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11. What are the chances for the realization of a kingdom of peace on earth? Who will bring about this kingdom of peace and who will not (cf. [Isa. 11:1-12](#) and [Rev. 20:1-6](#) and in contrast to this, [Rev. 13:1-10](#))?

Churches Transforming the Nations: The DNA¹ Vision

Jun Vencer

Keywords: Discipling, social, privatised, justice, transformation, evangelize, community, economic development, relief, peace, globalization, kingdom of God;

'Say to the nations, The Lord reigns' ([Ps. 96:10](#))

'... make disciples of all the nations' ([Mt. 28:19](#))

'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ' ([Rev. 11:15](#))

I. INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ commands his church to '*make disciples of all the nations*' ([Mt. 28:19](#)). In carrying out this commission, one may ask: What will a disciplined nation look like? A clue to the answer can be found in his very commission statement: '*... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*'. His teachings, contained in the Old and New Testaments, sum up the '*whole purpose of God*' ([Acts 20:27](#)). Of course this purpose is centred on the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, his life and mission. The question, then, may be rephrased: If Jesus is Lord of a community or nation, what will that nation look like?

This question, I submit, is of critical importance. It moves the gospel beyond the private claims of a highly individualistic evangelical culture and liberates it to touch people and nations. It also provides a legitimizing and integrating vision for the ministries of God's people. It ensures that social ethics in the present time is responsive to the vision of God's future. It makes faith in Christ a living and even subversive leaven for the transformation of a dying world into life.

In the commission of our Lord, the preliminary issues are: what does discipleship mean, and what does the nation include? A disciple is a student of a teacher or a follower

¹ DNA is an acronym for 'Discipling the Nations'. It can be misunderstood for DNA or *deoxyribonucleic acid* which is an essential component of all living matter and a basic material in the chromosomes of the cell nucleus. It contains the genetic code and transmits the hereditary pattern. I thought that the definition can be said of the vision as well. Christ is the essence of life and the vision is one that needs transmission from one generation to another until the eschaton.

The question is raised about the feasibility of discipling the nations. Discipling people, yes. After all, a disciple is a follower of Jesus and it requires a prior repentance and faith. The use of the term follows the biblical phrase in [Matthew 28:19](#). In this paper, it simply means a nation whose culture and people enjoy basically the values of the Kingdom of God. Moreover, it is a goal when the reign of God becomes a realm in the eschaton.

of a master. Disciples endeavour to become like their teacher and master. Paul describes discipleship in his letter to the Christians in Corinth: 'Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ' ([1 Cor. 11:1](#); [4:16](#); cf. Philp. 3:17). Of course, in Christian context, such following and becoming requires a prior personal relationship with Christ Jesus through repentant faith in him as Saviour and Lord.

As to the other issue, the word nation (Gk. *ethne*) refers to tribes or to people groups (cf. [Rev. 7:9](#)). It is the regular word in Scriptures used for Gentiles. Gentiles were non-Jews. 'In both Greek and Hebrews', says John H. Skelton, 'the plural "nations" was used of the nations of the unbelieving world, of pagans and of Gentiles'² But is the word consistently used for Gentiles and therefore exclusive of Israel? The Bible does not warrant such a conclusion. New Testament scholar R.T. France points out that the phrase 'all nations' has been used previously to [Matthew 28:19](#) in [24:9](#), and [14:25](#), [32](#) in the context which probably includes Israel in 'the nations'. [Daniel 7:14](#) does not exclude Israel from the dominion of the Son of Man.³

I am not convinced that 'nation' is to be limited to tribes and tongues or to people groups. If Israel is not excluded from the term nation, then it is hard to believe that the reference is just to the Jewish people without including in the understanding its culture, values and socio-political structures. This thought must be brought to the meaning of every nation.

'Nation' as defined by a U.S. Supreme Court ruling (*Montoya v. U.S.*) is 'a people ... existing in the form of organized jural society, usually inhabiting a distinct portion of the earth, speaking the same language, using the same customs, possessing historic continuity, and distinguished from all other like groups by their racial origin and characteristics, and generally, but not necessarily, living under the same government and sovereignty'⁴ In Political Law, the idea of nation includes: territory, sovereignty, people, government. As a *jural* body it is treated as a person that can act and be held responsible for such act.

Therefore a nation acting in autonomy can reject God or deny any accountability to him. In the Old Testament, when the nations or the nation of Israel acted in rebellion against God, they were scattered or destroyed in judgement. For when God judged nations, he did not only judge the people. The records of the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah says, 'Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord of heaven, and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground' ([Gen. 19:23](#)).

This was the same picture when Joshua conquered Jericho: 'And they utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey' ([Jos. 6:21](#)). In fact God said, 'Cursed before the Lord is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his first-born he shall lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he shall set up its gates' ([Jos. 6:26](#)). When God judged mankind because 'every intent of the thoughts of his heart is evil continually' ([Gen. 6:5](#)), he said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things to the birds of the sky' ([Gen. 6:7](#)).

I submit then that 'to disciple the nations' has a more expanded content than just people. This is suggested in the Mission Statement of the World Evangelical Fellowship:

² John K. Skelton, *Nation*, Baker's *Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, editor-in-chief (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), p. 371.

³ R. T. France, *Matthew: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1988) p. 414.

⁴ *Black's Law Dictionary*, sixth edition (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1990) p. 1024.

to serve churches and Christian organizations to disciple their communities and countries for Christ. In this article, country, nation or state are understood synonymously. The gospel is to be preached to every person, to the whole inhabited earth. But the preaching is to people who live in their communities with their structures, relationships, values and culture. The gospel is to transform not just sinful people but also unjust structures. For if Jesus is Lord, then such a fact challenges every form of idolatry and earthly power. The very declaration demands transformation of all areas of life and community or country because the church does not live in a sociopolitical vacuum.

This neglect of geopolitics in the life of the church is tragic. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann explains this anomaly convincingly:

Over the long haul of the Enlightenment, Western Christianity has been progressively privatized in terms of individuals, families, and domestic communities. By and large, out of bewilderment and embarrassment, the ecclesial communities have forgotten how to speak about national and international matters, except in times of war to mobilize God's support for the 'war effort.' The inevitable outcome of this privatization is to relinquish geopolitics to practical, technical analysis, as Joseph Stalin's question, 'How many divisions has the Pope?' That is, *if the theological dimension drops out of international purview, and with it any credible, critical moral dimension, then the world becomes one in which might makes right.* To some extent, that is what happened among us, because Yahwistic rhetoric in this arena of life strikes any modern person as mindless supernaturalism.⁵

Let me also point out that God, in freedom, has a special concern for the nations of the world. From the Genesis genealogy, we find that the entire world is in covenant with God ([Gen. 9:8-17](#)), that the covenant of God with Noah and his progenitors includes the nations and therefore all nations are bound together to live under the life-giving covenant and all are recipients of God's blessings for life. But the nations insisted on their autonomy, rejected God and refused his terms of blessings. For this reason they were scattered and 'the coherence and unity of mankind was irreversibly violated'⁶ ([Gen. 9:8](#)). Nevertheless, the nations are subjects of God's attention.

Will they have a future? It is for this that Israel's unsolicited testimony offers the nations an opportunity to see God in the life of Israel, that they may know him, experience his saving power, and join Israel in thanksgiving and praise ([Ps. 117:3](#)). The church, acting in continuity with Israel's mission, has the same duty to the nations, as noted in the statement in the Sermon on the Mount: '... that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven' ([Mt. 5:16](#)). The Psalmist says that 'All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you' ([86:9, 10](#)). His desire is that 'a whole earth and all its peoples shall now gladly affirm Yahweh's sovereignty and gratefully receive from Yahweh all the blessings of a rightly governed creation'.⁷

In the Old Testament, Yahweh's concern was not limited to Israel, nor did Israel have a monopoly of Yahweh. 'Yahweh' according to Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann 'has Yahweh's own life to live, and it will not be monopolized by Israel.'⁸ Yahweh is the Lord of the nations as well ([Ps. 96:10](#)). This is very important because God has a special relationship with and passion for Israel. Paul does not deny this sovereign

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) p. 525.

⁶ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 494.

⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 501.

⁸ Ibid.

choice of grace for Israel ([Rom. 11](#)). But what needs reflection and challenge is that in passages such as [Amos 9:7](#) 'Israel's monopoly on Yahweh is broken.'⁹ The liberation of Israel from Egypt through the exodus was paralleled by God's liberation of Israel's most serious enemies such as the Philistines from Capthor and the Arameans from Kir. Moreover, racist bias is rejected as well as ethnocentrism. Again, this is important in the modern world's understanding of nations which is increasingly becoming multi-racial.

Many years ago, the Philippines was known as the only Christian nation in Asia. Yet the nation was inclusive of Filipinos who are Christians, Muslims, Tribal animists, Hindus and Buddhists. While it meant that the majority of the citizens profess Christianity, it also meant that its culture, values, and laws are primarily based on Judeo-Christian values. This is the same understanding of the so-called Christian west. A similar understanding is found in the concept of Christian civilization. The point has relevance to the concept of discipling a nation.

Recently, the *Financial Times* published an article, 'Can Putin clean up?'. It described Russia saying that a 'sense of moral degradation, of what Russians call *bessperedel*, or lawlessness, pervades almost every aspect of life in modern Russia' Russia has degenerated into a country 'where bribes are paid more routinely than taxes'. Responding to such a situation, Valery Rudnyev, chair of the Moscow Club of Lawyers, said: 'Russia can only develop a truly law-based state if it roots its legislation in the moral values of its Christian, Muslim and Jewish population and conforms to broader conceptions of human rights.'¹⁰ Malaysia is a parallel example in which the basic foundation of government is based on Islam although it presents itself as a united Malaysia that is multi-racial and with a liberal and tolerant policy on religion.¹¹

The church should live its life and offer a testimony that 'God so loved the world ...' ([Jn. 3:16](#))—the world of nations. In doing so, they may joyfully hope for *the exciting possibility that every nation can, by acknowledging him as sovereign and by ordering their lives according to his Law (cf. [Is. 2:3](#)), be partners of God* in preserving creation and fulfilling 'the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature' ([Gen. 9:16](#)). Beyond all these, may all humanity be persuaded 'to become a Christian' ([Acts 26:28](#)).

II. STANDARD FOR TRANSFORMATION

I go back again to the question: What would a disciplined nation look like? If the command is given primarily to the church of Jesus Christ, then, inescapably, the church provides the key to the answer. For the church is God's 'eschatological covenant community'.¹² As a community it has covenanted to live by the Law of God under the rule of Christ, the Head of the church ([Eph. 1:22](#)). The church is under God's rule or reign. In the context of divine reign, one needs to examine closely the biblical teaching about the kingdom of God. For the church is both *ekklesia* (an assembly) and *baileia* (kingdom or God's rule). The church as the community of the kingdom is both the referent and the agency for discipling the nation. This being the case, the question may be restated: What are the indicators of the presence of the kingdom in church and in the nation?

⁹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 520.

¹⁰ *FT Weekend* (March 18/19, 2000) I.

¹¹ Mahathir Mohamad, Vision 2020.

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology For The Community Of God* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 1994) p. 604.

While the Bible offers no complete description of the kingdom, it remains its essential vision and hope. The church has paid lip service to it. Peter Wagner, perhaps the best-known leader in the worldwide 'church growth' movement, also refers to the unanimous opinion of modern scholarship that the kingdom of God was the message of Jesus. Then he adds,

I cannot help wondering out loud why I haven't heard more about it in thirty years I have been a Christian. I certainly read about it enough in the BibleBut I honestly can't remember any pastor whose ministry I have been under actually preaching a sermon on the Kingdom of God. As I rummage through my own sermon barrel, I now realize that I myself have never preached a sermon on it. Where has the Kingdom been?¹³

Dr. I. Howard Marshall of the University of Aberdeen has commented,

During the past sixteen years I can recollect only two occasions on which I have heard sermons specifically devoted to the theme of the Kingdom of GodI find this silence rather surprising because it is universally agreed by New Testament scholars that the central theme of the teaching of Jesus was the Kingdom of God.¹⁴

'Any systematic conception of Christianity', Walter Rauschenbusch says, 'must be not only defective but incorrect if the idea of the Kingdom of God does not govern.'¹⁵ The church needs to recover this vision of the kingdom and offer this hope to the nations.

The prophet Isaiah offers significant insights about the kingdom, the consummation of which is being awaited as the noonday of humanity. Isaiah chapter 9 begins with a message of gloom, despair and impending darkness. Judgement is about to come for the Northern Kingdom. The tenses in verses 1-7 are in the past indicating that 'the future is written as something which has already happened'. In fact, 'the eye of faith looks at all this but affirms that, real though it is, it is not the "real" reality... that hope is a present reality, part of the constitution of the "now" '. The royal Messiah referred to 'is born king (cf. [Mt. 2:2](#)), actually divine. In him everything that was envisaged is embodied; he is the eschaton.'¹⁶

From the verses cited, a vision of a disciplined nation through the kingdom can be constructed. I would like to venture this vision. In a community or country where the Lamb is the centre of life or where kingdom values are inculturated in people and institutions, that community or country would have economic sufficiency, social peace, public justice, national righteousness, and increasingly acknowledge Jesus as Sovereign.

1. Christian Influence.

*For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse
Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And his resting place will be glorious
([Is. 11:9](#), [10](#) cf. [Hab. 2:14](#)).*

A truly disciplined nation is one where Christ is Lord of all spheres. As John expressed it in regard to the world: 'The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and

¹³ Buzzard, *Coming Kingdom*, pp. 14-15, as quoted from C. Peter Wagner's *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981) p.2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gordon Harland, *Christian Faith and Society* (Alberta: The University of Calgary Press, 1988), p. 10.

¹⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 98, 99.

of his Christ; and he will reign for ever and ever' ([Rev. 11:15](#)). Dutch prime minister, Abraham Kuyper once said of the Lordship of Christ: 'There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, "This is mine! This belongs to me!" ' In God's own time, this glorious expectation will come to pass. The church is called upon as God's redemptive partner in realizing this vision. To disciple the nation, the local church as God's partner, should consider its duties to the nations.

To preach the gospel to every person. This means Spirit-led, systematic, and sustaining evangelistic communication at home and overseas. The *evangel* must be proclaimed in season and out of season. Christ must be offered to every person, a church planted in every community. The church must never fall into the trap of recognizing God's cosmic plan and neglecting the necessity for individual conversion without which one can not enter the kingdom (cf. [In. 3.3](#)). In our zeal to transform society we must not forget the *sin-analysis* of Jesus about man and society. The cross of Jesus can either be a stumbling block or a redemptive means to honour God. There is no other way to enter the kingdom nor is there any other name under heaven by which a person can be saved (cf. [In. 14:6](#), [Acts 4:12](#)).

To plant a viable and vital local church in every village or people group. Where Christ is, there the glory of God is also. In particular, Christ is present when two or three are gathered in his name (cf. [Mt. 18:20](#)). This is the nuclear presence of the church in a specific locality. In fact, this is the aim of evangelism—a church in every people group. We evangelize with the prayerful intent to organize churches. Our Lord himself declares his mission: 'I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it' ([Mt. 16:18](#)). The existence of the church as the primary agency of the Kingdom of God is essential to the task of discipling the nations.

In his definitive work on the Kingdom, Ladd advances this thesis: 'The Kingdom creates the church, works through the church, and is proclaimed in the world by the church.' Although the two are not identical they are inseparable. A tension is to be acknowledged that 'there can be no Kingdom without a church—those who have acknowledged God's rule—and there can be no church without God's kingdom.'¹⁷ Christ is both the King of the kingdom and the Head of the church. For this reason discipling and kingdom-building should not be independent or unrelated activities.

One of the most effective strategies is promoted by the movement known as DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation.). Its visionary founder, Dr. Jim Montgomery wrote: 'DAWN aims at mobilizing the whole body of Christ in whole countries in a determined effort to complete the Great Commission in that country by working toward the goal of providing an evangelical congregation for every village and neighborhood of every class, kind and condition of people in the whole country.'¹⁸ 'To complete' the Commission means 'that the last practical and measurable goal has been reached toward making a disciple of that country and all the "nations" within it'.¹⁹

To disciple every believer to live by all the teachings of the Lord. There must be solidity or maturity among God's people. Without such strengthening of the mind and spirit, the people can be discouraged and marginalized. The Word and the Spirit of God becomes indispensable in this process. Christian obedience, however, is essential to knowing God and growing in the Spirit.

¹⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 119.

¹⁸ Jim Montgomery, *Dawn 2000: 7 Million Churches To Go* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1989), p. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 13.

Disciples are needed to transform communities. There is danger in a Christianity that is on the right wing committed only to the salvation of souls and on the left wing only to the salvation of society—on the one hand, to save people from their spiritual death; on the other, to deliver people from poverty and injustice. The two are necessary dimensions of a truly evangelical message. Yet the two are, in many ways, disconnected from each other. Knowledge disconnects from character. Discipleship must be holistic. It must encompass the whole counsel of God ([Acts 20:27](#)). The absence of a holistic world view among believers is a tragic deficiency that has retarded the advance of the kingdom. I would urge that this world view should contain the following essential elements: God, Creation, Fall, Redemption, Church, and Vocation.

To model the Kingdom of God in their new community. If we want to have an ideal society, there must be a vital Christian witness in our society. It is not enough that we have churches planted in our cities and towns. These churches must be revived, alive, and living out their testimonies to their community. They must be the integrating centre of holistic life, a church where the blessings of the kingdom are enjoyed and shared with the community they are called to serve. ‘The Christian gospel’ Niebuhr says ‘which transcends all particular and contemporary social situations can be preached with power only by a Church which bears its share of the burdens of immediate situations in which men are involved, burdens of establishing peace, of achieving justice, and of perfecting justice in the spirit of love. Thus is the Kingdom of God which is not of this world made relevant to every problem of the world.’²⁰

The church however is not just a community. It is an eschatological community—already, though partially, experiencing in the present the reality of the kingdom that is still future. Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin referred to the church as ‘the sign that points people to a reality beyond what we can see’.²¹ The church is not the kingdom but it cannot be dissociated from Christ’s kingdom. It is its most concrete expression and God’s primary partner in redemption. It is a community where the Lord reigns.

To mediate the values of the kingdom in society through their transformational vocations. Witness to society becomes a natural consequence in the life of a believer like heat to the fire. This witness often is counter-cultural. The affirmation that ‘Jesus is Lord’ is an exclusive and a universal claim. This, as Newbigin explains of the early church, ‘was bound eventually to clash with the *cultus publicus* of the empire. The confession ... implies a commitment to make good that confession in relation to the whole life of the world—its philosophy, its culture, and its politics no less than the personal lives of its people.’²²

It must be recognized that the church is not always the instrument for political or social action. There are some issues that would call for a collective response. But in general, it is through its members who are actively fulfilling their vocation as lifestyle that the church must act. It is also important to recognize that the task is not just for a particular church but for the whole church and its instrumentalities (sometimes referred to as para-churches).

The transformation of people and society is the mission of Christ’s people here and everywhere. The technological innovations and the globalization of the world make the task of total mobilization of churches the more feasible. Spiritual grandstanding and self-aggrandizing individualism even with Bible-laced jargon only undermines the witness of Christ before a watching world.

²⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (Archon Books, 1969), p. 216.

²¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 63.

²² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 17.

To influence culture is not an innovation. The story of western civilization cannot be understood without the inclusion of its Christian heritage, such as the rule of law, the equality of men and women, the justice system and democracy. We need to remind ourselves that ours is not a lost cause in the midst of such overwhelming odds. The church is an eschatological reality. It was, it is, and it will be the people of God in pilgrimage to his new earth. As in the Eucharist, it speaks of its past 'in remembrance of me', it speaks of its present 'do this (now)' ... proclaim the Lord's death until I come, the future.

Christianity has influenced human history. The apostle Paul can be a case study to illustrate this point. He was a man of many cultures: Hebrew by birth, raised and educated in a Greek city, and a citizen of Rome. Each of those cultures had its own ideals. Each had its own metaphor for ultimate reality. Paul was going to show people of all three cultures that they were looking at the back walls with the beam and they needed to turn and see what the beam pointed to.

The Hebrew gave the world our moral categories; the Greeks have given us our philosophical categories; the Romans have passed on to us our legal categories. For the Hebrew the great pursuit of life was symbolized by light: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?' ([Ps. 27:1](#)). 'The people walking in darkness have seen a great light' ([Is. 9:2](#)). 'That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world' ([Jn. 1:9](#)). For the Hebrews light said it all.

For the Greeks, the ultimate goal was knowledge. 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' ([Jn. 8:32](#)). 'I know whom I have believed' said the apostle Paul ([2 Tim. 1:12](#)).

For the Romans, the epitome of life was symbolized by glory. Rome was a city to which all roads led. It was not built in a day. It was the eternal city. The glory of the Roman Empire and the Caesars is proverbial.

Light, knowledge, glory. These were the ideals of the three great cultures. These were the beams of light they stared at. Writing to believers in the city of Corinth that embodied all three influences, the apostle Paul said, 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, [has] shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ([2 Cor. 4:6](#)).'²³ Christ made the difference in transforming civilizations. In union with him, we are tasked to do the same.

A few years ago in Davao City in the Philippines in a coastal slum area where many Muslim dwellers live, a Christian lady worked with PHILRADS (the relief and development arm of the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches) in a church-based community Project. She was Evelyn Fernandez and was locally known as the Mother Theresa of Davao—for good reasons. She cared for the Muslim poor so effectively that whenever a Muslim was in need, they would rather go to her than elsewhere. This is a silent witness, yet so important for national transformation when multiplied countless times in the nation.

For even in a nation that is prosperous and has approximated justice in practice, it does not necessarily mean that a good society has been achieved. As Glen Tinder says, 'Life can be culturally vulgar, morally degraded, and spiritually vacuous even under conditions of substantive justice.' The fact is that even in societies where substantive justice is found or abounds, as in North America, it has also created a spiritual void and a moral morass that tend to negate the avowed goal of a good life and society. Therefore, we must take a look at another option, to go beyond simply public advocacy and to move into the heart of the issue itself.

²³ Ravi Zacharias, *The Cries Of The Heart* (Waco: Word, 1998), pp. 20, 21.

We need the kind of Christian influence that stems from the believers' life of worship in their local churches. The exodus reminds us that the liberation of the Israelites was to enable them to worship God ([Ex. 5:1](#)) before they could enjoy the blessings of Canaan. In worship, the people covenant themselves to obey their God ([Jos. 24:18](#)). In obeying their God, they become a 'delightful land' to those around them.

To share the blessings of the Kingdom of God with all nations of the world. The intent of God is not just to bless a nation. God has a plan not just for his creatures but for his creation. God wants his church to grow and to expand, to be blessed and to share the blessings. The prophet Isaiah wrote: 'For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations, And they will resettle the desolate cities' ([Is. 54:3](#)). This was the message of God to Abraham: 'And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' ([Gen. 12:3](#); [17:5](#)). This was reaffirmed by Christ in the great commission when he called his church 'to make disciples of all the nations' ([Mt. 28:19](#)).

2. Economic Sufficiency.

'... as with the gladness of harvest' ([Is. 9:3](#)).

God will eradicate poverty in the future. The language of Isaiah is 'gladness of harvest' (v [3](#)). During harvest time, the whole community is rejoicing. Nobody is hungry. There is food for everyone. The other metaphor was 'as men rejoice when they divide the spoil' (v [3](#)). Here is the image of a victor enjoying the spoil of war. This points to the biblical ideal that God promised his chosen people, where no poor person will be found in his community (see [Deut. 15:4](#)). This will be actualised, but not yet!

Poverty is an inescapable reality in the present. Within the 10/40 window are located 80% of the world's poor and 18 of the 40 least developed countries. In the Philippines, for example, about 43% are living below the poverty line (this figure can move up or down depending on what is added to or subtracted from the bread basket of basic subsistence). Newbigin said that 'During the three decades following the inauguration of the "Development" Decade, the gap in income between the richest and the poorest billions of the world's population was estimated to have widened by a factor of 500 percent.'²⁴ Christian Futurologist Tom Sine reported that 'The United Nations Development Program states that 30 years ago the poorest 20 percent of the world's population earned 2.3 percent of the world's income. Now they earn only 1.4 percent and that amount is still declining.'²⁵

The stark reality is that the ugly faces of poverty stare at us everywhere. These countries are social volcanoes that can erupt in tragic proportions unless something is done to alleviate poverty. Dr. Yen, the late founder of the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, once said that, 'even if the manufacture of nuclear weapons were discontinued and the superpowers were able to settle their differences, there would be no guarantee of security and lasting peace throughout the world, so long as two-thirds of the human race are left to suffer in mass poverty, mass inequality and mass discontent'. This is the church's continuing challenge; it is not just an ultimate concern but also a social concern.

²⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 94.

²⁵ Tom Sine, *Cyprus 2000: Which Scenarios Are Most Likely* (citing 'A Global Poverty Trap', *The Economist*, July 2, 1996, p. 34.)

But what does economic sufficiency mean? Many development planners would have varying answers. Prime Minister Mahathir answered this question in his Vision 2020 for Malaysia. In fact, it has become a successful national programme for the country.

This nation must be able to provide enough food on the table so that not a solitary Malaysian is subjected to the travesty of gross under-nourishment. We must provide enough by way of essential shelter, access to health facilities, and all the basic essentials. A developed Malaysia must have a wide and vigorous middle class and must provide full opportunities for those in the bottom third to climb their way out of the pit of relative poverty.²⁶

Economic sufficiency does not mean that all will be rich. There are many variables to consider, including differences in personalities, skills, resources, and culture; these factors will result in unequal productivity or scales of economy. God told his people Israel that ‘There shall be no poor among you’ ([Deut. 15:4](#)) yet he also said ‘the poor will never cease to be in the land’ ([Deut. 15:11](#), cf. [Mk 14:7](#)). Massive poverty is the stark reality in our world. And since redemption is also restoration, then the deviation between the ideal and reality becomes a church agendum for action. An effective response to poverty begins with analysis of the many causes of poverty: sin, laziness, and injustice. Others would add to the causes calamities, wrong values, religious vows. Christians should deal with these root-causes of poverty.²⁷

Across two millennia the churches and Christian humanitarian agencies have worked hard to alleviate poverty wherever they are found. At the immediate level, there is *emergency relief assistance* to arrest the deterioration of the quality of life and to end the dying. There is the *empowerment programme* for the poor which comes in the form of skills training, micro-finance, and other job or income-generating programmes that lead to economic freedom. One cannot ignore *value transformation* for the poor. Economic and national development especially in the modern world requires the enculturation and alignment of values that are consistent with science, technology and information. These values must include a work ethic of excellence. In an eloquent way, Dewi Hughes writes that ‘the issue is not whether we should engage in economic activity or not. This is our destiny.’²⁸

But economic wealth must not be hoarded and indulged in by those who have it. God is the one who gives the raw materials for production and also the one who gives the power to make wealth. Work and production are part of his means to provide for his creatures. Thus, compassion for others must not be neglected. Christians should not close their hands to their neighbours in need (cf. [Eph. 4:28](#)).

The dignity of human labour, the pursuit of productivity, and the compassion to help the poor have been contributory factors in the development of the middle class which, in turn, is a common denominator for viable democracies in the world. Micah sums it up well: ‘And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?’ ([Mic. 6:8](#)).

Then there is the need for *public advocacy*. Christian work has social justice implication. The Bible is so specific about some of its teachings on social justice. Policies

²⁶ YAB Dato’Seri, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia: ‘The Way Forward (Vision 2020)’—a speech delivered February 28 1991, p. 5.

²⁷ Note that poverty in a fallen world can be self-caused (laziness, greed, foolishness, shortsightedness), imposed (oppression and injustice), or due to religious error (fate, karma) and natural calamities. Clearly, the solution is not just relief but transformation of personal values and structural evils.

²⁸ Dewi Hughes, *God Of The Poor* (U.K.: OM Publishing, 1998), p. 157.

must be in place that allow for the opportunities to gain wealth, increase production and to widen the middle class of society. This would include avoidance of usurious interest and the dismantling of oppressive structures (see [Neh. 5](#)). This economic goal is both a religious and political concern.

Before leaving this concern, Hughes point out that ‘the two poles of biblical teaching focus on the great danger of acquiring wealth for our own enjoyment, on the one hand, and on addressing the needs of the poor on the other hand’.²⁹ It demands therefore, that those who have wealth should share with the poor in a ‘hands up’ way and not in a ‘handout’ so that the poor works himself out of poverty with dignity. Davis S. Landis, Professor Emeritus of History and Economics at Harvard University, observes: ‘History tells us that the most successful cures for poverty come from within. Foreign aid can help but like windfall wealth, can also hurt. It can discourage effort and plant a crippling sense of incapacity. As the African saying has it, “The hand that receives is always under the one that gives”. No, what counts is work, thrift, honesty, patience and tenacity. To people haunted by misery and hunger, that may add up to selfish indifference. But at bottom, no empowerment is so effective as self-empowerment.’³⁰ Israel, as God’s development project in the Old Testament, was instructed by God to do so. Paul expresses this same principle saying ‘... let him labour, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need’ ([Eph. 4.28](#)).

Granted the givenness of our responsibility to the needy and poor, the next question is this: What indicators or standards are we setting against which we evaluate ourselves periodically? What do we really want to see happen to them? In the study of successful democracies, we can set the following goals. (1) that not more than 10% of the people should be on survival mode economically, (2) that there will be a broadening of the middle class, (3) that not more than 50% people are illiterate, and (4) they are in good health or the life span increases alongside the developed nations of the world. Idealistic? But then small dreams never excited people into action.

3. Social Peace.

He is the ‘Prince of peace. There will be no end to the increase of his government or of peace’
([Is. 9:6, 7](#)).

Social peace is perhaps one of the most illusive pursuits of civil societies. In the last two decades, we have seen on many sides the problems of social peace. The transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy created labour unrest. Tribalization in Eastern Europe and ethnic cleansing in some countries of Africa have also been a problem. As globalization impacts many countries, geographical boundaries slowly diminish in importance. Urbanization and electronic commerce have been the cause, among other factors, of the development of multi-racial and pluralistic societies. The challenge of governments today is to maintain national peace and unity in their quest for national economic sufficiency and political stability.

Peace is not just absence of conflict or ‘no more war’. Peace is primarily well-being and freedom from anxiety. It includes goodwill and harmony in human relationships. It is to live a fulfilled life, ‘to have achieved all God planned’ (e.g. [Gen. 15:15](#); [2 Ki. 22:20](#)). Two related thoughts are subsumed in the title. *First*, because the Prince is Christ, and Christ is the man, the whole man, it points to a human ideal of a truly ‘integrated, rounded

²⁹ Hughes, *God Of The Poor*, p. 178.

³⁰ David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998) p. 523.

personality' (e.g. [Lk. 2:52](#)).³¹ *Second*, the means to peace will be non-violent. Here, the New Testament refers to the proclamation of the gospel of peace ([Eph. 6:15](#)). All these are combined in the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*: peace with God, with one's neighbour, and with one's environment.

Social peace is a key factor in eradicating poverty. The economic growth of the Pacific rim has resulted in the development of the so-called tiger countries. But the countries that registered growth since World War II, the Korean War or the Vietnam War have been countries where there is social peace, e.g. Japan, Singapore Taiwan, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong. A key factor in the development of many countries is their ability to lure investments and external venture capital to develop the economy. Venture capital from other nations will not flow into countries with social unrest. The West and other developed countries with their capital and high labour costs cannot compete in the global market. They have to invest outside of their countries into the so-called third world. But these investments will flow only where there is social peace. Social peace is a pre-requisite to economic growth. To be sure, venture capital and offshore manufacturing can bring their own kinds of evil. Oppression and exploitation often become issues that undermine the progress that they bring, and there can be widespread labour unrest. This is in fact one of the major challenges of democracy and development: how can a nation become prosperous without becoming idolatrous? How can democracy define the limits of individual freedom so as to protect society?

Social unrest is a key factor in poverty. Countries that have not grown as much or whose growth has been stunted by civil war or conflicts include Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh, Myanmar. The biblical narratives showed similar patterns where progress comes when the nation is at peace and not at war. Jeremiah told the exiles in Babylon 'to pray for the peace (welfare) of the city where I sent you for in its welfare you will have welfare' ([Jer. 29:7](#)). Clearly, political and economic advocacy is a vital ministry for evangelicals to ensure that just and favourable structures and systems are in place in the country to participate in the internationalization of business.

In addressing social peace, we have to deal with the issue of culture wars or tribal conflicts that have degenerated into genocides. There are obviously many reasons for this situation, ranging from ethnicity, to land claims, ideological struggles, and religious differences. The ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and in Kosovo are clear examples. Pockets of unrest are found among the tribal peoples in Nagaland, in Southern Philippines, and in Indonesia to name some. The issues are grave and no easy solution is suggested. But it is no excuse for evangelical indifference. Socio-political solutions gave South Africa social peace in recent years. This is an area for involvement by evangelicals as well as by others. Evangelicals can be a part of the peace initiatives of their government or of their churches as well.

Can evangelical faith contribute to the building of a new order that approximates to God's Kingdom? The answer is yes. In fact, the church is called upon as God's primary partner to realize that order that is certain to come.

Lasting social peace begins with peace with God. The Messiah, our Lord Jesus, is the Prince of peace, his kingly rule will be established non-violently. It will be through the gospel of peace. This is foundational. We are to call all men who have been alienated from God (cf. [Rom. 3:23](#)) to be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus.

Peace with God leads to peace with our neighbour. More than any other group within a nation, the evangelical church would have a decisive advantage in the ministry of reconciliation. Christians are called to be peacemakers ([Mt. 5:9](#)). The apostle Paul

³¹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p. 103.

provides a firm theological ground for such a ministry. Robert J. Schreiter follows and cites Jose Comblin's three levels of reconciliation: the 'Christological level, in which Christ is the mediator through whom God reconciles the world to God's self; an ecclesiological level, in which Christ reconciles Jew and Gentile; and a cosmic level, in which Christ reconciles all the powers in heaven and on earth'.³² These are Pauline concepts. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' ([2 Cor. 5:9](#)). The church is one body where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, where Jesus 'broke down the dividing wall, and abolished in his flesh the enmity' ([Eph. 2:14](#)); 'in him all things hold together ... and through him to reconcile all things to himself' ([Col. 1:18, 20](#)). Schreiter, drawing from his experiences in Chile, observes that 'reconciliation is more spirituality than strategy'. (p. 26).

Because the church is a community of reconciliation, it is given the ministry of reconciliation ([2 Cor. 5:18-19](#)). The idea of a Christian peace corps to mediate peace has biblical validity. The Church and Society Department of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) has focused on the ministry of reconciliation with considerable success in Rwanda and Cambodia. Recently, the evangelicals in Kingston, Jamaica have worked with the police to reconcile warring gangs with encouraging results.

Truth and justice must be factored into the process of reconciliation. If the oppressor recognizes wrong then he can repent. But often he doesn't. Since the oppressor cannot forgive himself, then the proper subject of reconciliation is the victim. This is where evangelical Christians are special instruments of grace in the hands of God. In the process, Schreiter continues, 'because the victim has been brought by God's reconciling grace to forgive the tormentor, the tormentor is prompted to repent of evil doing and to engage in rebuilding his or her own humanity.' Thus, forgiveness can lead to repentance. God, however, is not a Being of indifferent mercy in this act of reconciling. Paul tells us that our God is the God of wrath but that Christ died for our sins while we were yet sinners ([Rom. 5:8, 9](#)). For this reason, we do not seek a hasty peace, where everyone just wants to forget the past and start all over again; neither do we want the experts to secure compromises from the opposing parties in hope of arriving at 'peace'. In certain conflicts, clearly there is right and wrong. We are not called to reconcile God with the devil. However, it is necessary to deal with the root of violence or evil and to respect the humanity and dignity of the parties. The victim's forgiveness does not absolve the perpetrator of sin and wrong. He will be judged by the holy God.

The long road to lasting social peace begins in the churches. The ministry of reconciliation must work there or else we are disqualified as arbiters of peace in our societies. The church as the community of people reconciled to God by grace must become ambassadors of peace where there is unrest. Truly, they must follow the footsteps of the Prince of Peace.

In the last decade or so, about 123 countries within the United Nations have undergone radical changes. With improved technology, people have direct access to information. Consequently, people want to participate in the governance of their lives and future. As someone described it: the twilight of bureaucracy and the dawn of democracy. No wonder then that totalitarian governments were toppled. The problem is that Christians have been bitterly divided along political lines in their countries. Some collaborated with the establishments for the price of being left alone, and others have suffered persecution and reprisals for their radicalism. South Africa is an example. The 1985 Kairos Document admitted that 'the Church is divided. More and more people are now saying that there are in fact two Churches in South Africa—a White Church and a

³² Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 42.

Black Church. Even within the same denomination there are in fact two churches.’ With the collapse of apartheid under Nelson Mandela, the evangelicals had to decide whether they would remain divided or take the bold step of faith to dismantle their own multiple structures and be united. They did this in 1995 and formed one body—The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa.

Whatever approach one uses as may be required by the uniqueness of the context, the fact is that the ministry of reconciliation is inescapable for Christians. The new community of new creatures in Christ must demonstrate that model of peace. Clarke E. Cochran (*Religion in Public and Private Life*) observes that, ‘an effective public role for religion is often not in direct political involvement, but in public witness to what equality, solidarity, and mutual respect look like in specific institutional forms’.

Peace with the environment. God made a covenant of blessing for Noah with his descendants and with every living creature ([Gen. 9:10](#)). God desires that his bounty be experienced by all his creatures. This means adequate provisions, good health, and freedom. He wants his people to celebrate life and rejoice in him. But this would require that the air is not polluted, that the lakes and the sea are not dumping grounds for industrial waste, that the water is potable, that there is enough forest cover to prevent soil erosion and river siltation, that greed does not destroy our aqua-culture and make our animals extinct, that the streets do not stink with uncollected garbage, and that the land is kept fertile as we pass use from one generation to another. We are to be not only our brothers’ keepers, but we are to be good gardeners and good vice-regents of the whole of creation.

4. Public Justice.

‘He will rule ... in justice’ ([Is. 9:7](#)).

Peace is simply defined as ‘freedom from war or strife’. Technically, peace in this sense, can be imposed by the sword or by the barrel of a gun. Marxist and totalitarian governments have managed to have ‘peace’ for years. Yet, the collapse of Marxism in 1989 showed that coercion will not bring peace or sustainable development. A structure for growth must be in place that will allow for a reasonable degree of freedom and justice. With the end of the Cold War, US President Carter’s insistence on human rights as basis for American foreign policy is being revisited. The American management guru, Peter Drucker, made the observation that ‘governments will have to learn that it is futile, folly and predictably a wasted of money, to invest—whether through a World Bank Loan or through a Stabilization Credit—unless the recipient country establishes a truly independent and truly *legal* system. Otherwise the money will only make the wrong people rich: political bosses; generals; con-artists. Instead of enriching the recipient country it will impoverish it.’³³

The biblical foundation for social peace is justice. This divine concern is so serious that in the Old Testament, the word and its related terms are used about 500 times and 200 more in the New Testament.³⁴ However, it is not easy to precisely define justice. Its essence can be inferred from the Old Testament concept of *lex talionis* or the famous ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’ dictum ([Ex. 21:24](#)), although there is no record that this principle was applied physically or literally. The application of this text (v [26](#)) is more of an illustration of its meaning. I believe that Marshall rightly interpreted this as ‘the judicial

³³ Peter F. Drucker, *Managing in a Time of Great Change* (New York: Truman Talley Books/Plume, 1995), p. 336.

³⁴ Paul Marshall, *Thine Is The Kingdom* (Vancouver: Regent College Bookstore, 1984), p. 52.

principle of *equity*—treat equal cases alike and let the measure of reward and punishment be appropriate to the gravity of the deed'.³⁵

The term justice 'suggests primarily man's conduct toward others, especially in matters of legal or personal rights' ([Lev. 19:35](#); [Deut. 25:13–16](#); [Amos 8:5](#); [Pro. 11:1](#)).³⁶ It is external. It deals with laws governing relationship and the use of things that order life in society. Emil Brunner declares 'justice to be the supreme principle of earthly institutions and systems in fallen society....'³⁷ God insists that governors are to rule with justice ([Ps. 89:14](#)). Such a command is not a contradiction of his nature as merciful. Henry argues the correlation of these concepts succinctly.

The great distinctive of the Bible is that in respect to the people of faith, God is both the God of justice and of justification. Not the New Testament only but the Old Testament also relates God's justice and his mercy. The God of covenant is the God of justice and salvation.... The Psalmist can say of Yahweh: 'The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love' ([Ps. 33:5](#) NIV; cf [Pss. 87:11 f.](#), [102:11](#); [Jer. 50:7](#); [Is. 41:2](#)). God's justice vindicates his people from their oppressors ([Deut. 32:4](#), [35 f.](#); [Hos. 2:19](#); [Mic. 7:9](#)).³⁸

Justice has three essential dimensions. *Firstly*, it deals with equitable and fair legislation for everyone. This is a challenge for an evangelical Solon, the wise legislator, because he cannot impose his religion on others in a pluralistic society. But as Norman Geisler and Frank Turek point out, the task of legislation is to enact morality.

... all laws declare directly, or by implication, that one behavior is right and its opposite is wrong. In other words, all good laws are just laws, and to legislate justice is to legislate morality. Since securing justice is, in fact, the primary function of our government, *legislating morality is not only constitutional but unavoidable and necessary. The only question is 'Whose morality should be legislated?'*³⁹

The question 'whose morality should be legislated' may be answered in a number of ways. It will be determined firstly by the powerful or the majority, secondly, by culture, or thirdly, by an impasse on legislation resulting in anarchy. The Christian legislator should seek for universal values that would be espoused by other religions or cultures. Theologically, this is a plausible process because of God's image in every person. God is spirit (*ruah*—[Gen. 1:2](#); *pneuma*—[Jn. 4:24](#)) and he created human beings with the same quality of personality. According to Darrell Smith, 'The spirit reflects the more elegant or God-like characteristics in human personality (e.g., see [Rom. 8:16](#)) and is concerned with love, justice, truth, beauty, meaning, relationships, values, righteousness, benevolence, and eternity.'⁴⁰ This is supported by Paul the apostle saying:

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written

³⁵ Marshall, *Thine Is The Kingdom*, p. 52.

³⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. VI, God Who Stands and Stays: Part Two* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1983), p. 404.

³⁷ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. VI*, p. 407.

³⁸ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. VI*, p. 410.

³⁹ Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *Legislating Morality* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), p. 25.

⁴⁰ Darrell Smith, *Integrative Therapy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) p. 53.

in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or defending them ([Rom. 2:14](#)).

In concrete terms, we find the golden rule affirmed by different religions.

'All things you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them.' Christianity, [Mt. 7:12](#).

'What is hateful to you, do not to your fellow man.' Judaism, Talmud.

'No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.' Islam, Sunan.

'Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you' Hinduism, Mahabharata 5:1517

'Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.' Buddhism, Udanavarga 5:18.

'Do not unto others what you would not have them do to you.' Confucianism, Analects 15:13

The same sentiment is expressed by Oxford philosopher C.S. Lewis. Borrowing from Confucianism, he wrote of the principles of the Tao in *The Abolition of Man* saying that it draws support from all religious and moral traditions in inculcating certain rules such as: 'general beneficence towards others, special beneficence towards one's own community, duties to parents and ancestors, duties to children and posterity, the laws of justice, honesty, mercy, and magnanimity. Whether drawn from the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, Chinese *Analects*, Cicero, or the *Bhagavad Gita*, these are the truths that constitute the civilizational circle.'⁴¹ Even so, these constitute a minimal foundation that in amplification and definition must yield to Judeo-Christian tradition.

The Christian legislator must constantly seek the denominators of common grace for all mankind and ground their actions on them. All truth is God's truth because God, who is the source and end of all truth, is one. At the same time, the legislator must be courageous to stand by his theologically-informed and irreducible limits of tolerance in working with others.

Secondly, it is concerned with remedy. Due process is crucial in administering justice. If the remedial process is violated, then there can be no ample protection for the rights of a person. The penal code of a nation may consider rape as a crime but if a poor victim has no means to hire or avail of the services of a good lawyer⁴² or if the accused has the means to bribe a judge, then there will be miscarriage of justice. The crucial question then would be: Is the remedy available and affordable to the poorest of the poor? God exhorts that justice be given to the afflicted ([Job 36:6](#)) and to the slaves ([Col. 4:1](#)).

Thirdly, it includes penalty. For justice to exist, the penalty of law must be equally applied to the guilty whether he/she is rich or poor and not dependent on whom one knows or does not know. Moreover, it must be commensurate to the offence. The blessings of Israel under David [and other kings] was due to his administration of justice to all the people ([1 Chr. 18:4](#)).

The issue of justice is far more difficult than we can imagine. While there are clear principles of justice in the Bible, it does not provide for all areas. Examples would be laws

⁴¹ Cited by Richard John Neuhaus, *The Idea of Moral Progress, First Things* (August/September 1999, Number 95), p. 26.

⁴² The legal provision for public defenders for indigent litigants is a requirement of due process in many countries. The root of social justice 'that those who have the least in life should have more of the law' may be traced to God's concern for the poor.

against smoking in public and in such other areas as driving, abortions, euthanasia, drug addiction, genetic modification, cloning. In the West, a critical agenda of legislation has been focused on individual *choice*. The issues of abortion, de facto marriage and alternative lifestyles (homosexuality) are examples of legislative agenda that are being promoted on the basis of choice or freedom. Such legislation must deal with the fact that choices have consequences to society. Thus, one must go into prudential balancing in border situations to serve the common good. This is particularly true in cases where the separation of the church and state is constitutionally guaranteed.

This means that the church cannot impose its value system or coerce others to believe in the same way. Niebuhr reminds us that ‘the ultimate principles of the Kingdom of God are never irrelevant to any problem of justice, and they hover over every social situation as an ideal possibility; but that does not mean that they can be made into simple alternatives for the present schemes of relative justice’.⁴³

It must be noted furthermore, that because God requires everything to be just then ‘justice is a standard which can be applied not only to people. Even weights and measures must be just, i.e., they must be fair’ ([Lev. 19:36](#)). God enjoins all people to act justly in relation to others. This means that the task to do justice is for all people to do justly in all their doings ([Ps. 15:1f](#)). It can be negative in that one must ‘refrain from such things as idolatry, adultery, robbery and violence’ It can also be positive in that ‘a just person must care for those who are hungry and naked, defend the poor, and judge fairly between others (cf. [Ezek. 18:5–9](#)).’⁴⁴

What would be some specific goals that evangelicals can strive for? The most basic need is the recovery of the Christian vocation or calling. This call is by grace from God to God for God. It is a call to recognize the sovereignty of God and to respond in unqualified obedience. It is to live a life of wisdom, discerning the works of God in creation. It is to work with God as his transactional partner in redemption; yet, though partners, to admit to the decisive incommensurate difference between them *in pursuing justice, sharing love, and living in holiness* in the world. Such is the unchanging and continuing human vocation that qualifies our occupations in society. Each can serve as God’s agent of justice in every area of life.

Then they can help establish a government under the rule of law. For this cause, evangelicals can critically collaborate with other citizens or interest groups so that justice will roll like a river ([Amos 5:4](#)). The important point is that ‘God maintains a just order in the creation. We are to conform our actions to this order and we are to judge all things and all actions in terms of this order. When we say that something is just or unjust we are measuring it in terms of God’s requirement for justice.’⁴⁵ (cf. [Jn. 5:3](#); [7:24](#); [Acts 17:31](#); [Rom. 2:11](#); [Eph. 6:9](#); [1 Pet. 1:17](#); [2:23](#); [Rev. 16:7](#); 19.2).

The case of Albania, for example, is a fresh reminder of the input needed from God’s people in the development of a just system.

Another goal for evangelicals is the affirmation of religious freedom as the foundation of all other freedoms. To achieve this, an active public advocacy ministry for evangelicals is needed to monitor, evaluate and engage in shaping public opinions on the legislative or policy agenda from community to national levels of government. The work of the National Association of Evangelicals in the USA with their lobby in Washington D.C. is a model to be noticed, as is a similar activity of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Other national

⁴³ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity And Power Politics* (Archon Books, 1969), p. 25.

⁴⁴ Marshall, *Thine Is The Kingdom*, p. 53.

⁴⁵ Marshall, *Thine Is The Kingdom*, p. 53.

Evangelical Alliances use networks such as a Christian Legal Society to achieve the same end. In the Philippines, the Philippines Council of Evangelical Churches (PCEC) is part of the National Ecumenical Consultative Committee which meets with the President to present their views on national issues. This ministry should be linked with other like-minded interest groups. Not least, there can be participation in the global networks of WEF for additional pressure from the international community.

5. National Righteousness.

'He will rule ... in righteousness' (Is. 9.7).

Justice and righteousness, a frequent pair in Isaiah, are two sides of the same coin since both are rooted in divine holiness. Together, they form the moral foundation of the kingdom. For divine holiness will be 'perfectly manifested in true procedures (justice) which reflect righteous principles'.⁴⁶ J.A. Motyer further states that 'righteousness embodies holiness in sound principles, and justice is the expression of righteousness in sound precepts'.⁴⁷ Righteousness is an internal concept. Carl Henry says that 'the word righteousness tends to fix attention on inner divine-human relationships'.⁴⁸ It is the inner prompting in a person to give to the other person his/her due or right. If the citizens act rightly, then the collective result will be national righteousness.

There are five fundamental issues involved in the movement towards national righteousness.

First, is the issue of morality. For when one speaks of right it also posits a concept of wrong. But in a world where truth is culturally relativized, who defines truth? Is there an absolute that determines right from wrong? Is culture the authority in what is referred to as survival ethics? To those within a culture, a particular act may be right or wrong, but it may not be so within another context. Which culture can prescribe objective morality for all? And by what standard or authority will it be able to do that? Is it the voice of the majority or the coercion of superior power?

In a debate in Canada some years ago, the proposition was: Can a man be good without believing in God? The answer is not easy because a prior question arises: what is 'good'? If there is no transcendence, then there can be no objective good as referent for an answer. As a philosopher once said, ethics is transcendental. Stated another way, the question is: Can there be any moral goodness if there is no God? In a culturally pluralistic world one has to concede to relativism as a logical consequence. For if all cultures or religions are equally valid yet contradicting each other in essential points, then all can be wrong but not all can be right. This is the Law of Non-contradiction. Of course, there is another way out, that one position is right and all are wrong.

The Christian position is that there is God, the transcendent Being, who is the source of truth as written in Scriptures. God revealed his moral laws in nature in general (the law in your heart), and in the Ten Commandments in particular. Darrow L. Miller points out that 'the Ten Commandments brought order to society ...' and 'create the foundation for civil society'.⁴⁹ In the case of Israel, the exodus (political freedom) was followed by the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai (the Law or political charter).

⁴⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p. 103.

⁴⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. VI*, p. 404.

⁴⁹ Darrow L. Miller, *Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth To Transform Nations* (Seattle, Washington: YWAM Publishing) p. 124.

By this Decalogue, God defines morality in terms of what *ought to be* rather than the secular view of what *is*. Civil society must be based on *ethics* (normative principles) and not on *pathos* (emotions or feelings). Jesus must have referred to this same truth saying: ‘Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ ([Mt. 6:10](#)). The Kingdom of God ‘is governed by a moral philosophy’.⁵⁰ This means that all activities—political, social, economic, technological—in a civil society should reflect this divine morality for the people truly to enjoy the abundant life and the bounties of creation from God. It also means that cultures should be transformed into what Mangalwadi calls the ‘culture of the cross’—seeking first the righteousness of the kingdom and not compromising with wrong or evil.

The role of Judeo-Christian morality is indispensable to the very idea of the inevitability of human progress. Without grounding human progress in what Richard John Neuhaus calls ‘the civilizational circle of moral conversation’ or simply ‘traditional values’, the options, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, are between Aristotle or Nietzsche, between a tradition of virtue, on the one hand, and moral nihilism, on the other hand’.⁵¹

The link between values and progress is crucial to the future of humanity. It is true that the future holds endless possibilities for progress. But it includes possibilities both for good and for evil. Therefore, outside of Judeo-Christian morality, humanity has to face up to Reinhold Niebuhr’s conclusion: ‘History, therefore, has no solution of its own problem.’ Neuhaus strongly insists that ‘there can be no progress *beyond* but only *within* the civilizational circle of moral truths into which we were born, by which we are tested, and to which we are duty bound, in the hope of sustaining the circle for those who come after us. The alternative is the willed ignorance of nihilism.’⁵²

Evangelicals do affirm that ethics is inseparably grounded on biblical truth. Russell Kirk expresses this eloquently:

The terror of existence without object or rule was dissipated by the revelation that man is not alone in the universe; that an Other exists; and that Other is the One God, who makes it possible for human beings to be something better than the beasts that perish. Through the revelation of order in the universe, men and women are given the possibility of becoming fully human—of finding pattern and purpose in existence, unlike dogs that live from day to day only. So the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, are not a set of harsh prohibitions imposed by an arbitrary tribal deity. Instead, they are liberating rules that enable people to diminish the tyranny of sin; that teach a people how to live with one another and in relation to God, how to restrain violence and fraud, how to know justice and to raise themselves above the level of predatory animals.⁵³

Second, granting the normativity of Christian morality or kingdom ethics, the problem still arises because it cannot be imposed on others. Even if the language and spirit of the law conform to Judeo-Christian ethics, the fact remains that legislation cannot bring transformation. For ‘Legislation has to do with conduct that can be controlled’⁵⁴ but not with motive. For example, taking the teaching of Jesus on murder and adultery, the law can punish murder but not anger. The law can condemn adultery but lust is beyond its

⁵⁰ Miller, *Disciplining Nations*, p.133.

⁵¹ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Idea of Moral Progress*, p. 26.

⁵² Neuhaus, *The Idea of Moral Progress*, p. 27.

⁵³ Cited by D. L. Miller, *Disciplining Nations*, p. 123.

⁵⁴ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 129.

sphere. The ethics of the kingdom applies to both realms. And even believers have to recognize that 'ethics, like the Kingdom itself, stand in the tension between present realization and future eschatology'.⁵⁵

Third, what shall the people of God do? Since they cannot impose Christian morality, then they should live their lives so that by word or deed, they participate in the process of the inculturating of Judeo-Christian values in society. The church must promote this moral vision at all levels from village councils to the national parliament, in schools or in the market place, at home and in the church. This vision must be shared by the whole nation from the top leaders to the grass root citizens. Governance, legislation, education and socialization are target channels to achieve the positive goal of national righteousness. Adam Seligman, a holder of a Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Anthropology from Hebrew University, grounds the success of the American Civil Society in the idea of a Holy Commonwealth which was 'interiorized into individual conscience'.⁵⁶

Fourth, how should the people live? How, then, can a person be empowered to do what is right and not to do what is wrong? Reality clearly evidences what Scripture teaches that all are sinners or as Paul of Tarsus puts it: 'the things I want to do I cannot do, the things I don't want to do, I do. It is not me but sin in me' ([Rom. 7:19](#)). Any analysis of the acute state of man's criminalization of his culture or man's inhumanity to man cannot be resolved by economics or politics unless at the heart of the reform is the sin-analysis of Jesus Christ. For a new society, a new spirit ([Ez. 11:19](#)). For the birth of a new nation, a new birth ([Jn. 3](#)). This is made possible only in Christ Jesus who alone can transform man and make him a new creature ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). The Spirit of Christ is the needed dynamic for such empowerment.

Fifth, righteousness expresses itself in terms of showing mercy to the poor (cf. [Mt. 6:1-2](#); [2 Cor. 9:9-10](#)). This inference is drawn from the fact that in a fallen world of abounding unrighteousness, God himself 'must become the protector and vindicator of the oppressed'.⁵⁷ This can include political deliverance as in the exodus ([Ex. 9:27](#)) and spiritual deliverance as in redemption from sin and from bondage to the devil. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation ... the revealed righteousness of God ([Rom. 1:16-17](#)). God declares as righteous those who have faith in Jesus ([Rom. 3:24](#)).

The people of God should realize whose they are, God's own possession ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)). They are the people of the Word and of the Spirit. They are promised not just the Spirit who will lead them into all truth (cf. [Jn. 14:17f.](#)), but also power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them ([Acts 1:8](#)). Their Word-dependent and Spirit-filled lives will help them to become increasingly Christlike in their lives. This enables them to transcend and transform the righteousness of the law into the righteousness of the heart. The ethics of love becomes woven fabrics to them which is a sign of the gift of God's reign. It is manifested at home, in the church and then through vocational ministry in the world. Only when people see righteousness *incarnated* in the lives of Christians, will they accept the beneficence of Judeo-Christian morality for all humanity.

I was delighted to find out that a business text book published by Macmillan Press in the USA on business ethics featured Correct Craft. This company is owned by the Meloon family in Orlando who are godly people with a passion to reach souls for Christ. The independent analysis came out with a glowing report in comparison to the business ethics of the Ford and Rockefeller companies. Of course, as the Reformers would say, it would

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Adam Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 77.

⁵⁷ *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, p. 462.

be good to have our preaching converted into public policy. Clearly, the implication is kingdom witness in all areas of life. People may do right because of fear of sanction by law or culture. But the righteousness of the heart will ensure lasting righteousness among the people. The sum of all these is this: righteousness exalts a nation ([Pr. 14:34](#)).

III. POSTSCRIPT

The different elements are interdependent. Righteousness produces justice resulting in peace and economic sufficiency. On the other hand, history reminds us, economic prosperity can lead to consumerism and greed. The story of the West is like that of the Prodigal Son. After receiving the blessings, he took his share, indulged himself, and forgot his Father. There is a sense in which the Father is awaiting the return of the prodigal. This is a major concern today for developing nations. In their pursuit to become developed nations, how can they avoid becoming permissive and disintegrating their values? I asked the same question of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia during a visit. I remember his answer: through the protection of our own values in a democracy that is Asian in form.

The activities are multi-directional. The Christian message and ministries on poverty eradication, promotion of peace, public advocacy and apologetics are by themselves valid activities. Christian social concern and actions are legitimate activities by themselves and should not be construed as a means to an end; they justify themselves. These activities can lead to the centre of all life—Christ. In the same way those who are in Christ should manifest his life in and through them in terms of promoting economic sufficiency, peace, justice and righteousness.

These themes are very prominent in the teachings of the prophet Isaiah. The messianic text that is the framework of the vision naturally links with the messianic vision of the New Jerusalem that awaits its consummation in John's vision of the New Heaven and New Earth (cf. [Rev. 21](#)). Isaiah said that when the Messiah finally rules and creation is re-ordered, the universal people of God who are gathered in the second exodus will experience total provision ([Is. 66:13](#)), total peace ([66:24–25](#)), total security ([66:22–23](#)) and total happiness ([66:29](#)).

IV. CONCLUSION

The path to disciple a nation is not a paved interstate highway. It is not clearly lighted, and it presents many pitfalls. As one scholar wrote '... the very struggle to secure justice itself involves the use of the instruments of power, and the instruments of power are always ambiguous. Nor can innocence be maintained, or purely achieved, by withdrawing from the struggle. The fact to be recognized is this: there is no moral hiding place.'⁵⁸ But his chosen people are assured of God's promised wisdom and guidance. In fact, the very promises of God presuppose that he is not on the side of the status quo but demands change. This change must take place within his new community for this is where his judgement will begin.

The biblical ideal of the kingdom that is coming is the basis of Christian social ethics. The discrepancy between the ideal and reality is the arena for evangelical engagement. We need a theology that is not grounded on the capacity of humankind for progress as the panacea of human ills. Rather, we need one that is founded on our living Lord. He will realize his purpose: through an awakening, or through special political agencies, and/or

⁵⁸ Harland, *Christian Faith and Society*, p. 86.

through his church. For this reason, all activities should be grounded upon and should lead us to the centre of our faith—Jesus Christ. Everything flows from the centre to the peripheries of the circumference. The DNA Vision should be recovered, but this would require a death-experience of the old paradigms as they give way to the new. Lesslie Newbigin, missionary for many years in South India, has summoned Christians to challenge the belief-framework within which contemporary culture operates: ‘It must call unequivocally for radical conversion, a conversion of the mind so that things are seen differently, and a conversion of the will so that things are done differently. It must decline altogether the futile attempt to commend the biblical vision of how things are by seeking to adjust it to the assumptions of our culture.’⁵⁹

Let me conclude by suggesting some practical programmatic implications for the church.

1. The philosophical vision provides both the legitimating and integrating ideal for a holistic evangelical agenda. Not all of us can do all these things simultaneously. Therefore, it recognizes our interdependence in working out God’s total agenda in the world. We will appreciate the works of interest groups, specialists or para-church agencies within our midst and draw them into a creative partnership with the churches. The vision of a disciplined nation is our point of reference.

2. Our vision evidences the truth that such a total ministry cannot be carried out by any one denomination, church or organization. Present divisions within the Christian community must not add to the magnitude of the problem that is already there. The church must be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

3. This vision demands the focusing of the strength of local churches to allocate their limited resources in kingdom building.

4. It will define the prophetic nature of the church as agents of transformation.

5. It calls for the alignment of resources so that we can move in the same direction, seeking functional alliances and networking that will enable all of us to work together for the goal.

6. It calls us to repentance and to prayer. Praying in the midst of the apparent human helplessness leads to revival and awakening that can bring the grace and mercy of God in divine visitation.

7. It revitalizes the churches enabling them to validate Christian organizations and ministries, offer a structure for coordination, and a context for integration of total ministries in the community thereby bringing hope to the land for the glory of God.

There are limits to what the church can achieve in the sphere of politics. Scripture encourages us to look forward to that day when society shall be drawn towards that kingdom where ‘the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid’ ([Is. 11:6](#)); when ‘nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ ([Is. 2:4](#)); when Christ shall deliver ‘the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power’ ([1 Cor. 15:24](#)); when ‘there shall be no end to the increase in his government or of peace ... to uphold it with justice and righteousness’ ([Is. 9:7](#)); when ‘the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord, and of his Christ’ ([Rev. 11:15](#)); and when there shall be ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ ([Rev. 21:1](#)). In other words, we cannot be numbed into inaction by accepting as fate our fallen societies and evil in our world. Evil is not a finality in our world. On the contrary, we take a prophetic stance and live lives in the hope of our destiny in the coming kingdom.

⁵⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of Nineteen Eighty Four* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1983), p. 53.

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The Public People of God: A Paradigm for Social Ethics

Gordon Preece

Keywords: People of God, public, private, naked public square, polity, policy, universal, particular;

INTRODUCTION

The almost never-ending Clinton-Lewinsky affair displayed the blurred lines of public and private in contemporary western life. The varied reactions to the sorry saga from both sides of politics represented a range of pragmatic, political, philosophical and religious views regarding the relationship of private and public dimensions of contemporary society. Many liberals separate private and public sharply, saying President Clinton's sexual peccadillos are private and yet would rightly say with feminists that 'the personal is political'. Many conservatives are equally inconsistent, being upset most because Clinton's behaviour violates the 'private' family values they uphold, while allowing a similar individualistic and libertarian philosophy full reign over economics and politics.

Western culture's confusion and inconsistency over the public-private relationship is echoed in the church as many of the views voiced above were those of Christians. In this light it is important to put the question of the nature of the public and the church's public role into an historical and global context. Contrary to the parochial conceit of many modern westerners, the private-public split is a product of a liberal Enlightenment or modern perspective, about which death-notices are regularly, though perhaps prematurely, posted.

However, a change does seem to be upon us. Australian media theorist Catherine Lumby notes that unprecedented levels of media coverage and surveillance of private life driven by technological change, frenzied competition and globalization are pushing a changed perception of not only the relationship of public and private but the very notion of a public sphere(s) and space(s) itself. '[T]he contemporary media sphere constitutes a highly diverse and inclusive forum in which a host of important social issues once deemed apolitical, trivial or personal are now being aired.' These include 'the rise of feminism, environmentalism, gay and lesbian rights, indigenous rights, and a host of allied