of equality and harmony amongst the people, but used their position to amass wealth for themselves (Is. 5:8; Mic. 2:2), God deposed them and anointed another king who shared his own characteristics entirely: 'A child is born to us … and he will be our ruler … His royal power will continue to grow; his kingdom will always be at peace. He will rule as King David's successor, basing his power on right and justice' (Is. 9:6–7).

The anointed one (Messiah) is spoken of many times in the Psalms and Prophets. His principal tasks are 'to establish justice on the earth' and 'to proclaim that the time of God's salvation has come' (Is. 42:4; 61:2). This time, when the Lord will come 'to proclaim (fulfil) my covenant' (Mal. 3:1) is a time both of judgement and recreation (Zech. 9:9–17). Many of the messianic passages paint a picture of universal peace and prosperity (Mic. 4:1–4; Is. 25:6–9, 35:1–10, 65:17–25), which will embrace man's relationship to nature (Is. 11:6–9), to fellow humans and to God.

The kingdom is the manifestation of God's just and compassionate ordering of the whole of human life in society. It is the effective execution of his love. It is the complete reversal of all the consequences of man's evil: death, disease, plagues, enmity, famine, hate, greed, exploitation, idolatry, oppression, violence, culpable ignorance, prejudice and empty religious practices. It is the establishing of a new kind of community based on open and generous sharing according to such legislation as the sabbatical and jubilee year (Lev. 25; Deut. 15). It is a totally new order of things, the very antithesis of life in Egypt. If we may be bold enough to borrow the words of another, it is 'an association, in which the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all.'[6] It is a utopian vision of life in the messianic age.

As we turn to the New Testament, two central questions pose themselves. Firstly, did Jesus accept this understanding of the kingdom? Secondly, did he believe he had come to establish the kingdom in this way? At this stage we cannot attempt to answer them in detail; we will therefore indicate a few lines for further investigation.

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[6] Karl Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.105.

The prominence of the kingdom in Christ's preaching was extended both to his most immediate disciples (Luke 9:2) and to the wider group (Luke 10:9–11). It was still present after his resurrection, though certainly mentioned less frequently (Acts 1:3, 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 31). There may be, however, some significance in the fact that Luke opens and closes his account of the expansion of the witness to Jesus with explicit references to the kingdom. A considerable problem, however, arises in the case of Paul. He mentions the kingdom infrequently in comparison with other themes (14 times).[7] If, as we have been claiming, the kingdom is absolutely central to our understanding of the entire message of Scripture, this comparative absence does need accounting for.

I would make three suggestions to explain this curious fact. Firstly, Paul may simply have taken Jesus' teaching about the kingdom for granted. It is inconceivable that he was unaware of it. There is nothing anomalous about the story of Paul in Rome explaining to local Jewish leaders the 'message about the kingdom of God, and … about Jesus' (Acts 28:23). When he wrote to the church in Rome to give his explanation of the Gospel, it is natural to believe that he was talking about the 'good news of the kingdom'. The one time in Romans when he explicitly mentions the kingdom (Rom. 14:17) he seems to be reaffirming the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5:6, 9, 10, 12 and 6:31 with 5:20 and 6:33). The context (Rom. 14:1ff) seems to be a commentary on Jesus' saying in Mark 7:15a: 'There is nothing that goes into a person from the outside which can make him ritually unclean.' Paul is absolutely convinced that the fulness of the kingdom spells freedom, because Jesus himself had already embodied that freedom.

Paul also expressly recognizes the importance of Psalm 110 as the prophetic basis for certainty concerning the coming of the kingdom in the defeat of all God's enemies, of which death is both the summary and the culmination (1 Cor. 15:24–8). It is more than probable that Paul sees Christ's resurrection in this passage as the definitive enthronement of the Messiah. In his use of Psalm 110 and the royal Psalms, Paul acknowledges the same Old Testament background as Jesus. We can only surmise that the historical occasions of his letters did not necessitate any further elaboration.

Secondly, though admittedly this is an argument from silence, it may be that Paul did not want to use an idea for his predominantly Gentile congregations which would not have made as much sense in the political context of the Greek city-states as in that of Jewish history. If this is a reasonable assumption, then we can go on to suggest, thirdly, that Paul, a highly creative thinker, used different terminology to convey the same reality as that expressed by kingdom. Though unable to argue this exegetically here, I believe that those passages which deal with the two ages (Adam/Christ), the redemption of creation (Rom. 8:18ff), Christ's victory over the powers (Rom. 8:38ff; Col. 2:15), and the new community of reconciled people (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:13–18; Col. 3:10–11), express the same fact as the Gospels that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, the kingdom has arrived.

If these suggestions are accepted, then our thesis that Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom is the central message of the apostolic church is not challenged by lack of explicit mention of the kingdom in Paul.

Concerning the two questions posed earlier about Jesus' selfunderstanding, I believe both can be answered affirmatively. There is nothing in the Gospels to suggest that Jesus

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[7] The list includes two references in 2 Timothy, one in Ephesians, and two in Colossians, all of whose Pauline authorship has been disputed. However, personally, I can see little beyond speculation for denying their genuineness.

reinterpreted the goal of God's kingly rule as anything other than the complete reclamation and reconstitution of the created universe. Jesus himself reversed all the consequences of sin: disease, demon-possession, guilt, ritualistic and empty religion, a caste system of purity and impurity, scarcity of food, a hostile nature, commercial exploitation and death. The transfiguration shows plainly the conjunction of the resurrection life with physical existence. Finally, Jesus' frequent meals with his disciples and others, culminating in the celebration of the Passover, are portrayed as anticipations of the messianic banquet (Mark 2:15–9; Luke 22:14–8).

Mark, particularly, portrays Jesus as the second Adam who, leaving behind the desert and a struggle with wild animals (both representing an antithesis to the original garden which was fertile and whose animal population was tame and under Adam's control), and beginning with the defeat of the tempter, begins to undo all the effects of the fall.

Jesus, I believe, did presume that he was anointed by his Father to establish the new order. The signs he did were not intended simply to 'prove' that he was the Messiah, but to demonstrate that the Old Testament prophecies about the new age were actually being enacted at that precise moment: 'Go, and tell John what you are *seeing and hearing*.'[8]

In Jesus Christ 'the powers of the age to come' are present in contemporary world history. Though the kingdom will come in its triumphal fulness only at the end of present time, in a sense it has already fully come in Jesus. The most explicit evidence of its activity is the opposition which it arouses from those whose security in the age of sin and death is shaken and rebuked (Matt. 11:12; John 15:18–21, 16:1–4). Those who belong to 'this world' are those who own it: the rich, political rulers, religious leaders, the wise and understanding. To enter the kingdom they must become like children; but as they have so much to give up—wealth, power, prestige, privilege and knowledge—it will be virtually impossible for them to leave the foremost positions in one age to become 'the least in the kingdom' (Mark 10:21–3). But those who are least in this age—the poor, oppressed, sinners, outcasts (tax-collectors and prostitutes), lepers and the ignorant—'will come from the east and the west and sit down … at the feast in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 8:11, 21:31, 22:9–10).

The kingdom challenges us today in two fundamental ways: firstly, to recognize the reality of the presence of God's new order in present history (to pray 'your kingdom come' implies both that it is already here and that it needs to be more completely manifest); secondly, to understand that wherever the kingdom is present, the values and structures of the present age will be reversed (Luke 1:51–3). For example, Christ's kingdom is 'not of this world' precisely in the sense that his disciples are not to use violence to repay violence (John 18:36). In the next sections we will continue to explore the implications of this challenge.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE POOR AND SUFFERING

More than fifty years ago J. H. Oldham, one of the early leaders of the IMC, wrote words which, though prophetic then and familiar to us now through the influence of liberation theology, have still to be properly implemented: 'When Christians find in the world a state of things which is not in accord with the truth they have learned from Christ, their concern is

[8] The most explicit passages about the present fulfilment of the kingdom apart from the ones already quoted are: Matt. 4:23–4, 7:11, 8:22, 9:15, 9:16–7, 9:35–7, 10:7–8, 10:34–6, 11:12, 11:28–30, 12:28, 13:52, 15:28, 15:30–1, 16:28, 21:1ff, 21:31–2, 28:18; Luke 4:18–21.

not that it should be explained but that it should be ended.'[9] It is symptomatic of the inadequacy of much of the contemporary Church's theology, structures, and commitment to mission that so often the poor become the object of our controversies, rather than of our compassionate and suffering action.

In recent years much theological ink has been split debating the meaning of two texts from the Gospels: 'Blessed are the poor' (Luke 6:20), and 'He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor' (Luke 4:18). A lot of effort is wasted in trying to demonstrate that Christ's consistent attitude to wealth and poverty cannot be as radical as it seems. The kind of exegetical special-pleading generously dished out to suggest, for example, that Christ was more interested in motives towards wealth than in its possession and use, provides genuine insights into how ideological defence-mechanisms obstruct our endeavours at objective interpretation. Needless to say, the attempts to circumvent the plain meaning of the texts are made exclusively by those who have never experienced, and maybe never even encountered, the utterly dehumanizing effects of physical misery.

Controversy over the meaning of poverty today increases in the case of the economic explanations advanced to account for its steady increase in a world also experiencing growing abundance.

The standard explanation given by economists in the neo-classical (capitalist) tradition is that poverty, defined as lack of goods and services, is due exclusively to deficient productive capacity. An analogy is often drawn between successive periods of development in one country and the present development gap between nations. The assumption is that development is simply a matter of time, and comes when the right technology is applied to the right resources in a freeenterprise economic system. Thus, for example, Michael Alison, MP argues in a recent article[10] that the poor nations need a good dose of the old-fashioned 'Protestant work ethic' if they are to solve their economic problems and become eventually a high-level consumer society.

Marxists give very different reasons for the existence of poverty in some nations and affluence in others. To begin with, they read history in another way. Fundamental to their analysis of the development of economic systems is their theory of conflict. They point out, for example, that in the eighteenth century there were a number of flourishing commercial centres outside Europe (notably India and Indonesia) whose economies were in many ways superior to those of Europe. However, these countries came under the colonial domination of western powers, and their economies, thereafter, were made to subserve the interests of the colonial power. In India, for example, incipient textile industries were dismantled because they would have provided unfair competition to the Lancashire mills.

Thus, from the late eighteenth century onwards, a pattern of development and trade began to emerge across the world in which the stronger nations of Europe and North America were able to impose terms always beneficial to themselves. Much of the rapid industrial growth of the West can only be accounted for on the grounds that the natural resources of the colonies were unfairly exploited, while their industrialization was hampered by the militarily, economically and politically more powerful nations to the north.

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[9] *Christianity and the Race Problem* (London: SCM, 1926), p.26, quoted in J. D. Gott, 'Jerusalem 1928: Mission, Kingdom and Church', *IRM*, Vol. 67, No. 267, 1978, p.293.

[10] 'World Poverty and Christian Responsibility: a critical study of Ronald Sider's thesis in *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger', Christian Graduate*, Vol. 32, No. 4, 1979.

These two explanations (obviously simplified here) are poles apart. The first believes that the chief cause of actual discrepancies in levels of development is different *attitudes* to work. The second believes that the cause must be found in the *material* base of society, because economic systems in real life automatically operate to the advantage of those able to secure and control the means of production.

My own opinion is that both explanations are partly right, but that the second one is much closer to the reality of the current economic situation. Certainly, the so-called 'Protestant ethic' helps to explain why the northern European countries, steeped in the Reformation tradition, pursued so vigorously a free-enterprise system of production some time before the southern European ones. But as an explanation of current discrepancies in wealth it is far too simplistic. Hard work, initiative, frugality and risk may all have played their part in the initial stages of capitalist development, at a time when the fierce competition for markets and resources which characterizes today's world was comparatively unknown, but they are no match at all for the existence of commodity-pricing control, trade preferential agreements, import barriers, multi-national corporations, international currency liquidity, etc. Michael Alison's model for development is taken out of a standard (western) economic text-book; unfortunately it bears little resemblance to the real world.

The capitalist model of development conveniently ignores the fact that underdeveloped countries are not competing in the same kind of world as 200 years ago. It is an idealistic theory without any sense of history.

There is, moreover, another fallacy in Alison's argument. Whereas production is necessary to create wealth and gives access to goods and services, by itself it does nothing to eliminate poverty. In Brazil in the last fifteen years there has been phenomenal productive growth. At the same time the per capita real income of the lowest earning 75 per cent of the population has decreased, so that there is now more widescale absolute poverty than there was a decade ago. The proof is in the pudding. The existence of the Third World poor on an increasing scale is a permanent rebuke to the present international economic order based on the supremacy of relative economic bargaining power. Though its theories may look attractive when wrapped up in graphs and equations, its results in ending poverty are nil. What a man can consume (including basic amenities) is based on what he can sell. This latter is determined by a complex, interrelated world economic structure, backed by a powerful and articulate political ideology.

Of course, Alison and those who think like him are right to stress that the present system also favours the interests of the enormously wealthy, highly privileged, doctrinaire, ruling élites of many Third World countries. Before poverty can really be tackled there, huge political changes will be needed.

But the West cannot sit back and wash its hands of all responsibility. In a highly illuminating paragraph, Alison concludes his arguments by stating that 'the wealth of the West is derived not from the heartless greed of the affluent minority, or their exploitation of the numberless poor in the Third World. On the contrary, it derives from a break-through in the organization of the processes of wealthcreation, i.e., in human productivity itself originating in non-material Christian moral qualities. The danger of Sider's polemic … is that (it will induce) a Christian sense of guilt about wealth.'[11] One must say in response to this, in all brotherly charity, that it is a most comfortable belief to hold when you happen to enjoy most of the trimmings of affluence. Indeed, if one is going to enjoy the 'good life' without qualms, it is a necessary belief.

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[11] *Ibid.*, p.17.

Unfortunately, the Bible takes a much less sanguine view of the causes of poverty and attitude towards riches. In another paper[12] I have given considerable textual evidence to show that the biblical writers (especially in the Old Testament) make a careful distinction between the creation of wealth and the possession of wealth. The creation has been given to the entire human race to enjoy to the full. There is an abundance of supplies to satisfy everyone's needs. By hard work and the use of his natural skills man may create wealth for himself, and then enjoy what it provides. But, and this is the background of the prophetic condemnation of injustices and oppression, no one should be allowed to accumulate great wealth for himself. Accumulation, as the result of honest labour, was for the benefit of all the people; private accumulation, however, was necessarily the result of the violent exploitation of the weak. The point of the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21) was not to show God's approval of the inviolability of private property, but to protect access to life's basic needs from the unscrupulous greed of the powerful.

The economic system set out by God in the provisions of the covenant, and backed by the uncompromising stand of the prophets, was geared to satisfying the *needs* of every person (and particularly the defenceless)—'Give us today the food we need' (Matt. 6:11, TEV). The present capitalist economic order—a far cry from any idealized society based on the Christian values of hard work, compassion and sharing—is basically a want-satisfying system.[13] Protestantism believed that honest, hard work glorified God and therefore helped to fulfil man's purpose for existing. This belief became buried under the Enlightenment view of man which, believing that consumption equalled happiness, produced a system in which the accumulation of wealth was pursued for its own sake.

The present capitalist system is based on this latter view of man; its survival depends on its ability to persuade people to go on believing the myth. That is why radical Christians, who attempt to apply biblical norms to economic life, are considered subversive by governments of every shade of political opinion. When Christians, therefore, continue to support the system, on the grounds that it incorporates values derived from the Reformation, they ignore both history and the real world.

The continuing existence of the poor is a tremendous challenge to the theology, conscience and action of Christians everywhere, and a touchstone of the authenticity of our witness to Jesus. Can we be serious about a worldwide Christian *community* when there is still great disparity of wealth among different branches of the Christian Church? The early Church rejected such a possibility as a contradiction of the Gospel. The present Church still debates the issue theologically whilst, in practice, declaring that ownership of this world's goods has nothing to do with 'spiritual' fellowship. In the light of Scripture and the present world economic imbalance, does the Church have a special calling to the poor, and to be willing to suffer for the realization of a more just society everywhere? So often our standards are double: We commend Christian dissidents in Russia and Eastern Europe and we condemn them in Latin America, Southern Africa, the Philippines and South Korea. Finally, are we prepared to back our convictions that wealth-ownership and distribution under the

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[12] *The Origin of Accumulated Wealth*, Occasional Paper (Nottingham: Shaftesbury Project, 1977).

[13] C. T. Kurien, *Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1978) discusses the differences in the ownership of wealth in terms of the historical development of a need-based economy being overtaken and engulfed by a want-based economy. He draws from the facts of Indian economic history.

present system is inherently unjust by promoting, at whatever cost to our life-style, systematic study and action to produce a new order which favours the present poor? Do we see a task like this as an integral part of our witness to the Gospel (2 Cor. 9:10–5)? That, perhaps, is one of the most crucial questions with which we need to grapple.

THE CHALLENGE OF WORLD EVANGELIZATION

Much of what we have said about the kingdom and poverty still needs to be heard and assimilated by evangelical Christians around the world. There are encouraging signs that this is beginning to happen on an increasing scale. Alfred Krass believes that such a shift is taking place within evangelical circles that 'a new movement in the Church, not just a sub-group within evangelicalism', is being constituted by 'the radical evangelicals'.[14] I believe he may be right. The differences are not due to divergent views on scriptural inspiration and authority, as Arthur Johnston maintains,[15] for then the radicals would cease to be evangelicals, but to a different understanding of the range and implications of the Gospel.

Evangelicals who have come to appreciate that active care for the poor and oppressed is a non-negotiable part of Christian discipleship, and who believe, furthermore, that concern must take the form of deep *structural* changes in society in order that God's 'will be done on earth as it is in heaven', are not about to abandon all commitment to personal evangelism. Again, if they did this, they would cease to be evangelicals. It is easy for some evangelicals, playing on fears, suspicions and ignorance, to apply the domino theory to others by suggesting that interest in social matters will automatically lessen commitment to evangelism; or that, as soon as they accept the same kind of agenda as non-evangelicals, who are embarrassed by the challenge of personal faith in Christ, they will become absorbed by secondary tasks.

However, such reasoning lacks theological depth, for it begs the question as to what the Gospel is *all* about. The so-called 'radical' evangelicals think and act as they do, because they are gripped by a fresh vision of the Gospel which they believe is more faithful to scriptural teaching than the one they held before. Above all, they are struggling to integrate their Christian witness, so that evangelism, social involvement, personal integrity and growth in the knowledge of God and in Christian fellowship become indispensable facets of one many-sided spectrum.

Their belief in evangelism is no less intense, for they are convinced that men and women who do not put their faith in Jesus as their allsufficient Saviour and Lord are lost for eternity. Nevertheless, they view evangelism in the wider context of the coming of the kingdom in power.

Biblically the Gospel refers first and foremost to the good news that, despite all appearances to the contrary, 'God reigns' (Is. 52:7). The good news concerns God's activity in establishing a new order in Christ Jesus. Proclaiming this good news involves inviting anyone who will to enter into the kingdom, taking upon them Christ's yoke (Matt. 11:29–30) and following him.

In evangelism, the call to faith in Jesus, the Saviour, is inseparable from the call to submit to him as Lord, not only personal lives and lifestyles, but also political and economic systems in the corporate life of society. In evangelism, the free *offer* of forgiveness and new life is

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[14] 'Conversion in the United States Today', *IRM*, Vol. 68, No. 270, 1979, p.154.

[15] *The Battle for Evangelism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1978).

inseparable from the *demand* to reorientate one's life completely around the values of the kingdom as manifested in the life of Jesus. Justification by grace alone through faith alone is matched by justification by works. Under no circumstances can salvation be earned, but nor is it a package whose chief function is to supply the one missing commodity of the consumer society—the gift of permanent happiness. That is cheap grace, totally degrading to the majesty of the biblical Messiah, and contemptuous of the significance of the cross. Faith and action, belief and life, personal and social, spiritual and material, present and future—'What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.' So radical evangelicals are probably more committed to biblical evangelism than others who tend to restrict the Gospel to personal repentance and faith.

As far as Melbourne 1980 and the on-going life of the CWME are concerned, we are still not hearing from that quarter an unmistakable, clarion call to personal evangelism. The preparatory documents still reflect much uncertainty. Though evangelicals are not yet fully agreed on the complete meaning of evangelism, within the WCC constituency there is much more confusion.

I believe that two aspects of contemporary life have particularly influenced what might generally be called the WCC climate of opinion: In the West it is secularization, and in the East the resurgence of nationalism and religious conviction.

Secularism has pushed the Church of the West into a tight corner, forcing it to compromise its faith in two main ways. Firstly, Christian belief has become weak at those points where it does not seem to coincide with the demands of a radical naturalism. Cardinal doctrines such as the historicity of Adam and Eve, the virgin birth and the physical resurrection of Christ, for which a consensus has existed for eighteen hundred years, are now considered by many as, at best, optional extras, irrelevant to the heart of Christianity which centres on Jesus' humanity. Secondly, Christian faith has been transformed into a private, inner relationship between a person and God, with ethical implications only for individual behaviour. This 'privatization' of faith has caused Christianity to be seen as one way of life among many, valid but optional, in a pluralistic and multi-religious society. In both cases there has been a loss of conviction about the uniqueness of Christ, with devastating consequences for evangelism.

In Europe, particularly, the Church has become apologetic about representing a Christ who alone can offer true salvation and produce a new order. Aggressive evangelism, such as is common in Latin America and Africa, has become muted in the face of alternative claims to salvation (Marxism, technology, astrology, etc.). The Church seems to have lost its nerve, unwilling to speak prophetically against the idolatry of greed which motivates so much of life. Perhaps the Church is fearful of judgement beginning with itself.

Resurgent religions in the East are challenging the biblical revelation of the finality of Christ. As long ago as 1938, and significantly in the context of the Madras conference of the IMC, little agreement was reached on how Christians should approach people of other religions. As at Nairobi in 1975, the draft report was sent back by the plenary session.[16] Of course, the issues surrounding the proclamation of the Gospel to people of other faiths are complex. Evangelicals have been particularly insensitive and withdrawn culturally, tending to maintain their life in a ghetto, far removed from the struggles to promote genuine respect

[16] Cf. E. J. Schoonhoven, 'Tambaram 1938', *IRM*, Vol. 67, No. 267, 1978, pp.309–12. He concludes: 'In all honesty it must be recognized that up to the present we have not got much further with the problem in our ecumenical and missionary thinking.' Also David M. Paton, *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975* (London: SPCK, 1976), pp.70–3.

for human dignity. But the dialogical approach to witness championed so vigorously by non-evangelical Christians, has not produced any notable growth in the number of people coming to acknowledge Jesus as the only way of salvation.

The challenge of world evangelization comes in different ways to all Christians. Evangelicals should reconsider whether their preaching of the Gospel incorporates the entire sweep of the good news announced by Jesus and the apostolic church. Non-evangelicals should take seriously the fact that Jesus not only proclaimed the Gospel of the kingdom to the *poor*, but also came to seek and to save the *lost*. The participants of the Melbourne conference need to affirm their unwavering commitment to such past resolutions of the IMC as the following: 'As in the past so also in the present, the gospel is the only way of salvation … the gospel is the answer to the world's greatest need … Its very nature forbids us to say that it may be the right belief for some but not for others. Either it is true for all, or it is not true at all.'[17]

If both these challenges were met then there would be some hope that Christians of different heritages could respond together to John Mott's famous watchword: 'The evangelization of the world in this generation'—to take the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole world until lesus comes.

CONCLUSIONS

A new decade challenges the Church to halt its endless production of programmes, resolutions, committees, world and regional conferences and, above all, take stock of its actual and future commitment to world mission. The encouragements and warnings of our forebears since 1910 stimulate us to carry on the task of witnessing faithfully to our generation. In the light of the issues I have raised in these pages I would like to be bold (and, no doubt, foolhardy) enough to suggest the following priorities for the Christian community in Britain.

1. To discover a new style of leadership. There is at present too great a divorce between a formally chosen and God-anointed leadership. In all the churches there exist bishops who are such in name only, and those who exercise an episcopal ministry in fact. And when the two do coincide, the machinery of office tends to inhibit the exercise of Spirit-given gifts. As a result, the laity are frustrated; God's people are still largely 'frozen'; *de jure* mediocrity suppresses, or at least controls institutionally, *de facto* leadership. By contrast, the majority of prophets in Israel were 'laymen', who particularly denounced the ritual performance of the sacraments. Whenever such are absent from God's people, God's Word is silent.

2. To liberate itself from all the manifest and hidden trappings of 'folk-religion'. In many respects the Church has allowed the social expectations of non-Christians to determine its ministry. It is used as a prop to bolster the cultural and moral heritage of the nation and to provide a bulwark against the disintegration of certain institutions. As a result, the eschatological challenge of the kingdom to the Church to be a *communio viatorum* (a company of pilgrims) is obscured. The Church very often acts as a haven to receive and protect those whom Peter Berger calls 'homeless'—those who cannot withstand the anomie of modern existence—rather than being a community which makes people whole and then infiltrates them into society as salt and light. It would appear that many clergymen get

[17] *Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council, March 24–April 8, 1928* (The Jerusalem Series), 8 vols. (London: OUP, 1928), Vol. 1, p.483.

caught up in servicing folk-religion under the pressure to find a sense of purpose in their ministry.

3. To integrate practically evangelism and social involvement. Though the search for a theologically responsible solution to the question of missionary priorities is urgently needed, theoretical answers are not so important as a practical demonstration, at local and national level, of a ministry which embodies personal evangelism, church planting, leadership training, service in the community, the support of those involved in political life and the media, and a prophetic testimony on the great issues of the day.

4. To acquire skill in reading the signs of the times. Daily life seems to be made up of two kinds of historical movement: the ephemeral, constantly changing flux of transient affairs, which flash momentarily upon our screens and then pass from view to be replaced by new actors on the stage; and the much more permanent underlying trends (religious, economic, political and cultural) which shape the future of societies. It is these latter which Christians, with the aid of what is valid biblically in the social sciences and from the perspective of revelation, ought to be discerning and evaluating critically.

5. To renew its commitment to world evangelization. 1980, with its two world conferences on mission and evangelism, provides a remarkable opportunity to reappraise and reconfirm our unstinted commitment to communicate the good news of Jesus and the kingdom to every living person. Today Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia and China—areas where the vast majority of the world's population lives—present the greatest challenge. Latin American, North American and African churches continue to want sensitive support from other branches of the world Church. But in view of their own dynamic capacity for witness and the extent of their missionary penetration, this does not need to be so extensive as in other areas of the globe.

Missionary activity from Britain needs to turn a new corner with an appreciation of the full scope of the biblical Gospel, cultural sensitivity, real partnership, absence of all forms of triumphalism (especially the temptation to rely on massive financial support) and paternalism, a willingness to defend the rights of the powerless and underprivileged and the struggle for a more kingdom-like society. Only thus may we honour the one to whom we bear testimony and perpetuate the work of 'that great crowd of witnesses' who, before us, 'have fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith.'

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Evangelism and Power

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