

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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obedience of faith*

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# Editorial

Bernard Ramm has argued that Evangelicals must devise a new paradigm for doing theology in the Post-Enlightenment world. The issue is one of method. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest have attempted this in their 3 volume *Integrative Theology*. Their method is to identify the problem, test alternative solutions that have been suggested in the history of Christian thought and, using a responsible hermeneutic, search the Scriptures in their progress of revelation. From this foundation, a coherent and systematic Theology is developed in order to defend the truth against every alien theology, philosophy, religion and ideology and to demonstrate its relevance for the church's life, minister and mission in the world. This is a method of contextualizing theology at its best.

The WEF Theological Commission consultation in London last April focused on the need for a vital and coherent evangelical theology for the 21st century. The plenary papers were published in the October 1996 issue of ERT. This issue includes the summary findings of the 12 working groups, articles (including some by participants) and relevant book reviews. All this is a part of the on-going process of working towards an evangelical, integrative theology which is, in the words of Lewis and Demarest, 'biblically grounded, historically related, culturally sensitive, person-centred and profoundly related to life'. p.

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## Faith and Hope for the Future

### *Towards A Vital And Coherent Evangelical Theology For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Summary Reports of the Working Groups*

#### I

#### THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE WORD OF GOD IN THE PLURALITY OF CULTURES AND CHURCH

**MEMBERS: WARD GASQUE, CARL ARMERDING, W. CHEDZAMBUYO,  
JOSE NAFATE, PAUL NEGRUT, E. ECKHARD SCHRABEL, BEN MANICKAM**

#### Report

1. As evangelicals in WEF we believe that the Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

We affirm that

1. the authority of Scripture for faith and conduct is inseparably linked with the interpretation of Scripture
2. the interpretation of Scripture as the Word of God needs to pay attention to both the divine and the human aspects of the Bible

3. the Word of God in and through Scripture is directed, in space and time, universally to all of mankind and must therefore be interpreted in such a way that the Word of God becomes 'very near' so that we may obey it ([Deut. 30:11, 14](#))
4. the foremost task in the interpretation of the Bible is to find the true meaning of the text
5. the historical dimension of God's revelation recorded in the biblical texts makes it necessary to continually actualize the biblical message to contemporary mentalities in their diverse cultural and social contexts
6. the cultural (Israelite, Jewish and Greek) dimension of Scripture presents us with the [p. 6](#) task of dynamic contextualization (or inculturation) of the message of the Bible
7. the translation of the Word of God in Scripture must not be adapted to particular interests but has to remain faithful to the Holy Scripture as originally given by God.

2. We recognize the need to evaluate and study the following issues:

#### *A. Methods of interpretation*

1. Older and newer methods of historical (critical) interpretation with regard to their secular heritage.
2. The relevance of older (Jewish and patristic) methods of interpretation with regard to their practical theological orientation (*sensus literalis* and *sensus spiritualis*).
3. The influence of the diverse Christian traditions on interpretation.
4. The areas where evangelicals have to repent of faulty, one-sided and arrogant approaches to Scripture.

#### *B. Challenges of interpretation*

1. Ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us in the task of understanding and applying Scripture.
2. Similarities in interpretation, in different cultural context, i.e. the unity of evangelical biblical interpretation amidst the diversity of cultures.
3. The relationship of myth and historicity regarding God's revelation in Jesus Christ and in Scripture.
4. The hermeneutical process by which we may distinguish between what is culturally relevant and what is eternally valid.

#### *C. Interpretation and society*

1. The import of cultural and social realities on the process of interpretation, especially vis-a-vis ethnic diversity, political situations, poverty and prosperity, gender identity etc.
2. The question whether diverse social situations may justify a diversity of approaches to interpretation, e.g. systematic exegetical analysis, meditation, inspirational approaches.
3. The implications of interpretation for ethics, particularly in terms of issues which are discussed today, such as human rights, homosexuality, global and social justice.

#### *D. Realities of interpretation*

1. Methods and practical steps which will ensure that ordinary church members understand God's word, whether in the context of oral societies, of urban neo-pagan audiences and any other context.

2. Ways and means which will help poorer churches to evaluate the theology of the richer churches of the West in an independent spirit.
  3. The type of theological education needed for proper theological interpretation and for relevant application, including an evaluation of the place of the Bible in ever-expanding curriculae.
  4. Arguments and practical ways in [p. 7](#) which we can help equip to respond to the misuse and misinterpretation of Scripture, e.g. in the traditions of Islam.
  5. The task of the exegete and theologian in the midst of diverse and numerous responsibilities in theological institutions, local and national churches, in society and in the family.
  6. Evangelical publishing, in view of the task of helping God's people to understand God's truth afresh in each generation.
3. We recommend that WEF undertake an intensive study to study carefully the methods and results of biblical interpretation
1. in the religious contexts of non-Christian religions
  2. in the secular contexts of neopagan societies
  3. in the political contexts of the East, the West and the South
  4. in the ethical contexts of local traditions and global changes
  5. The unity of evangelical biblical interpretation in the context of the plurality of cultures and churches.

## II

### ‘CONFESSING GOD’S TRINITARIAN SAVING REVELATION THROUGH SCRIPTURE AND CREATION’

**MEMBERS: GORDON LEWIS, DORIS LEWIS, PAUL MURDOCH, SERGEI  
SANNIKOV**

#### Report

##### *1. Hope for the Future of Society—Divine Revelation to All people of all Cultures*

People with sin-blinded minds, misdirected loves and perverse wills do not of themselves wholeheartedly know, worship and serve their Creator. So God discloses his transcendent existence and power in nature ([Ps. 19:1–6](#); [Rom. 1:20](#)) and his moral requirements (the ten commandments) in all human ‘hearts’ ([Rom. 2:14](#)). This *general revelation* through creation is made ‘plain to them’ ([1:19](#)) by a *general illumination*. The eternal Logos, the ‘light of men’ illuminates all that he created ([Jn. 1:4–5](#)) and the Holy Spirit also convicts people of their moral accountability to the Creator ([Gen. 6:3](#)). Thus the elements of a theistic world view: (1) that the powerful, personal and righteous Creator’s being is distinct from creation (transcendent), (2) but (immanently) active in it, ‘have been clearly seen’ ([Rom. 1:20](#)).

The message made plain to all sinners is nevertheless suppressed by both individuals and their cultures (v. [19](#)). So we should not expect the empirical descriptions of any culture to highlight love of their transcendent Creator above all, or for their neighbours as themselves. The result of the universality of the divine revelation and illumination is that all cultures and individuals who do not value their personal creator and his moral demands above creation are ‘without excuse’ (v. [20](#)). Even those [p. 8](#) brought up in

monistic or pantheistic world views ought not to believe that God is anything like the art and imagination of idolaters or mythmakers ([Ac. 17:29](#)).

Since the Creation and the Fall, all people need to engage in three forms of dualism. Firstly, from the time of creation, temporal creatures must distinguish their own being from that of their eternal Creator (*ontological dualism*). This is not an eternal dualism (as in Zoroastrianism, but one which follows temporal creation. (Just as there are different varieties of monism, so there are different varieties of dualism). Since the Fall, all are accountable also for a radical distinction between truth and falsehood (an *epistemological dualism*) and right and wrong, (an *ethical dualism*).

Young people, in spite of being brought up in the pantheistic philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism, know better than to imagine that they are Brahman or the Void. Those taught by Nazi indoctrination to persecute and exterminate millions of Jewish people knew that murder is morally evil. Those guilty of 'ethnic cleansing' are inexcusable in any culture. Murders of God's image-bearers are objectively guilty before the Creator and, when caught publicly, feel subjective shame. General revelation and illumination convince all of us that we are far from holy and our only hope is to cast ourselves on the mercy of the divine Court. God's moral law, whether written on tablets of stone or our hearts, drives sinners to the one Saviour who gave his life for the lost. The problem is not with the law which is 'holy, just and good' ([Rom. 7:12](#)), but with the weakness of human flesh ([8:3](#)).

The most extensive passage on the subject of universal revelation ([Rom. 1:18–3:20](#)) concludes that all Gentiles, as well as all Jews, have not lived up to the moral principles they knew. Because of idolatrous worship and service, God calls the unjust what they are—guilty ([3:10–20](#)). They have chosen, not the way of the Giver of life, but the way of its destroyer, the way of death. Even though general revelation in itself does not provide the hope of an atonement for sin, it *provides hope in several ways important to all human relationships*.

(1) We can have hope for cultures, which like their Creator and Sustainer, will be *pro-life* in the most general sense. The giving of rain, food and joy are 'testimonies' to God's 'kindness' ([Ac. 14:17](#)). Although everything is made by God, only humans are made *like* God. The command not to murder God's image-bearers, however culturally qualified, remains a basic defence of everyone's right to life. The value placed on one human life created in God's likeness is not simply the product of legislation or social custom, but forms an independent criterion for appraising the laws and customs of any nation and the United Nations. Inherent rights are the foundation, not the consequence of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

(2) The universal prohibitions of bearing false witness, stealing or [p. 9](#) covetousness provide the grounds for hoping for greater *justice for all*. Although the concept of justice is difficult to define, when we are treated unfairly we know what injustice is. All of us know that might does not make right. However much that knowledge is suppressed, all know that the ultimate Administrator of justice requires that they treat others as they would be treated themselves. Hope for the future finally rests on the defeat of total relativism and utilizing God's universal disclosure of moral principles to correct injustices in homes, workplaces and governments.

(3) There is hope for coming generations who realize that *love* for others fulfils the moral law. We know that deserved justice is not enough; we all need unmerited mercy and grace. Caring more than fulfils the demands of justice. It seeks the well-being of others. Hopes for peace in the future rest ultimately on the fact that all non-Christians as well as Christians know that God's image-bearers ought to care for each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 177, 205, 269.

(4) In order that humans could be good stewards of creation, God made the eye to see and the ear to hear ([Prov. 20:12](#)). So hope for truth depends on the intellectual honesty to accept physical hypotheses that *fit verifiable data*. Total relativists in East and West imagine that our different standpoints prevent us from knowing any objective truth about reality. But because witnesses' reports of a traffic accident differ, it does not follow that there was no collision. We will not live long in any culture if we ignore data related to creation's laws, nuclear power, aids and cancer. When intellectual honesty is compromised, research will not be trusted, not even reports about the injustice of tyrants. If scientists have been arrogant, do not blame the scientific method, challenge the arrogance of naturalistic presuppositions. Given the necessity of testing hypotheses in a pluralistic world, one does not therefore assent to a first, isolated impression of data (as in naive realism), but to tested, converging lines of evidence (as in critical realism). All portrayals of events are not of equal worth; some are better informed than others.

(5) Since God's thought and communication is faithful and true (not self-contradictory—[Rev. 19:2, 9, 11](#)), all his image bearers should exhibit faithfulness in thought and consistency in the expression of that thought. It is impossible for our Creator to lie ([Heb. 6:18](#)). According to the law of *non-contradiction*, one ought not to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same respect. Although Aristotle classically formulated this law, it was not an invention of western philosophy. Its source is the Lord of all. It is assumed by the prophets, and Jesus Christ and his apostles. Logic, like science, is an instrument that can be used for good as well as evil. If logic has been used to deceive or oppress, do not throw out logic but deliver God's summons to deceivers to repent ([Ac. 17:30](#)). If they wish to be understood, teachers of world religions must not affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same respect. If postmodern promises can mean that which contradicts them, trusting [p.10](#) relationships, essential to the stability of all society's institutions, become impossible. Hope for the 21st century world depends on coherent thought by which we can live without hypocrisy.

These five commonalities: rights, justice, love, honest appraisal of facts and logical consistency integrate our values. They are here supported, not by induction or deduction, but by an analysis of universal revelation. These transcultural norms must be accounted for by any philosophy or religion. They are most coherently and viably explained by belief in God the Father who devised principles conducive to life, God the Logos who inscribes them on every human heart and God the Holy Spirit who convicts their violators of sin and error. They are not the product of the middle class, the West or the Enlightenment, but derive from the Lord of all. They serve as criteria of truth here and now and in the final judgement of all weak or powerful individuals, communities, religions and cultures. If we deny the universality and necessity of these foundational principles in favour of a particular confessionalism, we lose points of contact with our non-Christian neighbours and hope for good relations with our neighbours.

When we try to live in a manner which is consistent with general revelation and its five commonalities, barriers are broken down. Christians can cooperate with all other men and women for purposes of moral decency, physical necessities, legal justice and intellectual honesty. We remain part of the one human race, whose members derive from one person ([Ac. 17:26](#)). We may work together with atheists, animists, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, humanists or New Agers for improvements in the life support system (cleaner air and water), freedom from threats to life and moral integrity (abuse of women, men and children), or property (theft and bribery), etc.

## *2. Hope for the Future of the Church—God's Special, Redemptive Revelation*



God has a great plan by which he can remain true to himself and save people whose lives are marred by moral failure. Although creation does not disclose the Father's inner redemptive purpose, he makes it known in another, very special way. The supreme redemptive revelation comes through the life and teaching of the eternal Logos in human flesh ([Heb. 1:1](#)). Christ's teaching endures, though heaven and earth pass away ([Lk. 21:33](#)) and his life exhibited the principles he taught. He is the way, both teaching the truth and living by it. Prior to the incarnation of the eternal Logos the Old Testament prophets predicted the Messiah's coming. After he ascended into heaven, the New Testament apostles reported his work and applied it to the church and world. The supernaturally inspired and inerrant original writings of prophets and apostles, inerrant explain that, taking the place of sinners, the incarnate Christ satisfied justice and provided for us the gift of his perfect righteousness ([Rom. 3:21–26](#)).

Jesus is not the only way to God. All religions and philosophies lead to p. 11 God—as Judge! Before the divine tribunal every knee shall bow ([Ac. 17:31](#)). The most crucial question is not how people can get to God. It is rather: 'How can unjust sinners ever be accepted by God when they stand in his immediate presence?' Or, 'How can God remain just and justify the ungodly?' Special revelation explains that the death of the Messiah in place of sinners satisfies the demands of divine justice in response to our sin. The wage of our sin is death. The Saviour's death not only pardons believers from all sin, but imputes to them the gift of perfect righteousness. Those united to Christ by faith do not need to strive for more good *karma* to be acceptable to God. They have been accepted and given the perfectly righteous status of the risen Christ himself. By the work of the Holy Spirit believers are regenerated and progressively delivered from the power of temptation and sin (sanctified). Hope for the church rests on the special revelation of the gracious plan of redemption the Father designed, the Son provided, and the Holy Spirit administers.

Regarding interpretation of its revelation in Scripture, the Bible's assertions of the good news are context-related without being context-determined. In contrast, H. Richard Niebuhr said, 'The Bible can be read in many different contexts and will mean different things accordingly'.<sup>2</sup> Although the specific *applications* of a passage may be numerous, there is only one intended meaning (except in the case of a double entendre, symbol or figure of speech). Differences among interpreters on the meaning of the biblical writers can be resolved by appeal to criteria rooted in the five commonalities shared by people of different cultures. Twentieth century biblical scholars should accept the interpretive hypothesis (1) that is without contradiction, (2) that most coherently fits the relevant grammatical, contextual and historical evidence, and (3) that one can live by authentically, respecting rights justly and lovingly without hypocrisy. On these bases serious students of theology can break out of liberal and conservative hermeneutical circles to make some progress toward truth.<sup>3</sup>

What boundaries of co-operation with others does the doctrine of special revelation set? For purposes of evangelism and missions, Christians will work only with those who affirm God's redemptive disclosure in the sinless Christ and inerrancy of Scripture. The doctrines of the gospel of the incarnate, crucified and risen Messiah, determine the boundaries of cooperation for the redemption and reconciliation of sinners. Leaders in

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<sup>2</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (NY: Macmillan, 1942), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> These criteria test interpretive hypotheses in the three volumes of *Integrative Theology* by Lewis and Demarest (Zondervan) and in my *Decide for Yourself: A Theological Workbook* (InterVarsity). The criteria and verificational method of testing hypotheses are developed philosophically by comparing six methods of reasoning in my *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims* (University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland).

any religion who seek to offer eternal life to the unjust and [p. 12](#) immoral on other grounds deceive their followers and waste their time, money and effort.

### *3. The Ultimate Hope for the Future—the Trinity*

In the 21st century the doctrine of the Trinity will continue to be the most coherent and viable account of the biblical data about God. The elements of the doctrine include: 'The Oneness of God's Being', 'Three Personal Subsistences (Consciousnesses) in the Divine Being', the 'Interpersonal Fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit', an 'Administrative Order among the Three Persons' and their 'Distinctive but Harmonious Ministries in History'.<sup>4</sup>

*The oneness of the divine being* involves a multiplicity in unity. The text most often cited by Jews, Muslims and others to deny a possibility of the Trinity teaches a unity that does not exclude diversity. The word for 'one' Lord ([Deut. 6:4](#)) is used for two persons becoming 'one' flesh and 'one' nation. In the New Testament 'one' church or the 'one' body of Christ has many personal members. Biblical uses of 'one' (in both Hebrew and Greek) preclude polytheism, but regularly convey a multiplicity in unity. And in everything but a mathematical abstraction extra-biblical uses incorporate a multiplicity in unity. Since the simplest things involve several dimensions, parts, chemicals, organs or members, why should we imagine that the oneness of God bans diversity?

*The threeness of the divine being* will continue to be most like three persons. Father, Son and Spirit each thinks, feels, wills, relates and communicates. They intercede with one another and enjoy unbroken communion. So the Father is personal, the Son is personal and the Holy Spirit is personal. Each has the same divine attributes and engages in activities that only God can do. The hypothesis that the three are separate entities (a committee of Gods) does not fit the evidence of oneness. The hypothesis that imagines an undifferentiated monotheistic oneness does not fit the evidence of their diversity. The trinitarian doctrine is complex but not contradictory; it does not affirm oneness and threeness in the same respect. With respect to being, God is one; with respect to personal subsistences, God is three. The affirmation of one divine being denies three or more divine beings. The affirmation of three persons denies that there is but one personal consciousness.

The most coherent account of *the unity and diversity of creation* will continue to be found in the Trinity. Sooner or later every philosophy and religion must account for the world's observed diversity and unity. Those who affirm One undifferentiated ultimate Being like Brahman tend to explain away as maya the reality or endurance of the many (Hinduism, Buddhism). Those whose ultimate starting point is with many spirits, gods or material elements like fire air, earth and water or atoms, do not coherently account for the world's unchanging unity (animists, polytheists, materialists, [p. 13](#) idealists). Those whose ultimate reality is trinitarian have a coherent account of the fact that the entire universe (micro and macro) exhibits both multiplicity and unity. Although the divine Trinity cannot be fully comprehended, (what can be?), special revelation of the super-personal God is not contradictory.

*The future worth of one human person* is ultimately derived from trinitarianism. Alternative philosophies or religions like secular humanism, Hinduism and Buddhism with impersonal ultimates tend to be dehumanizing. Buddhist, New Age and other mystics for whom personhood is not an ultimate value, render meaningless the word 'God'. The inestimable worth of a single person is finally rooted in the image of the God who is eternally personal! We are not mere vibrations lost in the totality of Energy. We are

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<sup>4</sup> Each point is explained and developed in Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology* Vol. 1: pp. 270–280.



personal spirits, though finite, image bearers of the infinite God who is spirit. Human spirits will never lose their identity at death. God created and recreated us, not to dissolve us in an impersonal ocean of Nothingness, but to renew us and give us an eternal life of personal communion.

Faith in the Trinity provides the ultimate base for hope for *personal fellowship in the 21st century*. The Trinity is ‘the archetype of all community, all fellowship, all love’.<sup>5</sup> The unity of the Godhead is not only essential but also relational. Believers will never be absorbed in the Trinity, but will be brought into an eternal relational unity similar to theirs. Jesus prayed, ‘that they may be one as we are one’ ([Jn. 17:21–22](#), not essentially in this context, but one relationally). Distinct persons will enjoy an eternally unbroken communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The ultimate foundation for all community is found, not in social or political structures, but in the ultimate nature of the triune God. The final reason for families staying together is not legal agreements enforced by the state, but demonstrations of trinitarian love and grace. Unjustified schisms in the church are scripturally sinful, not only because of breaking relationships with members, but also with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Hope for authentic Christian *worship* in the future calls for the practice of the presence of the Trinity. It must avoid a practical unitarianism. It should not encourage movements committed to the Father only, Jesus only and Holy Spirit only. Such reductionist tendencies have characterized some temporary trends in history, but are not coherent with all the relevant biblical data about God. Hence they are not classically Christian. Rather, worship should relate to all three in communion and prayer as distinguishable and yet one. Meditate on the unity of the distinctive roles of the divine Planner, the divine Provider and the divine Enabler.

Hope for the future requires a trinitarian *theology of missions*. The sending of persons as ambassadors to others, is at the heart of trinitarianism. In outgoing love, the Father sent the Son. After his death, resurrection and ascension, the Son, [p. 14](#) in harmony with the Father’s will, sent the Spirit. Jesus said, ‘As the Father has sent me, so send I you.’ The challenge of Gerald Anderson remains significant:

A major cause for confusion in missions today comes from the inadequacy of the various attempts to formulate the theology of missions in recent years ... from the culture-centered, man-centered, revelation-centered, eschatology-centered, kingdom centered, Bible centered, church-centered, and Christ-centered points of view.

After recognizing the importance of each of these concerns, none is regarded as an adequate focus. Anderson adds,

It remains now for a major attempt to be made at formulating the theology of mission from the view of a *radical trinitarian theocentrism*. When it comes, this approach may plant the seed—but only God gives the growth—for a new flowering of missionary endeavor in our time.<sup>6</sup>

To be fruitful, missions in the future must *keep in step with the Holy Spirit*. The Spirit convicts of sin and calls sinners out of the world to become God’s people. He convinces them of the truth of the gosper’s assertions. He enables them to turn away from their idols and put their trust in the living Christ alone. The Holy Spirit regenerates, giving believers life from above. He baptizes believers into the body of Christ, indwells them personally

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<sup>5</sup> C. W. Lowry, *The Trinity and Christian Devotion* (NY: Harper, 1946), 157.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, ‘The Theology of Mission Among Protestants in the Twentieth Century’ in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), 15.

and collectively, bestows gifts, teaches, illumines, guides, fills, working in them to will and to do what pleases God. Theologians can plant the seeds of truth, cultivate and water them, but only the Spirit of truth can give sinners spiritual life and the grace to work together in the church. Only fruit born of the Holy Spirit perseveres. The Word must continue to test the spirits; the Spirit must continue to attest the Word.

What boundaries of cooperation are set by trinitarianism? For purposes of permanent church membership, evangelicals can join only with trinitarians. For unity of spirit in worship and the exercise of our gifts, we must fellowship with those who place their highest value upon the one God who eternally exists in three equally divine persons.

In conclusion, what are the boundaries of cooperation indicated in the three major doctrines of this chapter? Summing up the concluding paragraph of each section:

- (1) For purposes of the survival of the poor, personal morality and social justice, evangelical Christians will work together with all persons, regardless of religious or philosophical affiliation.
- (2) For purposes of evangelism and missions, evangelicals will work only with those who believe and teach the one gospel of Jesus Christ.
- (3) For purposes of permanent church membership, unite only with those who accept special revelation in the sinless Christ and inerrant Scripture, and orthodox trinitarianism. For building lasting church relationships [p. 15](#) it is also important to share similar convictions on matters like church government, the sacred ordinances and the day of worship.

With clarity of purpose and faith in each of the three doctrinal foundations, we have good reason to have hope for the future.

Ronald Dworkin

### III

## PROCLAIMING JESUS CHRIST AS THE ONE UNIVERSAL SAVIOUR AND LORD IN A WORLD OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR PLURALISM

**MEMBERS: TERRANCE TIESSEN (CHAIR), GUILLERMO COOK, RICHARD HOWELL, IFRAHAIM MATHEW, ALAN PALLISTER, SAMUEL SIDJABAT**

### Pluralism: Both Friend and Foe

At the end of the 20th century pluralism is a fact of life which has both positive and negative implications for the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the unique Saviour and Lord of all. Evangelicals support and benefit from situations where there is respect for a plurality of perspectives. We are committed to the rights of others to believe and worship freely and we ask for that right for ourselves. This sort of tolerance and respect is a healthy form of pluralism. In some situations, however, the tolerance of differences is based on a relativistic approach to truth and knowledge, which either denies the existence of absolute and exclusive truth or insists that knowledge of such truth is impossible.

As we move toward the 21st century, evangelicals increasingly find themselves in one of two situations that have adverse effects on the proclamation of Jesus. There are still many places where religious freedom is granted in principle but not in practice, either because of the dominance of an oppressive religious majority, or because of an anti-religious secular philosophy. On the other hand, in parts of the world which are most tolerant of religious differences, there is a growing resistance to groups which make

exclusive claims to truth, as evangelicals do. The proclamation of Jesus as *unique* Saviour and Lord is perceived as an unacceptable intolerance of the convictions of others.

### **The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord**

Although evangelicals defend the right of others to practise their own religious convictions, we are committed to truths which necessarily exclude the validity of other beliefs and practices. God has made himself known to us through his action in history, the meaning of which he has revealed in the Bible. The Bible is thus our sole authority for faith and practice and is the arbiter of all [p. 16](#) claims to truth and morality. It is on the basis of this biblical revelation that we assert that there is only one true and living God, who exists eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In his uniqueness, God, who revealed himself supremely in Jesus Christ, is Lord of all other beings, who depend upon him for their very existence.

Humankind was created by God and for fellowship with him, but now lives in fallenness and alienation from God because of sin. To reconcile sinners to himself, the Word of God became a man in Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a perfect human life and died an innocent death. Through his resurrection, he overcame the power of death and sin and opened the way for the reconciliation of sinners to God, so that God might be just and yet justify sinners. All those who truly believe in Jesus as Saviour and who bow to his Lordship are accepted by God as his children. Those who hear and understand the proclamation of Jesus, but who refuse to believe and submit to him, remain under condemnation by their own choice, though God continues to be patient and gracious toward them until the end of their lives when their final response is irrevocable.

There is not a consensus among evangelicals regarding the possibility of salvation by grace, through faith, of those who are incapable of explicit faith in Christ, whether because of a physical incapacity or because of a lack of knowledge. This is an aspect of evangelical theology which is currently the subject of intense discussion. From all perspectives in the discussion, however, there is a strong commitment to the importance of the universal proclamation of Jesus Christ as the normal means by which God brings people to salvation. This is one of the essential ministries which God has given to the church.

### **The Proclamation of Jesus Christ**

The proclamation of Jesus Christ is done both verbally and in deeds which require interpretation for their meaning to be evident. In its verbal proclamation, the church calls all people to repent of their sin (against God, against other human beings, and against God's creation), to cast themselves upon God's mercy, to trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and to submit themselves to him as their Lord. Christians also proclaim Jesus Christ by the symbols of Christian worship, by their lives of Christian faithfulness, and by their deeds of compassion and acts in pursuit of justice for others. As the grace of God is at work in the community of his people, the church becomes a sign of the kingdom and manifests the nature of life in that kingdom, in imperfect but attractive ways.

Having experienced the saving power of God, Christians are called to proclaim his Lordship in private and public worship. Every aspect of their lives, personal and social, must be submitted to Christ. Within the context of the plurality of religions, the identity of Jesus as Lord must be clearly proclaimed. (For example, within Islamic contexts, it must be stressed that Jesus is God and not merely a prophet. Within Hindu contexts, his uniqueness as God is [p. 17](#) the point needing emphasis.) In every situation, the forms of idolatry, religious and secular must be exposed. In this way, the implications of the Lordship of Jesus will be made clear in the face of other entities that compete for the allegiance of human lives.

Given the plurality of religious and cultural contexts in the world, proclaiming Jesus, in a manner that genuinely brings people into a meeting with him, is a complex and difficult task. The situation of hearers of this proclamation must be carefully assessed and those who proclaim Jesus must discover how to communicate effectively the truth of God within the context of the hearers. In this difficult task, we find hope in the promise of Christ to be present with those who carry his name to the ends of the earth, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit who illumines both those who proclaim and those who hear.

In seeking to contextualize the proclamation of Jesus, we must be careful that the Christ we proclaim is the one whom the apostle proclaimed in their preaching and in their writings, as uniquely Saviour and Lord. People must be called to be disciples of Jesus Christ with lives of personal holiness and social righteousness. In every situation, there are risks that the identity of Jesus and the claims of his Lordship will be subtly modified to make the message more acceptable and the life of discipleship more easy. Here evangelicals outside the context may play a role that is helpfully critical, but this requires much sensitivity when their understanding of the context is minimal. The task requires constant attention to both the voice of God in Scripture and the dynamics of the situation in which God is calling people to himself.

### **Evangelical Proclamation and Relationship to Other Denominations and Religions**

The proclamation of Jesus is a duty accepted by all Christians churches. What this means is not always understood in the same way. Christians should seek to cooperate wherever possible with others who share their commitment to Jesus as unique Saviour and Lord of all. In such cooperative mission efforts, evangelicals must ensure that the gospel which is proclaimed is uncompromisingly the biblical good news.

It is essential that we understand the position of those among whom we proclaim Jesus Christ. Dialogue with representatives of other Christian groups or with other religions may be a helpful process to further mutual understanding. Such dialogue is always conducted, however, within the context of the church's evangelistic mission. Listening must precede but may both substitute for proclamation.

Sadly, serious, and often violent, religious conflict is a feature of our times. Evangelicals, while holding fast to the uniqueness of Jesus as Saviour and the universality of his claim as Lord, must do so in evident humility. It is Jesus Christ who is supreme and we are simply his followers. We, of all people, should be most conscious of God's grace towards us and must shun all expressions [p. 18](#) of pride or superiority. In relationship to other Christian groups, this should lead to a non-sectarian attitude. When persecuted for their faith, Christians should follow their Lord in the way of the cross, in a spirit of forgiveness and love. This too is a way of proclaiming Jesus, the one who suffered and called us to suffer with him in order that we might also share the joy of his final victory.

## **IV**

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT CHALLENGES EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY**

**MEMBERS: THOMAS ODEN, RAL BUAI, DAVID SAMUEL, THOMAS  
MACKEY, DAVID SUAZO**

We who proclaim Jesus Christ as the one universal Saviour and Lord in a world of religious and secular pluralism, and who interpret Scripture as the Word of God amid the plurality of culture and church traditions, attest our experience of the convicting and transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit in a sinful and oppressed world.

The forgotten person of the Trinity has been powerfully reintroduced in our time partly due to two distinctive movements.

- 1) The pervasive presence and effects of *charismatic* and Pentecostal movements on all continents and in all Christian communions, and
- 2) in the search for *ecumenical* embodiment of the oneness of Christ in the church, which has sometimes softened into syncretistic universalism. These two factors have brought the Holy Spirit once again into the centre of theological discussion. The modern ecumenical movement must come again under the tutelage, guidance and judgement of the ancient ecumenical movement. The modern charismatic movement must come to recognition of the history of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is leading the faithful today into all truth by:-

1. creating and preserving the world even when fallen (through creative grace)
2. drawing the fallen towards repentance (through common and preventive grace)
3. convicting of sin (by the grace of repentance)
4. enabling faithful response (through justifying grace and grace of baptism)
5. encouraging faith to become active in love (by cooperating grace)
6. engendering spiritual formation towards maturity in faith active in love (by sanctifying grace)
7. uniting the body of Christ (through eucharistic grace)
8. empowering the church to fulfil her mission (through marturial grace)
9. working to enable our hearing of scripture (through the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit)
10. fulfilling the promise of the [p. 19](#) Father in the consummation of the work of redemption (by the completing work of the Spirit)

We respectfully request that an ongoing study of the work of the Holy Spirit be undertaken by WEE. We ask that this study commission proceed first by making inquiry into those key texts that have emerged repeatedly in our own conversation—among them: [Rom. 8](#) (incl. the work of the Spirit in renewing creation), [Acts 2](#) and [10](#), [Genesis 1](#), [John 14](#), [Gal. 5](#), [Eph. 4](#), [1 Cor. 12](#), [1 Cor. 2](#).

The work of the Spirit embraces not only issues of redemption (repentance, justifying grace, faith active in love, obedience, *klesis* and *ekklesia*) but also of consummation and creation.

The Holy Spirit is challenging evangelical theology to correct widespread excesses that have occurred in the name of the Holy Spirit. These excesses appear in the varied forms of willing, feeling, and knowing by abuses of or deficiencies in volition, emotion, or intellect.

- 1) The excess of pragmatic hyper-activism limits the range of the work of the Spirit to being primarily a human activity, and in doing so neglects both the renewal of the mind in Christ and the power of God to transform the inner emotive life.
- 2) The excess of intuitive hyper-emotionalism limits the range of the Spirit's work to having its locus in our hearts only, to the neglect of deeds of mercy, critical reflection, and social accountability.
- 3) The excess of rationalistic hyper-intellectualism has limited the range of the Spirit's work to having its primary locus in the mind, in thought processes, in correct ideas, often to the neglect of inner spiritual formation, the works of love, and care for the poor.

The relational unity of the one God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the model for integrating and bringing a Christ-centred cohesion. The Spirit-filled self encompasses intellect, will and feeling. The unity of the person as one who knows, does and feels, is a



work of the Holy Spirit. The new formed self is then sent into the world to manifest this unitive work of God the Spirit in social, economic, domestic and political life.

God the Spirit acts to reveal God's word through Scripture, to elicit repentance and faith through preaching and to awaken and sustain communities of faith who become salt, light and leaven within the fallen world.

While political liberation models of Christian community were opting for the poor, heavily influenced by a theory of class warfare alien to Christian faith, the poor themselves were opting for Spirit-filled communities that gave them a new self-respecting identity and accountability within the social order.

The Spirit of God who created the whole creation in the beginning is the same Spirit of God who dwells among the evangelical Christians today. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of grace who convicts the sinner's heart so that he realizes that he is a sinner needing to be saved. The [p. 20](#) conversion of three thousand by one proclamation of Peter on the Day of Pentecost occurred because of the power of the Holy Ghost who convinced them that they should ask what they must do to receive the salvation of Jesus Christ, which was provided by God's grace for every soul.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is continued throughout church history beginning from the Day of Pentecost to this very moment. The Spirit of God moves upon the face of the earth as he moved upon the face of the water in the chaotic creation in Genesis.

The power of the Holy Spirit was great in the persecuted church. The church of God survived despite severe persecution only because of the Holy Spirit's sustaining power which gave them boldness to endure all persecutions. Persecution often caused many to renounce their faith yet probably also served to purify the church.

The convicting and transforming ministry of the Spirit in a sinful and oppressed world is seen throughout the history of the church.

The Spirit of the Lord is the mightiest force to convict sinners and transform their lives to become new creations of God. Modern technology, education etc may help people in various ways, but these things of themselves, cannot change a person to become a regenerated soul. ([Jn. 1:1-10](#)).

Without the convicting and transforming power of the Holy Ghost, true conversion is not possible. Establishing schools, dispensaries, hospitals, orphanages etc may have some influence within a society but true conversion is possible only by the convicting and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The revivals of 1900-1910 began a significant worldwide awakening in our century. Healing and Latter Rain movements took place in North American Pentecostalism, as did the Charismatic Renewal movement which began in the USA in the early 1960s and subsequently spread throughout the world.

Whenever these awakenings have occurred the primary factor has been the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. There are some features which constantly appear in revivals—1) persistent prayer, 2) preaching and testimony, and 3) a deep awareness of the holiness of God leading to a strong sense of conviction of sin and repentance, followed by extreme joy when peace with God is received.

In the nation of India, the tiny state of Mizoram is now the only state in India which is almost one hundred percent Christian. The Church in Mizoram celebrated last year a centennial since the first western missionaries landed in that region. The first 20 years of missionary endeavours produced very few converts. But when revival swept across the state, from 1906 till today virtually the whole population of nearly one million have been converted to Christ.



The convicting and transforming power of the Holy Spirit is the essential force bringing souls to Christ. In the absence of this power the evangelical church will not survive [p. 21](#) or will become a powerless lifeless shell of a movement.

### **Proposals**

1. WEF Study Group Theme: 'Discerning the Spirit: Toward an Evangelical Theology of the Holy Spirit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' A book to be produced by 1999. To include: The Work of the Spirit: Understood Exegetically, Historically and Theologically and How the Holy spirit is at Work in the World today.

## **V**

### **REPORT OF GROUP 5**

#### **TOWARD A VITAL AND COHERENT EVANGELICAL ECCLESIOLOGY FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MEMBERS: PAUL SCHROTENBOER, GRAHAM CHEESEMAN, TONY LANE, M. PRETORIUS, HELGE STEDELMANN.**

Having considered the biblical teaching concerning the church and the classic description of the church universal (one, holy, catholic, apostolic), and in the awareness of the current confusing situation (in which even though the church is often not popular there is a spiritual hunger) we move in faith and hope.

#### **We affirm**

- 1 That the church is the body of Christ, the community of the redeemed, brought into being by the Word and Spirit and that on the basis of Christ's acceptance of us we are called to accept one another ([Rom. 15:7](#)). The Holy Spirit is at work in and through the church.
- 2 That God's gift of the church, which Christ built and the forces of hell cannot destroy, entails our task to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and to strive to attain to the full stature of our unity in Christ ([Eph. 4:3, 13](#)).
- 3 That this body becomes visible as Christians assemble in fellowship (*koinonia*) in local congregations and in larger groupings, as these manifestations of the church fulfil their calling and mission in proclamation (*kerygma*), witness (*martyria*), worship (*leitourgia*), celebration of the sacraments and service (*diakonia*).
- 4 That all true believers, whatever their racial, cultural and denominational backgrounds, should rejoice in their common membership of the one family of God and that together they may with confidence experience the joy of a closer and more visible fellowship.
- 5 That there is urgency that the church contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints ([Jude 4](#)) in this age of religious pluralism and relativism, and clearly display its nature as the pillar and ground of the truth ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)).
- 6 That in the post-Christian and neo-pagan age which has seen scandalous moral lapses by Christian leaders and church members uncritically adopting the life style of their society, we must diligently maintain [p. 22](#) our Christian moral standards, striving for holiness in the fear of God.

#### **We recognize**

- 1 That there is an inevitable tension between the universality and unity of the church and the specificity of the church in its contextual forms. This diversity has been due in part to

historical and doctrinal differences between denominations as well as geographical and (less justifiably) ethnic, class and cultural differences. It is imperative to distinguish between the fundamentals of the faith, on which there should be unity, and secondary issues, on which there may be legitimate diversity.

2 That there exists a current tendency to emphasize the kingdom *to the detriment* of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, though in some parts of the world the church may have been emphasized to the neglect of the kingdom.

3 That the church is far from perfect and that we need to repent of our past failures. We look to God to renew his church, as he has so often done in the past.

### **We recommend**

1 That in view of the biblical teaching and the great proliferation of church denominations, WEF undertake an intensive study, based solidly on Scripture and building on previous studies by evangelicals, including those done under the auspices of the WEF:

- to investigate what implications the soteriological aspects of the WEF Basis of Faith have for an evangelical understanding of the church;
- to consider revising the WEF Basis of Faith to produce a clearer statement on the church;
- to study the biblical teaching with a view to distinguishing the central core of fundamental doctrines from those secondary issues on which there may be legitimate diversity;
- to describe carefully the biblical teaching on the relation between church and kingdom;
- to prepare suggested guidelines for evangelicals in their relations between different churches and other church groupings.

2 That the WEF institute a commission on evangelical ecclesiology to implement these recommendations.

## **VI**

### **OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST'S MISSION OF WORLD EVANGELIZATION, COMPASSIONATE SERVICE AND PROPHETIC JUSTICE**

**MEMBERS: RENE DAIDANSO, ANNE-MARIE KOOL, BEN MANICKAM,  
BONG RO, KAZUHIKO UCHIDA, GODFREY YOGARAJAH, J.B. JEYARAJ  
(PAPER ONLY)**

#### **1. Affirmation**

(1) We affirm our commitment to Christ's mission of world evangelization. God showed his mercy to the human beings, created in his own image and yet lost in their sin, **p. 23** through sending his own Son, Jesus Christ to be their Saviour. Jesus entrusted the church with the task of proclaiming this gospel message. The disciples were commissioned to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the triune God and teaching them to obey everything he taught ([Matt. 28:19-20](#)). Evangelism is properly defined in the Lausanne Covenant as 'the proclamation of the historical and Biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to Him personally and so be reconciled to God'.

It is sad to notice in some circles of the Christian church that this commission of global evangelization is neglected or even opposed. One of the reasons for this negligence or opposition is the denial of the uniqueness of Christ and his salvation and the adoption of a pluralistic viewpoint. Theological compromises with pluralism and syncretistic trends have damaged the evangelism of many churches.

However, we evangelical Christians still take the great commission seriously. At the same time we realize the apologetical task of confronting the challenges of religious syncretism and pluralism, not ignoring other religions.

(2) We also affirm our commitment to Christ's mission of compassionate service. The Christian believers are expected by Christ to meet not only the spiritual but also the physical needs of others, whether Christians or not, out of love and compassion.

Although there has been a debate among evangelicals as to whether our compassionate ministry is to be included in 'mission' per se, it is universally admitted that ministry to the needy is to be done by Christians. In fact, evangelical believers have done a lot by starting orphanages, homes, for the elderly, schools, hospitals and other charitable institutions. Such a service has helped to demonstrate God's love and concern for people.

However, this important ministry is not immune to decay. In some areas of the world such services have become a mere routine and lost their original fervour. Some of the institutions are regarded as employment opportunities for Christians, ignoring the original vision of the founders and the biblical demands. Others have bad records of corruption and mismanagement. We should recognize that important questions confronting compassionate services involve recapturing the vision, improving management and accountability, and being solidly based on the biblical mandate.

(3) We further affirm our commitment to Christ's mission of prophetic justice. Again, believers are to be deeply concerned with justice in human society and with the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression, just as the OT prophets were.

Although Lausanne meetings and other consultations of evangelicals have reiterated this task, many churches have still not taken it into serious consideration. The church's prophetic role is much more than merely preaching judgement. An analysis of socio-political situations will lead to exposing violations of human rights, defending the weak, p. 24 such as the poor, refugees, women and children, and establishing social justice. The social responsibilities of Christians involve more than compassionate service and being involved in relief and development projects.

Despite recognized difficulties in integrating world evangelization with social concerns, we evangelicals should go one step further in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to address the question of human rights, justice and peace, and take the micro and macro level problems as our own tasks without neglecting the urgent need of evangelism. This involvement in the holistic mission will bring hope for the needy and strengthen the witness to the credibility of evangelical Christianity.

## **2. Foundation**

To formulate an evangelical theology of mission, we should consider not only Christ's mission but also the whole redemptive work of God from the trinitarian perspective.

(1) 'Christ's mission' did not begin with his coming, but originated in the purpose of God the Father manifested in his creation and continuing rule.

a. God created the whole universe including humans. The created world was originally very good, but it was spoilt because of the fall of the first humans. Yet the whole world remains under the care of the Lord. He announced the plan to redeem fallen humanity and continued to entrust humans with the task of taking charge of the world. Significantly, in the centre of the creation stand human beings created in God's own image. Biblical

anthropology, particularly the idea of the dignity of individual humans, provides a foundation for our holistic mission.

b. God the creator is also the Lord of history. His lordship is manifested in the history of the world, particularly of Israel. He chose Abraham, delivered the Hebrews from the slavery, made the covenant with them, giving them his law, and continued to communicate his counsel through the prophets. Not only God's plan of salvation, but also his concern with justice and love has been revealed throughout history.

(2) In order to understand fully Christ's mission, we also need to reflect on his incarnation and the teaching of the kingdom of God.

a. Incarnation indicates how deeply God loves the world. God related himself to us, sending his Son to the world. Christ has come to save us from our sins. Because of his sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, we are reconciled to God. We sinners are forgiven and given eternal life. Christ, the incarnate Son, also showed us the true meaning of humanity through his total obedience to the Father. His whole life made visible the righteous and merciful God.

b. Christ preached the gospel of the kingdom which was actualized in his person and ministry. The kingdom is given as a gift to those who humbly accept him. His teaching clarifies how the saved can live sharing the realities of God's rule, whose loci are justice and love. Mercy is especially exemplified by Christ in his healing, feeding and associating with the outcast. [p. 25](#)

Thus the kingdom of God has arrived with his coming, but we still wait for its consummation at the time of his second coming. In between, we are to live the new life of the kingdom.

c. The whole ministry of Christ is termed 'mission' since he is the Sent One. Our mission is modelled on his mission ([Jn. 20:21](#)). As, through the ministry of his Son, God intended to give eternal life to sinners, so, through the ministry of his disciples, the Son intends to make people share his life.

(3) Christ's mission cannot be fulfilled without the work of the Holy Spirit.

a. The mission to save sinners is actualized by 'another Counsellor' who regenerates them. The soul-winning, however, is not the final goal. He continues to help the saved to bear the fruit of new humanity, transforming them into the likeness of Christ. And his whole plan will be completed when they are made to participate in the life of the world to come.

b. This new creation by the Spirit is found not only in the life of individuals, but also in the community of the regenerated. In the early church evangelism did not stand by itself, but went forward hand in hand with the ministry to the needy. Thus Paul's missionary journey involved fund-raising for the poor believers in Palestine. The Spirit of God grants his gifts to the believers to build up the church and to reach out to the people in the world, showing love and justice to them.

It is thus obvious that the triune God is so concerned not only about the redemption of the sinners but also about the development of the community of the redeemed and the recreation of the whole world. God's mission is not simply to allow fallen individual humans to be reconciled with himself but to reshape whole societies. The holistic mission is founded upon the whole plan and action of the triune God manifested in the whole scripture.

### **3. Theological Tasks**

To affirm our commitment to Christ's mission, the following theological issues are to be dealt with.

### *1. Integration of Mission*

We need to integrate our mission of world evangelization and social responsibility. Whether the mission, in its definition, includes social activities or not, we should embrace the view that Christ entrusted the church with the task of world evangelization and also of ministering to people with compassionate service and prophetic justice.

In most, if not all, of the important segments of biblical teaching, evangelization and practising love and justice go hand in hand. The two tasks may be diagrammed as making a concentric circle, which shows a core-fruit relationship, the core being evangelism while the fruit is doing acts of love and justice. The evangelistic task is to be followed by the task of producing the fruit of love and justice which reshapes the sinful world. Compassionately helping the needy and prophetically acting in the cause of peace and justice, which foreshadow the eternal kingdom to come, also build a bridge for sharing the gospel. A vital and [p. 26](#) coherent evangelical theology cannot be established without paying due attention to the tragic realities of the contemporary world crying for compassionate service and social justice.

### *2. World Evangelization*

We should rethink the task of world evangelization in the light of the shift of the centre of gravity of missions and the increasingly pluralistic society we live in. The mission field starts on our doorstep and missionary movement ought to start in our own local situation. World evangelization has been discussed mostly in its macroscopic/global perspective, but we should now pay more attention to microscopic/local steps. Grass-roots level efforts are a key to our commissioned task.

In order to accomplish the great commission, the multiracial character of church and mission is also to be theologically reflected in the light of the ethnic crises in various regions of the world. We should develop an ecclesiology of multiracial churches hinted by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (especially chap. [2](#)), lest the church, the body of Christ, should be ethnically fragmented. The church is, in the divine plan, to be a reconciling community.

Evangelism in a dominantly non-Christian area, in particular, is often confronted by a serious question: 'What about my dear parents (or grandparents/ancestors) who have not heard the gospel?' Thus one of the current issues, whether the unevangelized will somehow have a chance to be saved by God's grace or not, is to be tackled.

### *3. Compassionate Service*

A practical question is how to define compassionate service. The early church extended their ministry to the poor, geographically crossing national boundaries and yet mostly within the circle of faith. To whom are we to be neighbours today? Living in the time of globalization, our horizons are certainly to be expanded to the global needs. The best biblical advice would be that of Paul who says, 'as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers'. However, as the 'opportunity' increases almost infinitely today, we have to raise a question afresh: how is this principle to be applied to the ministry of individual believers/churches in the face of enormous needs.

Another question is how to develop this ministry in some sensitive context where the church is misunderstood or accused of proselytizing or unethically inducing people to conversion, taking advantage of the giver-position. We have to take into account the fact that compassionate service does not necessarily pave a way to an effective evangelization.

Again we have to tackle the question of how we can keep the integrity and vitality of Christian compassionate service, preventing it from losing its original vision and falling into a pit of corruption.

#### *4. Prophetic Justice*

We are facing enormous numbers of problems in our contemporary world, which surpass our relief activities. For instance, in addition to setting up emergency centres for the [p. 27](#) ever increasing number of refugees in Africa, we have to intervene somehow at the root of the problem. There is also the question of how the church in the first world raises its voice if there is a strategy in their own countries to hold Africa in a state of economic dependence, withholding technologies from the developing countries there, or if the economic growth of African countries is swallowed up by a cycle of foreign debts just because of the current world economic system? Again, a more universal question is how the church should address itself to social injustice like bribery.

Hence we need to establish an evangelical theology of prophetic justice. Compared with compassionate service, this topic is not so conspicuous in the NT, though social concern is testified by, i.e., Jesus' cleansing of the temple ([Jn. 2:13–22](#), [Matt. 21:12–17](#)) and the apostolic demands to pay wages ([Jam. 5:1–6](#)). Christ and his disciples were not zealots, taking more moderate attitudes to society. The church was able to avoid becoming an ideological movement probably because Christianity is not primarily political. Nevertheless its regenerating force can affect politics. Though Paul did not press Philemon to abandon slavery, his teaching as a whole has led to its abolition. Jesus and his disciples challenge the *Pax Romana* and its gods and laws in a deeper sense.

## **VII**

### **PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY**

**MEMBERS: ROLF HILLE, BRIAN EDGAR, JAN HENZEL, EVERETT HUNT, DONALD TINDER, JOSEPH TSON**

#### **Report**

The Gospel of Jesus Christ needs to be lovingly and boldly proclaimed with recognition of the large and growing context often called Post-Modernity. While maintaining confidence in reason and verifiable experimentation for scientific and technological progress, post-modernity (in contrast to both the Christian and the Enlightenment traditions) denies that there are universal truths in religious or ethical matters.

Our challenge is to show that, while the methods of verification differ, a variety of apologetic, moral, experiential and logical approaches demonstrate that the gospel is true not only for us who believe but for everyone.

Unlike some who react to modernity and post-modernity, we recognize the value of many achievements—technological, political, economical, social, and in media communications—of our secular age. While regretting and opposing unhealthy developments, we explicitly disavow the use of force or the law to impose the gospel or its implications upon people. Instead, Christians need to participate as fully as possible in the various aspects of the lives of our societies (including politics, academics [p. 28](#) and the media), guided by Christian faith, along-side of those who participate while guided by other belief systems.



Those who have received the gospel in a post-modern context need to reflect and act theologically and ethically upon the various effects, negative and positive, which these developments have had upon individuals and societies. Bio-medical technological developments are especially in need of Christian voices.

## **VIII**

### **SERVING CHRIST'S KINGDOM OF LOVE, PEACE AND JUSTICE IN THE MIDST OF ESCALATING VIOLENCE, POVERTY AND POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION**

***MEMBERS: PEDRO ARANA, EMILY CHOGE, GEOFFREY GLE, BRYAN EVANS, EMILIEN RAZAFIARISON, SAMUEL YAMEOGO***

We live in a world created by God in which he has inaugurated his kingdom through Christ. In some aspects of preparing for the kingdom and alleviating disadvantage, work by God's people towards peace and justice has made huge progress in the last 200 years—concern for slaves, orphans, physically disabled, people with psychiatric and mental disabilities, women, ethnic minorities, the poor, those in exploitative working conditions, the hungry, refugees.

In other areas this world does not reflect the character of God's love, peace and justice. Instead there is violence, poverty, casteism, class conflict, political and religious oppression. Specific examples could include police brutality in Asia; war and ethnic clashes in Rwanda, Bosnia, Russia and Liberia; rape, wife battery, female infanticide. The flow of refugees increased ninefold between 1970 and 1994. Mass poverty and unemployment continue in the Two Thirds World.

This does not glorify our Maker who showed his love for the world through his creative and redemptive work. He sent to us the Prince of Peace whose rule should have no end. This shalom does not mean merely absence of war but wholeness in all dimensions—social, spiritual, physical, economic and political—a kingdom built on justice and righteousness. Justice is the foundation on which the throne of God rests and Jesus commands us to seek first his kingdom and justice ([Mat. 6:33](#)).

We recognize that transformation of society can come only through transformed people, so we desire to win men and women to faith in Christ. And yet we believe that an evangel which narrows itself to an individual relationship with God without affecting the society around will be incomplete. Consequently we strive for an evangel that is soteriological, prophetic, and compassionate. This will work against both personal and structural evils. Aware [p. 29](#) of the enormity of the task, we affirm our dependence on the Holy Spirit who can enable us.

### **Recommendations**

1. WEF should set up a unit to develop a stronger theology on peace and justice issues, with encouragement to publish books. This group should also network with other Christians and people of other faiths or no faith working in this area.
2. We encourage each national alliance of evangelicals to set up a unit which can, using the resources from #1 where appropriate, develop guidelines and seek cooperation with their government to promote peace and justice. This will require full participation of churches.

## IX STRIVING FOR RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S SUSTAINING AND REVIEWING WORK IN CREATION

**MEMBERS: KEN GNANAKAN, DAVE BOOKLESS, MANI CHACKO, G DALE,  
CRAIG MILLWARD, BRUCE NICHOLLS, P NULLENS, JOSEPH SHAO**

The foundation of all our environmental discussion is a God who is a personal Creator, who manifests himself in his creation. This trinitarian God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the basis of all personhood and relationships. By his own free act God brought into being a creation radically distinct from himself, yet which exists and is sustained by him. The worth of all creation is not intrinsic but instrumental, deriving from its relationship with a holy God. All matter was made good in its original state, and perfect in its relationship to God. The world was made to God's glory.

The fall of humanity has radically disrupted the relationships between God, humanity, and the rest of the created order. Therefore ecological imbalance owes its origin to the entry and persistence of sin within God's perfect created order. However, nature still retains a positive value, declaring God's glory, and awaiting the restoration of its relationships with God and humanity. Since the fall, a hierarchy of responsibility and accountability has been perverted into one of exploitation, seen in human relationships and in attitudes to the environment.

Human beings are both created, and therefore physical beings related to and dependent on the rest of creation, and yet also in the image of God, with an independent relationship to the Creator and a responsibility towards the creation. This responsibility of stewarding and protecting creation continues despite the disruptive effects of the fall upon the task.

The incarnation of Christ reaffirms the physical creation. The resurrection of Christ lays the foundation of a material eschatology—a new heaven and a new earth. There will be both continuity [p.30](#) and discontinuity, as with the body of the risen Christ. In the light of despair over the ecological crisis, there is therefore hope for the whole of creation in Christ, and a basis for our continuing involvement. The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God ([Rom. 8:21](#)).

The theological framework outlined above, combined with the worldwide ecological crisis, has enormous implications for our priorities in theological education and in practical action, for our ethics and lifestyle, and indeed for our worship, and our mission and evangelism.

**Ethics:** Our ultimate vision of creation restored in Christ must inspire us now in the penultimate. Our ethics are interim, those of a kingdom that is now, but still not yet. The roots of the ecological and environmental crises in the present era lie in individual and corporate human sin. Instead of dealing only with the symptoms (such as pollution, poverty, overpopulation), we need also to deal with the causes. At the ethical level these lie in greed (materialism, the love of money and unrestrained pursuit of profit), the abuse of power (exploitation of the poor, of women, of animals), individualism (selfishness). There is a need for repentance where evangelical Christians have merely followed the spirit of the age in these areas. At a positive level our ethical motivation for environmental involvement is primarily that of love, for God and our neighbours—including future generations.

**Education:** Some priorities for action:

- WEF TC to encourage the networking of evangelical theologians and environmentalists, with the encouragement of national and regional groups.
- sharing of resources, bibliographies and key people in this field.
- need for monographs on specific aspects of the ecological crisis.

Ministerial Training: WEF TC to produce short course on theology and ethics of creation, covering all major doctrines, and integrated into major disciplines.

- WEF TC to produce monographs on theological basis for creation care.

Local Church: encourage idea of a conservation/ecology/creation Sunday, such as that pioneered by A Rocha and the UK EA, with teaching materials and suggestions for practical action.

- encourage incremental steps towards environmental awareness, and simpler lifestyles amongst evangelical churches.
- encourage involvement beyond the churches, in, eg, conservation groups, both as a Christian responsibility, and as an evangelistic opportunity.

Youth: a key area, not only as they are tomorrow's leaders, but because they are often more aware of (and less anaesthetised against) environmental issues, yet unaware of a Christian basis of involvement.

- importance of focus on animal welfare, arts and music in reaching youth.
- WEF TC to produce study guide, taking c. 10 aspects of the ecological [p. 31](#) crisis (eg deforestation, pollution) and developing a biblical perspective.

Beyond the Churches: potential for practical involvement with and evangelistic witness towards non-Christians, as we explain motivation for involvement, and hope in Christ for all creation (NB experience of A Rocha in this area).

Much further thinking and discussion are needed. We need to speak biblically, incisively and prophetically on many issues, and need further research to do so. Areas for research include: nuclear power and its abuses, bio-ethics, creation spirituality, the history of Christian attitudes to the environment, and many others. We must do this out of love for Christ, in union with whom all things have their proper place, and through whom God has decided to bring the whole universe back to himself ([Col. 1:17](#) & [20](#)).

## X

### **AFFIRMING OUR ESCHATOLOGICAL HOPE IN CHRIST'S KINGLY RETURN TO REIGN, THE FINAL JUDGEMENT, AND THE CREATION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS OF A NEW EARTH AND A NEW HEAVEN**

**MEMBERS: JOCHEN EDER, RODRIGO TANO, J MCINTOSH, DAVID  
SAMUEL, HANS SINNING**

#### **1. Our hope in the context of doctrine and church.**

While working on eschatology, evangelicals have to affirm the validity of their subject not only on the level of doctrinal statements and symbolic books. To formulate the doctrine of the coming Lord Christ in seminary classes and in textbooks is but one part of the task.

Treating eschatology as a vital part of evangelical theology at the threshold of a new millennium means however to proclaim the significance of this subject *in the preaching of our churches*. There, in public worship, our hope of Christ's return must be expressed. In the pulpit, the eschatological horizon of justification has to be made known: Christ saving men, who believe in him, from eternal condemnation. In worship, the righteousness of God's new creation has to be proclaimed, for the sake of creating righteousness in the hearts of the congregation through the proclamation of the Word of God and so to stimulate analogies of righteousness in an unjust society, Christ's kingly return is part of our theology, not just as a written statement of our dogmatics, but as the truth proclaimed to the congregation, challenging secularized Christianity all over the world. [p. 32](#)

## **2. The structure of the topic.**

While discussing Christ's return to reign, we have to acknowledge doctrinal differences between Christians concerning the literal understanding of the millennium, the rapture of the believers and other related issues. We affirm the necessity of in-depth bible-based research on these themes, which hinder the common witness of individual Christians and churches. Certainly the protestant distinction of fundamental and nonfundamental articles in eschatology could be helpful to avoid unproductive discussions. The distinction could also be expressed by the concept of a *hierarchy of truths*, which arose in the Roman Catholic context at the Second Vatican Council. In that way theological condemnations of diverging opinions on the subjects of minor importance can be avoided. The affirmation of Christ's personal, visible return to this earth has to be emphasized over against the negation of the churches' classical faith by a liberal theology and a secularized world. Affirming Christ's visible return to this earth, we reject that type of docetic eschatology, which interprets Christ's coming only as the coming of an impersonal reign of Christ.

## **3. Church unity and social action in eschatological context.**

The coming Christ and the coming unity of the church under his reign are a strong impulse for evangelicals to seek now for a visible unity in witness and social action, by crossing the boundaries of our denominations to have fellowship with other Christians. Furthermore, the coming Christ is a strong impulse for our involvement in society with acts of mercy, because Christ will look for the fruit of faith ([Mat. 25:34-40](#)).

## **4. Christ's reign and political reign.**

The coming of Christ to establish his reign on earth reminds us of the limitations of every type of human government and dominion. Human government is ordained by God to produce justice and peace through the means of political and administrative power, to create a more righteous and human world. We affirm that task with the reminder that political engagement in doing so can neither substitute nor prepare the way for the coming reign of Christ. In political context, only analogies of Christ's reign can be realized. The coming of Christ doesn't depend on our efforts, but is related only to God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

## **5. Faith and the final Judgement.**

The preaching of final judgement is related to the key issues of theology: the call to conversion, the distinction between 'formerly' and 'now' in Christian life, the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper and the delimitation of the church from the world. According to the Book of Revelation, the coming of Christ to judge the world and to set up

divine justice on earth, is for the consolation of the believers. But it is an object of dread to the world which doesn't really want Christ to reign over them. **p. 33**

The coming of Christ to liberate Christians from suffering and persecution has been the subject of expectation and fervent prayer in Christianity throughout the centuries. Without the expectation of the imminent *parousia* of the Lord, Christian hope for the future will vanish into a mere *utopia* of the kind the philosopher Ernst Bloch vainly taught people to trust in.

## **6. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth.**

Ever since the book was written, God's promise of a new heaven and a new earth in [Revelation 21](#) has provoked imitations on the level of a (Christian or) human creation of a just society. At this point, the vital link between Christian doctrine and the struggle for an improvement of human living conditions was never questioned, not even by secular atheists. Evangelical theology will stress that social engagement cannot create the heaven on earth nor can it merit us our salvation, which is by grace alone. The final righteousness is an act of the God who speaks, who by his word creates conditions unobtainable by human efforts. The creation of a new earth and a new heaven is already now the object of Christian praise and worship.

## **XI**

### **'RECOGNIZING GOD'S PURPOSE FOR GENDER DISTINCTIVES IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE, CHURCH AND SOCIETY'**

**MEMBERS: JUDITH GUNDRY-VOLF, KLALED BOUSHRA, ROSEMARY DOWSETT, MARGARET JACOBS, JOE KAPOLYO, LEELA MANASSEH, NIKOLAY NEDELICHEV, BEULAH WOOD, ISAAC ZOKOUE**

#### **Report**

This working group dealt with the theme of faith and hope for the future as it relates to the issue of gender distinctives.

*1. We identified the following key challenges to the church and the evangelical movement moving into a new millennium:*

1.1. With grief and empathy we recognize the tragic fact that gender distinctives are often expressed in the marginalization and oppression of women and girls in various and often shocking ways, and that such treatment, in the worst cases, is specifically because of their sex. Examples include female foeticide and infanticide, prostitution, rape, wife battery, incest, dispossession of widows, and severe psychological oppression. These injustices must be condemned and alleviated in the light of the biblical witness to the full human dignity of women and to their equality with men. There is both evidence and information relating to these issues of abuse, but by and large Christians are ignoring it. Evidence needs to be collated, and information disseminated, in a deliberate **p. 34** consciousness-raising strategy and in a campaign as thorough as Wilberforce's to address the evils of slavery.

1.2. Women's and men's roles in societies the world over are changing rapidly in the face of global socio-cultural, economic and political changes, and issues of gender identity and roles are being rethought in cultural debate. Fresh biblical and theological reflection on gender and gender distinctives is imperative in the light of this situation in order for

the church not to lose capable, gifted and motivated women (or men) and so that it can best fulfil its task as the light of the world today rather than come to be judged as irrelevant or outmoded. The church should not merely reflect secular culture, or the cultural patterns of other religions, but neither should it lag behind where a society is pushing forward in right directions even if from secular convictions. We recognize that Christian understanding should not be driven by western patterns, not by those of radical feminists, for example, but by glad exploration of biblical teaching and illuminated application of it. We also recognize that gender roles may need to be expressed differently in different contexts; for example, what kind of models are possible and appropriate for Christian women in an Islamic society? Further, we recognize the need for fresh and incisive thinking about gender identity and roles for Christian men today, in a variety of cultural settings.

1.3. Women are already, and have long been, making significant contributions in the Christian church, and in the family. These contributions and the gifts from which they spring must be recognized and valued, given proper legitimation, encouraged and actively promoted for the sake of the body of Christ and the mission of the church to the world. Where there has been a conspiracy of silence, or a denial of the contribution and gifts of women, as, for example, in traditional church history texts, explicit corrections must be made. In the light of these it will be easier for Christian men and women to identify God-given possibilities for women in the present and the future.

1.4. Evangelical Christians are not in full agreement on questions of gender distinctives and on a Christian theology of gender. While recognizing the key role of scripture for this issue, they disagree on the interpretation of the relevant biblical texts and their hermeneutical implications. Cultural differences can play a part in these disagreements. This impasse points to the need for more work on the problems of exegesis, hermeneutics, and the role of the reader's context in interpretation. Further, in addition to close study of specific texts, in the context of the testimony of the whole sweep of biblical material, we also wish to see a more thorough response to the charge that the Scriptures are themselves sexist, or that they are used to justify the oppression of women.

1.5. We also note the urgent need for careful and honest critical analysis of and response to the contributions p. 35 of many feminist writers, especially those who raise legitimate questions but address them in an unbiblical manner. We grieve that in some cases the church has contributed to and exacerbated radical feminism by its failure to respond to justified criticism or to repent of sinful practices. At the same time, we have reservations about the goals of many feminists, and reaffirm that our goals must be defined in terms of the gospel. We confess that in some countries, evangelicals either dismiss more than they should or embrace more than they ought. We believe there is a special need to collate and analyze carefully feminist writings, and information about feminist agenda, in countries outside Europe and North America, and to make available to the world church the contextualised responses of male and female evangelical theologians working in the Two Thirds World.

1.6. We condemn sexism, misogyny and homophobia, and the toleration of such, wherever they occur: in attitudes and assumptions, views and trading, structures and actions, inside and outside the church. We believe that Christians are called to demonstrate 'a better way' of mutually respectful, affirming relationships, where man and women gladly serve each other and seek to do each other good. This living out of God's perfect design of harmonious and appreciative complementarity is to transform relationships in the family, in the church, and in society, and will in itself be a powerful testimony to the world of the gospel.



*2. The following approaches and theological perspectives serve as grounds for faith and hope in addressing these challenges.*

2.1. When all the relevant biblical texts are taken into account, and we resist the impulse toward harmonization, we discover a diversity of perspectives on gender distinctives within the Bible, from subordinationist to nonhierarchical models for gender roles. These perspectives are not necessarily contradictory; rather they point to the multiplicity of cultural expressions of Christian faith and the context-oriented character of the biblical teaching on gender.

2.2. God created man and woman distinct (male and female), yet without differentiation as concerns being created in the image of God, being given responsibility for creation, and having individual accountability to God. Woman and man were created as complementary to each other.

2.3. Christ redeemed woman and man from sin and its consequences experienced in gender roles in the fallen creation. In Christ, man and woman remain sexually distinct, yet now they also have a *common* identity: 'you are all one in Christ'. This new identity based on being in Christ affects the whole of Christian existence (not only the relationship to God but also to fellow human beings). Thus in the body of Christ there is a new equality and a new reciprocity of woman and man ([Gal. 3:28](#); [1 Cor. 11:11-12](#)). The outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh and the distribution of spiritual gifts without regard to gender at Pentecost and in the early church gives evidence [p.36](#) of this new equality and reciprocity. The Spirit can and does empower men and women to new roles not based on gender but on spiritual gifts. Equality of status thus expresses itself in equality of function.

2.4. Jesus' relationship to women in the gospels provides a Christian model for a new understanding of gender. Jesus resisted gender discrimination. He made women full members of God's family, treated them as persons and not as objects of potential male lust, did not hinder women from learning at his feet over against traditional role expectations, but welcomed them in the roles of disciples, and sent women as his witnesses to proclaim the good news of his resurrection.

2.5. The New Testament teaching on gender roles is characterized both by sensitivity and adaptation to the culture as well as by critique and transformation of the culture in the light of the new creation and in the power of the Spirit of Christ (for example, by affirming celibacy for those who have the gift and not making gender role necessarily dependent on biological sexual identity).

2.6. A redeemed version of male headship not characterized by oppressive domination but by the sacrificial love of Christ is one biblical model of gender roles and relationships. Examples of nonhierarchical models of gender roles and relationships are also found in Scripture (for example, the early Christian teacher couple Priscilla and Aquila, or Paul's description of equal and mutual marriage relationships in [1 Corinthians 7](#)). Experience has taught us the immense danger of the abuse of male power, inherent in hierarchical models, due to human fallenness, a danger which is not inherent in nonhierarchical models of gender relationships. At the same time, we acknowledge that women, equally with men, are fallen, and that neither women nor men are exempt from the sinful desire to dominate others.

2.7. The apostle Paul appeals to the created order in support of *non*-hierarchical models of gender relationships ([1 Cor. 11:11-12](#)) as well as a Christologically-defined gender hierarchy. This invites us to look for models which incorporate the strengths of both.

2.8. In contrast with much current debate (which is often acrimonious and destructive) and much common practice (which may be deeply marred by sin), God's design for men and women in all their relationships, in marriage and family, church and

society, is born of perfect grace and love. We are therefore entirely confident that humble, careful, prayerful biblical and theological study, mindful of our limitations but seeking together to hear and obey God, can be only for our good and his glory. Therefore, while we are soberly aware of the difficulties of our task, we nonetheless approach it in hope and faith, believing that to seek to confront sin and to foster righteousness is entirely in line with God's will.

### *3. Recommendations*

3.1. We urge each national evangelical fellowship to study and address gender issues, in the light of [p. 37](#) these theological perspectives, in ways appropriate to their context. This should embrace general gender roles and distinctives in marriage and family life, church and society, and may also include issues such as ordination, inclusive language, sexual orientation/homosexuality and lesbianism, representation and voice. In addition, national fellowships should address those issues of abuse specific to their context, for example from among those listed under 1.1. above.

3.2. We recommend further theological and biblical reflection on gender issues by evangelical men and women. The lack of adequate theological resources has limited those working against abuses and exploitation of females. The theological and biblical task should be undertaken jointly by men and women, rather than only by men, or only by women.

3.3. We recommend that WEF facilitate and finance exchange of research and publications on gender issues in various countries.

3.4. We recommend that WEF offer scholarships for women to engage in theological study and to participate in conference so that women's contributions are integrated in to the mainstream of theological work.

3.5. We recommend the formation of a task force on women and gender by the WEF Theological Commission to work on issues raised here and others related to them.

## **XII**

### **REFLECTING ON THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN COMMUNICATION IN THE MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH**

***MEMBERS: MIRIAM ADENEY, JOHN BENNETT, JEREMY MUDDITT, RANDY AND NICOLE MCCASKILL, KATHLEEN NICHOLLS, BILL THATCHER***

#### **Report**

##### *1. Definition of media as used in this task force*

Media includes all possible forms of communication, such as: dance, drama, visual arts, puppets, pantomime, storytelling, music, ballads, textiles, books, tracts, poetry, scripture portions, cartoons, audio-cassettes, videos, the Internet, radio, CD Rom, film and TV.

##### *Statement*

As Christians in this life, what is our purpose? To borrow the motto from Columbia International University, our purpose in this life is 'To know Him (Jesus) and to make Him known'. This is important because it is only through Jesus that we can know God. [John 14:6, 7](#). Therefore, in the aforementioned motto, the phrase 'To know Him' is our

responsibility to ourselves, ([Col. 1:9-10](#), [2 Pet. 1:3-4](#)) and the phrase 'to make Him known' is our responsibility to others, primarily the lost ([2 Cor. 5:20-21](#), [Lk. 24:46-48](#), [Col. 1:27-28](#)). Every individual Christian has this twofold duty: 'To know Him and to make p. 38 Him known'. We must apply our whole soul, our talents, our intellects, our gifts our hearts, our bodies, and our creativity to these tasks. And we must remember that our primary means for doing so, and the source of all truth, is the inspired Word of God himself, given to us through the Holy Scriptures, and illuminated for us by the Holy Spirit. Theology transforms our understanding of media at many points. For example, when we use electronic or print media, we run the danger of thinking we can communicate without personal involvement. Yet God's personhood calls us to personal involvement. Media studies also show that one medium alone does not necessarily persuade, although it can. A follow up may be needed for reinforcement, and often that second medium is a live human person. For example, an evangelistic dance and narrative was put on in a village in India, and at the same time, a brochure with the names of local Christians living in that village was handed out, so that if anyone had questions or wanted further information they would know who to contact. Also, many Christian videos come with a study guide as a back-up to the video itself, which is often intended for use in a small group Bible study. An awareness of God as Person therefore affects our use of media. Secondly, there is a danger of separating communication from community. God is Triune, and as such he values relationships. Witness his desire that we be restored to relationship with him. Such relationality is central in Christ's teaching and in the doctrine of the church. Thus, when our involvement in media becomes an excuse or hindrance to our involvement with people and the needs of society and the church, we must be careful to avoid this. An example of such a danger can be found in the scholar who spends all his time with books to the exclusion of human relationships, or the computer fanatic who spends [10-12](#) hours a day at his computer, and never interacts with other people. Such idolatry of any media must be avoided. We must use media to encourage people to know and love God, through Jesus the son, in real communities in a real world. Thirdly, there is a danger of separating communication from an understanding of culture. God is Creator. God also gave us the gift of creativity, and therefore we have a diversity/variety of cultures. However, against the backdrop of a fallen world, the cultures we have developed demonstrate patterns of idolatry, exploitation, and other sinfulness. Nevertheless, as humanity also bears God's image, so also our cultures show patterns of beauty and wisdom. Respecting local cultures includes the development of culturally appropriate theologies which speak to local priorities and values through local thought patterns and symbols. Some people would define this as the using of 'Cultural Keys' to help a people group understand God. An example of this is the use of the 'peace-child' in Dani culture as an illumination to the Dani people that the Son of God became the peace-offering between God and man, enabling man to be reconciled to God. Another example of using p. 39 cultural forms to express truth, is that of the Tonka Wheel from Tibet. There is a painting of a Christian Tonka Wheel which teaches theology from the Bible. By contrast, when we continue a policy of using only western forms of communication instead of investing in local communication styles and in the training and support of local methods, we devalue local cultures. Just as in the words of Dr. Noelliste: 'no theology created elsewhere will engage the context vigorously enough', so some communication methods evolved elsewhere will not necessarily communicate vigorously enough. Conversely, however, we must continually be on guard against syncretism, which may creep in unawares if we become too enamoured of local culture. For this reason we must always be extremely careful to base every media-message on Scripture, and be sure that we do not use a cultural form of expression that is not redeemable, such as a trance dance, where the dancer becomes possessed by evil

spirits. Fourthly, there is a danger inherent in abstract communication which lacks clarity. We need to communicate in a way to which people can relate, just as people could relate to Jesus Christ. His self-revelation was specific and sensory. Jesus taught through symbols and stories emerging from the local context. When we teach theology mostly through theological propositions and rarely as he taught, we run the risk of cheapening his incarnationai message. When we plan for print communications only, and never for systematic teaching through indigenous art forms or electronic media, we err similarly. Clearly, theology affects our use of media at every point. We must take into account our understanding of God as Person, as Triune, as Creator, and as Incarnate Redeemer. Other implications arise from a developing understanding of God: his holiness, his lovingkindness, his sustaining power in nature and society, and so on. In the end, in spite of the dangers, we are compelled to communicate in whatever way is appropriate and necessary, for God is a communicator, and his love compels us to communicate through all appropriate means. We must become like Paul, who said 'I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it' ([1 Cor. 9:22-23](#))

### *3. Goals for the next 3-4 years*

- 1.a. Encourage some groups in many countries/regions to make a plan for balanced theological teaching materials, e.g. 30 book titles. Some detailed plans for achieving this have been formulated, including the production of a brochure which may be made available to 1996 conference participants.
- b. Assist in procuring grants to achieve this.
- 2.a. Network media-training consultants and local resource people, ie local theologians and lay Christians, as well as other experts in local cultures, with the purpose of developing culturally [p. 40](#) contextualized media which proclaims the truth of the Scriptures.
- b. Train the consultants to nurture theological and cultural richness.
- 3.a. Encourage extensive local rewriting, or new-writing of Christian books as the primary option in book publishing; and the importing of book translations as a second option.
- b. Allocate funds accordingly.
- c. Apply the same principles to other forms of media as appropriate.
4. Develop a curriculum for teaching one doctrine, possibly in a specific culture, using a carefully designed teaching package combining several media, to model an alternative to the primary use of books alone.
5. Develop a plan for encouraging selected widely-distributed western authors to provide a grant to a local non-western author instead of using the money to translate their own books.
6. Develop a plan to encourage experts in various fields of communication to act as mentors/facilitators in local contexts.
7. Consider producing a book on Communicating Theology Through Media. [p. 41](#)