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The church world of today is not the same as it was in the 1940s when the WCC and National Councils of Churches were formed. Nor is it the same as it was in the mid-60s when Vatican II took place and the renewal of the Holy Spirit began. We, as the disciples of Jesus, may not have changed much, and we need to hear afresh near the close of this century a word to be discerned in others through reliance upon God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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The Church's Mission and Ministry in India

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The following article is a revised version of a paper presented at a conference on The Mission and Ministry of the Church in India at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India last November. The conference met as a preliminary to the coming World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in Texas, USA, later this year, to be held under the auspice of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, and sought cooperation and dialogue among the various groups and persuasions. It discussed church's mission and ministry from an Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and 'ecumenical', as well as evangelical, point of view; this paper represented the evangelical position.

Editor

Change and pluralism mark the contemporary Indian scene, including the Indian Church. The global processes of secularization, modernization and liberation affect us all. The tensions these revolutions have generated are only strengthened by the stubborn fact of Indian pluralism, making harmony for survival the urgent need in the land. Religious pluralism, the nerve centre, has thus been the subject of scores of debates in the last decade. If the Church has no substantial solution to offer here, she must at least keep her house as clean as possible from such pollutions. This is the relevance of our theme: we dialogue about the Church's mission and ministry both and largely for the sake of her unity as well as for showing her usefulness in contemporary world. My modest aim here is to raise some relevant questions about the Indian Church's mission and evangelism and give some guidelines by way of answering them. p. 168

MISSION AND MINISTRY

Ours is an age striving not so much *to understand* what the world is as *how to change* it.² For the last half century or so, ‘-isms’ have been replaced by ‘-izations’—humanism by humanization, evangelism by evangelization, secularism by secularization, theology by theologization, freedom by liberation, reflection by action. In such an atmosphere, it is natural to look at the Church also ideologically rather than theologically—that is, in our inquiries concerning the Church, questions about her *function* dominate rather than her *nature*. This is valid to some extent, for, as Jesus said, the Church is the salt and light of the new world,³ giving it meaning, hope and revelation. As is now universally accepted, the Church’s mission does not take place in a vacuum, be it social or spiritual, but in the concrete world of men. This means that the church is a church for others. The CRESR Consultation also acknowledged that all Christians are called to both witness and service.⁴ The missiologist Herbert Kane rightly comments that ‘the church is the only institution in the world that exists for the sake of others. Its supreme mission is to meet the world’s greatest need’.⁵

One’s definition of the greatest need of man depends upon one’s belief. If one accepts universalism, then all are already saved in Christ and are ‘on their way to heaven’, so their greatest need turns out to be improvement of their lot here and now. This is what the Hong Kong Declaration denies: [p. 169](#)

But we repudiate the idea that the gospel begins and ends with the improvement of man’s physical conditions. Until men are brought to put their trust in Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour, God’s good news has not come home to them in any biblical and meaningful sense. We must bring men under the challenge of the gospel so that their lives may be transformed by the power of God and they may be built up in their fellowship of God’s church. In giving priority to evangelism we emphasize the transcendence of God.⁶

On the other hand, if one believes that man is immortal, created in God’s image and for God but is fallen out of his fellowship, then man’s fellowship with his creator becomes his greatest need, for time and eternity.

Following the latter option, John Stott defines the word ‘mission’ as

... not a word for everything the church does. ‘The church is mission’ sounds fine, but it’s an overstatement. For the church is a worshipping as well as a serving community, and

² ‘“Philosophers,” wrote Karl Marx, ‘have only interpreted the world differently; the point is, however, to change it.” However unlike they are in fundamental affirmations, the Christian gospel and communism are at this point in agreement. But the agreement goes little further. Distinctively, the Church proclaims the changed world as the consequence of changed men. Reflective man produces new philosophies; it is only regenerate man who holds the clue to a society that is really new’—Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Fleming H. Revell (Old Tappan: 1982), p. 1.

³ Stott’s interpretation of the Church as the salt and light of the world is handy here: he concludes that Jesus, by using these terms, expressed several aspects of the life of the Church—‘first, Christians are fundamentally different from non-Christians ... Secondly, they must permeate non-Christian society, rather than existing for themselves; thirdly, they can influence non-Christian society, and finally, they must retain their Christian identity’—John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, Marshalls (Basingstoke: 1984), pp. 64–67.

⁴ *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Tom Sine, MARC, California: 1983, p. 479. (Now republished by Regnum Books in a new edition, ed. V. Samuel and C. Sugden.)

⁵ *The Christian World Mission: Today and Tomorrow*, Herbert Kane, Baker Book House (Grand Rapids: 1981), p. 152. The statement originated with Archbishop William Temple.

⁶ ‘The Hong Kong 1973 Declaration, in *Voice of the Church in Asia*, ed. Bong Rin Ro, Asia Theological Association (Hong Kong: 1975), p. 167.

although worship and service belong together they are not to be confused. Nor ... does 'mission' cover everything God does in the world.... 'Mission' describes rather everything the church is sent into the world to do.⁷

Thus, while the mission of the church reveals the meaning of her existence, her ministries reveal her relevance, her usefulness.

To put it in another way, the church's mission is *to be* a worshipping fellowship (*leitourgia* and *koinonia*) and *to do* service and proclamation/witness (*diakonia* and *kerygma/marturia*). The 'Wheaton '83' Declaration on the Nature and Mission of the Church states:

The mission of the church is inseparable from that of Christ who bought the church with his own blood. Thus in repentance and faith we enter his kingdom and pledge him our allegiance; in baptism we confess his lordship; in the eucharist we proclaim his death until he comes; in becoming his disciples we enter into a life of submission and denial, of identification and crucifixion—where we participate in his suffering—and of obedience where we follow him where he leads; in worship and service we demonstrate his rule over our lives for the good of the world.⁸ p. 170

In an excellent study of New Testament ecclesiology, Edmund Clowney shows that the Church can be best grasped in its trinitarian aspect—as *the people of God*—an assembly of people, chosen by him to worship him and to be his new nation, a city set on the hill; as *the disciples of Christ*—the gathering church of Christ, as his body; and as *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*—worshipping, nurturing and witnessing in the Spirit.⁹ The same emphasis is noted also in the Grand Rapids meeting of CRESR in 1982:

God created and redeemed the world in order to reveal his infinite majesty and his eternal love. Therefore the primary sin is to refuse to honour him as God or to give him thanks ([Rom. 1:21](#)), while the supreme duty of his redeemed people is to *worship* him in humble praise and obedience ... Only if rooted in a vertical relationship to God in *worship* can the church's two ministries of *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakonia* (service) be held in proper balance and tension.¹⁰

Evangelicals have complained about the lack of this dimension of worship in many an understanding of mission. The question of *the role of the Church in the world* is therefore essentially linked with the more basic question of *what the Church is*.

Once this understanding of the church's mission is recognized as valid, her ministries also fall into focus.¹¹ Kane observes,

⁷ John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, Falcon (London: 1975), p. 30. Cf. also p. 82: 'Mission denotes what God sends his people into the world to do, and of primary importance within this mission of sacrificial service is 'evangelism', the sharing with others of God's good news about Jesus.'

⁸ *New Frontiers in Mission*, ed. Patrick Sookhdeo, Paternoster (Exeter) and Baker (Grand Rapids: 1987), p. 176.

⁹ 'The Biblical Theology of the Church', by Edmund P. Clowney, in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. Donald A. Carson, Paternoster (Exeter) and Baker (Grand Rapids: 1987), pp. 15–87.

¹⁰ Tom Sine, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 445.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn and James P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue*, SPCK (London: 1987), p. 121f.: 'But it is nonetheless significant that there are so few controversial issues on the matter of the ministry of all Christians. There can be an agreement because thought and practice has not yet moved beyond first principles. No one really knows yet what "the ministry of the whole people of God" amounts to.'

The church has several functions, which include worship, teaching, fellowship, service, and witness; but the prime function of the church will have all eternity to worship and serve and praise. Witness is the one activity that is restricted to her life here on the earth.¹²

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the Church's mission includes all these ministries. Since ministries show the Church's usefulness in the contemporary context, they need to be updated constantly according to the needs of the time. Also, when there is more than one ministry, the obvious important question is: which one has priority over which?

Here we need to take seriously W. R. Hogg's concept of challenging relevance, to maintain the cutting edge of the gospel message and at the same time to exercise a ministry of prophetic criticism of the situation. However, the gospel was not given particularly for Bangalorean, Indian, Asian or even global contexts—or for that matter, for the first, 15th. or 20th. century contexts. It was meant for the 'human' context, irrespective of the time-place matrix. By 'human context' I mean man *qua* man, not as an Indian or African or American. Though principles can be evolved from the Bible to be applied to our modern situations, the Bible does not give any ready-made solution to all of them. What we are saying here is that though the principle of relevance is essential in any application of the gospel of Jesus Christ to contemporary situations, it must be kept in balance with 'the whole counsel of God', maintaining also the universal relevance of the gospel for the basic 'human' situation. Though the Church is *in* the world, she has the mandate not to be *of* the world. The world expects the church to be different. In exercising her prophetic ministry to the world, the Church needs to evaluate the self-understanding of the situations in the light of the biblical revelation.

EVANGELISM

It is very heartening indeed to note that the coming together of 'Evangelicals' and 'Ecumenicals' to discuss evangelism has been increasing in the last couple of years, which is a good sign—particularly under the WCC leadership of the 'evangelist' Emilio Castro. Fortunately (or unfortunately!) in the 20th. century evangelism and evangelicalism have been increasingly interpreted as being identical. While the definition of evangelism remains in dispute, there is a general concern to distinguish it from the more inclusive 'mission' or 'witness' of the Church, and to give it its proper place among the various ministries of the Church for the fulfilment of her mandate.

Article 4 of the Lausanne Covenant defines evangelism thus:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is p. 172 indispensable to evangelism. And so is the kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship ... Jesus still calls all

'What is so astonishing is the complete absence from its pages of a distinction between "priest" and "laity", of the thought that some Christians may or must needs exercise a priesthood which is not the prerogative of others. The New Testament stands as an exceptional testimony to a different understanding of the way in which God's people may approach him, and one which marks it off both from the Old Testament and from what was subsequently to become the pattern of catholic christianity.'

¹² Kane, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church, and responsible service in the world.¹³

Evangelism, then, as John Stott admirably epitomizes, is sharing good news with others. The good news is Jesus. And the good news about Jesus which we announce is that he died for our sins and was resurrected, and that in consequence he reigns as Lord at God's right hand, and has authority both to command repentance and faith, and to bestow forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit on all those who repent and believe. This is what is meant by 'proclaiming the Kingdom of God'.¹⁴

Since the Church has several ministries, their order of priority is of great significance in carrying out her tasks. The WEF/LCWE Conference on the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR) gives a three-fold relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, portraying social action as the *consequence, bridge* and *partner* to evangelism, though evangelism has a twofold priority over the former:

The very fact of Christian social responsibility presupposed socially responsible Christians, and it can only be by evangelism and discipling that they have become such. Secondly, evangelism relates to people's eternal destiny, and in bringing them Good News of salvation, Christians are doing what nobody else can do. Seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls ... Nevertheless, if we must choose, then we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all humankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and that therefore a person's eternal, spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal and material well-being.¹⁵

This means that everything the Church does is not evangelism. Evangelism is an identifiable, unique activity, the presentation of Jesus p. 173 Christ and the response of faith. Liturgy, education, social ministry, and the like, may have evangelistic elements but they are not evangelism, however necessary they may be. We seem to have lost confidence in the power of the Gospel message to stand on its own. The Great Commission derives its meaning and power wholly and exclusively from the Pentecost event. It does so in terms of a deeply organic relationship. The proclamation of the gospel is therefore not one activity among many in which the Church of the New Testament engages; but it is her basic, her essential activity. It is for this reason that the preaching office is the central office in the Church.¹⁶ As such, evangelism takes precedence over other ministries of the Church—the healing, teaching, prophetic or reconciliatory ministries.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

1. It is significant that though the concept of a responsible society has been discussed at international level for the last fifty years, yet the Church has not been considered a model

¹³ C. Rene Padilla (ed.), *The New Face of Evangelicalism*, Hodder and Stoughton (London: 1976), p. 67.

¹⁴ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, pp. 54, 55.

¹⁵ Tom Sine, *op. cit.*, p. 452–456.

¹⁶ Cf. Sookhdeo: 'Evangelism, including the verbal proclamation of Jesus Christ and the planting and perfecting of churches, has a priority since it is concerned with the eternal condition of men and women. In addition, Christian social responsibility presupposes the existence of socially responsible Christians, who can only become such as a result of evangelism and discipling. Thus the church has one mission but many ministries'—*op. cit.*, p. 178.

for it, thus revealing her inner inadequacy and hence her weak voice in the secular world—also indicating that the Church belongs more to the ‘not yet’ than the ‘already’. In a recent Assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship in Singapore in 1986, the truth was brought home in no unmistakable terms that unless the Church is renewed it is possible neither for the Church to reach the world nor for the world to listen to the Church. It is essential therefore that the Church recovers its basics. In scores of discussions on mission and ministry of the Church in the last few decades, several distinctions of the Church have been lost and need to be recovered—such as the distinction between the Church and the world, between the saved and the lost, between witness and service, and between the sacred and the secular. This is why we said earlier that it is only partly valid to use the principle of relevance, for the Church’s vertical dimension needs to be kept intact in order for us to grasp her tasks—a theological understanding of the nature of the Church is thus a prior necessity to understanding her mission and ministry. **P. 174**

2. This means that our primary task is the renewal of the pastors of the local congregations, as the enablers of the Church’s leadership, as well as the renewal of the laity, those who carry out the Church’s task of mission in the world. Though mission is primarily an enterprise of the Church, this does not mean that the missionary task is solely the task of the local congregation.

3. A survey made of Indian Christians some years ago revealed that they embraced Christian faith not because of the *shanti* or peace it gives them, but rather primarily because of the offer of brotherhood in the Church. Once the Church sets her own house in order, at least to some extent (by way of taking the beam out of her eyes!), she has something to offer to the world, and can fruitfully minister to the world. A local congregation is equipped with the gifts necessary for the common good, and by being an earthly model of the Kingdom to come she manifests her saltiness and light. The Church ought to be the hope of the nation by offering such a much-needed model. Thus Church renewal strengthens any social reform.

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Covenant, Fulfilment and Judaism in Hebrews

John Fischer

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Coming from the pen of one who is involved in mission to Jews, the article makes a fascinating reading in its creative approach to the book of Hebrews, which is traditionally thought to express the setting aside of the Old Testament on account of Jesus’ fulfilment of it. The author demonstrates rather that the book of Hebrews is actually stressing the identification of Jesus as the true centre and intent of Judaism.

Editor