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EVANGELISM AND MISSION – WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?¹

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INTRODUCTION

We could approach our topic in many ways – from defining the terms, to debating their inter-relationship, to analysing their modern-day usage. Our approach shall be: to survey factors leading to doubt and uncertainty about evangelism; to note some recent definitions of the terms, and then to look, again, at aspects of the biblical understanding of the gospel, because of its importance for charting the way ahead in evangelism and mission today.

MISSION AND EVANGELISM IN THE FIRING LINE

‘The Christian Mission – at least as it has traditionally been interpreted and performed – is under attack not only from without but also from within its own ranks’, warned David Bosch.²

We do well, therefore, to commence with an overview of some aspects of this attack which has left uncertainty and differences of thinking about evangelism and mission today.

The Post-Christian context in the West

Bosch listed a series of changing attitudes in Western society in the twentieth century which have questioned the validity of Christian mission in our modern world.³

¹ A revision of a paper presented to Mission and Message, the Conference on Evangelism organised by the Evangelism Workgroup of the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa, New Zealand, 2-4 June 1995 at Wellington, New Zealand.

² In what has become a classic study of our topic: David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (American Society of Missiology Series, No. 16, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991), p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

- Scientific and technological advance, with its associated secularisation, appear to make God redundant.
- The de-christianising of the West – which is itself now a pagan mission-field – numbs the incentive for mission to other parts of the world.
- The globe no longer falls naturally into ‘Christian’ and ‘non-Christian’ territories. With migration of peoples of many faiths and the decline of Christianity in the West, proximity demands a review of attitudes to those of other faiths. Their devotees are often more active and more aggressive advocates for a faith than so-called Christians.
- The acute sense of guilt about previous exploitation of other peoples by the West leaves Western Christians unable or unwilling to testify to their faith.
- Economic divisions internationally between the rich and poor, with the rich being seen as Christian, cause anger in the poorer nations or embarrassment in the West.
- The fact of younger churches demanding ‘autonomy’, with their own theologies and priorities, implies Christian missionaries from the West are redundant.

To Bosch’s list we could add the resurgence of other major world religions; the renaissance of traditional spirituality amongst indigenous peoples world-wide; the demise of the communist bloc; and the appeal of New Age teachings displacing respect for Christianity in the West. Each of these has brought a fresh challenge to traditional mission methods. And each questions whether mission is necessary today.

Conflicting motives and methods

Bosch also suggested the traditional foundations and motives for mission have been proven inadequate or at least ambiguous in the twentieth century. As that century opened, James Dennis, like his fellow-supporters of global mission, felt it only appropriate to celebrate the supposed superiority, adaptability, achievements and strength of the Christian religion. The achievements of Christian missions in education, cultural preservation, linguistics, literacy, health, medical progress, political development, social welfare and even in the contributions of missionaries

to scientific endeavour were massive by any standard.⁴ But the expectation pervading Dennis's three volumes, that other religions would soon collapse under the advance of Christianity, was ill-founded. As the twentieth century progressed, such false confidence withered, and with it much popular support for the missionary cause.

Moreover, various motives for mission have been tried and found wanting. Academic studies of nineteenth-century mission, Bosch pointed out, have found imperialist, cultural, romantic, and ecclesiastical-colonialist motives undergirding much missionary effort. Some more religious motives, while better, are still ambiguous. The desire for conversions, while leading to personal commitment, has often also restricted the breadth of the biblical meaning of the reign of God. The eschatological motive, wanting to fulfil the task and hasten the return of the King, easily led to fixing eyes on heaven but ignoring the needs of this present world. Even the motive of church planting was conceived as if the church was co-terminus with the Kingdom of God. Again, the philanthropic motive often tended to equate God's reign with an improved society.⁵ Bosch did not mention the even more trenchant critique from the antipodes. Neil Gunson seriously suggested the motive for mission was the desire for personal social advancement. Nineteenth-century missionaries, who came largely from lower middle class or middling class families, Gunson claims, found that by dominating a tribal group through missionary service, they could, on their return to Britain, win the acclaim of the upper classes and thereby ensure their own personal social advancement.⁶ The net result of such questioning is doubt about the validity and uncertainty about the practice of mission today.⁷

⁴ James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Christian Missions*, vols 1-3 (Edinburgh & London, 1897, 1899, 1906).

⁵ Bosch, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁶ Neil W. Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860* (Melbourne, 1978). Gunson's thesis has deeply influenced writings emanating from the Australian National University's School of Pacific Studies in recent years. See for a rejoinder, J. M. Hitchen, *Training Tamate: The Formation of the Nineteenth Century Missionaries' Worldview...* (University of Aberdeen PhD Thesis, 1984), pp. 144-70.

⁷ For an important assessment of the net result of these changing attitudes as expressed in local church views on evangelism and mission in Australasia, see the National Church Life Survey reports edited by Peter Kaldor et al., listed in our bibliography below.

Tensions in globalising the mission

Part of our problem is the global nature of the worldwide mission today. The church is present in every part of the world. Mission from and to any part of the world today, therefore, by definition involves the churches closest at hand as well as those at a distance. Moreover, the trends in thought and practice disseminated from influential global centres reach to every corner of our global village.

Perhaps some of the issues facing New Zealand's national game in this age of World Rugby Cup competitions may provide an analytical analogy to throw some light on the situation.

COMPETING CODES

Somewhat like the Union versus League conflict of rugby codes, on the global scene we have competing approaches to the tasks of mission and evangelism. We have a series of almost mutually exclusive approaches to mission, with little trust and only partial understanding between them. An observer could be forgiven for suggesting our different church groupings are promoting rival 'codes' of missionary outreach.

1. The Mainline churches have produced a mammoth amount of reflection and analysis in the four decades since the International Missionary Council amalgamated into the World Council of Churches at its New Delhi Assembly in 1961. Many evangelicals perceived this watershed event for the conciliar approach to mission as the hi-jacking of missionary effort by those who had little commitment to it. For those within the movement it was a clear statement, and re-instatement, of 'the missionary nature of the Church'.⁸ Since 1961, thinking about evangelism and mission in mainline churches has been largely determined by the programmes and consultations of the World Council of Churches, particularly through its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, and its secretaries for evangelism. The WCC Assemblies – especially Uppsala 1968, Nairobi 1975, and Canberra 1991 – have issued key statements and the Assemblies of the CWME have stimulated and guided the debate. The themes at Bangkok, 1973, *Salvation Today*, and

⁸ To use the title of Johannes Blauw's almost prophetic book which delineated the issues which have dominated conciliar discussion ever since: Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary nature of the Church* (London, 1961).

Melbourne, 1980, *Your Kingdom Come* encapsulated the central issues at stake in their respective decades.

From an outsider's perspective (and for much of the time since New Delhi evangelicals were made to feel themselves as outsiders) the 1960s' decisions to 'let the world set the agenda' left the conciliar movement's debates subject to the fickle whims and fads of international economic, environmental and political developments. Evangelical critique of these Assemblies has lamented the concentration on such themes – albeit couched in terms of 'salvation for social structures', 'liberation theology', 'preferential options for the poor', 'concern for the integrity of creation' and the like – with the resultant neglect of the personal salvation of the unevangelised, and loyal obedience to the Great Commission.⁹ The popular debate has concentrated on the more radical, and usually politically left-wing, programmes and pronouncements of WCC Assemblies and staff.

However, other more central streams have influenced the formal statements of the movement. From the late 1970s sincere attempts have been made to present more broadly representative and balanced statements. This is evident, for instance, in the definitive summary found in 'Mission and Evangelism – An Ecumenical Affirmation'.¹⁰ Likewise, the regular letters of Raymond Fung while secretary for evangelism of WCC have shown a respect for the concerns of those previously ignored in the earlier debate.¹¹ As we move into the twenty-first century deep differences persist, as the CWME Assembly in Canberra indicated. But now there is a willingness to take differing views more seriously.

The present challenge is for WCC central programme and staff pronouncements to be brought into closer harmony with member church convictions if the conciliar movement is to continue its influence.

⁹ For this critique see, e.g., Rodger C. Bassham, *Mission Theology 1948-1975: Years of Worldwide Tension, Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic* (William Carey Library, Pasadena, 1977); Peter Beyerhaus, *Missions: Which way?: Humanization or Redemption* (Grand Rapids, 1971); P. Beyerhaus, *Bangkok '73: The Beginning or End of World Mission?* (Grand Rapids, 1973); Bruce Nichols and Bong Rin Ro (eds), *Beyond Canberra: Evangelical Responses to Contemporary Ecumenical Issues* (Oxford, 1993).

¹⁰ *International Review of Mission*, vol. LXXI(284), Oct 1982, pp. 427-51

¹¹ Raymond Fung, *Evangelistically Yours: Ecumenical Letters on Contemporary Evangelism* (Geneva, 1992).

2. Meanwhile equally massive discussion, debate and rethinking have taken place in the Evangelical camp. The key movements developed from two consultations in 1966. One, initiated by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, was the Berlin Congress on Evangelism.¹² The other was a joint gathering of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association, the two largest North American missionary sending associations, at Wheaton Illinois.¹³ After a series of regional consultations,¹⁴ the momentum gathering from these 1966 consultations received fresh impetus on a global basis at Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974.¹⁵

The resulting Lausanne Covenant has proved a watershed document committing evangelicals to a holistic understanding of mission and evangelism. Its section headings have defined the agenda for evangelical discussion and praxis since 1974: *The Purpose of God, The Authority and Power of the Bible, The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ, The Nature of Evangelism, Christian Social Responsibility, Evangelism and the Church, Partnership in World Evangelisation, Culture and Leadership, Conflict and Persecution, and The Power of the Spirit and the Return of Christ.*¹⁶ Subsequent conferences have significantly advanced the discussion, particularly regarding the relationship of evangelism and social justice.

From the early 1980s, parallel groups such as the World Evangelical Fellowship have brought wider representation to the discussions. The key gatherings or reports have included: The Willowbank (Bermuda) Report: Gospel and Culture, 1978; The Simple Lifestyle Conference, High Leigh (England) 1980; The *Thailand Statement* from the Pattaya Conference, 1980; The Consultation on the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, Grand Rapids, 1982; and The Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need with its *Wheaton '83 Statement*.

¹² See Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham, *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin 1966: Official Reference Volumes (2 vols) (Minneapolis, 1967).

¹³ See Harold Lindsell (ed.), *The Church's Worldwide Mission* (Waco, Texas, 1966).

¹⁴ E.g., W. Stanley Mooneyham (ed.), *Christ Seeks Asia: Official reference Volume, Asia South Pacific Congress on Evangelism, Singapore, 1968* (Hong Kong, 1969).

¹⁵ J. D. Douglas (ed.), *'Let the Earth Hear His Voice': International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland* (Minneapolis, 1975).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*; See also, John R. W. Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1975).

The global meeting in Manila, July 1989, produced the *Manila Manifesto: Calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World*, clarifying the themes of the world-wide debate to that point in its twenty-one succinct affirmations and twelve elaborative sections.¹⁷

However, at Manila differences which had been held in creative tension since Lausanne showed signs of splintering, as we shall see. The more recent DAWN (Discipling a Whole Nation) and *AD 2000 and Beyond* movements leading up to the *Global Consultation on World Evangelisation '95 Declaration*, published from Seoul, Korea, in May 1995 show important reversals. The focus has returned to practical strategies rather than depth of understanding and application of missionary theology. The series of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association sponsored consultations on evangelism in Amsterdam in 1983, 1986, and the largest of all these evangelical meetings, 'Amsterdam 2000' have highlighted, but not resolved, the differences within the evangelical camp.¹⁸ The evangelical emphases are under internal pressure – but the commitment to both evangelism and mission is still strong and central.

3. In the Roman Catholic camp also the changes have been deep and broad since Vatican II. This 'Second Ecumenical Council' of the Roman Catholic Church, meeting between 1963 and 1965 transformed Catholic attitudes to the understanding and methods of mission. Those of us in a missionary situation like Papua New Guinea in the 1960s and 1970s saw the changes unfolding before our eyes. The open and often bitter confrontations between Catholic and Protestant missionaries before Vatican II have given way to sincere efforts towards cooperation, understanding and respect.

The Vatican II documents, particularly *Ad Gentes* (Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity), *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), and *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), have redefined the ground rules for Catholic approaches to evangelisation and mission. More recent papal statements have confirmed and clarified these changes,

¹⁷ Lausanne Committee on World Evangelisation, *The Manila Manifesto: An Elaboration of the Lausanne Covenant Fifteen Years Later*, 1989.

¹⁸ See the *Amsterdam Declaration* published at *Amsterdam 2000*, and my comparison of its emphases with the Lausanne Covenant, in *New Slant*, March-April 2001.

especially *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, 1975). For evangelical observers, particularly significant have been the rediscovery of Bible study and the place of the laity in the *Base Ecclesial Communities* and other parish renewal movements worldwide. These have already changed Catholic grassroots thinking about the church in the world and have potential for even greater change in the coming decade. In a recent survey of 'nine breakthroughs' in Catholic missiology in the period 1965-2000, the Maryknoll priest William Frazier suggests there is no previous parallel in Catholic history to the developments of these thirty-five years. He concludes his survey with the 'hope that this period of growth will not come to an end with the new millennium'.¹⁹

4. The political collapse of communism and the opening of the Eastern Bloc countries to the West have opened the way for a fresh contribution from the Orthodox family of churches. They bring distinctive emphases on ritual, liturgy, community and the sacraments in mission and evangelism. Their depth of penetration of the popular culture of the societies they serve, and their fresh emergence from seventy years of communist persecution, mean the Orthodox are a force to be reckoned with on the global mission stage.

I discovered this dramatically at a consultation convened to inaugurate Dudley Woodberry as the new Dean of the School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, in November 1992. One plenary speaker at this *Consultation on Missiological Education for the 21st Century* was Michael Oleska, an American missionary of the Russian Orthodox Church, based in Alaska. A brilliant communicator, he began his message on, 'The Historical Christian Mission of the Orthodox Church', with the quip, 'Yes, we have one!' He outlined the centuries-long work Orthodox churches have put into evangelising and contextualising the gospel in the countries in which the Orthodox church is dominant. He suggested they had devoted eight centuries translating the gospel into the culture of Greece. In-depth mission, he warned, always takes centuries and the Orthodox have been doing it since Pentecost. He made a plea for Western nations to appreciate the depth of the sufferings of the church in Russia over the past seventy years. He pointed out that when, through those hard times, only two or three aged widows turned up for daily Eucharist each carrying a basket full of little loaves for the priest to

¹⁹ William B. Frazier, MM, 'Nine Breakthroughs in Catholic Missiology, 1965-2000', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 25(1) January 2001, pp. 9-14

bles, such a small turn out did not mean the church was dead. Far from it, each loaf represented a whole family standing true to Christ despite the fact that each one could name a father, brother or cousin who had been physically persecuted or imprisoned for their faith. Oleska pointed out that such suffering teaches vital lessons about mission. The Orthodox churches have matured and deepened their faith through these years. He concluded with a timely reminder to the largely evangelical audience that they cannot lay exclusive claim to the missionary task, or to the title 'evangelical': 'At last the Orthodox are able to make their contribution – which is clearly needed – to the rest of the church and to the whole world. May this evangelical mission have free course in the third millennium. Maranatha.'

The world-wide church needs the Orthodox perspectives for a full-orbed grasp of both the gospel and our mission in today's world.

Clearly, the approaches to mission and evangelism in these camps are different. We dare not gloss over the variations in theology, methodology or practice. We need, however, to move beyond this clash of the codes to a new understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each of our differing approaches to mission and evangelism.

CONVERGING CONCERNS

In their converging training methods, increasing professionalism, new marketing techniques and promotional activities, Rugby League and Rugby Union become more like each other by the day. So too, during these years since 1961, significant forces have brought increasing convergence regarding key aspects of mission and evangelism amongst the different church groupings.

1. The Charismatic Renewal Movements have meant a rediscovery of the personal presence and power of the Holy Spirit for mission and evangelism in our contemporary world. By reinvigorating Catholic, mainline Protestant and evangelical congregations alike the Charismatic movement has created a new surge of global concern to share the faith with others. Moreover, the Charismatic movement has brought the larger Pentecostal churches, such as the Assemblies of God and Apostolics, each with significant global mission involvement, back into the main stream of Christian awareness. We are still probably too close to these movements to appreciate the breadth or depth of their contribution.

2. Rediscovery of Holistic mission. Since the mid-1970s particularly, we have seen a fresh convergence of thought about the integral inter-relationship of evangelism and social action in the Church's mission. After outlining the changes historically, Bosch sums up:

By the early 1980s, then, it seemed a new spirit was establishing itself in mainstream evangelicalism.... They had no doubt that they were called to a ministry proclaiming Christ as Saviour and of inviting people to put their trust in him, but they were equally convinced that sin was both personal and structural, that life was of a piece, that dualism was contrary to the gospel, and that their ministry had to be broadened as well as deepened. ... Today both evangelicals and ecumenicals grasp in a more profound manner than ever before something of the depth of evil in the world, the inability of human beings to usher in God's reign, and the need for both personal renewal by God's Spirit, *and* resolute commitment to challenging and transforming the structures of society. ... A similar convergence of ideas is witnessed in Catholicism. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in particular, underscores the important advance in Catholic thinking that took place since Vatican II....²⁰

We must not underestimate the continuing differences. National and local centres have some way to go to catch up with the implications of these more formal statements embracing a holistic understanding of the church's task which are being promulgated by their grouping's international centres. However this convergence has removed one of the previous causes of division between the various camps in their approaches to mission.

3. Significant inter-confessional discussion in recent years has also brought some important clarifications of understanding. As just one example we should mention the discussion between Roman Catholics and evangelicals in both Britain and the United States. Under the leadership of Basil Meeking (since returned to New Zealand) and John Stott, points of catholic-evangelical agreement and difference were thrashed out in the 1980s. From 1992-1994 similar US discussions involved notables such as Charles Colson, Richard Neuhaus, John White and Kent Hill on one side, and Frs Juan Diaz-Vilar, Avery Dulles, S. J. and Bishop Francis

²⁰ Bosch, *op cit.*, pp. 407-8

George, OMI, for the Catholics. Their final statement does not gloss over the differences, but presents an impressive listing of common ground.²¹

4. We are also seeing new patterns of interaction and communication transcending previous confessional divisions. Witness the changes in editorial policy of major international mission journals, and in the patterns of operation of the societies which sponsor them. Whereas once you could expect a clearly confessional or partisan list of contributors and could predict the likely emphases of each issue, these days you never know whether ecumenical, evangelical, Catholic or Orthodox contributions will predominate in any one issue of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*; *Missiology*; *Missionalia*; *Mission Studies*; or even in *International Review of Mission*.²² To only a slightly lesser extent, this diversity also increasingly characterises major book publishers in the evangelism and mission fields – with Orbis and Eerdmans as prime examples.

These strands of new openness and convergence are perhaps a predictable partial response to the increasingly anti-Christian context of our modern world. Whether they prove a force for strengthening the task of global mission depends upon how we develop them.

RECOGNISING AND SELECTING ALL THE PLAYERS

In our Rugby analogy the crucial point of conflict is in selecting the players and their coaches. Can we, or should we, regard all rugby union and rugby league players as a single pool of potential contributors for either code, or do we need to erect increasingly secure fences between the codes? Likewise for the coaching and training skills – should Frank Endacott and John Graham, or their successors on the Rugby League scene, become All Black coaching consultants for future Rugby Union World Cups?

Certainly in our mission and evangelism camps we are still very selective about which players or coaches we regard as appropriate for our different confessional teams. When constructing our training curricula

²¹ See, Charles Colson, Fr Juan Diaz-Vilar et al., 'Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 43, May 1994, pp. 15-22.

²² Although a case could possibly be put for suggesting that the *International Review of Mission*, the professedly most ecumenical journal, has been the most predictably partisan in its editorial (though never in its bibliographic) policy in the past two decades.

often we ignore available input from those of another church grouping. When evaluating the progress and problems in fulfilling the task we tend to overlook all the participants who do not conform to our particular approach. We are also good at acting as if we are the only ones on the field and in the team.

The problems this causes become evident in various ways. Since Bosch can be applauded as more comprehensive and inclusive than almost all his predecessors, perhaps it is not too unfair to point out some of his continuing narrowness of perspective:

- Several writers have noted that Bosch omits adequate reference to the role of women in mission history and in recent times.²³
- Chris Sugden suggests he gives inadequate attention to 'the growth of the Pentecostal Movement especially in Latin America where consensus among observers is that Pentecostals are achieving among the poor at least as much if not more than Liberation theologians and activists whom Bosch discusses at length'.²⁴
- When discussing developments in ecumenical thinking in the nineteenth century, Bosch overlooks the fundamental contribution to ecumenicity in mission of the faith missions such as the China Inland Mission. When discussing the same issue in the twentieth century, again the faith missions are ignored and their ecumenical organisations, such as IFMA and EFMA, receive no mention.²⁵
- The selectivity is all too often evident in scholarship about mission. Not only for Bosch but for all scholars it is too easy to take a nationally selective perspective. This is evident, for instance, in Bosch's discussion of missionary motivation referred to above. The wealth of British and Australasian scholarship in this area, such as in Gunson, Piggis, or even Hitchen, receives no mention.²⁶

²³ See Willem Saayman and Klippias Kritzing (eds), *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered*, Maryknoll (N.Y., 1996), *passim*.

²⁴ Christopher Sugden, 'Placing Critical Issues in Relief: Response to David Bosch', in Saayman and Kritzing, *op cit.*, p. 148f.

²⁵ Bosch, pp. 458-61

²⁶ See, e.g., Neil Gunson, *Messengers of Grace*, *op. cit.*; Stuart Piggis, *Making Evangelical Missionaries 1789-1858: The Social background*,

These examples illustrate the difficulty, even for the most globally-minded of scholars, of fairly representing the full range of contributors when discussing the global missionary task. Our parochialism hinders the depth of our grasp of the issues – and of appropriate solutions to problems.

Selectivity of viewpoint becomes a special problem in mission when defining those who are the object of mission. From within the different theological and ecclesiastical camps the position looks different. Even in David Barrett's massive attempts statistically to survey the church's global mission it has proven difficult to define acceptably the 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' constituencies around the globe. For many evangelicals, if Catholicism has become formal or syncretistic in one place then that is reason enough to regard that area as 'unreached' and in need of the gospel. 'Nominal' Christians are regarded as a significant part of the 'mission field'. For Catholics, however, 'evangelisation' based on such thinking is nothing more than proselytism and is greatly to be deplored. The issues of nominalism and proselytism, flip sides of the same coin depending upon your perspective, present a major problem in defining the task, in agreeing about methodology, and in shaping inter-confessional relationships. These are not new issues – as the only limited success of attempts at 'comity' in mission have proven. Even movements which have brought people together across denominational boundaries in one place, have, in other settings, undermined hard-won inter-church cooperation, and brought a new generation of inter-church rivalry. The charismatic movements that brought many together in New Zealand in the 1980s, brought new divisions in Papua New Guinea during the same period.²⁷

Whom to recognise as fit for inclusion in 'our' team is a continuing problem in global mission.

Motives and Training of British Protestant Missionaries to India (Abingdon, England, 1984); John M. Hitchen, *Training Tamate...*, op. cit.

²⁷ The writer can document cases from Papua New Guinea in the mid-1970s where similar effects have followed the globalisation of some para-church evangelistic agencies. They have often insisted on retaining their own name and identity over against the established churches, even when those churches have opened doors for their specialised ministries to be incorporated within the regular life and structures of the churches themselves.

WHOSE RULES?

Few international rugby fixtures avoid tensions over the refereeing. Variations in the rules, or at least of their interpretation, are always seen as factors in the success or failure of some teams. Several major areas of debate about the 'rules' are evident in global mission today.

Ultimate authority

The place we turn for our final decisions on faith, life and action controls both our theory and practice in mission. David Evans suggests that when we refer to Scripture, Tradition, and Reason as if they are alternative authorities, we are actually embracing a kind of Enlightenment 'folk religion'. He calls us to heed the return amongst both Catholics and Protestants to 'the ancient and normative single source of Scripture'.²⁸ Even Lesslie Newbigin, who has drawn swords with evangelicals most often over his own caricatures of their appeal to scriptural authority, can be quite outspoken on this issue:

[T]he gospel can only be communicated to our pluralistic society by communities that take the Bible as the fundamental framework of their thinking, as the way they understand the world and the human story.... To live in the world of the Bible, with all the tensions that are within the Bible story, to take it as the framework within which we try to understand and find our way through the perplexities of living now, is to be embarked on a journey with the confidence that we have a reliable clue for our exploration – not that we know the whole truth.²⁹

Agreement that the Bible is indeed the normative authority for mission is an essential starting point for moving forward on an adequate basis for global mission.

Heeding the Third World voices

Since the beginning of the modern missionary movement Westerners have assumed the right to make the rules and appoint the referees in the global missions effort. But that prerogative has been questioned in our generation. We could demonstrate the problem in each of the confessional

²⁸ David Evans, 'Evangelism with Theological Credibility', in Christopher Wright and Christopher Sugden (eds), *One Gospel – Many Clothes: Anglicans and the Decade of Evangelism* (Oxford, 1990), p. 30, citing the approach of Vatican II and official Anglican statements.

²⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids and Edinburgh, 1994), p. 165.

'camps'. Two examples will suffice. Western evangelical missiologists struggle to respect input and critique from their Third World counterparts. Ghanaian Presbyterian, Kwame Bediako, traces the developments in evangelical thinking since Lausanne 1974 in his article, 'World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of the Christian World Mission'.³⁰ Bediako documents the impact of Third World evangelicals in shaping the Lausanne Covenant so that:

It represented and demonstrated a fundamental truth of really authentic mission throughout the whole of mission history, namely, that mission has to do not with triumphalism, but with travail; that travail in mission has to do with more than the expending of resources, finance and personnel; it is the expending of life itself, for the sake of more life and for the overthrow of sin, evil and death in every manifestation of these.³¹

He goes on, however, to show how in the 1980s an influential North American group of missionary activists ignored these Third World emphases and returned to a narrow triumphalistic understanding of the gospel. He also challenges the way the social sciences dominate Western missiology and proposes:

There is a viable alternative to the dominant anthropology-based missiology. ... A more helpful approach to understanding and engaging in Christian mission is through exposure to Christian mission history itself. ... The coming of the Gospel to Africa, Asia and Latin America is not at its deepest level the history of the meeting of these continents with Western values and ideas. Instead we have to do... with Christ... conversing with the souls of Africa, Asia and Latin America, as has been the case with the coming of the Gospel also to the peoples of Europe in earlier centuries. Therefore through exposure to these 'histories' within Christian mission history, it should be possible to appreciate and understand some of 'the essential urges of Christianity' as these have manifested themselves in the different cultural contexts of mankind.³²

Bediako's concern is that if the mission task is rightly understood in these terms then it is dangerous to return to triumphalistic and pragmatic strategising such as has regained the ascendancy in much evangelical

³⁰ In Vinay Samuel and Albrecht Hauser (eds), *Proclaiming Christ in Christ's Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism* (Essays Presented to Walter Arnold on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday; Oxford:, 1989), pp. 52-68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 65, citing John Foster's telling phrase.

missionary thinking in the past decade. This kind of Third World critique of Western missiology is timely, but demands such a massive reorientation of effort and priorities that it may be all too easy simply to ignore it.

Unfortunately this is not only an in-house evangelical problem. Christopher Sugden documents how even such an ecumenically-minded missiologist as David Bosch was selective about which Third World missiological voices he chose to heed. He recognised those from further afield, but on some issues found it difficult to recognise those in his own backyard, especially if they came from a different confessional team. At points he attributed to Western missionaries ideas which derived from Third World missiologists from his own region.³³ Our point is not to undermine the value of Bosch's work, but to indicate how difficult it is for the best of us to change our mind-set and genuinely to respect the insights of those from a different background – particularly when their critique is penetrating enough to challenge the rules by which we operate.³⁴

We are in a climate in which we must allow coaches and players from every corner of our globe to help us clarify and define our global mission and methodologies. No one cultural group can any longer assume ownership of the rule-making task.

Pragmatists or thinkers

Kwame Bediako's critique also highlights another crucial tension in present-day mission and evangelism. We face a growing divide between our theoreticians and practitioners. In tertiary education an increasingly clear distinction is being drawn between 'missionary training' and 'mission studies'. This is potentially dangerous at precisely the point when missionary skills training needs to be informed by careful study of mission history and theory, and when missiology needs to be constantly in touch with the realities of mission practice.

Enthusiasm, commitment and personnel resources are not lacking in evangelical commitment to global evangelisation today. The zeal is exemplary and stands in sharp contrast to the lethargy in some sections of

³³ Sugden, 'Placing Critical Issues in Relief...', op. cit., pp. 142ff.

³⁴ Harold Turner assures the present writer that if I knew the local political and ecclesiastical relationships existing between Bosch and local evangelical and African missiologists I would be less critical of Bosch. I readily accept that warning, but it only confirms my point about the difficulty of breaking out of our own presuppositional frameworks.

the church. Nevertheless we are concerned about the overly pragmatic emphases and the neglect of missiological lessons evident in some evangelical quarters such as the popular programmes associated with the *AD 2000 and Beyond* movement. In the decade following Lausanne evangelicals sought to work out the implications of understanding mission as 'the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world'. In the more recent movements we appear to have reverted to assuming that centralised agencies, or internationally representative committees, have the right to determine evangelistic strategies for all the different people groups around the world. 'Global strategizing' has the potential to usurp the responsibility of local churches to determine their own evangelistic patterns. The current tendency to focus on the '10/40 window' (the area ten to forty degrees north of the equator from West Africa to East Asia), as the 'target' for global evangelism could easily reintroduce the old and inappropriate geographical understandings of 'mission fields'. We are in danger of neglecting basic lessons of missiology and of reinstating questionable pragmatic methodologies in an effort to complete the task of global evangelism in line with our own timetables. While applauding the practical enthusiasm we long to see it expressed through missiologically sound methods.

Hesitant or triumphalist

The tensions outlined thus far have left some in serious doubt about how to proceed with the mission of the church. They call for caution and expect only slow steady work. The questions, critiques and conflicting recommendations have led to what Max Warren called, 'a terrible failure of nerve about the missionary enterprise'.³⁵ Others are impatient with such temerity and claim the finished work of the resurrected Christ and the living presence of the Holy Spirit as more than adequate provision to forward the task aggressively. They call for a more active confrontation of rival religious claims and the powers of evil. As Bosch pointed out, for many of these: 'It is "business as usual" as regards the continuation of one way traffic from the West to the Third World...'.³⁶

With each of these tensions the issue is: which group should determine the rules for mission and evangelism? The challenge before us on both the global and local scenes is to overcome these polarising tendencies. The task is so crucial we need both First and Third World insights harnessed cooperatively. We must bring together both the

³⁵ Cited in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 6-7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

theoretical and pragmatic insights in patterns of evangelism and mission which deeply impact our modern world. We must free the disillusioned from their doubts and harness the triumphalist enthusiasm into channels cut by sensible and serious reflection. The call is to listen to each other long enough to develop an effective partnership better to achieve our common goal – a goal which makes striving for possession of a Rugby World cup for a few years pale into insignificance.

DIFFICULTIES OF DEFINITION

If nothing else, the survey above has confirmed both the importance and difficulty of defining mission and evangelism. Bosch warns that, 'Ultimately, mission remains undefinable; it should never be incarcerated in the narrow confines of our own predilections.'³⁷ In recent debate, 'Broadly speaking, controversy prevails in two areas: the differences (if any) between "evangelism" and "mission", and the scope of evangelism.' Bosch shows how each conceivable relationship between mission and evangelisation has been espoused by some proponent, and the terms themselves have been used with wide diversity of meaning.³⁸

With those caveats in mind we need only refer to a number of tentative attempts at definitions. The following excerpts from Bosch's 'interim definition' of mission are helpful:

The Christian faith... is intrinsically missionary.

Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as this was portrayed, first, in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely, in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth... the church begins to be missionary not through its universal proclamation of the gospel, but through the universality of the gospel it proclaims....

Mission... refers primarily to the *missio Dei* (God's mission), that is, God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate. *Missio Dei* enunciates the good news that God is a God-for-people.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 409-20.

The missionary task is as coherent, broad and deep as the need and exigencies of human life....³⁹

Mission is thus the broader term embracing all that God the Father sends his Son and his Spirit to achieve in and through the world. This clarifies the more distinctive task of evangelism:

Mission includes *evangelism* as one of its essential dimensions. Evangelism is the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe in him, calling them to repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, and inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰

The Lausanne Covenant states it thus:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.⁴¹

William Abraham, seeking to build on the recent recovery of the importance of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God as central in Jesus' life and ministry, and in an attempt to correct what he sees as a false emphasis on mere proclamation as the essence of evangelism, suggests:

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 8-10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary* (Minneapolis, 1975), p. 20

We can best improve our thinking on evangelism by conceiving it as that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.⁴²

This is a helpful emphasis, provided the balance of the Gospel writers is conserved in our understanding of the Kingdom of God. Each of the Gospel writers makes the death and resurrection of Christ the culmination and the interpretive crux for the meaning of the Kingdom in the ministry of Jesus. Abraham pays only passing attention to this and focuses instead on the earthly life and pre-crucifixion ministry of Jesus to determine the essence of the Kingdom. This distorts the biblical message and can therefore distort both our understanding of the gospel and the way we conduct the evangelistic task. When the crucifixion and resurrection are given their central place in understanding the Kingdom of God, then Abraham's definition is useful as it avoids the danger of assuming everything the church does can be called evangelism.

Both our survey of trends in recent approaches to evangelism and mission, and these sample definitions point us to the importance of the third part of this paper.

'THE EVANGEL THAT DETERMINES OUR EVANGELISM'⁴³

Positive forward steps in both mission and evangelism demand a clear grasp of our message. Clarifying our definitions, reaching common ground across the methodological, ecclesial and world-view divides, and regaining lost confidence and nerve will all depend upon our answer to the question, 'What is our Gospel?'⁴⁴

⁴² William J, Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, 1989), p. 95. Bishop Peter Atkins, Dean of St John's College, has popularised Abraham's definition, and expounded it, in his *Good News in Evangelism: A Study Guide to the Issues During the Decade of Evangelism* (Auckland, 1992).

⁴³ This section heading is borrowed from Darrell L. Guder, 'Evangelism and the Debate over Church Growth', *Interpretation*, vol. XLVIII(2), April 1994, p. 147.

⁴⁴ On Definitions, David Evans notes, 'evangelism must... be defined in terms of the message', in 'Evangelism with Theological Credibility', in Chris Wright and Chris Sugden, *One Gospel - Many Clothes: Anglicans and the Decade of Evangelism*, p. 33. On Methodology, Daryl Guder identifies one problem in the Church Growth Movement as their failure to address 'the central theological issue.... That issue is the basic question:

This is therefore the focus of the rest of this paper as it has been in two earlier articles.⁴⁵ In our *New Vision New Zealand* chapter we answered this 'What is our Gospel?' question by affirming the gospel is God's power in action; it announces and explains God's action in Christ for us; and the gospel summons us to enjoy the benefits of this action. Exploring the theme in *The Vision New Zealand Congress* volume we focused on the uniqueness of the historic evangel. We surveyed the current relevance of the range of biblical terms identifying the gospel, the dynamic word-pictures explaining it and the distinctive features characterising the gospel of Christ. We concluded by spelling out some methodological implications for evangelism today.

We all long for simple summaries of crucial realities. Some of my colleagues suggested encapsulating the essence of the gospel in words such as:

- God rules here and now (– and everywhere and for keeps)!
- God loves ratbags!
- God's liberating power in action in Christ!

Others suggested we cannot improve on key texts such as :

- 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19)
- 'God so loved that he gave...' (John 3:16)

or the Apostle's own summary:

- 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...' (1 Cor. 15:1-5)

But no single formula adequately identifies the essence of the gospel. Even in Jesus' own preaching we find him using a series of different, but

What, in fact is the gospel we proclaim?', 'Evangelism and the Debate over Church Growth', *Interpretation*, vol. XLVIII(2), April 1994, p. 147.

⁴⁵ See my two contributions to the Vision New Zealand Congress, January 1993, in Bruce Patrick (ed.), *New Vision New Zealand: Calling the Whole Church to Take the Whole Gospel to the Whole Nation* (Auckland, 1993), pp. 146-57; and, 'The Gospel for Today's New Zealanders', in Bruce Patrick (ed.), *The Vision New Zealand Congress: Waikanae, New Zealand, January 1993* (Auckland, 1993) pp. 29-44, republished in John Crawshaw and Wayne Kirkland (eds), *New Zealand Made: Perspectives on Mission in Aotearoa* (Wellington, 1994), pp. 7-24.

closely related and overlapping terms to identify his message and mission. Jesus' encounter with the rich man and the evangelist's related comments as recorded in Mark 10:17-34 offer a way into a clearer grasp of the Christian gospel.⁴⁶

Both the opening question (v.17), and Jesus' concluding summary (v.30) focus on 'eternal life'. This is the basic theme. But in the course of the incident Jesus uses three other terms and Mark's comments introduce a fourth descriptive term to discuss the same reality. Mark immediately follows the incident with a further explanatory paragraph. These terms and explanations offer complementary insights into the nature of the gospel.

When asked how to inherit eternal life (v.17), Jesus, on checking the man's sincerity, looked at him and loved him (v.21), then effectively answered, 'come follow me' (v.21). When the man refuses this invitation Jesus comments to the disciple how hard it is to 'enter the Kingdom of God' (v.23). The disciples respond by asking, 'Who then can be saved?' (v.26). Mark concludes the incident by noting that Jesus was leading his followers up to Jerusalem where he would be condemned, die and rise again (vv.32-34).

No one of these terms is sufficient on its own to identify the essence of the gospel. All of these key terms are needed. 'Being saved' is, in this conversation, directly parallel with 'entering the Kingdom', 'commencing the journey with Jesus' and 'inheriting eternal life'. What is more, for Mark, discussing these ideas is closely related both to the love of Jesus and to his death and resurrection. Each of these phrases brings together a whole cluster of concepts describing the Christian Good News.

Receiving Eternal Life speaks of experiencing the new dimensions of life characteristic of 'the age to come'. It takes for granted the reality of another realm of existence beyond our time-space boundaries. It assumes a worldview in which time has a purpose and future culmination. It makes the astounding claim that the realities of the future age of consummation can commence in this present life and continue beyond it into the next. For first-century hearers the phrase conveyed eschatological significance. Jesus is the one in whom the long awaited age of fulfilment is inaugurated. Knowing and relating to him is the way into this quality of life. The rest of the New Testament will fill out the breadth of meaning inherent in 'eternal life' with its development of the whole

⁴⁶ This section develops the discussion in *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, pp. 31-3 and in *New Zealand Made...*, pp. 10-12.

family of spiritual realities associated with new life, new birth, growth, and family relationships.⁴⁷

The possibility of inheriting this kind of life – and all the associated relational realities flowing from it – is dramatic good news for modern Westerners whose mind-set is ingrained with the idea that reality is embraced by time and space categories alone. Such news undermines the common assumptions that meaning, value and enjoyment depend on the measure of our grasp upon present pleasures. It gives the lie to conceiving the Christian experience as a mere existence or legalistic bondage. The life of the long-awaited age offers purpose and personal significance.

Jesus looked at and loved him confirms that God takes the initiative in meeting our needs. The love of God in Christ is the driving force behind our gospel. In sheer grace Christ reaches out to establish personal relationships with us humans. He is moved by our need. He becomes involved at the point of our weakness and helplessness. His compassion embraced this man even before he made any response to Jesus – and despite the fact that he would not accept the invitation.

Again, this brief note of Jesus' love will blossom in other scriptures into the central aspect of the evangel. In his letter John will put love as the essence of God himself and as the motivating power for sending Christ to bring us life, to die as our representative and to become our Saviour (1 John 4:8-14). The possibility of personal relationships – costly, self-surrendering relationships – offered to the rich man in that loving look are deeply intertwined with the gospel language of this passage.

Commencing the Journey with Jesus is another provocative aspect of the gospel offered to the rich man. This call to follow is prefaced by a command to go and sell, and then to turn and come after Jesus. Life has a destination and goal. Many have lost their way. The true pathway is orientated towards the future. But starting on this pathway involves options, choices, and a turn around which changes our values. Repentance, costly self-denial and a new commitment to others in their need – these are the essential starting points on 'The Way'. Christianity is primarily a way of life. Following – becoming disciples – is essential. It means meeting and committing yourself to Jesus. Companionship is needed, and available, on this Way alongside Jesus and as part of his travelling band. Our Lord is not an absent landlord but a present, involved fellow traveller.

⁴⁷ See *The Vision New Zealand Congress*, p. 37f.; *New Zealand Made*, p. 17.

But this discipleship imagery goes further. Disciples follow their Teacher in order to learn, to live out and to pass on his teaching. The One who is the Way is also the Truth. He demands the obedience of the mind as well as the modelling of the life-style according to his teachings.⁴⁸ Settling down or turning back are occupational hazards for the Christian.

Ray Muller confirms the relevance of such powerful imagery for moderns. In New Zealand a 'search for meaning and purpose in life' ranks high amongst the reasons given for turning to the gospel.⁴⁹

Entering the Kingdom. The gospel is not merely a foretaste of the future or a pioneering adventure. It involves new loyalties to a new ruler. It means joining a new community. The News is that the true Ruler of the universe has never abdicated. Rather, the long-awaited King has arrived. He has inaugurated his reign on earth. The earthly ministry of Jesus demonstrates the good news that the kingly rule of God has come. True, the final consummation is still future, but the Kingdom is already a reality for those who respond aright to the king.⁵⁰ With infinite mercy the king invites rebel subjects to return to their intended status and role as citizens in his Kingdom. At last there is a way for humans to act responsibly within a properly ordered society where justice, love and peace are in control. As with 'eternal life', 'entering the Kingdom' involves a taste of the values of the future Kingdom by participating in God's reign here in the present day. This involves sharing in the new societal life of the king's loyal subjects. Shared life within the church becomes a sign and a foretaste of the greater Kingdom reality of the coming age.

But this Kingdom experience also includes a dimension of fulfilment. The hopes and yearnings of an oppressed and hurting nation were encapsulated in the idea of the Kingdom. The pain and waiting can have an anticipatory experience of relief and fulfilment within the Kingdom of God.

Again, the good news of the Kingdom speaks directly to the disillusion and hurts documented for New Zealand in Norman Brookes' list of 'Trends in the Nation'. The message of the Kingdom offers another

⁴⁸ See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 81 for this aspect of discipleship; cf., Darryl Guder, 'Evangelism and the Debate over Church Growth', *Interpretation* vol. XLVIII(2) (April 1994) pp. 148-9.

⁴⁹ Ray Muller, 'Who responds to the Gospel', in Bruce Patrick (ed.), *New Vision New Zealand*, pp. 205-7.

⁵⁰ For William Abraham this is the aspect of the gospel which has been overlooked and which needs to be recaptured for effective evangelism today, *The Logic of Evangelism*, pp. 17ff.

kind of welfare state based on surer foundations than those found wanting in the past two decades.⁵¹

Being Saved. The next term in Mark 10 speaks of wholeness and wellness in the midst of danger and disease. Salvation in scripture has a wide range of meaning. It addresses the realities of human failure, deprivation and addiction in every realm of life – moral, social, spiritual, and environmental as well as personal – and announces a way to restored health and wholeness. But, with biblical realism it also points to the costliness of such an accomplishment. It cost Christ sorely to achieve the needed renewal. Only his crucifixion and resurrection could accomplish the necessary rescue to answer the needs of humanity. This salvation, as Jesus explained in this Mark 10 passage, brings both a present and future impact (Mark 10:26-30).

Jesus foretells his death and rising again. We suggest that after such a concentrated discussion of gospel terminology it is not at all surprising that Mark next records Jesus resolutely leading his followers towards Jerusalem and explaining to them about his forthcoming death. Eternal life, the love of Christ, becoming disciples, entering the Kingdom, and being saved are all unattainable apart from the reality of the crucifixion and empty tomb.

We find this same range of terms and explanations brought together in other key passages. The final chapter of Acts links salvation (28:28); proclaiming the Kingdom (v.31) and discipling (instructing) about the Lord Jesus (v.31). John chapter three links new birth (vv.3-6) with seeing the Kingdom (vv.3, 5), with eternal life (vv.15-16) and again with being saved (v.17). When seeking to identify the essence of the gospel the scriptures require a range of key concepts. The reality is far more glorious than any single humanly appreciated concept can represent.

Experiencing our gospel

The Mark's Gospel narrative sets the foundation for an adequate understanding of the gospel. The features of the Good News outlined there determine both the message we proclaim and the methods we adopt in making it known. As the rest of the New Testament builds upon that foundation we note other distinctive features of the way we experience the evangel.

⁵¹ Norman Brookes, 'Trends in the Nation', in *New Vision New Zealand*, pp. 74-80.

- The gospel brings a living experience of the Triune God. God is personally involved in offering the experience of new life. Our new wholeness comes from God the Father, through God the Son, by a personal encounter with God the Spirit.
- The gospel of the living God focuses on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world. Christianity is not merely another one of the many religions of human contrivance. It is God breaking onto our human scene live in the Person of his Son to offer us an intimate relationship with him as a daily reality. The challenge before contemporary mission and evangelism is so to present Christ that his uniqueness is not compromised by our cultural, ecclesiastical, or methodological accretions in the process of presentation.
- The transforming relationship with Christ is accessible by straightforward personal faith. God himself has achieved and freely offers the restoration to wholeness we need. We simply respond to his action on our behalf. A trusting commitment is the way to actualise in personal experience what Christ has accomplished for us. This is a humbling way of access to God. None of our status-gaining achievements are necessary or of value in this transaction. Thus it is equally accessible for every person – whatever their supposed standing according to human criteria. This is good news indeed for those who know they fall short of God's expectations.
- While based on a personal act of faith, our experience of the gospel is worked out within the new community of the church. The gospel of Christ is not at home with the individualism of modern Western society. Christ creates community. To be in him is to be in relationship with each other. According to Jesus the depth of our experience of the Good News can be measured by the way unselfish love increasingly regulates our behaviour (John 13:34-35).
- A valid experience of the gospel of Christ is all-embracing. He redirects the believers' life-styles and values systems. We discover that the personally present Friend and Counsellor is also the reigning Lord over the whole created cosmos. We begin to discover his handiwork in every part of the universe – whether in its physical, psychological, societal or more distinctively spiritual aspects. His constructive purposes for the environment and for the eco-systems of our planet bring a personal dimension and depth of meaning into the technological and scientific realities that surround us in our contemporary worlds. Even the darker side of

life with its suffering, inexplicable pain and death, takes on productive significance in the light of the resurrection and coming return of Christ. Not that the mystery or the enmity are removed, they just become tinged with hope.

- The flip side of Christ's all-pervading Lordship is that all of life becomes a responsible stewardship. We discover through Christ's liberation an enriching and deeply fulfilling sense of accountability. Our choices and decisions take on eternal significance. God treats us as responsible humans with the capacity either to refuse or accept him. That is the ultimate in proving human dignity – and welcome Good News in a nihilistic age.
- Finally, a genuine experience of the gospel transforms us to become other-centred and globally concerned. We are saved not only from self-centredness, but for service. We become caught up in God's ongoing purposes for the whole world. The evangel begets evangelism. To experience the *missio Dei* is to enlist in the ongoing *missio Dei*.

To understand and experience the Good News aright, then, is its own best defence and confirmation. Uncertainties about the need and validity of mission and evangelism today are best dealt with by a fresh experience of the Christ who is at their centre.