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# The Churches as Peace Making Communities and Agents of Change

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## I. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The heart of the theological base for this paper can be stated in two theses: (1) The Gospel is the Good News of the kingdom of shalom and righteousness that broke into history decisively in the person and work of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when Christ returns. Therefore, (2) the church as Jesus' Messianic community must model the kingdom's shalom and righteousness or its common life is a public denial of the Gospel it preaches. I want to give a brief definition of shalom and righteousness and then develop these two points.

*Shalom*, the Old Testament term for peace, is a rich, comprehensive word.<sup>1</sup> 'Well-being' and 'wholeness' are good synonyms. Shalom refers to wholeness in every area: material abundance, national prosperity, right relationships among persons in society. [Leviticus 26:3–6](#) paints a glorious picture of this comprehensive shalom which God will give Israel if the people walk in his law. The earth will yield rich harvests; wild animals will not ravage the countryside, and the 'sword shall not go through your land'. Perhaps the best short definition of shalom is right relationship—with God, neighbour and the earth.

Righteousness has a very similar meaning. In the Old Testament, *tsedheq* (115 times) and *tsedhaqah* (117 times) are the words most often translated righteousness. The root meaning was probably 'straight'—i.e. something which matches the norm. It is used of accurate weights and measures ([Leviticus 19:36](#); [Deuteronomy 25:15](#)) and straight paths ([Psalms 23:3](#)). It is also essential to notice that *tsedhaqah* is very often used in passages of Hebrew parallelism as a near synonym for *mishpat* (justice) (e.g., [Amos 5:21–24](#); [Isaiah 5:7](#)).

Both justice and righteousness have a theocentric foundation. The holy God who is just and righteous made a covenant with Israel and at the heart of that covenant is the divine demand that God's people imitate his justice and righteousness. ([Psalm 7:11](#); [72:1](#); [Deuteronomy 4:37–40](#); [6:25](#); [10:17–19](#); [1:17](#); [Leviticus 19:15](#).) Righteousness means faithfulness to God (as defined in the first four commandments) and faithfulness to other people (as defined by the other six commandments). Like shalom, righteousness means right relationships with God and neighbour as stipulated by God's Covenant.

This understanding of shalom and righteousness is at the core of Jesus' proclamation of the Good News.

## A. THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF SHALOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

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<sup>1</sup> See Gerhard von Rad's discussion under '[eirene](#)' in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (hereinafter cited as *TDNT*), 10 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Eerdmans, 1964–1976), 2:402–6. See also Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976).

*Jewish Messianic Expectation.* To understand what Jesus meant by announcing the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, we need to explore Jewish Messianic expectations which were rooted in the prophetic predictions of a future Messianic age. The prophets announced God's judgement on the idolatry and economic injustice of Israel and Judah. But they also pointed to a future day when God would raise up someone from the shoot of Jesse to bring God's shalom—i.e. right relationships with God, neighbour and the earth.

It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the Lord  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised up above the hills;  
and peoples shall flow to it,

and many nations shall come, and say:  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall decide for strong nations afar off;  
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more;

but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,  
and none shall make them afraid;  
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

([Micah 4:1-4](#))

As [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) shows, right relationship *with God* was central to this Messianic hope:

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new [p. 313](#) covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother saying, 'Know the Lord' for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.'

Right relationship *with neighbour* was also at the core of the prophet's Messianic hope.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called  
'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'  
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,  
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and for evermore.

([Isaiah 9:6-7](#))

Although the word for *peace* is not used, the vision of messianic shalom in [Isaiah 11](#) is at least as breathtaking. When the messianic shoot from the stump of Jesse comes forth, he will judge the poor with righteousness (verse [4](#)). Peace and harmony will prevail throughout the earth:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them ...  
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.  
([Isaiah 11:6, 9](#))

Von Rad summarizes the Messiah's role in the prophetic hope for shalom: 'The Messiah is the Guarantor and Guardian of peace in the coming Messianic kingdom.'<sup>2</sup>

*Jesus Fulfills Messianic Prophecy.* The early church declared Jesus to be the fulfilment of these messianic prophecies. [Matthew 4:15–16](#) quotes [Isaiah 9:1–2](#) in connection with the beginning of Jesus' proclamation of the coming of the messianic kingdom. Paul refers to [Isaiah 11:1](#) and [10](#) in [Romans 15:12](#). In [Luke 1:68–79](#), Zechariah announces that John the Baptist will prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah. Quoting [Isaiah 9:2](#), Zechariah points with eager anticipation to the Messiah who will 'guide our feet into the way of peace' ([Luke 1:79](#)). When the angels ([Luke 2:14](#)) announce Jesus' birth with the p. 314 choral shout 'peace among men,' they simply confirm the dawning fulfilment of the prophetic vision of messianic shalom.

Shivers of excitement must have raced through first-century Jewish folk when Jesus announced the ringing words: 'The time is, fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel' ([Mark 1:15](#)). I believe Jesus meant two things: He meant he was the long-expected Messiah, and he meant the Messianic age of shalom and righteousness was breaking into the present.<sup>3</sup>

*The Kingdom as Present and Future.* Vigorous scholarly debate has raged over whether Jesus thought the kingdom was entirely future or entirely present, or partially future and partially present. Some have argued that the kingdom was entirely present in his life and work. Others have insisted that for Jesus the kingdom was exclusively future. It would come only at the end of the age. But there is a growing consensus that, in striking contrast to contemporary Jewish thought, Jesus viewed the kingdom as both present and future. Jewish eschatology (belief about the 'last things') looked forward to a supernatural convulsion when the Messiah would come to destroy Israel p. national enemies in a bloody battle and initiate the new age of messianic peace. In Jewish expectation, there was a radical, almost total break, between the old age and the new messianic age. Jesus, on the other hand, taught that the messianic age had actually broken into the old age. Its powers were already at work in this old age in his person and work, even though the kingdom would come in its fullness only at the end of history.

Several incidents from the Gospels support the contention that Jesus considered the messianic kingdom to be present already. Luke places the programmatic account of the visit to the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. There Jesus read from [Isaiah 61:1–2](#), widely accepted as a messianic passage. A tremor of anticipation must have surged through the synagogue as they listened to the words about the coming Messiah who would release captives, heal the blind and liberate the oppressed. When he

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<sup>2</sup> Gerhard von Rad. 'Eirene', *TDNT*, II, 405–6.

<sup>3</sup> See George Eldon Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 135–92.

was finished, Jesus informed the audience, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

Jesus made a similar claim when John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to ask if he was 'he who is to come' (that is, the Messiah). Jesus' answer contained clear allusions to messianic prophecies: 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and p. 315 the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them' ([Matthew 11:4-5](#)). His actions, Jesus said, demonstrated that he was fulfilling messianic expectation. After a dispute with the Pharisees about the source of his power over demons, Jesus declared: 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God *has come upon you*' ([Matthew 12:28](#)). The kingdom is truly present.

Yet Jesus recognized that the kingdom had not reached its culmination. Sin and evil continued to flourish so Jesus looked ahead to a time of eschatological fulfilment when at the close of the age, the kingdom would come in its fullness.

The kingdom which Jesus announced then was the reign of God which broke decisively into history in the person and work of the Messiah and will come in its fullness only at his Second Coming.

*The Shape of Jesus' Messianic Kingdom.* But what was the shape of this reign? Was it a political order like Rome? Or an invisible Spirituality in the hearts of isolated individuals? No, it was rather the shalom, the right relationships with God and neighbour that comes when one accepts Jesus' Messianic proclamation. It is as [Matthew 6:33](#) says the shalom that comes when we seek first the new kingdom and its righteousness (i.e. right relationships). As the Lord's Prayer makes clear, it is the visible new social order of Jesus' disciples that comes by faith in the Father of our Lord Jesus when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven ([6:10](#)).

If anything is clear in Jesus, it is that we enter this kingdom by sheer grace and forgiveness, not by human effort and merit and certainly not mere societal engineering. Jesus disagreed sharply with the Pharisees. They thought that the Messianic Kingdom would come if all Jews would totally obey the law. Jesus on the other hand insisted that one enters the kingdom by sheer grace as a little child. 'For the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard' ([Matthew 20:1](#)). No matter how long the labourers worked, they all received the same salary. In parable after parable, Jesus taught that God is a forgiving Father who seeks lost sheep ([Luke 15:3-7](#)) and forgives prodigal sons and daughters ([Luke 15:11ff.](#)).

His actions matched his words. To the extreme annoyance of the self-righteous Pharisees Jesus associated with prostitutes and tax collectors. He forgave such sinners because he knew that the Father in Heaven is like the father of the prodigal son. And it was the same understanding that led him to the cross to die as the substitutionary atonement for the sins of all who would believe on Him. Central to any p. 316 understanding of the reign Jesus announced is the biblical teaching that it is for sinners who repent and accept unconditional divine forgiveness through Christ's cross.

Equally important to an understanding of the Messianic Kingdom Jesus proclaimed is the fact that it was a new social order in which all things were being restored to that shalom, that set of right relationships, intended by the Creator. Jesus formed a circle of disciples and together this new Messianic community began to model a challenge to the status quo at every point that it was wrong.

He upset those who were happy with the easy divorce laws that enabled men to dismiss their wives for many reasons. Instead he insisted that God intended one man and one woman to live together in lifelong, joyful union. Jesus also disregarded social patterns that treated women as inferior. According to Jews of the time, a woman's word had no

authority in court. It was a disgrace for men to appear publicly with women. A widely used prayer recommended for daily use by Jewish males thanked God that they had not been created a Gentile, an ignorant man or a woman. Jesus, on the other hand, appeared publicly with women ([John 4:27](#)), taught them theology ([Luke 10:38–42](#)) and honoured them with his first resurrection appearance.

Jesus upset political rulers, smugly satisfied with their domination of their subjects. In the dawning messianic age, servanthood must replace domination. The greatest in the kingdom is the Messiah who is servant of all. Therefore those who aspire to leadership in Jesus' kingdom must likewise be humble servants rather than domineering masters.

Jesus terrified the economic establishment of his day. It would be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle, he insisted, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom ([Matthew 19:24](#)). He summoned those with capital to lend to the needy even if they had no hope of recovering their investment ([Luke 6:30, 34](#); [Matthew 5:42](#)). He recognized in the rich young ruler that idolatrous materialism that plagues many rich people. Therefore he summoned him—and presumably all others who worship the same idol—to give all his wealth to the poor ([Matthew 19:21](#)). And he denounced those who oppress poor widows. If, as an increasing number of scholars have argued, [Luke 4:18–19](#) represents Jesus' announcement of the Jubilee, that simply underlines his call for sweeping changes in economic life.

Most astonishing of all perhaps, Jesus taught that right relationship with neighbour included love even for vicious enemies. 'You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your [p. 317](#) enemy. But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.' Rejecting ethnic limitations on neighbour love, rejecting violence and retaliation, Jesus taught his circle of followers to abandon the old age's search for shalom through the sword. Imitating the perfection of the Heavenly Father means loving one's enemies.<sup>4</sup>

It is crucial to see that the new Messianic kingdom Jesus announced involved a very concrete set of right relationships between husband and wife, men and women, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed. Nor was Jesus merely talking about a private ethnic for personal relations. Jesus came as the Messiah of the entire Jewish people. Rich and poor, leaders and 'unimportant' folk listened to his teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' Messianic manifesto to which he called the entire Jewish people. Not all accepted it to be sure. But they should have. To suggest otherwise is to make a farce of the claim that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah sent by God to inaugurate the Messianic kingdom.

And Jesus did that in a concrete visible form even though the majority rejected him. In the circle of his disciples, he formed a new community, a new social order, that began to live out the ethics of the New Messianic reign he announced.

*Cross, Resurrection and Pentecost.* Most of Jesus' contemporaries, however, found it hard to believe that the carpenter's small circle of forgiven tax collectors, prostitutes, and fishermen was truly the beginning of the glorious Messianic kingdom promised by the prophets. Jesus' circle was too weak and insignificant; his teaching was too demanding and costly; and his claims were too presumptuous if not indeed blasphemous. To prove he was wrong the religious and political leaders had him crucified. That, as Jurgen Moltmann rightly insists, destroyed the credibility of Jesus' fantastic Messianic claims. 'For the disciples who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem, his shameful death was not the consummation of his obedience to God nor a demonstration of martyrdom for his truth,

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<sup>4</sup> For my most intensive treatment of this problem, see Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (Downers Grove and London: InterVarsity and Hodder and Stoughton, 1982, 1983), chapter 5–8.



but the rejection of his claim. It did not confirm their hopes in him, but permanently destroyed them.<sup>5</sup>

But then God raised him from the dead. The resurrection proved to the discouraged disciples that Jesus was truly the Messiah and that his Messianic kingdom had begun. And Pentecost confirmed it. As one [p. 318](#) read's Peter's sermon in [Acts 2](#), one sees clearly that it was the raising of the crucified One and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that convinced the early church that the Messianic Age predicted by the prophets had truly begun ([Acts 2:17ff](#); [29ff](#)). Jewish Messianic hope had expected the giving of the Spirit when the Messiah came. The Messianic prophecy of Joel had come true ([Acts 2:17ff](#)) at Pentecost. That event therefore, confirmed the belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

The New Testament uses two interesting words to express the early Christian belief that the Messianic age had truly begun even though it was not yet fully present. They are the words *aparche* (first fruits) and *arrabon* (pledge or down payment). In [I Corinthians 15:20](#) and [23](#), Paul says that Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits of the general resurrection which Jewish Messianic hope expected to occur at the coming of the Messiah. In [II Corinthians 1:22](#) and [5:5](#), Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a down payment or guarantee (cf. also [Romans 8:23](#); [Ephesians 1:14](#)).

The word first fruits is used in the Old Testament to talk about the early harvest festival which celebrated the first arrival of the new crops (see [Exodus 23:16](#), [19](#); [Deuteronomy 26:2](#), [10](#)). The full harvest was not yet present, but the beginnings of the harvest had already arrived. The presence of those first fruits were cause for rejoicing for they were visible tangible evidence that the full harvest would surely come.

*Arrabon* (down payment or guarantee) is a loan word from the Semitic. It comes from the area of commerce and means a deposit which pays part of a total debt and gives a legal claim for the full repayment. It is a present tangible pledge that ratifies a contract. As the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says, 'it always implies an act which engages to something bigger.'<sup>6</sup>

These words were particularly suited to express the early Christian belief that the resurrection and Pentecost were visible tangible evidence that the Messianic kingdom had begun. Like the first fruits of the harvest, the Messianic Age had truly dawned. The early Christians had already tasted the power of the age to come ([Hebrews 6:5](#)). Therefore, in spite of the powerful evidence that the old age was still very active, the early Christians were certain that the fullness of the Messianic Kingdom would surely arrive in God's good time.

*Cosmic Hope of Coming Kingdom.* It was the present reality of the already dawning Messianic kingdom that anchored the breathtaking cosmic hope of the early Christians. They dared to believe that the crucified and Risen Carpenter was the key to history. They dared to [p. 319](#) believe that he was even now King of Kings and Lord of Lords ([Revelations 19:16](#); [1:5](#)). They dared to believe that at his return he would complete his victory over every rule and authority, even death itself ([I Corinthians 15:20-26](#)) and bring all things into subjection to God. They even believed that creation itself would be freed from its bondage and decay and experience the glorious freedom and wholeness of the children of God ([Romans 8:18-23](#)). Even though they were an almost infinitesimally insignificant minority in a powerful pagan Empire, they dared to proclaim that God would reconcile all things in heaven and on earth through the cross of this Jewish Carpenter ([Colossians 1:15-20](#)). They dared to hope for that cosmic completion of the Kingdom of shalom and

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<sup>5</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, I, 475.

righteousness Jesus announced precisely because the resurrection and Pentecost were solid tangible evidence that the Messianic reign had already begun.

## **B. THE CHURCH AS MODEL OF THE KINGDOM'S SHALOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS**

One of the weaknesses of Protestantism in general and Western Protestantism in particular is its inadequate doctrine of the church. Seduced by Western individualism, we have too often failed to understand and live the fact that according to Jesus and the apostles, the church is a new social order, a new redeemed community of shalom and righteousness. The church is not a mere collection of persons individually on their way to heaven. From the biblical perspective, the church is Jesus' new Messianic community, a reality already living now, the radical challenge to the status quo required by the values of Jesus' dawning kingdom. In fact, the church is part of the Gospel we preach.

That does not mean, as CRESR insisted, that we reduce salvation to the horizontal communal transformation occurring by God's grace in the body of believers. The justification of sinners through Christ's substitutionary death and the regeneration and sanctification of individuals through the work of the Holy Spirit are at the core of salvation.

But CRESR rightly insisted that salvation and the Gospel include a powerful communal element:

Salvation continues with the *new community*. For salvation in the Bible is never a purely individualistic concept. As in the Old Testament, so in the New, God is calling out a people for himself and binding it to himself by a Solemn covenant. The members of this new society, reconciled through Christ to God and one another, are being drawn from all races and cultures. [p. 320](#) Indeed, this single new humanity—which Christ has created and in which no barriers are tolerated—is an essential part of the Good News ([Ephesians 2:11–22](#)).<sup>7</sup>

It is essential to realize the implications of the statement that the church is part of the Gospel. If the Good News we preach were merely justification of sinners (as some radical Lutherans occasionally suggest) then we would not expect Christians to live any differently from the world. If the Gospel were only justification and regeneration of isolated individuals (as some radical pietists occasionally imply), then we would not expect the church as a community to be fundamentally different from other social groups. But if the Gospel is the Good News of a new *community* which has broken into history and which lives a new set of values in defiance of the evil of the status quo, then the church is a visible public denial of the very Gospel it preaches whenever it does not concretely model that messianic shalom and righteousness that Jesus announced and lived.

[Ephesians 2–3](#) makes it very clear that St. Paul understood the church to be part of the Gospel. [Ephesians 2:11–22](#) describes how the blood of Christ's cross brought an end to the social, ethnic hostility between Jews and Gentiles as both confessed Christ and found peace with God on exactly the same basis—namely the unconditional grace of God at the cross.

Then in chapter [3](#), Paul talks about the gospel as the 'mystery of Christ' (verse [4](#)) which he preaches. Verse [6](#) is a careful definition of this mystery which is the Gospel: 'This is how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in

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<sup>7</sup> *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* (LCWE and WEF, 1982), Sect. 5a (pp. 28–29).



Christ Jesus through the gospel.' The fact that there is now a new multi-ethnic church where the racial hostility of Jews and Gentiles is publicly being overcome is a fundamental part of the Gospel Paul preaches.<sup>8</sup>

The church is Jesus' new Messianic community where the broken relationships between men and women, rich and poor, black and white, oppressed and oppressor, master and slave, are now being overcome concretely and visibly for the world to see. The fact that it is now possible by God's grace to enter this new community (still imperfect to be sure, but gloriously transformed and far less broken than unredeemed society) is one central part of the Gospel.

That, of course, is exactly what we should expect from the fact that [p.321](#) Jesus defined the Gospel as the Good News of the Kingdom. If the prophets' messianic predictions foretold a Messiah who would bring shalom and righteousness, i.e. right relationships with God and neighbour; if the New Testament claims that these Messianic hopes began to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the dawning kingdom he announced; and, if the church is now (between the Incarnation and the Eschaton) the place where Jesus' Messianic kingdom comes to visible expression in human history; then obviously Jesus' new multiethnic, multi-class community is an essential part of the Gospel. This new social order must either be a living, public demonstration of the shalom and righteousness (whether economic, social, marital, etc.) Jesus announced, or it stands condemned as a damnable hindrance to and public denial of the Gospel it claims to announce.

I have argued thus far first that the Gospel is the Good News of the Kingdom of shalom and righteousness and second that the church as Jesus' new messianic community is an essential part of the Gospel. If those two propositions are true, how then does the church work for peace and justice?

## **II. WORKING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE**

The church promotes peace and justice in two ways: first, simply by being the church, Jesus' radical new community of shalom in a fallen world; and second, by using whatever appropriate means are available to change surrounding society through relief, development and structural change.

### **A. JUST BEING THE CHURCH**

Merely living the full biblical reality of what it means to be the body of Christ has a powerful impact on surrounding society. Merely living as Jesus' new multi-racial, multi-class community of shalom in a world rent by racism, nationalism, tribalism and militarism profoundly shapes the larger social order even apart from any direct political outside the church.

Think of what would happen if the Church in South Africa or Northern Ireland, India or Greater Philadelphia would just be the church. Racial prejudice, ethnic hostility, gross economic inequality, and caste bias rend the body of Christ and separate brother from brother and sister from sister within the church all over the world. Quite apart from direct political involvement, if black and white Christians in South Africa would dare to worship together, share their [p. 322](#) economic resources the way the early church did and be mutually accountable to each other, apartheid would collapse. If rich Christians in the West and the new Christian elites in the Third World would devote as much time to

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<sup>8</sup> Obviously, the extensive discussion of the homogeneous unit principle relates to this point. See René Padilla's excellent treatment in *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 142–169.

economic sharing in the worldwide body of Christ as did St. Paul who spent years on his intercontinental offering, we would offer the world a new model of economic caring that would undoubtedly prompt greater attempts to end the global scandal of starvation and poverty. Just being the church, merely living visibly and publicly a new communal reality of racial, economic and social shalom within the body of Christ is the first way that the church works for peace and justice.

In fact, unless we do this, it is absurd to work politically to introduce greater justice into societal social structures. It is a farce for Christians to ask government to legislate what their own congregations refuse to live. If I am not allowing the Holy Spirit to bring reconciliation to whatever brokenness exists between me and my wife and between me and my sisters and brothers in my local congregation, it is hypocritical arrogance to suggest that I know how to bring peace to the global political community. That does not mean we must have perfect marriages and churches before we engage in politics, but we had better be on the way. Otherwise, our political engagement lacks integrity and weight.

One could develop an almost infinite number of subpoints and applications of this proposition that the first way the church works for peace and justice is simply by being the church. But I will restrict myself to four.

First, evangelism is central to the way the church works for peace and justice. Christians reject the naive notion of Marxists and other children of the Enlightenment that we can create new persons if we merely adjust the social order. Humanist educators supposed that better education would create good people. Liberal social theorists argued that a better environment would eliminate crime. And Marxists cheerily predicted that the elimination of private property would create unselfish socialist men and women eager to love their neighbours as themselves. This is naive nonsense. The human predicament, unfortunately, is deeper than evil social structures. It lies at the core of each of our selfish hearts twisted by the Fall and our idolatrous rebellion against the Creator. Nothing short of a living personal relationship with God in Christ is adequate to transform selfish sinners. Certainly, changing social structures can do important things. But it cannot create new persons. Only divine grace can do that. [p. 323](#)

One part of the evangelistic task is a prophetic condemnation of and call for repentance from all forms of sin. If we preach repentance biblically and therefore condemn all forms of sin, both personal and social, we will, simply by doing faithful biblical evangelism, help reduce economic injustice, idolatrous nationalism, indeed every structural evil in society. People enmeshed in evil social structures need to know that those structures displease God. They need to know that knowing participation in social evil is not just an affront to neighbour but also a damnable sin against almighty God. Similarly, the faithful evangelist will call converts to let Christ be Lord of every area of life including their business, economics and politics.

Evangelism also leads to teaching a full biblical worldview. A biblical approach to the dignity and equality of all people, male and female, black and white produce social transformation. So does a biblical attitude toward work, creation as finite but very good, and the value of creating wealth. Evangelistic activity which leads people to replace Eastern monism, secular materialism, animism and castism with biblical theism also contributes powerfully to peace and justice.

Simply doing biblical evangelism contributes in many ways to peace and justice. Knowing that, and learning from the last century of liberal Christianity a failure, this generation of evangelicals will, precisely as they plunge deeply into the search for peace and justice, not loose or even weaken their central passion and commitment to personal evangelism. It is only as individuals are transformed by grace and adopt a Christian

worldview that the church has the 'people power' to live as Jesus new community which can in turn offer a new mode of shalom to a troubled world.

Second, it is only as the church avoids the twin dangers of cultural conformity and cultural withdrawal that its communal model of transformed relationships can best impact the larger society. If it is faithful to Jesus' dawning kingdom which challenged the status quo at every point that it was wrong, then the church will be a counter-cultural community defying surrounding society by challenging its brokenness with a new model of shalom and righteousness. Unfortunately, sinners resent those who call attention to their sin. The world, therefore, regularly persecutes those Christians who attempt to live the full reality of kingdom values. In the face of persecution, Christians historically have either conformed or withdrawn. The greater temptation seems to have been slow, subtle but pervasive conformity to surrounding cultural values. Occasionally, small bodies of Christians withdrew to mountain retreats or rural solitude. In the latter case, they may have continued to model Jesus' kingdom values [p. 324](#) but their cultural and physical isolation prevented their model from impacting the total society in a maximal way. Conforming Christians, of course, had little corrective impact at all because they had already abandoned Jesus for the way of the world.

Christians today must retain a sharp understanding of the radical difference and deep incompatibility between Jesus' kingdom and fallen society. And they must live the alternative kingdom in the very midst of the fallen world which so desperately needs a different model even though its sin leads it to reject and persecute those who dare to offer it. Only if we avoid both cultural withdrawal and cultural conformity can the church best work for peace and justice by being the church.

Third, if the church is to impact society by being the church, then loyalty to sisters and brothers in other tribes and nations must transcend tribal and national loyalties. One thinks of significant illustrations such as the Christian members of the kikuyu tribe in Kenya who condemned terrorism against people including Christians in other tribes during the Mau Mau terror. More often, Christians allow national or tribal loyalties to supersede the oneness of the body of Christ. Most Christians in the United States have a higher commitment to 'fellow Americans' than to brothers and sisters in Christ in the Soviet Union. A poster that is receiving wide circulation makes the point. It is called: 'A Modest Proposal for Peace: Let the Christians of the World Agree not to Kill Each Other'.<sup>9</sup> If American and Russian Christians cannot commit themselves to even this minimal definition of what surely it ought to mean to be part of the one body of Christ, then they need the prodding of other believers in the worldwide church in order to take this step toward peace. If all Christians in the world would seriously announce that they will henceforth refuse to participate in preparations for or engage in the killing of other Christians, they would make an enormous contribution to peace. Here too, just being the church is the first way to work for peace.

Finally, let me come even closer home and talk about the division and institutional competition that exist in the church. Too often, good evangelical agencies devoted to evangelism or development allow personality conflicts and institutional self-interest to supersede the best interests of the cause of Christ. Why, in spite of widespread demand from Third World leaders, cannot the WEF and LCWE unite and thus avoid unnecessary duplication and fragmentation? In the world, personal agenda, institutional identities, and a host of other things lead [p. 325](#) to hostility and war. Christians condemn this sin. But what integrity does our prophetic condemnation possess if the church itself cannot model that righteous shalom that overcomes unnecessary duplication of religious structures and

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<sup>9</sup> Available from Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, P.A. 17501.

denominations? Jesus said that genuine Christian love and unity would convince the world that He came from the Father ([John 17:20–23](#)). It would also foster peace in the world. Are we willing to restructure present relationships between evangelical denominations, between the WEF and LCWE, and between numerous para-church agencies in order to enable the church to be the model of shalom Jesus intended?

If the church wants to promote peace and justice it ought to start by being the church. Anything less is a farce.

## **B. SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH RELIEF, DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN THE LARGER SOCIETY**

Until Christ returns, all attempts at short term remedial assistance to victims (relief), longer term promotion of self-sufficiency in local communities (development) and the fundamental transformation of basic socio-economic-political systems (structural change) will at best only produce somewhat less suffering, oppression and violence in a fallen world. Does that mean that Christians should keep all their activities for peace and justice within the church?

Not at all—for several reasons. The doctrine of creation tells us that the Creator wills people to enjoy physical and social wholeness during their short sojourn on earth. Second, both the Old Testament and the New Testament clearly indicate that God continues to desire the good gifts of creation for all even when we stupidly rebel against him. God patiently continued for a very long time to grant Israel and surrounding nations the good gifts of creation in spite of gross sin. Jesus taught that God sends his sun and rain on the just and unjust and commands us to do the same ([Matthew 5:45–58](#)). Third, Christians know that the Risen Lord is *now* king of kings and Lord of lords. The ancient usurper still refuses to bow to the reigning Sovereign's rightful claim to dominion over all the earth, but that is no reason why Christians should accept the devil's deceitful, blasphemous claim to be Master of the present age. Christ is the rightful ruler and to the extent that we make the larger society a little more like what he wills, to that extent we give concrete expression to our faith in his universal sovereignty.

Finally, we know that eventually, at the Parousia, the kingdom of shalom and righteousness will come in its fullness when the Risen Lord [p. 326](#) reigns *de facto* as King of Kings. That is the way history is going. At that time, adultery, poverty and war will be no more. Knowing what the Prince of peace and justice intends for the future, Christians will eagerly seek to erect imperfect signs of that coming kingdom in societies whichever offer them the freedom to engage in relief, development and public life.

To be sure, even the most successful structural changes will not create a new people. Sin will remain pervasive. Therefore, we should not, as the Lausanne Covenant and CRESR rightly insisted, use salvation language to talk of the limited social transformation in the larger society effected by Christian social action.<sup>10</sup> But peace in Vietnam and Northern Ireland, justice in South Africa and the Philippines, and freedom in Afghanistan and South Korea are all important even though their realization would not be salvation.

Again, a host of specific issues clamour for discussion. I can only touch on a few.

Perhaps the first and most difficult issue is what socio-political activity is appropriate for the church as church and what is better done by individuals and para-church Christian

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<sup>10</sup> *Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, Sections 3(b) (p. 17), and 5(a) (p. 29).

organizations. But this topic is vast and complex, and CRESR has made important suggestions.<sup>11</sup> Hence, I will make only a couple of brief comments.

It seems to me that there is nothing wrong in principle with the church as church (whether local congregation, regional conference or national or international synod or assembly) taking an explicitly political stand. If the leaders at such an event wish to speak *to* the church, they may do so, but should make it clear that they are speaking for themselves and addressing the church. If Christian leaders wish to claim to speak *for* their total church, then they must first have a careful process of discussion and discernment within the body to see what the Spirit and the Word are prompting that body to understand as their joint declaration to the world. Too often in political pronouncements, Christian leaders have claimed to speak *for* their churches when they should have been speaking *to* them.

Many factors suggest that normally, detailed political stands should be taken by individual Christians and para-church organizations, devoted to Christian political engagement. The complexity of issues and the importance of accepting and affirming honest, divergent socio-political views within the church both suggest caution frequent political pronouncements by official church structures. At the same time, courageous acts like the Confessing Church's Barmen p. 327 Declaration or the Catholic church's demand for freedom and justice in the Philippines were right and essential.

Second, the church's self-conscious identity as a counter-cultural community committed to Jesus' kingdom values is just as important for her political work in the larger society as it is for her existence as the new community. If Christians simply endorse the tired ideas of current ideologies, they merely reinforce an unjust, violent status quo. That is about the last thing most societies need. Only if Christians are very clear that their attempt to change the larger society must be fundamentally shaped by biblical values rather than secular ideologies, only then can they make a significant contribution.

That means that Christians must have their own internal structures for thinking through fundamentally biblical approaches to public life and the concrete problems that need alternative solutions. That is a complex task. It involves careful exegesis, attention to hermeneutics, and a sophisticated analysis of contemporary society.<sup>12</sup> We dare not simply endorse the current left wing or right wing proposals for peace and justice. Instead, we must do extensive, sophisticated analysis within the body of Christ working with those who share our biblical commitments, in order to develop profoundly biblical alternatives for economics, politics and public life generally. To do that well in the next two decades, we will need a host of new national and international evangelical publications, organizations and think tanks. Otherwise, the current worldwide evangelical interest in public life will be a failure because we will simply endorse secular ideologies rather than offer the world a biblically informed Third Way.

Third, Christians must resist the demonic temptation to absolutize any current political reality. Many American Christians tend to equate or at least to closely identify God and country (or even the Republican party) and fail to understand the evils perpetuated by American power. Nicaraguan Christians sympathetic to the Sandinistas tend to exaggerate the accomplishments and overlook the faults of the 1979 revolution. And so the temptation goes from country to country.

Absolutizing any political reality is idolatry. Since we know every socio-political order will be very imperfect until our Lord returns, we must vigorously apply biblical norms to

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Section 7 (pp. 43–61).

<sup>12</sup> I have tried to spell out a methodology in my 'An Evangelical Vision for Public Policy', *Transformation*, July–September, 1985, pp. 1–9.



every social order. That will mean praising the good and denouncing the evil on the basis of biblical values rather than current national propaganda.

When Christians do that successfully, they offend all contending p. 328 parties. Partisan politicians want our unqualified endorsement, not limited praise and prophetic criticism. Samuel Escobar's recent article in *Transformation*<sup>13</sup> shows how evangelicals in Peru offended both the government and the guerrillas when they even-handedly condemned both Marxist terrorism and police and army brutality. South African Christians find themselves in a similar no-man's land when they condemn violence and injustice on all sides and seek reconciliation with justice.<sup>14</sup> Because the ultimate loyalty of Christians is Christ and his kingdom and because they insist on reconciliation with enemies rather than extermination even of oppressors, they will at best fit only awkwardly within partisan political movements. But precisely in that disturbing prophetic presence lies their most significant contribution.

### III. SEIZING THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES

The situation has changed fundamentally in the last fifteen years. In the Chicago Declaration, the Lausanne Covenant, the Madras Declaration and similar previous evangelical statements on social responsibility,<sup>15</sup> the first concern was to plead with evangelicals to become involved in social issues. It was necessary to argue that social action was also biblical and that evangelicals must do more than evangelism.

That has all changed. At least in North America and I think increasingly elsewhere, the debate is no longer over *whether* biblical Christians should do social action as well as evangelism. In the U.S., all evangelicals from Jerry Falwell to Jim Wallis agree we should. The debate today is over the precise shape of our socio-political proposals and agenda. Should we be democratic socialists or democratic capitalists? Should we support or reject abortion and nuclear weapons? The debate flows vigorous—and sometimes vicious.

The worldwide debate over the concrete shape of evangelical social engagement will be one of the most difficult and crucial items on our agenda in the coming decade. Never have we had a larger number of well educated, strategically located evangelical leaders in all areas of society. Never have we had a greater opportunity to shape our national societies and the international community in a way that reflects biblical principles. This could be our finest decade of social engagement.

It could also be the time when we self-destruct in ferocious p. 329 fratricide. The difference between the political proposals of Jerry Falwell and Jim Wallis are enormous, in spite of the fact that both honestly seek to be biblical. The disagreements among theologically conservative Christians in Northern Ireland, South Africa, South Korea, Nicaragua—indeed everywhere—is immense. Either we learn how to listen to each other in a new way and submit our differences to the norm of scripture in humble, prayerful, intercontinental dialogue, or we lose an historic opportunity.

Four things would be especially important.

First, we must somehow figure out how to do a better job of listening to the insight and corrective counsel of other Christians in other social and geographic contexts. American Christians are at a dangerous stage of nationalistic idolatry and pride. South

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<sup>13</sup> January–March, 1986, pp. 9–15.

<sup>14</sup> See the April–June 1986 issue of *Transformation*.

<sup>15</sup> See René Padilla, 'How Evangelicals Endorsed Social Responsibility (1966–1983)', *Transformation*, July–September, 1985, pp. 27–32.



Korean evangelicals seem hesitant to speak out for justice and freedom. White South African evangelicals still sometimes act as if they had decades to dismantle apartheid. Is there not some way that the wisdom of other parts of the worldwide body of Christ can more successfully provide insight and accountability for each of us in our specific situations?

Of course, no one understands each local setting in all its uniqueness and complexity as well as the national church. And, of course, I'm not urging an arrogant Western ecclesiastical imperialism dictating to Third World churches. But we are one worldwide body. And we easily become so enmeshed in the details of our local setting that we lose perspective. People from the outside can see things we miss.

Will evangelical Protestantism really offer *no substantial way* whatsoever for mutual worldwide accountability and counsel? Quite honestly, I do not know how to do it. A Journal like *Transformation* and an occasional international conference on simple lifestyle or justice and peace are simply inadequate. One thing I ask of this consultation is that we spend some time thinking about how we can develop new networks and mechanisms for intercontinental evangelical exchange, counsel and accountability on issues of peace, justice and liberty.

Second, and closely related to the first, we all need to resolve as individuals to listen carefully to and affirm the strengths of the arguments of those who disagree with us. One illustration will suffice. In recent decades Christians concerned with justice have sometimes neglected freedom and liberty. And Christians concerned with freedom (political and religious) have sometimes been willing to sacrifice justice. Surely both concerns grow out of biblical faith. Both groups would be better if they could hear the strength of their [p. 330](#) 'opponent's' critique and insight. More diligent listening and a readiness to acknowledge the strong points of others would help enormously.

Third, we need more attention to the precise areas of our disagreement over issues of peace, justice and liberty. Reaching a conclusion about the best or most biblically faithful domestic policy on welfare or foreign policy toward South Africa is an exceedingly complex undertaking. It demands more than a few biblical proof-texts and a casual glance at the morning paper. I think evangelicals would understand their different political conclusions better and progress more quickly toward resolving their disagreements if we were more self-conscious about all the components that contribute to those political decisions and tried harder to isolate the *precise* areas of disagreement.

There are at least four crucial components in any political judgment by Christians: (1) each person's personal history and ideological background; (2) one's interpretation of the Bible; (3) one's reading of history; and (4) carefully examined generalizations (some would call such a set of generalizations an ideology) that are consciously derived from the above, especially two and three.

We all bring along assumptions and convictions from our family church and education. Mine includes the individualism and free enterprise assumptions of a typical farm boy; the biblical assumptions derived from devout, pietistic, Anabaptist parents and church; and the influence of both socialist and anti-socialist professors in college. Anyone who wants to be biblical must vigorously and consciously seek to evaluate every element of inherited ideology on the basis of the scriptures. But no one should pretend to have succeeded fully. Therefore, we should always welcome others who help us discover ways that unconsciously inherited ideology—whether of the left or right—still shapes our thinking.

The Bible is the crucial norm for all political judgments of those who want a biblically informed political agenda. But a common commitment to biblical authority does not preclude major disagreement.

Sometimes, we disagree over the *exegesis* of specific tasks. For instance, I am inclined to think that although the literal meaning of [Matthew 25](#) is that Christians must feed and clothe brothers and sisters in Christ, nevertheless Jesus' extension of neighbour love to include everyone in need ([Matthew 5:43-44](#)) means that [Matthew 25](#) also summons Christians to offer food and clothing to all the needy they can assist. Others limit the application of [Matthew 25](#) to fellow Christians. The way to overcome disagreements on specific exegesis is [p. 331](#) to do our exegesis more carefully and do it together with those who challenge our interpretations.

Sometimes we disagree when we attempt to summarize the central themes of the scriptures or when we try to state a comprehensive overview of the biblical teaching on a particular area such as the family or economic justice. When I try to listen carefully and systematically to what the Bible says about economic justice, I hear the Bible saying that God has a special concern for the poor, weak and marginalized; that God is opposed to extremes of wealth and poverty; and that God as the only absolute owner wants the productive resources of the earth distributed in a decentralized way so that individuals and families can earn their own way and co-operate with God in the shaping of history. (Therefore, I am not a socialist, if socialism means state ownership of the means of production. I believe decentralized, limited private ownership rather than the concentration of power as in state ownership or huge corporations is what the Bible suggests.) Others disagree vigorously. Again, the way to make progress on these disagreements is to challenge the specific biblical work which provides the foundation for each other's biblical generalizations.

Sometimes we disagree over more fundamental hermeneutical questions. Anabaptists, dispensationalists and Reformed thinkers all bring different assumptions about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments to their understanding of the text. Those assumptions as well as others obviously affect how each of us relates the biblical material to specific public policy proposals for contemporary secular societies. Hermeneutical differences are harder to resolve. Nevertheless, we should try to help each other see where we think a more faithful reading of all scripture would lead to different hermeneutical assumptions.

Our different readings of history are a third area of disagreement. We often differ both in our interpretation of the broad sweep of history and also in our understanding of what is really the case (the 'facts') in a particular situation. My reading of history leads me to conclude that the history of twentieth century Marxist-Leninist states shows that in spite of some positive results their overall impact has been so negative that we ought to vigorously resist any expansion of Marxist-Leninism. Another broad historical assumption of mine is that Western colonialism has had massive evil components as well as positive elements. Others would disagree vigorously.

Similarly, it is not easy to agree even on specific 'facts'. What 'really happened' when the Pope visited Managua? How strong is the hard core Marxist-Leninist element in the Sandinista party? If my answer to [p. 332](#) the latter question had been 'totally dominant', I would have supported a different U.S. policy toward Nicaragua in the last seven years than I have.

Disagreements over matters of fact are difficult but not impossible to resolve. If they result from a mere lack of information, sharing facts will help. Joint exploration by groups like Evangelicals for Social Action and the Institute for Religion and Democracy is one way to resolve different interpretations of the facts in places like Nicaragua or South Korea. If either side is afraid of such a joint exploration, the public ought to know and draw the appropriate conclusions. If disagreements result from conflicting methodologies in the social sciences, the process of adjudication is far more complex, but not impossible. We

dare not give up the attempt to help each other see the facts more accurately. Whether or not the impact of British colonialism in Nigeria or U.S. political and economic involvement in the Philippines has been positive *is* a factual question. If we refuse to confuse such disagreements with moral failure and instead look more carefully at the data together, we will make more progress.

Finally, we disagree over the broad generalizations (or ideology) that we consciously derive from the complex of previous decisions. I believe that on balance a market economy (with certain parameters to restrict injustice) rather than a state owned, centrally planned economy as in the U.S.S.R. is more likely to produce both freedom and justice. I believe that a pluralistic political process with more than one political party is more likely to produce liberty. And I believe that many independent centres of power (church, media, economic life, education, the state) rather than one centre of state power controlling all the others leads more surely to peace, justice and freedom. Again, others—including faithful Christians—disagree

If we can become more clear about *precisely* where we disagree, we can at least understand each other better. And we can probably proceed more quickly to lessening the disagreements. It is essential that a disagreement over the specific exegesis of [Matthew 25](#) not be misconstrued as an immoral lack of compassion for the poor or Marxist-Leninist politics. If you disagree with someone here, you need to question his exegesis, not his compassion or his politics. It is tragically misleading to see a different judgment about the degree of Marxist-Leninist influence in the Sandinista party as an ideological commitment to Marxist-Leninism. If you disagree you need to challenge her facts not her commitment to democracy. It is dishonest to portray an honest conclusion from history and the Bible that democratic capitalism is the surest path to justice for the poor as a lack [p.333](#) of compassion. If you disagree, you need to question his broad reading of history and the scriptures, not his concern for the poor. If evangelicals are to make a maximal contribution in the area of public life, they must pay much more careful attention to the precise areas of disagreement.

Finally, we need a new covenant to dialogue civilly, honestly, fairly and biblically. The debate should flow fast, but not furious, vigorous but not vicious. In particular, the evangelical leadership needs to enter into a mutual covenant personally to avoid and publicly to condemn: name calling and slanderous stereotyping; inaccurate, one-sided depictions of others positions; distortion of the facts; unwillingness to test one's views with others on the basis of the scriptures.

The level of name-calling and malicious stereotyping has ballooned in the last few years. I disagree intensely with President Reagan's nuclear policy. But I believe he desires peace in the world as much as I do. It is valid for me to argue that his nuclear build up will probably lead to nuclear war, but it is immoral name-calling to call him a warmonger. Similarly, it is quite proper for someone to charge that my advocacy of a bilateral verifiable nuclear freeze increases the danger of nuclear war or even a Soviet take-over, but it is slander to call me a Marxist.

There *is* a difference between honest categorizing and malicious Stereotyping. We cannot avoid using categories for people and movements. It is not wrong to think that on nuclear policy, I tend toward a liberal-left stance and Jerry Falwell toward a conservative-right position. But it would be very wrong to ignore Falwell's repeated affirmation of democratic pluralism, and the separation of church and state and imply that he is a Fascist. Similarly, it would be dishonest to ignore my repeated repudiation of Marxist-Leninism and marshall selective quotations to imply that I secretly favour Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism.

We need a new covenant to portray each other's opinions fairly. We all know tempting it is to exaggerate one aspect and ignore another side of an 'opponent's' perspective. There is a fairly simple way to check whether we have accurately understood and fairly summarized another's views. We can ask the other person! I suspect that at least one half of the current battles in church circles would end if the major contestants merely consulted each other personally and directly to see if the views they were denouncing were actually held by the other person. One criterion of honesty in debate is that we state the views of a person we criticize in such a way that that person says, 'Yes, that is what I mean'. p. 334

Until we do that, we have no right to criticize. Of course, people may sometimes dishonestly deny what they are actually saying. There must be room for showing carefully and factually that a person pretends to be something other than what he really is. Nor am I saying we can never object to other views without picking up the telephone. But I think we would make an enormous step forward if the evangelical leadership would covenant together not to engage in any major public criticism of each other until they had personally checked with the other party to make sure they were accurately stating the other's views.

Third, we must get our facts straight. We dare not continue to accept a situation where different Christian organizations offer the public contradictory facts and then refuse to meet together or search together to resolve the contradictions. The most rigorous submission to the facts, however unpleasant, is essential for maximal evangelical impact on public life.

Finally, we need a new covenant to search the scriptures together. It is a farce to have Jerry Falwell and myself continue forever telling the American public that our mutually contradictory public policy stands are thoroughly biblical. There is a way to work at that. Evangelical leaders could sit down privately twice a year for two days of confidential conversation and explain prayerfully and openly to each other the biblical foundations of our different political proposals. As we survey Christian history, we see that even Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley occasionally got it wrong. We ought to conclude that since we are making at least as many mistakes, we desperately need the insight of other Christian leaders who are striving to submit their total lives in biblical revelation. (I know that some try very hard to do this and that others persistently refuse to co-operate.) One criterion of the integrity of evangelical political leadership should be a willingness regularly to test the biblical validity of one's views with other biblically committed Christian leaders.

In the late twentieth century, evangelicals face an unprecedented opportunity. In order not to squander it, we need new structures of international counsel and accountability; a new openness to acknowledge the valid arguments of those who disagree with us; greater self-awareness of the precise areas of our disagreement; and a new covenant of integrity in debate. Even if all that happened by special supernatural intervention, we would still have different perspectives and organizations. But we might at least be viable instruments that the God of shalom and righteousness could use to make our world a little more free, just and peaceful.

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