

# Christian Mission Today: Are We on a Slippery Slope? What Makes Mission Christian?

by Christopher Little

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**A**t first thought, such a question begs an obvious answer, but in reality, there is a growing divide among evangelicals today regarding the fundamental meaning, role, and purpose of Christian mission.

## *Historical Antecedents*

One should really not be surprised by this since the present debate is the inevitable consequence of powerful human forces at play over the past several centuries. It is widely recognized that our present era has been fashioned by the Enlightenment which was successful at dislodging God and placing human-kind's dignity, aspirations, values, and needs at the center of the universe. The church has not remained impervious to this far-reaching reconstruction. Whereas Protestant missionary ethos originally focused on the glory of God, in the nineteenth century it was "superseded by the emphasis on his love" which resulted in "yet another shift in motivation—from the depth of God's love to the depth of fallen humanity's pitiable state." As such, God's love was reduced to "patronizing charity" for those in the so-called undeveloped world (Bosch 1991:290).

This anthropocentric posture gained further momentum in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a variety of ways but most notably through the widespread influence of Johannes Hoekendijk. His disillusionment with the organized church led him to emphasize God's activity outside the church in bringing the kingdom of God and shalom to the world. His views ultimately found fruition at the World Council of Churches (WCC) assembly in Uppsala (1968) where the catch-phrase "the world sets the agenda" was oft-repeated, signifying that a predominately horizontal view of mission had been embraced.

It was at Uppsala that the now famous evangelical "backlash" (or "meltdown" as some would have it) occurred. Donald McGavran decried this move toward humanization in mission and retorted, "Will Uppsala betray the two billion [unreached]?" John Stott interjected that while Jesus wept over those who rejected Him, he did not notice the "Assembly weeping similar tears." And

Arthur Glasser concluded that evangelical concerns had been disregarded at the meeting (Yates 1996:197–198).

The ecumenical/evangelical divide reached its climax at the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism's Bangkok conference (1973). Peter Beyerhaus testified afterward that the gathering "seemed to have lost sight of the preeminent goal of Christ's great commission," that

the concept of salvation [had] been so broadened and deprived of its Christian distinctiveness, that any liberating experience at all can be called 'salvation'...any participation in liberating efforts would be called 'mission', and therefore, evangelicals "now are challenged to present the biblical alternatives by articulating our faith and by acting accordingly in obedience to Christ's Great Commission (Beyerhaus 1973:150, 161).

As a result, the stage was set for the Lausanne Movement.

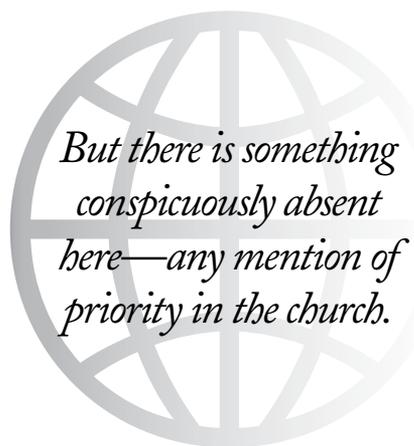
For ten days in July of 1974, 2430 participants and 570 observers from 150 countries met in Lausanne, Switzerland, to discuss the church's missionary mandate. Stott, who was the central figure in drafting the Covenant, had "changed his mind from earlier positions" (Yates 1996:207). He began to view Christian mission as an equal partnership between evangelism and social action. That is, they should be considered as two wings of a bird which fly together. However, McGavran's voice at the meeting won out in the end as the Covenant declared, "*in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary*" (Paragraph 6). The Lausanne Movement has continued to affirm this position in the 1980 Thailand Statement, in the 1982 Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility, and in the 1989 Manila Manifesto (Stott 1996:159–160, 183, 236). Yet the question of priority throughout these consultations was not easily resolved, and to varying degrees, tension over the matter has lingered as

evinced in the 2004 Forum in Pattaya.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a

consensus over this complex issue [still] remains a goal to be reached in the future rather than a present reality (Moreau 2000:638).

### *Historical Repetition*

Evangelicals committed to the primacy of proclamation in Christian mission have been accused of "reductionism" by their counterparts, whereas the latter have been charged with "expansionism" by the former. Be that as it may, the evangelical missions movement is



presently undergoing a metamorphosis of monumental proportions as it contemplates and pursues its missional obligation to the world. Moreover, this transformation in many ways is paralleling the events of the WCC in the last century.

Such an assertion, of course, must be supported by hard evidence. There is room to only touch on the following points. First, evangelical theologians of mission are currently advocating that the missionary task involves securing justice for the poor, overcoming violence and building peace, caring for the environment, and sharing in partnership (Kirk 1999). Second, evangelicals are now being told that mission entails launching businesses which bring in the kingdom of God (Borthwick 2003; Rundle and Steffen 2003; Yamamori and Eldred 2003).<sup>2</sup> Third, the recent edition of the *Mission Handbook* records that for the registered organizations there was a decrease of 11.9% for evangelism/

discipleship ministries, an increase of 65.8% for educational programs, and an increase of 14.6% in relief and development activities from 1998 to 2000. In addition, relief and development projects comprised 35.1% of the total income given for overseas ministries (Welliver and Northcutt 2004:23ff.).

And last, 160 leaders from 53 countries under the World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission met in Iguassu, Brazil (1999), and crafted the Iguassu Affirmation. They hoped it would

be received as a working document to stimulate serious discussion around the world. [They desired] that it will become a point of dialogue that will help shape both missiology and strategy in the next century/millennium (Taylor 2000:16).

Thus, it should not be overlooked quickly nor taken lightly. Embedded in the Affirmation is a desire to emphasize "the holistic nature of the gospel"; an interest in pursuing appropriate responses "to political and economic systems"; an invitation to study the "operation of the Trinity in the redemption of the human race and the whole of creation"; a pledge to "address the realities of world poverty"; a call "to all Christians to commit themselves to reflect God's concern for justice"; and a challenge to engage "in environmental care and protection initiatives." It must be promptly added, however, that the Affirmation also upholds the commitment to proclaim "the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness and loving humility" (Taylor 2000:17ff.).

But there is something conspicuously absent here—any mention of priority in the mission of the church.<sup>3</sup> This appears purposive since those at Iguassu made a concerted effort to not "repeat the errors" of

the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century [in which] an unfortunate over-emphasis on pragmatic and reductionist thinking came to pervade the international Evangelical missionary movement (Taylor 2000:4, 7).<sup>4</sup>

Evidently, they were attempting to empower evangelicals to reach a consensus on that which has beleaguered them for decades. If this is the case, some evangelicals will find reason to applaud but others will wonder if McGavran had been present whether he would have again raised the thorny matter of the now 4.2 billion non-Christians in the world (Barrett and Johnson 2004:24).

These developments (and more could be cited) show that at a maximum contravening mission agendas are being pushed to the center of the evangelical family, and at a minimum, erosion of the biblical mandate for evangelizing the world is transpiring. Therefore, it is fair to say that a trend toward horizontalization in mission is well underway among evangelicals, and as such, mirrors what happened to the WCC.<sup>5</sup> This burgeoning movement is being propped up by at least two pillars: holistic mission and the kingdom of God motif. An in-depth analysis of them thus behooves anyone interested in the future of evangelical mission orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

### *Holism Scrutinized*

Holistic mission views evangelism and social responsibility as inseparable.<sup>6</sup> That is, within the purview of Christian mission it intentionally seeks the “integration of building the church and transforming society” (McConnell 2000:448–449). The most startling fact about this theory is that the two main missional models of the New Testament fail to live up to its goals.

Recall the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (Jn. 6:1ff.).<sup>7</sup> On this event, A. B. Bruce insightfully writes:

Jesus mercifully fed the hungry multitude in order that He might sift it, and separate the true from the spurious disciples.... To allow so large a mixed multitude to follow Himself [sic] any longer without sifting would have been on Christ's part to encourage false hopes, and to give rise to serious misapprehensions as to the nature of His kingdom and His earthly mission (1988:124).

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Consequently, He refused to accept the role of a false king who continues to offer the benefits of the kingdom apart from submission to its true King (Jn 6:15, 26, 29).

Given the theology of holism, Jesus was mistaken. He should have ministered to the felt needs, the physical appetites, the earthly desires of the crowd in order to demonstrate concern for the whole person. Yet those present that day were confronted with this truth: “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (Jn. 6:27).<sup>8</sup> This response by Jesus proves that He did require behavioral change in order to receive the benefits of the kingdom (*contra* Ramstad 2003:78), the otherworldly character of His ministry did not generate a more just society on earth (cf., Severn 2001:444), and, although mission may include word and deed, deed requires word to explain it (cf., Moffett 1999:576), whereas word apart from deed is a perfectly legitimate expression of Christian mission (*contra* Engel and Dyrness 2000:65–66).<sup>9</sup>

The apostle Paul exhibits the same orientation in mission. While in Syrian Antioch, he along with Barnabas “for an entire year... met with the church and taught considerable numbers” (Ac. 11:26). Subsequently, they were whisked off to Cyprus after having been set apart by the Holy Spirit (Ac. 13:2ff.). But were there no downtrodden, disenfranchised, and diseased both within and outside the church to attend to? According to Rodney Stark, Syrian Antioch was the cite of recurring devastation by way of war, fire, floods, earthquakes, epidemics, famines, etc. (1996:159ff.). So what could have possibly caused Paul to leave behind those who were suffering?

Robert Speer rightly surmises:

Paul seems purposely to have avoided... personal charity.... [He] was not to meet the passing physical need of one century, but to plant in the world the eternal life of Christianity.... The energies by which St. Paul naturalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire might have been exhausted in the effort to cope with the physical evils of the one city Antioch. He had a greater work to do and was strong enough not to sacrifice the best on the altar of a good (1910:101).

And that greater work, which beckoned him on from one city to another, was to turn people “from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Ac. 26:18).<sup>10</sup>

The inherent dilemmas with holistic mission do not stop here however. As a case in point, Bruce Bradshaw asserts, “Christians who separate evangelism from development have a dualistic world view” in which “spiritual” ministries like evangelism are justified instead of “physical” ministries like development (1993:28). To rectify the situation, a holistic worldview must be embraced which tolerates no dichotomies except the one between Creator and creation (1993:32ff.). Accordingly, for him there can be no priorities in God's redemptive activity in relation to creation. Yet Bradshaw has overlooked one crucial factor—the eternal/temporal dichotomy. Not all of creation will last forever: some elements are temporal and others are eternal. Jesus even endorses this dichotomy:

I say to you... do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (Lk. 12:4–5; cf., Mt. 18:8–9).

Hence, He clearly promoted a biblically-informed theocentric worldview where eternal realities outweigh temporal ones which necessarily leads to priorities in mission (*contra* Strauss 2005:61–63). Indeed, God’s

priority for alienated human beings is reconciliation to himself. The reason is not hard to find. Continued alienation in time means alienation for eternity (McQuilkin 1993:177).

There are other notable inconsistencies with Bradshaw’s argumentation. Based upon his reflection of Colossians 1:15–20, he deduces that “God is working redemptively through the entire creation” (1993:34). However, F. F. Bruce points out that rather than adopt this view which ultimately leads to universalism, it is more sensible to interpret the phrase “reconcile all things to Himself” (v. 20) as indicating God’s forcible subjugation of rebellious elements in the universe through judgment (1973:209–210). Consequently, to assume that God’s people can serve in this capacity, as Bradshaw does, is to mistake the divine role for the human. In addition, while Bradshaw maintains the Western contempt for the physical world is based upon the influence of Gnosticism (2002:102ff.), Carl Braaten counters that holism is actually rooted in Western humanistic tendencies inherited from Greek philosophy (1985:80–81). Furthermore, in reference to relief and developmental work, Bradshaw never sufficiently addresses the ethical issue of Christianity’s credibility in the eyes of an unbelieving world which views such activity as manipulating people to convert (Begos 2003:66);<sup>11</sup> that “civilizing mission” of days gone by “has metamorphosed into development” mission on the contemporary scene (Bonk 1993:49); that it takes away financial resources from evangelism (e.g., one church in Ethiopia “was disturbed by the fact that there were more financial resources available for relief and development work than for evangelism” (Thomsen 1999:261)); and that there is nothing particularly Christian about humanitarian work in

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the first place. For example, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, the United Nations, USAID, Oxfam, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, etc., are all striving to alleviate the ailments of humanity for basically philanthropic reasons. But unless Christian mission transcends philanthropy the work of holistic mission practitioners is “superfluous” since non-Christians are achieving an earthly shalom apart from Christ (Beyerhaus 1971:91).

### *Kingdom of God Clarified*

Holistic mission draws heavily from the kingdom of God concept



(McConnell 2000:448). This topic has been the focus of growing interest among evangelicals (cf., Glasser 2003:11ff.). James Engel and William Dyrness have even gone on record as stating that Jesus calls

us to join him in the process of extending the present realities of the kingdom of God—his lordship over all of life—throughout the world.

Consider carefully what Christ said when he announced the “mission statement” for his life: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18–19). If this defines his agenda, it also must define ours (2000:22–23).<sup>12</sup>

But such an assertion merits closer inspection.

First of all, Jesus gave no indication that this messianic passage (cf., Isa. 61:1–2) had any concrete application apart from Himself and His own ministry as the Messiah. In fact, He said it “had been fulfilled” the very day He read it (Lk. 4:20). Moreover, Andreas Köstenberger, after his very extensive analysis of semantic clusters in the gospel of John, concludes that the disciples of Jesus are not to “model their own mission” after His (1998:220). This is confirmed by the Greek terms employed both in John 17:18 and 20:21 by which the Father’s sending of Jesus is specifically differentiated from the sending of Jesus’ disciples (1998:186ff.). And, in reality, it can be no other way since among other things: 1) He was born to die for the sins of the world (Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 19:10); 2) He essentially confined His mission to the Jewish people (Mt. 10:6; 15:24); and 3) His “signs” were meant to separate Him and His mission from all others (Jn. 2:11; 4:54; 7:31; 20:30; cf., Köstenberger 1998:169ff.). Therefore, any missiological paradigm which does not distinguish Jesus from His disciples in any age is not credible.<sup>13</sup>

Second, John Bright, widely acknowledged as an expert on the kingdom of God, notes that the early church never imagined it

could by its labors bring in the Kingdom! That is a modern delusion of grandeur which the early church simply would not have understood (1989:233).

Indeed, the kingdom of God “being from above should never be equated with human achievements” (Hedlund 1991:174). The idea that it could has long been recognized by European theologians as a human-centered understanding of the kingdom conjured up by American progressivism (cf., Yates 1996:248).

Third, Paul Hiebert rightly deduces that concentrating on the kingdom of God as

the central theme of missions causes the church to lose sight of the lostness of human beings and the urgency of evan-

gelism....The focus is on the Kingdom on earth, rather than the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1993:156, 158).<sup>14</sup>

By default, then, the world is allowed to set the agenda. As long as this course of action remains unchecked, the Father's yearning for the return of lost sheep will go unsatisfied (McQuilkin 1993:177).

Fourth, Engel and Dyrness go on to stipulate that every segment of human society should be infiltrated by the kingdom "*with special preference given to the poor*" (2000:80). This confirms that evangelicals are now being influenced by the tenets of Liberation Theology.<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may,

the idea that God has a preferential option for the poor causes dismay and is repudiated by many. It is argued that God is impartial. To claim that he is particularly favourable to one group of people is to run the risk of giving a false sense of security. It may lead to a subtle form of idolatry... (Kirk 1999:113–114).

The road to clearing the confusion in this area is to recognize that the "poor" in Scripture is not simply a socio-economic term (cf., Hesselgrave 2003:152ff.). Rather, in several significant passages (cf., Mt. 5:3; Lk. 4:18; 6:20), it relates to the Jesus tradition regarding "the pious poor" (Countryman 1980:31–32, 84–85). Paul reveals this tradition when paralleling "the circumcised" with "the poor" in Galatians 2:9–10, indicating the latter was actually a designation for the Jerusalem church as "the genuine eschatological people of God" (Georgi 1992:33–34, 53). Evangelical mission philosophy has unfortunately yet to reflect this biblical theology concerning "the poor."

And fifth, the supposition that the kingdom of God can be established here and now (cf., Engel and Dyrness 2000:79) amounts to over-realized eschatology. This view fails to acknowledge that the "kingdom of God cannot be subsumed in earthly forms [because] as long as the kingdom of the world lasts, it possesses an

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eschatological character" (Vicedom 1965:22). No one has done a better job of articulating this reality than Hendrik Kraemer:

The Kingdom of God is a transcendental, supra-historical order of life. Identification of a so-called Christian social order, Christian State or Christian culture with the Kingdom of God signifies making what is by its nature relative (social order, state, culture) absolute, and making the absolute (the Kingdom of God) relative. This is so because the tension inherent between the sphere of relative human history and that of the transcendent realm of God, the ethic of the Kingdom of God, of the complete fulfilment of the will of God, can never be annihilated in this dispensation. Therefore the Kingdom of God can never be realized in any social, economic, political or cultural order. If it were it would amount to saying that the absolute and perfect can be adequately expressed in the relative and imperfect (1947:93).

This is undoubtedly why Paul connects the coming kingdom to the return of Christ (2 Tim. 4:1, 8).<sup>16</sup> In the meantime, he interprets it as a "spiritual experience" in the lives of those who have already submitted to its King by repentance and faith (Glasser 2000:541). As such, the church in mission should take its lead from apostolic precedent rather than opportunistic theology (cf., McQuilkin 2000:649).

### **Doxological Mission: A Needed Corrective**

To criticize one missional paradigm without offering another is not only gratuitous but counterproductive. It is therefore my conviction that the contemporary evangelical movement stands in need of recovering the doxological theme in mission.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus clearly emphasized this aspect of His ministry when He stated His

principle motivation was to seek "the glory of the One who sent Him" (Jn. 7:18). Moreover, He summed up His entire terrestrial sojourn in this way: "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do" (Jn. 17:4). This indicates that the overall context for whatever Jesus did either as Prophet, King, or Priest, was to bring glory to the Father. As such, there is no purely humanitarian act discernible in the biblical record concerning His life since the vertical took precedent over the horizontal.

The doxological impetus is also witnessed in Pauline mission. Paul not only considered himself a channel for the revelation of God's glory (2 Cor. 4:6), he was driven by the passion to see God glorified. For instance, he strove to make known "to all the nations, the obedience of faith" in order that "the only wise God, through Jesus Christ" would receive "glory forever" (Rom. 16:27), he labored to bring unity between Jewish and Gentile believers so that "with one voice [they would] glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:6), and he yearned for the church at large to spread God's grace so that "more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:15). From this, one can conclude that the "ultimate goal of Paul's mission was to see God glorified" (Schreiner 2001:72). This was his *modus operandi* since he was keenly aware that

[i]f the pursuit of God's glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man's good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served and God will not be duly honored (Piper 1993:12).

One can therefore not justifiably deny that a sound theology of mission demands this doxological orientation.

In reality, without it mission may be mission but it is surely not biblical nor Christian. This is because the

ultimate purpose for....mission is to bring glory to God, so that a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language might declare the praise and honor and glory and power of God for all eternity [Rev. 7:9ff.] (Williams 1998:240).

Consequently, mission is not fundamentally undertaken for “the welfare and glory of man...but the glory of God forms the highest goal of missions” (Peters 1972:57) for “of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever” (Rom. 11:36).

If the chief end of mission is the glory of God, the means of mission must reflect this priority. The church, which exists “for the sake of the glory of God” (Bosch 1991:168), therefore must concentrate on increasing His glory. The manner in which to do this is not by highlighting what human beings can do for one another, but by proclaiming what Christ has done for them so that they “might glorify God for His mercy” (Rom. 15:9). This obliges the church in mission to realize that “[w]orld evangelization...is [its] greatest and holiest work” (McGavran 1970:90). Or to put it another way,

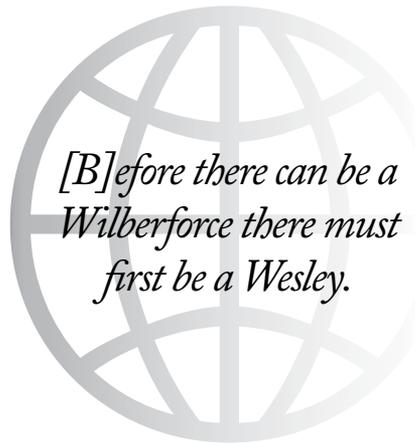
[e]vangelism is the central task of the church on earth, because it is the one function the church can do better here than in heaven (Hiebert 1993:161).

None of this is meant to deny God’s concern for the physical conditions of humanity but instead to affirm that: 1) the deepest impoverished state a person can suffer is alienation from God and therefore the greatest demonstration of His compassion is the remedy for this plight (Jn. 3:16–17; Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 4:10);<sup>18</sup> 2) the surest path to societal transformation is through the conversion of hearts (e.g., before there can be a Wilberforce there must first be a Wesley);<sup>19</sup> and 3)

evangelism must remain the leading partner to social action since

[o]ur vertical relationship to God comes first whereas [our horizontal relationship to our neighbor...is...second (Moffett 1999:576).

No doubt the debate over the mission of the church will continue. Yet the most disturbing fact confronting the church as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not an imbalance of material resources but rather “the unequal distribution of the light of the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.”



Thus, the church is called upon to do what the world cannot and will not do—evangelize the lost! “It was the supreme task for the Church of the New Testament,” so may God grant it to be the same today (Moffett 1999:576). **IJFM**

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Summary Affirmations state with one breath that church planting among unreached peoples is "a central priority" but with another calls for the "increasing integration of service to society and proclamation of the gospel" ([www.lausanne.org/Brix?pageID=13891](http://www.lausanne.org/Brix?pageID=13891)).

<sup>2</sup> In light of this, Western Christians can no longer escape the accusation that capitalism has been adopted as a means of missionary expansion.

<sup>3</sup> On this subject, McGavran discerns: “we realize that Christian mission must certainly engage in many labors. A multitude of excellent enterprises lie around us. So great is the number and so urgent the calls, that Christians can easily lose their way among them, seeing them all equally as mission. But in doing the good, they can fail of the best. In winning the preliminaries, they can lose the main game. They can be treating a troublesome itch, while the patient dies of cholera. The question of priorities cannot be avoided. In this fast-moving, cruel, and revolutionary era, when many activities are demanded, a right proportioning of effort among them is essential to sound policy. And ‘rightness’—a true and sound proportion in our labors—must be decided according to biblical principles in the light of God’s revealed will” (1970: 24).

<sup>4</sup> The notion that 20<sup>th</sup> century evangelicals have been adversely affected by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy with respect to the social dimensions of mission is an inappropriate characterization on at least two counts: 1) evangelicals were unapologetically committed to the priority of world evangelization before the 20<sup>th</sup> century ever dawned (cf., Robert 1990:29ff.); and 2) humanitarian work has in fact persisted within fundamentalist mission circles (cf., Patterson 2000:380ff.).

<sup>5</sup> This means Charles Van Engen’s thesis that evangelicals in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have experienced “a broadening vision of an evangelical theology of mission which became less reactionary and more wholistic without compromising the initial evangelical élan of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910” (1996:128), although perhaps valid for past generations, no longer holds true today. Whereas there was a singular program at Edinburgh to which the attendees were called, “the evangelization of the world in this generation”, the same “élan” was not articulated at Iguassu. As such, how can evangelicals expect to save themselves from the same fate of the WCC when they incorporate “sociopolitical and economic agendas” into the mission of the church (Van Engen 1996:155)?

<sup>6</sup> Holistic mission is the corresponding term for a “comprehensive notion of salvation” employed by the WCC of past generations (Beyerhaus 1973:161).

<sup>7</sup> Some would object to the ensuing discussion on the basis of a selective use of Scripture, that is, it amounts to proof-texting. But citing such passages is clearly justified on at least three grounds: 1) there is no canon within the Canon, so each sec-

tion is equally authoritative; 2) to discount Scripture at any point will eventually force one to walk the road of making the whole of it irrelevant; and 3) numerous narrative and didactic passages touch on issues only once but rather than diminishing their significance it elevates them (e.g., Jesus informed His disciples in response to their question regarding when the kingdom will be restored to Israel, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Ac. 1:7)).

<sup>8</sup> All biblical citations are from the New American Standard Bible (1995).

<sup>9</sup> If this is the case, several passages in Scripture require further explanation. First, in the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus is not primarily concerned with addressing the socio-economic needs of people but with overcoming prejudice (Lk. 10:29). Second, the final criterion for separating the sheep from the goats on judgment day is not mere philanthropy among the masses but caring for the “brothers” of Jesus (Mt. 25:40; cf., Jam. 2:1ff.). And third, although the disciples of Christ are commanded to do “good works” (Mt. 5:16), one must keep in mind that Jesus likewise did such things which resulted in the multitudes “glorifying God” (Mt. 9:8; 15:31; Lk. 7:16), but at the end of His ministry there were only a handful of wavering disciples left (Jn. 20:19).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, Paul did spend considerable time and effort collecting an offering from the Gentile churches for the Jerusalem church. But the purpose for this project has been greatly misunderstood. There are basically four options for why Paul undertook it: 1) to validate his ministry before the Jewish apostles; 2) to provide humanitarian relief for the poor; 3) to demonstrate the Gentile Christians’ indebtedness to Jewish believers; and/or 4) to convert Israel. The first two options are not sustainable while the last two are (cf., Little 2005:151ff.). Yet Roger Aus’ argumentation (1979:232ff.) that the main reason for which Paul organized the collection was to convert the nation of Israel best fits all the available evidence.

<sup>11</sup> As Adolf Harnack notes, such activity was unheard of in the early church: “we know of no cases in which Christians desired to win, or actually did win, adherents by means of the charities which they dispensed. We are quite aware that impostors joined the church in order to profit by the brotherly kindness of its members; but even pagans never charged Christianity with using money as a missionary motive” (1998:480). Rather, what attracted people

to the church was the “moral life” of Christians (1998:460).

<sup>12</sup> In a gospel that is often used to promote compassion ministries in view of Jesus’ example, it is important to note what William Larkin Jr. says about this passage: “of the four infinitives from Isaiah that show the purpose of the Spirit’s anointing and sending of Jesus, three involve preaching. The poor are evangelized (euangelizomai); the prisoners have release and the blind have recovery of sight proclaimed (kērussō) to them; the year of the Lord’s favor, the Jubilee year, is proclaimed (kērussō). The other purpose is to send the oppressed away in freedom. Luke, then, regards the primary activity of Jesus’ ministry as preaching. Other tasks are present, such as Jesus’ healing and exorcism ministry or his sacrificial death and mighty resurrection, but these either validate or become the content of the gospel message. Luke’s report of Jesus’ ministry activity, especially in summary statements, keeps Jesus’ preaching ministry before his readers (4:43–44; 8:1; cf. 7:22). In Luke’s gospel Jesus’ description of his ministry in salvation history framework also emphasizes the centrality of preaching and the necessity of commitment. ‘The law and the prophets were until John; from then the kingdom of God is being evangelized, the good news about it is being told and everyone is being urgently invited into it’ (16:16, cf. Matt. 11:12)” (1998:158).

<sup>13</sup> The issues of continuity and discontinuity in the missions of Jesus, Paul, and the church go beyond the scope of this discussion. For more information on this vital subject, see Little (2005:107ff.).

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this is why, as Stan Guthrie has observed, Engel and Dyrness’ book “makes no mention of the eternal destiny of the lost” (2001:110).

<sup>15</sup> Just like non-Western Christians should not welcome everything from the Western church, Western Christians should not consent to everything coming out of the non-Western church.

<sup>16</sup> Gerd Theissen believes there were also political considerations for Paul doing so: “The Hellenistic mission was operative almost exclusively in cities with a republican constitution, subordinate to Rome’s imperial power but also benefiting from it. Urbanization and Romanization, or Hellenization, went hand in hand. Those structural contradictions which characterize the political situation of Palestine are missing here. Thus it is not surprising that the radical theocratic element within the early Christian movement retreats almost com-

pletely. The proclamation of the kingdom of God, a staple in the preaching of Palestinian itinerant charismatics (Lk. 10:9), is almost wholly absent in Paul... Meanwhile, the political structure is accepted without reservation (Rom. 13:1ff.) and Paul, being a citizen of Tarsus and of Rome, is fully integrated into the political texture of the Roman Empire" (1982:36).

<sup>17</sup> Notice "recovering" not "discovering" since Gisbertus Voetius, who articulated the first comprehensive Protestant theology of mission (Jongeneel 1991:47), was committed to this idea. According to Jan Jongeneel, Voetius' goals for mission were three-fold: "1. The conversion of the nations (*conversio gentium*); 2. the planting, gathering and establishing of a church or churches, namely, of those who have been converted (*plantatio, collectio et constitutio ecclesiae aut ecclesiarum*); 3. the glorification and manifestation of divine grace (*gloria et manifestatio gratiae divinae*)" (1991:64). Jongeneel explains, "There is a definite and clear progression in this order. Conversion in a certain sense can be understood as preparation for church planting while conversion and church planting together, both of which in their own way contribute to the gathering and preservation of the elect, are subordinated to the ultimate goal of missions: the glorification and manifestation of God's grace" (1991:64). Thereafter, he notes, "The final and ultimate goal of missions,

according to Voetius, is the glorification and manifestation of divine grace (*gloria et manifestatio gratiae divinae*). God is not only the first cause but also the ultimate goal of missions. The highest purpose is therefore not the salvation of sinners (Eph. 1:10) but the honor of God (Eph. 3:10-11; Rom. 11:32). Church planting as well as conversion reaches its final goal in the exaltation of God's name.... The purpose for delivering and gathering the elect can only be expressed in a doxology: *Soli Deo gloria!*" (Jongeneel 1991:68). And a result of his analysis, Jongeneel rightly concludes: "Not only conversion and church planting but even the coming of God's kingdom on earth is subordinate to God and his glory as the ultimate goal of all missions.... We gladly concur with Voetius that the worship and adoration of the triune God by the nations of the earth is and must remain the final goal of all mission activity by the church. On this score Voetius has provided the church of his time and ours, standing as it does at the dawn of a third millennium of mission activity, with a clear vision" (1991:77-78).

<sup>18</sup> Lamin Sanneh says much the same: "life is more than meat and the body more than raiment (Luke 12:23)... There is a spiritual hunger on the continent [of Africa] far deeper, even if also less inchoate and less tangible, than the famine or AIDS crisis, though those are real enough" (1999:76).

<sup>19</sup> As Roland Allen shows, this perspective is supported by the Pauline method: "[Paul] had one end, one purpose, one work. He could not have looked upon the service of the people of Macedonia, in our sense of the words, as his work; he could not have attempted to reform social evils directly; he could not have dreamed of attempting to impress the people of Macedonia with the excellence of his social activities, so that they might hail him as a benefactor and welcome him because he provided schools for their children, orphanages for their waifs, or hospitals for their sick; he could not have imagined the possibility of revealing the power of the gospel in any such manner, or by any such activities. The churches which he established did those things, or things like them; they soon began to bury outcast dead, to purchase the freedom of slaves, and to do other pious works which appealed to them as proper expressions of Christian charity; but St Paul himself never directly engaged in any such work nor endeavoured to direct the Christian churches of his foundation in the doing of them. He could not have done so. Social activity of this kind was a fruit of the Spirit it could not be expected to appear until the apostles had done their work and had ministered the Spirit" (1960:104-105).



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