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Editorial

Christ, Christianity and the Church

As history progresses and the historical Jesus becomes more distant, every generation has the right to (and must) question his contemporary relevance—and hence also that of Christianity and the Church. The articles and book reviews in this issue generally deal with this relevance.

Of the three, of course the questions about Jesus Christ are the basic ones. As we deal with plural and conflicting claims concerning what is and ought to be, the real question turns out to be: Does the truth found in Jesus agree with, clash with, or surpass the truth in others? In turn, the question of Jesus' relevance boils down essentially to the question of his finality—whether we Christians believe that Jesus reigns and all authority has been given to him in earth and heaven. Modern Christological trends substantiate this (Bray). If this is so, then as Newbigin says, 'We shall not need to be told to let it be known. Rather we shall not be able to keep silent'. If anything evangelism is about Jesus Christ (Hattori).

Christianity (as in the *History of the Expansion of Christianity*—a steady, automatic and inevitable expansion, like that of leaven in the dough) is neither greater than nor equal to Christ, but *less than* Christ. Not in the sense that Christ spills over into other religions and ideologies but rather that Christianity and the Christian church have not yet exhausted their grasp of Him. This is the burden behind finding an authentic indigenous Christianity (Omulokoli), or its grappling with the rise of secularization (Conn). It is unfortunate that Christianity has been moulded into a system, a religion. As a system, like every other system Christianity also is human and imperfect. But in fact it is a way of life; for Jesus came not to found a religion but to show the way to live, the way to God Himself.

The church is an institution. As such it cannot avoid being in constant tension with other institutions such as the state. The article on the church and state (Chao) gives an entirely different approach to the problem from those European debates majoring on the Constantine Christendom 'idea'. While an exegetical article (Coleman) reveals how the fellowship of the church goes beyond the sociological solidarities, [p. 4](#) another research (Trembath) demonstrates the crucial role the Church has to play in religious authority, in the very inspiration of the Scriptures.

On advice of many, henceforth two issues of ERT will be multithematic every year. And I trust you will empathise with us as the subscription cost has had to be slightly raised to meet the rising costs.

Editor [p. 5](#)

Evangelism—The Bible's Primary Message

Yoshiaki Hattori

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Basing his findings on the exegesis of Joel's passage on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Hattori makes an interesting case for evangelism as the message of the Scriptures. This is a typical approach of a growing 2/3rds world Christianity. It is a parallel to C. S. Song's systematisation of theology on the basis of Christian Mission. With his solid trinitarian faith Hattori concludes, 'Not only Ministers but every member of Christian church without any exception is to be ... a witness of Christ and of His Gospel to this world ... The theology of Evangelism is the theology of the Bible as well as the theology of the Christian church.'
Editor

The greatest commission entrusted both to us Christians and to the church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make disciples of the same Jesus Christ ([Matt. 28:19–20](#), [Mark 16:15](#), [Luke 24:48](#)). You may call it in one word 'Evangelism'. Accordingly it must have been the very essential reason for the existence of a Christian church which is based upon the Bible, the fully inspired and infallible Word of God. Here we see very closely the undeniable triangular corelationship: Bible—Church—Mission.¹ Through her long history, Christian church has been endeavouring after the fulfilment of the entrusted task of evangelism in various ways and means but always in accordance with the orthodox trinitarian doctrine of God which is the core of the Christian church. The abundant love of God the Father, the wonderful advent of the Messiah for the work of redemption in Christ the Son, and the mighty descending of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God as the generating power of sending forth the witnesses of the saving [p. 6](#) grace of the gospel in Christ Jesus unto the uttermost part of the world, have been the basic doctrine of the church.

Here in this paper, I present a biblical concept that evangelism is the main theme of the Bible from the beginning to the end in terms of theology of evangelism. Theologically speaking, world-evangelism entrusted to us Christians is neither Jewish-Jehovaism, nor humanitarian Jesusism, nor merely charismatic spiritualism, but the Biblical concept of mission based upon the orthodox trinitarian doctrine of Godhead in the Christian church.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Trinity in the Old Testament

The concept of God in the Old Testament is definitely monotheistic and there is no pluralistic concept as allegedly seen in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#). Such is the orthodox position of the Christian church, at least of the evangelical church. So it is neither polytheism nor even henotheism but monotheism through and through. In the Old Testament the concept of trinitarian monotheism is well presented as the basic norm (though the term 'trinity' is used neither in the Old Testament nor the New). The concept of God the Father is manifested as the Creator in [Genesis 1:1](#). As to the third Person of Godhead in the Old Testament, though not in the most precise way of expression, it is seen in expressions like 'the Spirit of God' ([Genesis 1:2](#)). In addition, 'angel' ([Exodus 23:20](#), [32:34](#), [33:2](#), etc.) or

¹ Robert J. Schreiter says in the beginning of his recommendatory preface in *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* by D. Senior and C. Stuhlmuller, 'Christians have always turned to the Bible as the charter document for their missionary activity. In so doing they have mined those rich resources in many ways, and for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they have been guided for personal reasons, seeking inspiration to rekindle and guide their missionary motivation. At other times the reasons have been practical or apologetic, to address specific problems or to underwrite certain strategies. In still other instances they have looked to the Scriptures for blue-prints of missionary action or criteria for the establishment of the Christian community.' Donald Senior/Carroll Stuhlmueeller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983, p. xi.

‘the angel of the Lord’ ([Genesis 16:7](#), [22:15](#), [Exodus 14:19](#), [Numbers 22:22](#), etc.) is the being which works with God and gives direction and may also be understood as an indirect expression indicating the work of the third Person of Godhead (‘the Spirit of the Lord’ [II Samuel 23:2](#)).

The concept of the second Person of Godhead, God the Son, may be seen in the expressions such as ‘word’ ([Psalms 33:6](#)), ‘wisdom’ ([Proverbs 8:12](#)), and [Isaiah 48:16](#) may be taken for an indication of the Triune God in the course of the progressive revelation in terms of Biblical theology.² It is a theological necessity that the idea of Messianic prophecy is to be viewed, if one is to see the doctrine of the second Person of Godhead (God the Son) in the Old Testament, in its relationship to the full revelation seen in the New Testament. p. 7 Moreover, the essential unity between the Old and the New Testaments has been well accepted in this theological relationship between the doctrines of God the Father and of God the Son by the church. This may be expressed in terms of ‘prophecy and fulfilment’. Accordingly, on the basis of progressive revelation both the doctrine of God the Son and the doctrine of God the Holy Spirit are to be most manifestly revealed in the New Testament. The second and the third Persons of Godhead are revealed in the Old Testament only within the frame of prophecy; therefore, both varied and flexible understanding or expression may seem necessary for these two Persons of Godhead, at least in the economy of the Old Testament. It seems to be more so in the case of the third Person of Godhead; and theologically speaking, that may be considered to be the significant order in progressive revelation.³

However, although the understanding on the plural form of the divine name *‘Elohim*, ‘God’, in the Old Testament on the basis of the doctrine of triune God may not be rejected decisively or denied completely, it may be much more objectively and positively accepted as Biblical understanding on the philological/cultural basis of the so-called ‘*pluralis excellentiae*’ or ‘*pluralis magnitudinis*’.⁴

Evangelism and the ‘Elect’ in the OT

As clearly indicated at the beginning of the Bible, [Genesis 1:1](#), God is the Creator of the world (heavens and earth), and the covenant of creation intrinsically embodied in His work of creation is the fundamental principle of a Biblical world-view. However, as a tragic reality in history man’s rebellion against the Creator-God in terms of the fall of man did break the covenant (the covenant of creation), and immediately God did begin to institute the covenant of redemption for p. 8 the fallen man and World through His divine revelation. Since then, this covenant of redemption has been the very central message of the entire Biblical revelation both in the Old and the New Testaments.⁵

² G. W. Bromiley, ‘The Trinity,’ *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, (editor-in-chief, E. F. Harrison), Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960, pp. 531–532. For more details, cf. J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1962, pp. 172–176.

³ General references to the ‘Spirit’ in the Old Testament indicate this clearly, e.g., Loyd Neve, *The Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1972.

⁴ Cf. Otto Kirn, ‘Doctrine of the Trinity,’ *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, edited by S. M. Jackson (editor-in-chief), New York/London: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1912, Vol. XII, p. 18; Payne, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 167; E. Kautzsch/A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957 impression (of 2nd English edition, 1910), pp. 398–399 (§124-g-h).

⁵ J. H. Bavinck voices that God’s creation is the foundation of our mission principle, saying, ‘... [Genesis 1:1](#) is obviously the necessary basis of the great commission of [Matthew 28:19–20](#).’ J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans, by D. H. Freedman, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1964,

Therefore, the message of redemption (evangelism) originated out of the very concept of the *proto-evangelium* ([Genesis 3:15, 21](#)) has always been keeping its focus on the salvation of 'this fallen world' of ours, which had been once in the abundant blessing of God under the covenant of creation. In addition to the Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant ([Gen. 9:17](#)), Abrahamic covenant ([Gen. 12:3, 17:4-5, 18:18, 26:4, 28:14](#)), and Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple ([1 Kings 8:23, 41-43, 60](#)) indicate well such theological truth. So, the consciousness of the co-relationship between the trinitarian concept of God and the principle of evangelism⁶ among the people of Israel has been acknowledged as a transitional/progressive development⁷ derived from the concept of the almighty sovereign God, the Creator and the Ruler of the world.⁸ Among the prophets in Old Testament times, such evangelism/mission consciousness had become much more manifest and their identity as the people of God both in word and life required them to be holy and righteous. In fact, it was considered to be their witness/mission/evangelism to their surrounding world ([Isaiah 9:1-2, 34:1, 40:28, 41:1, 49:1, Jeremiah 1:10, Ezekiel 28:25-26](#), etc.). In the Book of Psalms, some good examples which show us such evangelism/mission consciousness among the people of Israel may be found: God's majesty over the entire world ([Ps. 8](#)), judgement upon the entire world ([Ps. 9:8](#)), creation of the entire world ([Ps. 19](#)), God's dominion over the world ([Ps. 33](#)), call for praise to the entire world ([Ps. 66:8, Ps. 96](#)), joy for the world ([Ps. 67](#)), call to all the people of the world ([Ps. 98, 100](#)), proclamation of God's work ([Ps. 105](#)), praise of God in the world ([Ps. 117](#)), etc. Therefore, in the course of God's people, Israel, their understanding on God did bring forth the sense of evangelism to themselves as a sort of self-consciousness of the elect.⁹ Eventually, their identity or their life-style as the people of God became necessary to be propagated in various ways; then along with the increasing expectation for the promised Messiah some sorts of specialized offices or services were in demand for carrying such a task of evangelism to the world. The appearance of prophets may be considered as one of the most apparent results of this trend under God's sovereign providence.

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

The Development from the Elect-Consciousness to the Evangelism Consciousness

p. 12. Cf. also Richard R. DeRidder, 'The Old Testament Roots of Mission,' in Wilbert R. Shenk, *Exploring Church Growth*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1983, pp. 173-174.

⁶ 'The Old Testament basis for the Christian mission must surely center, then, in its doctrine of God, in its revelation of the nature of the first Person of the Trinity and of the very ground of the Trinity itself.' G. Ernest Wright, 'The Old Testament Basis for the Christian Mission,' in G. H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961, p. 22.

⁷ Such consciousness in the history of Israel is usually acknowledged in Abraham, but it could be further traced back to Noah. Cf. Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1962, pp. 19-21, 25ff.; Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Mission*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1965, p. 11.

⁸ Cf. Donald Senior/Carroll Stuhlmuehler, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983, p. 321. 'The Bible gives awesome witness to the universal sovereignty of God. His lordship and provident care transcend every human boundary—even those of Israel and the church ... Thus the biblical God is the ultimate source of mission and the ultimate catalyst to the church's instinct to move beyond the boundaries of a particular culture or national group.' *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁹ Sundkler, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-15; Blauw, *op. cit.*, pp. 44ff.

When evangelism consciousness derived from the elect-consciousness becomes stabilized both collectively and-individually, as H. H. Rowley says,¹⁰ theologically speaking, service becomes the focal point of election. Even more specifically Blauw states, 'Therefore election is not primarily a privilege but a responsibility.'¹¹ The term *bāḥar*, 'to choose or to elect', in its usage in the Old Testament connotes the evangelistic mission of the people of Israel as God's chosen people toward all other peoples of the world.¹² This is the principle of expansion in evangelism and this principle is based upon p. 10 the evangelistic or missionary responsibility and consciousness on the part of God's chosen people with both phases, centripetal and centrifugal.¹³

This evangelism—oriented movement may be seen in the prophets in Old Testament times. The task and responsibility of evangelism committed to them did necessitate the most effective means or approach toward its fulfilment. As we have seen in the course of history, until the appearance of so-called prophets¹⁴ the judges along with the priests were in leadership through the periods of the conquest and of the settlement of the people of Israel in the land of Canaan. However, for the people of Israel the experience of the conquest of the land of Canaan and of the settlement there in the land was their first evangelism-oriented step with many lessons toward the great God-given task of world-evangelism,¹⁵ because through the experiences they had to cope with the crucial issues related to today's great missiological theme, namely the cross-cultural problems of evangelism. As God's chosen people they had to keep their identity and had to model the God-given way of life to the surrounding people of different culture in the land of Canaan. The so-called 'Amphictyony' (socio-religious tribal league of the Israelite people in Canaan) may be considered to be one of the methods they had to utilize under such

¹⁰ 'The purpose of the election is service, and when the service is withheld the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails.' H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1953, p. 52. Cf. also, *ibid.*, pp. 42, 53–54, 117–118; and Senior/Stuhlmüller, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Similar aspect may be seen in the prophetic consciousness among Old Testament prophets. Cf. Susumu Higuchi, 'Call-Narratives of the Prophets,' *Shingaku Kenkyu* (Bulletin of the School of Theology, Kansei-Gakuin Univ.), XXIII (1975), 1–28 (Japanese).

¹¹ Blauw, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹² 'Thus throughout, *bḥr* includes the idea of separating, but in the sense that the one separated by *bḥr*, 'choosing, selection,' stood that much more clearly in the service of the whole. In my opinion election of the people in the OT is to be treated in a similar way. The horizon of election of the people of Israel is the peoples of the world, in relationship to which as a whole the 'individual' Israel was chosen, *bḥr* as a technical term for the election of the people of Israel stands under the symbol of universalism.' Horst Seebass, 'bachar, II–III', *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. Johannes Bottenweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. by J. T. Willis, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977 revised ed., Vol. II, p. 83; cf. also p. 87.

¹³ cf. Stuhlmüller, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11. Stuhlmüller divides the application of this principle into four stages: 1) Election, the basis and the dangers of election, 2) Israel's various reactions to the nations, 3) The development of Israel's sense of election, 4) an outreach toward universal salvation. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁴ Although (*nb*) has been usually considered to be the most basic philological background for its meaning of 'prophet', that has recently been questioned in terms of the application of the term to all the prophets of Old Testament times. Cf. Bruce Vawter, 'Were the Prophets *nābî's*?', *Biblica*, LXVI (1985), 206–220. Yet, the decisive view on the matter seems to be remained in further study in future.

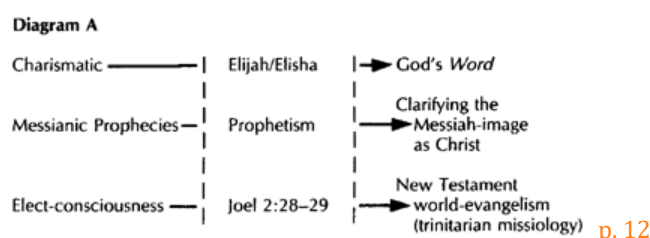
¹⁵ For some detailed discussions on the significance of Israelites' conquest and settlement in Canaan from the view of Biblical theology, cf. Yoshiaki Hattori, 'On the Biblical Significance of the Crossing the Jordan-river in the History of Israel,' *Tojyo* (Research Journal on Thoughts and Christianity), VII (1976), 69–85 (Japanese).

circumstances.¹⁶ The people of Israel might, in one sense, be said to be destined for world-evangelism under His sovereign providence.

The leaders among the people of Israel in the period of the Judges, at least most of them, experienced some sort of charismatic gift and they [p. 11](#) were playing the role of prophet,¹⁷ such as Gideon with extraordinary skills in military strategy, Samson with the mighty power, Jephthah with bandit-like leadership, etc. However, in the revealed history of the people of Israel the nature of the leaders, those in prophetic office in particular,¹⁸ had been gradually but progressively shifted from charismatic to word-oriented spokesman-type.¹⁹ The prophets with some sort of charismatic gifts could offer good leadership at the particular time of their involvement, but the prophets with a word-oriented spokesman type of nature might be able to offer more long-lasting leadership. In this transitional process, the role played by both Elijah and Elisha was very crucial; in fact one form of training-institution for prophetic office was beginning to be socially recognized under the name of ‘the sons of the prophets’ ([II Kings 2:3–18](#)). With such professional training, in the course of the revealed history of Israel seen in the Old Testament, the essential element of prophetic office became ‘to speak forth’ the word of the Lord as spokesman *for* and *of* God.

Considering that the revealed truth under the Old Testament economy was nothing but the preparation for the revealed truth under the New Testament economy, it is extremely significant for us to observe that God in His wonderful provision had been working toward the complete New Testament principle of world-evangelism by all His people. It was through the prophet Joel that God marvellously revealed the great principle of world-evangelism.

This may be indicated by diagram A:



God the Father should be preached to this world because of His greatness and His immeasurable love toward us. ‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life’ ([John 3:16](#)). He is the One who made the decisive provision for the lost world by providing the prophetic message for the coming of the Messiah, God the Son. As the very Son of God, Jesus

¹⁶ However, the validity of ‘Amphictyony’ in the history of Israel has been recently questioned due to the Hellenistic elements included in the term. Cf. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institution*, trans. by J. McHugh New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1961, pp. 92–93; William Sanford LaSor/David Allan Hubbard/Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982, pp. 219–220.

¹⁷ Cf. [I Samuel 9:9](#).

¹⁸ Of course, the origin of the prophetic office or prophetism is to be found in Moses. [Exodus 4:10–17](#), [Deuteronomy 18:18](#).

¹⁹ The priestly office, though not powerful in leadership, had played some significant roles; however, the aspect of evangelism might be found more clearly and positively in the prophetic office rather than in the priestly office. The Christian church today needs to have both—prophetic/evangelistic and priestly/pastoral—in good balance.

manifested that He Himself was sent by and from God the Father ([John 10:38](#), [14:10-11](#), [17:21-23](#)). Then, what was needed was the energetic power by which the work of the Messiah (the gospel of Jesus Christ) be preached world-wide by all God's people ([John 14:16-17](#), [15:26](#), [16:12-13](#), [Luke 24-49](#), [Acts 1:4-5](#), [8](#)). And that took nothing less than the descending of the Spirit of God in the form of the Holy Spirit, the third Person of Godhead.

Joel 2:27-29 and Acts 2:14-21

The birthday of the Christian church was on the day of Pentecost, because the affirmation by the believing Christian community that they were the followers of Jesus Christ with their confession of Christ's lordship was made on that day. And the community consciousness of Christians did become decisive on that day of Pentecost by the work of the Holy Spirit as recorded in the second chapter of the Book of Acts.

Then, a question to be asked is: 'If it was the birthday of the Christian church, was there not any Christian church before the event of Pentecost?' In terms of 'Christian church' as such the answer might be negative; but in another sense the answer could be affirmative, because there were the people of God, community of believers—the people of Israel in earlier time and the followers of the Messiah Jesus Christ later in history. Then, what happened at the time of Pentecost? This is information we should learn from the text ([Joel 2:27-29](#)) of the inspired Word of God, the Bible. On the day of Pentecost, unspeakable blessing from God was brought to the people of God, who had known only the joy of being the believers in God so to speak, and that unspeakable blessing on the day of Pentecost did make a great difference among the believers in God. Here we see a parallelism in the revealed truth between the advent of Jesus Christ and the advent of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the advent of Christ (including His death on the cross and His resurrection on the third day) did make the great difference in the experience of the people of God, so the advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost did make the other great difference in the life of Christian people in the early church. If we fail to observe this great p. 13 parallelism as a revealed truth in the Word of God, the Bible, we are Christians but only half or partial Christians (one might say 'nominal Christians') and we are missing a great thrill, the exciting blessing of being witnessing Christians.

The Book of Joel in its form and structure reveals, as a prophecy on world-evangelism, what was most needed after the advent of the Messiah. The over-all contents of the Book of Joel may be indicated by diagram B. As we read the section [2:14-27](#), we find God's answer to the request of the people of God and the promise of various kinds of material blessing. This is a Biblical and theistic view of the world. Every good in this world, every material blessing is under the sovereign control of our God the Almighty, and they are available to all those who walk with God. The most typical expressions used in the Old Testament are the blessings of 'land' and of 'descendant'.²⁰ The prophet Joel knew well that truth as God's divine revelation.

Diagram B

The Book of Joel

God's judgement

God's blessings

²⁰ [Genesis 12:1-7](#), [13:14-18](#), [15:1-7](#), [17:1-8](#), etc.

Exhortation repentance	for	Material blessings	Spiritual blessings (Prophecy Pentecost)	Prophecy of the Lord's Day
1:1-20		2:12-17	2:18-27	2:28-29
				2:30-32 3:1-21
2:1-11				
Hebrew		Hebrew		Hebrew
O.T. ch. 1		O.T. ch. 2	O.T. ch. 3 "after this ..."	O.T. ch. 4

Now, let us look into the text: 'And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions' (v. [28](#)). The meaning of the expression 'after this' in the context is that in addition to what have been mentioned in the preceding section (vv. [14-27](#)), namely the material blessings, 'now I will ...' In fact, it is interesting to observe, though this itself may not be conclusive, that the Hebrew Bible which was most probably used [p. 14](#) by Jesus ends chapter [2](#) at v. [27](#). Therefore, v. [27](#) is the conclusion of the section dealing with the material blessings of God: 'Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is no other; and My people will never be put to shame' (vs. [27](#)). In another word, God blesses those people who walk with Him as His people with much material blessing. If we do work hard as His people (Christians), not for our own sake but for God's glory, He does bless us with His abundant blessings. This is the biblical view of work.

In addition to this biblical idea, the text here in the following two verses (vv. [28-29](#)), as God's promise, talks about the spiritual blessing which is considered to be much superior to any of the material blessings mentioned in the preceding verses of chapter [2](#). This is an extremely important biblical and theological concept of God's creation. Whatever the philosophy may be or whoever the critic may be, the Bible clearly indicates that spiritual matters are more essential than material matters. Any material prosperity without faith in the Almighty, sovereign God is doomed to tragedy sooner or later as we have seen in history. That is the very reason why the text of this portion of the Scriptures 'And it will come about *after this* I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind ...' is crucially important.

Yes, the promise of God in the time of the prophet Joel was to be fulfilled in the days of New Testament grace, and it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. That is the reason why Jesus Christ Himself 'commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the father had promised', ([Acts 1:4](#)) and said, '... You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth' ([Acts 1:8](#)). It is by the Spirit that man is vitalized.²¹ In the time of the Old Testament, material blessings were considered to be

²¹ The process of the renewal of people in terms of the exiled people of Israel seen in the revelation to the prophet Ezekiel indicates this truth ([Ezekiel 37:5-10](#)). A somewhat similar concept may be seen in the

available (God willing) to *all of His people* without distinction. But not so in spiritual matters; spiritual blessings were considered to be given *only to a special class of people* such as priests, Levites, prophets, etc. However the promise was that when the time came spiritual blessings would become available to all of God's people. This was really unbelievable to the people of the time of Joel the prophet. Therefore, it was a tremendous promise of God, a promise for an entirely different new age—'the age of the Holy Spirit'.

p. 15

The text (v. 28) says first, 'I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind', then, 'and your sons and daughters will prophesy'. That means no distinction of sex. Then the text continues, 'Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.' That means no distinction of age. 'Prophesying', 'dreaming' and 'seeing visions'²² were considered to be connected with the offices or the works given to special classes of people, not to everybody, in Old Testament times. But when God sent the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost fulfilling the promise made through the Son Jesus Christ, every believer as Christian became eligible for spiritual blessings.

Let's look into the text again in v. 29 where it is said: 'And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.' This was rather a shocking but amazing promise of God. In the days of the prophet Joel, it was just unbelievable that even servants both male and female might be eligible for spiritual blessings. When the age of the Holy Spirit came as the fulfillment of God's promise through the prophet Joel, there began a new dispensation under which there is no distinction in receiving God's spiritual blessings between, not only two sexes man and woman, nor two ages old and young, but even among servants male and female.

PENTECOST AND WORLD-EVANGELISM

Now, since Christian church had already experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost as the fulfilment of that promise given to the prophet Joel, the blessing of the Holy Spirit is today available to all of us *without any exception*. That means each one of us is to receive the Holy Spirit in order that we, each of us, may become the Spirit-filled witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ to our neighbours and to all other peoples of the world.

This is the message of the text, and is also the message of Pentecost, the message of the amazing grace of receiving the Holy Spirit. Then, this is nothing else but the message of world-evangelism. Not only ministers but every member of the Christian church without any exception is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be a witness of Christ and of His gospel to this world. So the spirit of Pentecost is the spirit of world-evangelism. There is a beautiful and theological unity between the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.²³ Let us say repeatedly and loudly that God promised

creation process of man ([Genesis 2:7](#)). Cf. Walther Zimmerli, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans, by J. D. Martin, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983, Vol. II, pp. 260–262.

²² The revelation through dreams and visions is essentially the same as the revelation through words, especially in terms of prophecy in the Old Testament. For more detailed discussion, cf. Yoshiaki Hattori, 'Dreams and Revelation in the Old Testament,' *Evangelical Theology*, X (1979), 4–25 (Japanese but resumé in English).

²³ 'The Christian fellowship was born in the context of apostolic preaching. The power of that preaching stemmed from the truth of the biblical message, the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit.... The heart of Christian persuasion lies in 'words which the Holy Ghost teacheth' ([I Cor. 2–13](#), KJV). Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Vol. IV God Who Speaks and Shows), Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1979, p. 476.

through the prophet Joel that in the age of the Holy Spirit (in which we are now) there is no distinction whatsoever in receiving spiritual blessings, therefore the Holy Spirit is available to all of us. However, caution needs to be taken here because we may be falling into or making a limitation by ourselves! That limitation could be in me and in you unless we are careful, and it would be a tragedy. What then, is the limitation? Simply this—whether we are willing to seek after the Holy Spirit or not.

Conclusion

Hence, we all need to receive the Holy Spirit to go out and to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ and to evangelize the world. A tragedy of making self-limitations after the event of Pentecost is recorded as a great warning to us: Ananias and his wife Sapphira ([Acts 5:1–11](#)).

Truly, the theology of evangelism is the theology of the Bible as well as the theology of the Christian church. The concept of trinitarian missiology is the divine revelation seen all through the entire course of the revealed history of the Bible from the beginning to the end, and accordingly it should be the goal of both Christians and the church.

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The Fellowship of the Church in the Book of Acts

Robert E. Coleman

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In this fine exegetical study Coleman analyses the various aspects of Christian fellowship, such as unity, mutual supports, corporate meetings, their places and time, internal tensions and relationships, nurture of the believers, etc. His call to reemphasize the element of fellowship in all our carefully ordered modern worship services is urgent and relevant. The emphasis on family and personal relationships in the early church fellowship is something that present day congregations can learn with benefit.

Editor

BODY LIFE

Responding to the Gospel invitation brought one into association with other persons of like faith. This fellowship of kindred spirits constituted ‘the church of the Lord’ ([20:28](#)), those called out from the world to follow Christ, and as such was the primary means by which disciples were trained. Just as Jesus had lived closely with His followers, so now the gathered community of believers formed an ongoing communion with His Spirit.