

Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 26 • Number 2 • April 2002

*Articles and book reviews original and
selected from publications worldwide for
an international readership for the purpose
of discerning the obedience of faith*



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

for
**WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE**
Theological Commission

The Church's Responsibility within the East African Context

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Keywords: Evangelism, mercy, justice, culture, community development, good works, restitution, land, business

1 Introduction

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to some of our neglected Christian responsibilities. We will identify the priorities of the Christian church and the role that it plays in various societies in bringing changes that God wants. The model used in the study is Jesus in Jewish society and that of the great preachers such as John Wesley.

It is my conviction that evangelicals could be very influential in our societies if they maintained a balance between spirituality and social work.

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This is very important particularly in the continent of Africa where the masses are uneducated and poor. We have many Christians in Africa who need education to develop skills for earning a living. What are evangelicals doing to meet some of these needs? This paper is an attempt to answer this question.

2 Church Responsibility

Church responsibility is a very broad discipline. Therefore, my discussion is narrowed down to evangelism and the way Christians and the church must work out their salvation in response to their social context.

a) Evangelism

The church must give priority to the ministry of evangelism. Jesus commanded his disciples to be witnesses starting from Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria and to the rest of the earth. The purpose of evangelism can be captured in a statement of the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches which states in no uncertain terms, that evangelism

is making Christ known to people so that each is confronted with the choice of making a personal decision to accept Christ as their saviour.¹ The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 also has a clear statement which recognizes that 'our Christian presence in the world' and dialogue with others are 'indispensable to evangelism' and but are not to be confused with evangelism itself — the 'proclamation ... of Christ as Saviour and Lord'.²

Once we have identified the main priority of the church, we raise the question, is that all? Are there other things Christians can do once they have given their lives to God? We must bear in mind that there is a broad view of Christian work depicted in the Bible. Jesus himself gave guidance on this by saying, 'You are the salt of the earth'. To be the salt means to be tasteful. Is there any place for Christians to think about people who are hungry, poor, unskilled and oppressed in the same context as evangelism? Commenting on the Wesleyan tradition of evangelism, Outler stated:

...evangelism must issue in visible social effects or else its fruits will fade and wither. Christian proclamation must take on visible form and the Christian community must be committed to social reform, or else it will stultify our Lord's prayer that God's righteous will shall be done on earth here and now, in justice and love and peace as always it is being done in heaven.³

¹ Samuel H. Moffett, *The Biblical Background of Evangelism* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1962), p. 9

² *The Lausanne Covenant*, para 4, 'The nature of evangelism'; see also paras 5, 'Christian social responsibility' and 6 'The church and evangelism'.

³ Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1971), p. 25

Wesley was a preacher who believed in heart holiness, experience and practice. Outward witness in daily living should be a confirmation of inward experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in a Christian. Christian experience must be made visible in the life of a Christian through the testimony of their works. Realizing this, John Wesley organized his converts into societies. He related these societies to church sacraments and Christian discipline. He encouraged Christians to share life in the Spirit. He organized evangelistic enterprises that were rooted in the laity who were the workers of the society of that time. The laity carried the Christian testimony to the market place, to the work place, and to their communities. Wesley's evangelistic tradition brought reformation in all sectors in England. He brought reform within the organized work force, prisons and institutional slavery. Wesley's programme addressed the social problems affecting the common people of his time, Outler states:

He wanted to prepare men and women for the daily triumphs of grace but always within a corporate matrix of disciplined fellowship. He knew...that men shall not live by bread alone nor yet without bread; not by violence but also not in servility and destitution; not by institutional self-maintenance nor yet without institutions.⁴

The Wesleyan tradition of evangelism is rooted in the love of God and neighbour and is expressed in meaningful social action. If the church translates what God is doing in her, the result will be transformation of the society. Social work or rendering

⁴ Outler, *Wesleyan Spirit*, p. 32

services to society is an expression of God's love to people. The church must love the work of mercy for it is a way of expressing the grace of God. The integration of social work and evangelism is very important in reaching the world and showing that God loves the people regardless of their sins.

b) Motivation for Evangelism

Christian witness is not for glorifying personalities or to earn spiritual 'brownie' points to advance our own status as Christians. Loving those who are Christians means we desire the best for them. The 'agape' love which God manifested to us while we were yet sinners should be in our hearts and our daily practice. It is a love which is not based on merit. Outler has described this love in this manner:

Methodism... is the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of primitive Church... This old religion is no other than love, the love of God and of all mankind... This love is the greatest medicine of life... Wherever this is, there are virtue and happiness going hand in hand... this religion of love and joy and peace has its seat in the inmost soul; but is ever showing itself by its fruits... spreading virtue and happiness all around it.⁵

The work of evangelism is the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot convert people. This is the work of God. If we portray the impression that we use the work of evangelism to advance our interest, people will resent the preaching of the word of God.

The theology of pastoral care comes in here. Most evangelical pas-

tors today are trained to be good listeners to their clients. The idea that people talking about their problems to a counsellor makes them feel better, is not relevant to all cultures. This approach is perhaps appropriate to an individualistic culture, where people are always concerned with their own life and problems, and become careless of others around them. Traditionally, Africans had ways of counselling themselves. This was done through extended families or friends who cared for each other's needs. What does a pastor do when a family comes for counselling not because of a spiritual problem, but because they cannot make ends meet? Third World countries are full of such Christians. It is not easy to quote a scripture to those who are hungry and expect their needs for hunger or shelter to be met. The story of the good Samaritan should give us some clue on how we should deal with human needs. The priest and the Levite were religious people who were supposed to render help to those who were afflicted. Sometimes religious people may not be doing God's will; they may be doing what they think is God's will. We also learned this from the Pharisees. They were very strong 'church' members of that time, but Jesus disapproved of their religious practices. Caring for human beings is the ultimate concern of God. The Pharisees cared more for their religious practices than for people.

If pastoral care is to be relevant to the people and their situation, the leadership must be aware of the variety of needs represented in their con-

⁵ Outler, *Wesleyan Spirit*, p. 39

gregations. For instance, within the congregation there are those who are needing remedial care, those feeling hurt, those already involved, and those who are against constructive social change. The people who need remedial services are those who have been hit by certain crises such as death caused by accidents, unhappy marriages, financial problems, severe sickness in the family, or children's misbehaviour and so on. These needs may differ from one culture to another, so pastoral care must be approached in context in order to meet the needs of the people.

A further problem must also be noticed. People going through such difficulties are so caught up with emotional pain that they do not have any resources left to minister to others. Their attention is directed toward their own emotional and physical survival. So their problems must be dealt with first before they are free to take responsibility of addressing concerns beyond themselves. This is the situation for most pastors in East Africa for they are immersed in conditions of economic hardship and stress.

c) Caring for the Saved

When evangelistic services are held we get converts. These converts come to the church with various needs, and they have a hope that God will meet their needs. These needs could be spiritual or physical in nature. The church is responsible for creating channels for meeting those needs—for example establishing medical institutions, agricultural projects, or educational institutions. In

his life Jesus demonstrated the integration of evangelism and social work. He fed those who were hungry and healed those who were sick. He counselled those in need and warned against injustice and evil practices. His process of doing ministry brought transformation within communities with corrupt practices.

d) The Work of Mercy

The work of mercy can be defined as an act of kindness. The church should be known for this. The Roman Catholic nun, Mother Teresa, was an example of what I am trying to convey here. She worked among the poor and the needy in India.

A story of the work of mercy is narrated very well by Jesus when dealing with the question from a lawyer, 'Who is my neighbour?' Jesus told the story using two religious leaders (Luke 10:25-37). The expert in the law was familiar with the functions of the priests and the Levites. They were supposed to show compassion to those who were hurting and to care for the needy. Jesus told of a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was caught by robbers and beaten. The robbers stripped everything from him and left him half-dead. This man might have been a Jew. The priest and the Levite, being godly people, should have been the first to show compassion, but they walked on their way.

A Samaritan, who belonged to group who were despised by the Jews, came and saw the man. He stopped and provided the help the man needed. He not only helped to dress the man's wounds, but also

provided transportation to a hotel and paid the bills. The priest and the Levite were lacking in compassion or mercifulness.

What do we lack today in our churches? Who are our neighbours? There are children classified as 'street children', people we call 'homeless', or 'poor'. The church must preach the gospel and at the same time do social work (or the work of mercy, as I would prefer to call it). The church must make efforts to meet the spiritual as well as the physical needs of people.

The work of mercy can easily thrust the church into the world if care is not taken. The church must be a light, salt and yeast. She should not be a friend to the world but seek to transform the world (Rom. 12:2, Matt. 5:16; 13:33). The book of Acts provides a picture of individuals who cared for each other and showed special concern for widows and orphans, although these efforts may have been limited to those of 'the way'. However, individual Christians, such as Dorcas in Acts 9:36-41, performed acts of mercy wherever need was found.

The biblical examples should be our model when approaching issues that affect our church members and the people in the world at large.

e) The Practice of Justice

The subject of a just society is addressed throughout the Bible. It is an easy subject to talk about but difficult to attain. Policies may be drawn up to address the issues, but usually the practice proves to be difficult. Third world theologians are concerned with issues of justice particu-

larly when it comes to the distribution of wealth; this is where their people are hurting. The basis of injustice is a heart problem for often its cause is selfishness and greed for material wealth. Corson-Finnerty points this out by saying that people in all parts of the world and throughout history have often suffered oppression at the hands of others.⁶ The church should not be oppressive because that is not what God wants. Social injustice occurs within a society or social groupings or social institutions. It has its roots in the rejection of people because they are perceived to be different from others.

Some of these oppressive attitudes within religious institutions are so subtle even honest Christians fail to recognize their existence until the victim cries out for help. The power of pastors must be checked because they can also oppress their members. Peter the apostle warned the church elders against an attitude of oppression. In 1 Peter 5:3, for example, we read that pastors should be an example to their flock. Because of the way they use God's word, some pastors and councils can be dangerous if not checked by the members. The church exists on earth as a witness to God through nurturing people spiritually and empowering them to explore and use God's purposes and gifts.

For leaders to develop fair practices of justice, they must encourage a participatory approach in decision making by the members of the social

⁶ Adam Daniel Corson-Finnerty, *World Citizen* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1982), p. 61

group or religious institution. The United Methodist form of government is an ideal one. An oppressive pastor can be weeded out by the congregation. The practice of justice needs careful evaluation, using a biblical paradigm to consider decisions taken by church councils. The most vulnerable group affected by injustice are the uneducated, who might not be aware of their God-given rights. James warned the Christians of his day not to practise favouritism. The poor and the rich should be given equal treatment (James 2:1-4). Our churches today are not free from this problem. The disciples tried to oppress the children, but Jesus rebuked them saying that the kingdom of God belongs to such little ones (Matthew 19:13-14). Religious institutions, by invoking the name of God, can be oppressive to naïve people.

f) The Root of Injustice

In order to correct the injustice, the church should first uncover the root of injustice. Cultural Christians (those born into their parents' Christian beliefs) can easily practise injustice unintentionally. Faith development, which social science scholars describe in six stages, shows the practices of injustice that we may not be aware of as cultural Christians.

In the first stage (extending from infancy to six years), we learn our faith from our parents, by picking up their attitudes toward prayer, church, and God. This is learning through diffusion from the people with whom we are in immediate contact.

The second stage extends from ages seven to twelve, when we learn

our faith from parents or people such as our sisters, brothers, Sunday school teachers, and the pastor or missionary. These people pass on Christian stories to us. These stories are not limited to Bible stories but also cover cultural beliefs and practices. The younger generations are told that these are 'our Christian heritage'. No one questions if these values are oppressive or just, or even if they are biblical.

The third stage starts at age thirteen, and continues throughout adulthood. In this stage we learn our faith within our environment or through our neighbours. We learn to stick to norms of our church. Whether these norms are right or wrong, we practise them without question. The people in this stage like to stay in the middle of the group—not to be too far ahead or behind the group; this is to protect one's security within the group.

The fourth stage is the stage in which we realize that Christian faith is not based on groups or church organizations, but that each individual must give an account to God of what he or she did with their faith. We will have to give an account for our actions and value systems. This stage is where we take our individual responsibility for what we believe.

While the fourth stage may begin as early as sixteen, the fifth stage begins at thirty. At this stage we become eclectic in our theology; wishy-washy acceptance becomes the trait of this stage. Walsh describes this stage as a 'kind of theological jello flowing every direc-

tion'.⁷

The sixth stage contains seven categories namely: form of logic, form of world coherence, role taking, locus of authority, bounds of social awareness, form of moral judgement and role of symbols. We cannot discuss all these categories because our purpose here is to help us think of the values of cultural Christianity that are accepted and practised without question.

Most Christians die in stage three. They cannot evaluate their mission and the changes of society and come up with new approaches of doing the work of God. Churches or institutions made up of Christians who remain in stage three of their faith will die a slow death. A church, or any religious institution, can practise injustice. Without the members raising questions they can continue to hurt those who are affected. The churches and other religious institutions are the most vulnerable, because if anyone raises a question against her practices it would seem that one has questioned God's command.

Religious personalities can also be in the same category. Paul faced the problem when he was abused by the high priest in Jerusalem. The high priest was so highly respected that no one could question his orders (Acts 23:2-4). The book of Acts narrates the struggles of change against injustice and Jewish religious discrimination. Most African Christians today are examining themselves and

their Christian faith. This examination has resulted in the call for an African Theology.

3 The Approach of Evangelism and Mission

The influential missionary today in Third World countries is the one who provides soup, soap and the gospel to the people. These are the more influential ones, whereas others are likely to be irrelevant. Jesus himself set the example of preaching the gospel while at the same time providing bread and healing for those who needed them. Evangelism must go hand in hand with social work in order to be effective, Batchelor states,... 'for the Christian, social and economic development cannot be separated from evangelism'.⁸ For the church to be the salt of the earth, the ministry of evangelism must be integrated with social work and other works of mercy. Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed concern for the whole person. In Mark 6:34, we see a crowd waiting to hear from him. He taught the people about the kingdom of God but he did not stop there; the people had physical as well as spiritual needs. The disciples would have wanted the people to go away and find food but Jesus asked the disciples to collect what food the people had and bring it to him. With Jesus' blessings, the two fishes and the five loaves were enough to feed the crowd. God is interested in the development of the whole person; denying people their physical needs is not right before God. He created

⁷ John Walsh, *Evangelization and Justice* (MaryKnoll, New York: Orbis, 1980), p. 6

⁸ Peter Batchelor, *People In Rural Development* (Carlisle UK: Paternoster, 1993), p. 161.

good things for human beings to enjoy. The only problem is how people have used these things. Selfishness and greed are what God hates. Material things sometimes have been used to oppress others who have little. Christians should fight this misuse of material things.

a) God's People in the Society

In Matthew 5:13, we find Jesus teaching his disciples to be the salt and light of the world. We know that salt is used for flavouring and preserving the food we eat. Without salt the food will be tasteless and the food will probably go bad if it is kept for a few days. The disciples also were instructed to be the light of the world.. What do these two symbols mean today for the followers of Jesus Christ? Or to the church?

The first thing that the Christian worker, evangelist, missionary and Bible teacher must do is to study constantly the Word of God and our changing societies to be sure that the Word of God remains true and speaks to contemporary issues. We must not water down the word of God to fit our interests and those of our societies. The second thing that they must do is live what they preach and teach. We can preserve the word of God only if we are devoted to studying it carefully and practising what we teach and preach. Societies and cultures of the world keep changing but the word of God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

What do we need as a 'flavour' (or salt) for people to taste? First of all, our lifestyle must draw people to God. A life which expresses itself through God's love will be tasteful to

people. We must also do some work to show the love of God to people. A Christian is also likened to light that exposes things hidden in darkness and shows the way to God. A Christian must keep his light shining; this light is the word of God in him. Things that are hidden in darkness could be corruption, injustice, oppression, craftiness, discrimination and jealousy, and so on. The Christian must expose these by teaching and preaching against them. He must also live a life style free from these vices.

b) Doing Good Works

For a Christian to be influential in society he must do good works. A Christian must strive for excellency in whatever he does. Mediocre service does not honour or glorify God. Jesus told his disciples to let their light shine before men so that they may see their good deeds and glorify God. Good works done to others will cause them to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). What kind of good works can a Christian do that will help people in their lives? What did Jesus do to the people? In Mark 7:32, we find Jesus healing the deaf. People had brought the man to him, just like we take our sick people to hospital for treatment and wish to see them become well. Therefore, the creation of hospital, clinics, community health services, and any other similar services that would cure or prevent diseases of any kind are good works. If it is done right, this is where good deeds are manifested.

Another area is educating people. We have institutions of higher learning which are meant to develop

potential skills and intelligence so that people can use them to earn a living and serve the community. Jesus was called a teacher (Mark 9:38) and emphasized the need for good morals. He also warned his disciples against religious groups who offered misleading teaching, such as the Pharisees who were very strict in their religious laws. Jesus said, 'Be careful... watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod' (Mark 8:15). Yeast was used at that time to ferment large amounts of dough. In this context it refers to the evil disposition of both the Pharisees and Herod Antipas who wanted Jesus to produce a sign of divine authority (Luke 23:8). Jesus taught against religious groups who used others in their own interest. The Pharisees burdened others with religious rules that they themselves could not keep.

Modern education is very influential in our societies. It is a very strong salt. Many people want to get this kind of education. Therefore, Christians must get involved in education. This is one good work that can help God's people. Educational ethics affects the students' values, hence the society. Holmes states:

...education is not job training, although it will of course have career outcomes. It is not just broad learning across various arts and sciences. Nor is it just an introduction to the heritage of our past... Education helps shape people, cultivating abilities and qualities that last throughout life and transfer to a myriad of tasks.⁹

To develop people educationally

includes promoting thinking ability, language and communication skills, decision making, social concern and responsibility, and a sense of personal identity and moral character. It is very important to help people think for themselves; then they can make responsible decisions and become the kind of persons God meant them to be. Theologians must have a broad education in order to serve God's people well in our modern cultures. They will then be able to see ideal values that Christians ought to pursue—moral values such as honesty and justice for all. So it is important for Christians to venture into the world of education and develop good education programmes with broad curriculums that address the needs of the changing cultures.

The church, or the Christian educator, should be careful when developing an educational programme. The curriculum should be broad in order to avoid what I call 'oppressive education'. Oppressive education is a narrow education developed for the poor people by charitable organizations or oppressive governments for the purpose of using the results to advance the interest of the educators. For instance, in 1911 the British were interested in African education, so they created the Department of Education for Africa and appointed J. R. Orr as its director. He was the wrong person to be given this post, because J. R. Orr had a wrong view of African people. Tignor states:

Orr's philosophy of African education was based on stereotyped, racist, and educationalist ideas ... He believed African

⁹ Arthur F. Holmes, *Shaping Character* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 4

people to be primitive and child-like and argued that education had to be adapted to this essential fact. The African mentality was 'undeveloped,' he contended, and like the mind of a small child, it must be stimulated into more disciplined and energetic activity by means of handicrafts and manual training. Eye and hand training held to be valuable in developing the motor centers of the brain.¹⁰

Since Orr had a racist educational view that advocated that Africans must proceed from 'sensation to precept to concept', he made the government-controlled elementary schools devote three-fifths of their time to gardening and local handicrafts such as mat-weaving, basket making, and pottery. Orr's goal was to offer Africans skills which would fit the development of rural areas for the ultimate purpose of producing raw materials for British industries.

He acted as if he wanted to secure a suitable education for African needs, but he wanted to prevent Africans receiving professional education. This was revealed when Orr became sceptical of missionary education because of its emphasis on literary training. Orrs' idea of education was oppressive because it was not geared toward the interests of the learner but the interests of the provider. Christians participating in this kind of educational process without trying to bring change would not be right. We cannot glorify God with that kind of education. We must bear in mind that God values souls more than material things. I use the term 'soul' to mean people.

c) Community Development

Community development is another powerful tool for influencing society and in manifesting good works that would glorify God. It is only through the help of the Holy Spirit that we can do excellent work to glorify him. We learn from the Bible that creation groans in pain (Rom. 8:22). It is God's will that things should be brought to the state they were in when God created the world. Christians must strive to do excellent work. We are aware that we have weaknesses which might hinder us doing good works, but the spirit of God is there to give us the power to do that which meets his standards.

Since good works are important for God's glory, how should Christians do their work? Every Christian who knows God must do whatever they are doing well with the aim of glorifying God. For instance, if you are a producer of bread, you should produce good bread which people will like. If you are a teacher, teach well. If you are a cook, cook so well that people would like to come to your hotel to eat. If you are the mayor of a city, you should create an environment free from corruption in which people would enjoy doing their business. All that I am saying is, a Christian should do good works, not mediocre works, that will glorify God.

d) Salvation and Good Works

We Christians must take care not to think that we earn our salvation through good works. It is only by the grace of God that we are saved (Eph. 2:8-9). Also, the apostle Paul tells us

¹⁰ Robert L. Tignor, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976), p. 205

that the quality of our work will be assessed by God with fire (1 Cor. 3:12-14). Paul is talking about spiritual life, but we cannot separate our spiritual life and our daily works. Spiritual people must manifest their spirituality by what they do. Chan describes spirituality¹¹ as a 'lived reality'. To be closer to God is to follow Jesus' footsteps. It is not the best preaching that measures our spirituality (for even a sinner can be a good preacher) but rather the life we live and the demonstration of Christian love for our neighbour. If the Holy Spirit lives in our lives then his fruit should be manifested.

e) Making Restitution

God is involved in restoration of men and women to himself. He wants things to be put right with him. Therefore, Christians should also be involved in putting right the wrongs which sinful acts have produced. Zacchaeus set a good example when he came in contact with Jesus. The Bible does not tell us directly that he did repent of his sins, but Jesus said that salvation has come into Zacchaeus' home. What did Zacchaeus want to do? First, he wanted to share his wealth with the poor. Secondly, he wanted to restore property that he gained through cheating people. These were the two things that brought salvation to his home. These served as a testimony to people who knew him as a corrupt person. Restitution helps one to live rightly with other people in society. This is where the vertical and horizontal the-

ology of love comes into practice. This I believe is a recognition of individual sins. The individual has to bear the responsibility for putting right what they have done wrong.

f) Structural Sins

Every culture has its own sins. Social sins such as racial and sexual discrimination are very dangerous because no one seems to bear the responsibility for them. The church, the community of God's people, must be careful not to fall into this trap. The Pharisees and the priests referred to by Jesus in the gospels seemed to fall into this trap. They thought that they knew God better than anyone else. We do not find anywhere in the Bible that this group ever repented. They were the ones who wanted to have Jesus put to death.

A group of people who view themselves as righteous before God can be dangerous in society. They can be oppressive to those who are ignorant. The church of Jesus Christ should be free from social sins. Today Christians must be specific in pointing out sins just as Paul was. When Paul talked about the sins of the flesh he listed them so that no one could mistake them. Chan tells us that the Bible does not make distinction between small sins and big sins. He states:

The sins of slander and envy, for example, are mentioned along with sins of murder and adultery because they all come from an evil heart (Mk. 7:21-23).¹²

We have sins which an individual is

¹¹ Simon Chan. *Spiritual Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), p. 16

¹² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, p. 64

more responsible for—for example, sins of the mind (evil thoughts), sins of attitude (hatred, envy), sins of the tongue (slander, gossip), and sins of action (theft, deceit). These can be turned into collective sins once a group works closely with each other and builds close relationships with each other.

g) Revival Meetings

Some churches have revival meetings in which God is expected to speak to every individual who is present so that they may correct their ways. It is a time designed for individual examination. This of course should bring repentance and restitution after we become aware of the sins that affect ourselves, God, and other people. Ministers of the gospel also are included. There is a wrong assumption that the pastor, the ordained leader, the missionary, and church are saints. History shows that the most vulnerable of all are those deemed to be the best preachers of the word. Church leaders should view revival as if it is designed for them also. The missionaries also should view themselves as vulnerable to sin. The scholars of the word are also in this category. Attitudes of hatred, jealousy, and greed, for example, can be hidden before people but not before God.

When attempting to contextualize biblical teachings, it is important to list the sins of the culture that the Bible ought to address. God is against the sins but not the culture of the people. This is very important in doing missionary work. Often missionaries transmit their own cultural sins to other cultures. When people

are converted, the Holy Spirit must be allowed to work in the hearts of people and bring conviction in their lives. It is the Holy Spirit that changes people. It is important for every Christian to embrace a certain rule which will remind them of God and how they should do their work in the secular world. It is important to encourage Christians to build good, honest businesses. There is nothing wrong with a Christian acquiring wealth honestly. The church should encourage this, particularly in Third World countries where people are so needy for material things.

This is where the theology of restitution is very important. Again, we learn from Zacchaeus, a tax collector. At first, he was not a good model for Christians in business because he was a greedy, dishonest person who sought to acquire his wealth through the wrong means. But when he was saved he sought to rectify all that he had done wrong. Christians should also be encouraged to seek professional training in areas of good works that can serve as a witness and a Christian testimony. Paul, though he was called to be a missionary, worked as tentmaker to support himself so that he would not be a burden to anyone and could be free from human subordination (often brought about when you are reliant on others for material things).

h) Land Issues

The question of our attitude to land is discussed in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Christians have to live on earth while waiting for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. No one 'owns' land because we did not create

it. We can't take it anywhere, either. The problem that we are facing is that the concept of land ownership in Africa today was introduced by Europeans. This form of land ownership has created landless people.

What did Jesus say about land? Jesus did not deal with this issue very much. However, when he was asked by Peter what would those people who have given up everything and follow him get, Jesus answered him by saying that as well as eternal life they would receive double what they left behind. Land is included among these things (Matt. 19: 27-30). The answer was given in the context of a community which believed that wealth was a sign of divine favour. This will happen at the renewal of all things. If those things were not important, then Jesus would not have promised to restore them. Everything that we use comes from the land which God himself has created.

To build a strong church and society, Christians must be taught the good use of all natural resources. Jesus did not condemn wealth, but rather greed for wealth. If we are to be effective in Christian ministry, we must practise what we preach. For example, missionaries who come from developed countries cannot preach against wealth and expect people to believe them, because they are talking about something that is not practised in their lives.

4 The Christian and the Business World

a) The Church and Business

Today's world is defined by the mar-

ket economy. Work has become the means of survival. To get work one must have the skills to do that work. Professional training is necessary for one to earn a living today.

What about the church? It should do the same. To pretend that we don't need money to organize church functions is not being realistic or truthful. Churches need resources to carry out their ministries. Some churches and Christian missions oppose the idea that Christians can involve themselves in business. They say, 'Doing business will lead to immorality.' However, the same people will go to church and ask for financial support for their ministries. This group would view the church's activities as not in any sense of the word a business. They generalize that businesses are conducted in a worldly way and not God's way.

Before Christian leaders prevent their congregation from doing business, they should know that there are business aspects to their ministries which are the same as those of any profit or non-profit organization. Christian enterprises are not in the business of making a profit, but all are in the business of making money. For any Christian work to succeed it must keep to the basic principles of management, namely, planning, organizing, staffing, supervising, and controlling. Whether the organization has two people or two thousand, each of those functions must be carried out in order for the organization to be successful. For Christian workers to be effective, they must be trained in areas of management. Church ministries

have sometimes suffered because training is mediocre.

It is also important to bear in mind that when one becomes a Christian or is ordained, that does not mean that one makes more moral decisions. Most Christians in leadership and administrative positions are not trained in the areas of ethical decision making or even business methods. The malpractice of Christian business people has led to the destruction of the church and Christian workers.

b) A positive view of Business

Some Christians have argued that when Jesus told the rich young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor, he implied that the accumulation of wealth is an hindrance to earning salvation. The picture of a camel struggling to enter the eye of a needle is equated to a rich man who finds it difficult to enter the kingdom of God because of his riches. Jesus' sermon in Matthew chapter 5 does not seem to paint the job description of a salesman! Studies have shown that students selecting business careers are more money-minded, security-oriented, and less concerned in helping people than those students who are select careers in teaching, science, medicine, and engineering. Business students are interested in raising their social status. This behaviour is certainly difficult to reconcile with Christian faith.

However, others believe that it is possible for one to be both a Christian and a business person. When we turn to the biblical view of creation, we learn that God created both heaven and earth. The biblical view is not

that the things of the spirit or of heaven are good and the things of earth or material are evil. From the beginning people were commanded to use the material of the earth and rule the earth.

Harold L. Johnson tells us that Paul's writings sometimes have been used to argue that Christianity sets material values over against spiritual values by making a distinction between 'flesh' and 'spirit'.¹³ He points out that on the surface it appears that 'flesh' referred to the material aspects of life while 'spirit' refers to such matters as worship, meditation and communion with God. However, most Christian scholars agree that the concept of the flesh relates to the totality of human behaviour and personality stemming from a non-Christian philosophy. The term 'flesh' is connected with the short-comings of the spiritual nature—for instance, enmity, strife, jealousy, selfishness, dissension, envy, and party spirit. The term 'spirit' is connected with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These approaches to life did not necessarily suggest a low standard of economic well-being.¹⁴

So the creation perspective does not treat the material world as inherently evil and the world of business as irrelevant for Christian living. It is sad to say that some western missionaries have preached against material-

¹³ Harold L. Johnson. *The Christian as a Businessman* (New York: Association Press, 1964), p. 40

¹⁴ Johnson, *Businessman*, p. 40

ism in Africa, but from the African point of view, the missionary is the most materialistic person they have ever seen because they possess so much. Therefore there is a great need for African Christians and churches to develop a better understanding of the world of business as a ministry.

c) Service to the Neighbour

God is interested in providing good services to people. Jesus demonstrated this by washing his disciples' feet. Jesus took the cultural services that were known by the Jewish people and used them to get his point across. People followed Jesus because of what he provided for them. Jesus provided services that were holistic in nature. For the church to be influential in our societies she must follow the pattern that Jesus set.

Serving others with production of goods is not wrong as long as the product is beneficial to the neighbour, and does not exploit them. The doctrine of creation and incarnation points to the value of production and the use of it. This means that to provide services people need is a ministry. There are different types of services. There are services which empower people to gain skills that will help in earning a living, such as providing good education. There are services that are oppressive and exploitative such as providing training that will serve the interest of the provider only.

The church is supposed to make some contribution to human welfare. Christians in business should be motivated by altruistic concern for

their fellow humans rather than by profit. Physicians, teachers and ministers provide humanitarian services but through them they earn a living. Christians in business provide services needed by people in their communities. If the business person produces something that people want and if the product is good for the people, then they are helping to meet the needs of the people. For instance, a farmer who produces corn, finger millet, wheat, vegetables, cotton, bricks or timber, will help in meeting the needs of the people.

There are many other services that are humanitarian in nature. Christians should be encouraged to equip themselves for these activities. Christian higher learning institutions should provide programmes that incorporate a variety of skills which Christians can use to serve God. Providing inferior training for Christians will make the church powerless. Medicine is the most influential tool today for evangelism because it provides something that the people need.

Christian ethical awareness and ethical analysis must be incorporated into the logic of business decision-making and problem-solving procedures. This would mean that after a problem has been identified and analysed, the alternative solutions that are formulated should be based on Christian ethical judgement. Courses offered in business administration should be taught using approaches of Christian ethics. It is right for a Christian to make a profit justly and to use means that are within the biblical norm of justice.

d) *The way things ought to be*

When we go back to the story of the Garden of Eden we read of the original righteousness by which humanity was expected to live. In Genesis 2:15 we are told God took the man he had created and put him in the garden to work it and care for it. The man was not going to stay in the garden idly; he had to work. The woman was created to be a helper in this work. Working to produce materials for living is the proper thing to do, because humanity was in harmony with nature. After the Fall, nature became non-cooperative. We have to be careful so that the world of business will not mislead us. Troeltsch once stated:

...the world itself is a mixture of good and evil, so the whole social order, with its pleasure and its labor has its good points. On the other hand, it is also full of danger: its bad side is manifest in its tendency to distract the hearts of men from the one thing needful.¹⁵

e) *Unrealistic Beliefs in the Church*

The belief that material things do not matter and do not influence the church in decision making is unrealistic. The modern church suffers from this problem, particularly the churches in developing countries. The church should aim to provide parental care to the orphan, to be a husband to the widows, to help those who are ready for marriage, to encourage business people to create work for the unemployed, show mer-

cy to the handicapped who are unable to work, provide food for the hungry, visit the sick and the prisoners and to defend the defenceless. To say that the church does not need material things and trained personnel to do these ministries is unrealistic. It is a mistake for the church or any Christian organization to ask for charitable funds and services to build personal merits or merits for the organization. The aim of charity is not to heal social evils or remove poverty but to demonstrate the spirit of God's love. There is often a great lack of this in Christian ministries today.

This approach calls for humble living and not human pride. Troeltsch tells us that the spirit of restraint and simplicity of life should not be given up but rather this spirit should be encouraged in those who are giving and those who are receiving.¹⁶ This humble spirit has to be the work of God and not the result of human effort.

f) *Working for a living*

Can Christians work for a living? When Jesus called his disciples, they were fishermen by profession. They were working for a living. Everybody works for a living. No one would like to be a beggar. All material things come from God, and they were intended to be used by people whom God created. God established the pattern of work as the means to acquire these goods.

Christian workers such as pastors and evangelists also work for a living.

¹⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (Westminster: John Knox, 1992), p. 58

¹⁶ Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, p. 135

They must be paid by the people they serve. The church is making a big mistake if they use the services of an individual without payment. An evangelist has a right to earn a living through the church. Paul the apostle mentioned this, except that he found his own means of earning a living through tent-making so that he would not be a burden on the church.

g) God's People and Money

Money can be defined as a tool which is used to motivate people to work. It is like a receipt for selling your labour to somebody who wanted it and after finishing they give you a receipt which will prove to another person that you deserve what you want to get in exchange for that receipt. The Bible tells us that the love of money is the root of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). It is not the money that is evil, but the love of money. The evil is within the person not within the money. This can be said about wealth also. Wealth in itself is not evil; the person who possesses it is the problem. Wealth can be used to build the kingdom of God. Condemning wealth without condemning the possessor is very misleading. Money should not dictate our Christian life or the church activities. Church activities have sometimes suffered because they have been allowed to be dictated by funds.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I am saying that Christian ministry is very broad and has many implications. It is not enough to bring people to Jesus Christ, but we must continue building them spiritually, economically and intellectually. We have to prepare Christians to know how to live here on earth and prepare them also for the next kingdom.

In Africa, where the majority are not educated, and resources are undeveloped, a rural development programme should be part of Christian education curriculum. Therefore, the missionaries who are needed today in Africa are those who are trained in medicine, rural development and modern technology such as computers, business, buildings and agriculture. Even Christians who are road engineers have a contribution to make.

Evangelism and missionary work must go hand in hand with social work. In Africa, we are able to preach the gospel to our people. Adequate and holistic training is what African people need. The Church in Africa has grown spiritually, but it needs to respond to its own cultural context instead of being adversely affected by western cultural values.