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*Articles and book reviews reflecting
global evangelical theology for the purpose
of discerning the obedience of faith*



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EDITOR: JUSTIN THACKER

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Editor

Justin Thacker

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Manuscripts, reports and communications
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Editorial:

‘The Whole Church’—Reflections of the Lausanne Theology Working Group

THE LAUSANNE Theology Working Group hosted a consultation in Panama, 26-30 January, 2009. 25 people from around the world convened, and worked together around 4 plenary papers and 18 case studies, which provided us with a very wide variety of perspectives on what God is doing through his church in the world.

Each morning we studied 1 Peter together, drawing on its rich teaching on what it means to be God’s church in the world. We found this constantly integrated with our wider discussions.

The topic, ‘The Whole Church’ is the second in a series of consultations on the theological significance of the three phrases of the Lausanne Covenant, ‘*The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world*’. The first consultation took place in February 2008 in Chiang Mai on ‘The Whole Gospel’, and the third will take place in February 2010 in Beirut. The findings of the first consultation were published in the January 2009 edition of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*. The findings of the second are published in this edition, and the third and final volume will be published in October 2010. Together, they comprise part of the contribution of the Theology Working Group to the preparation for Lausanne III Congress, Cape Town 2010.

Since our focus was strongly on the Lausanne phrase, our angle of approach to all that we tackled was missional. That is to say, we were not attempting to discuss or define an exhaustive systematic ecclesiology.

Rather, we were asking—what do we mean by the phrase ‘The Whole Church’—in relation to all that we understand to be the identity, role and functions of the church within the mission of God for the sake of the world?

When the phrase was first used, it is possible that ‘the whole church’ was intended simply to mean, ‘all Christians’. The main point of Lausanne’s call was to insist that evangelization was the task of the whole church (all Christians), not just of the clergy or professional missionaries. However, the expression raises a variety of questions about the wholeness of the church in relation to its mission. ‘Whole’ has qualitative significance as well as quantitative. So we framed the papers, case-studies, and discussion sessions in our consultation around six broad themes which are reflected in the papers that follow:

1. The whole church in the whole Bible
2. The whole church as a transformed and transforming society
3. The whole church as a people committed to wholeness (in the midst of multiple brokenness and divisions in the world and within the church)
4. The whole church called to be a blessing to all nations—even (especially) in contexts of exile and migration
5. The whole church and mission strategies
6. The whole church in its bewildering diversity (from mega church to hidden believers)

**Chris Wright, Chair Lausanne
Theology Working Group**

'The Whole Church': Statement of the Lausanne Theology Working Group

KEY WORDS: *Church, Gospel, World, Mission, Apostolic, Holy, Catholic*

Introduction

'*Salvation* belongs to our God'

'You will be my *people*'

'*The earth* is the Lord's'

The starting point for our ecclesiology must be the same as for our theology of mission and for our understanding of the world. Mission, the church, and the world all belong to God. The concept of *missio Dei* reminds us that our mission flows from the mission of God, for salvation belongs to God. Similarly, the concept of *ecclesia Dei* reminds us that the church derives its identity and purpose from the God who called us and created us as a people for himself.

Mission is God's. The church is God's. The world is God's.

Our doctrine of God, in all its Trinitarian richness, must govern our ecclesiology. The opening of 1 Peter reminds us of our identity in relation to the work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The rest of the epistle makes it clear that what we *do* as a church flows integrally and inseparably from who we are as church. Being and doing cannot be torn apart. *We are called to be who we are, and to live out what we are.*

Though our discussions around all the papers and case studies ranged very widely, we found it helpful to arrange our reflections and findings around the four great terms used to describe the church in the Nicene Creed, since it became clear that each one of them has strong missional significance:

'We believe in *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic* church...'

We also found it encouraging that a more recent statement of faith includes mission strongly in its effort to define the nature and purpose of the church.

The church stands in continuity with God's people in the Old Testament, called through Abraham to be a light to the nations, shaped and taught through the law and the prophets to be a community of holiness, compassion and justice, and redeemed through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church exists to worship and glorify God for all eternity and is commissioned by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in the transforming mission of God within history.

(from the new Tearfund Statement of Faith, adopted in 2007).

A. One

We give thanks that the one church is

God's church and not our own, and hence finds its identity and purpose in the one God and King who called it into being and reigns over it as Lord. Biblically, the church is *one in relation to the one living God* (for he alone is its creator, redeemer and Lord, sustaining, sanctifying and indwelling it by his one Spirit); *one in relation to Christ* (for it includes all who are in Christ); *one throughout history* (for it includes all whom God has called to himself in all ages, before and after the incarnation); and *one in all the biblical pictures of it* (there is, e.g., only one household of God; only one bride of Christ; only one vine; only one priesthood and temple; only one flock; only one body—the body of Christ). All of these truths we found illustrated again in 1 Peter.

1. Yet we confess that often we understand church according to our own limited perspectives. We easily approve of the congregation or tradition in which we participate, but fail to recognize the wider reality of God's church in many different cultures and forms, including those that are strange and even disturbing to us. We repent of this and seek to cultivate the spirit of Barnabas who, when confronted in Antioch with a new and cosmopolitan manifestation of following Jesus, 'when he saw the grace of God, he was glad' (Acts 11:23). *We urge Lausanne to go on being a forum where all kinds and ways of being the church in mission can be recognized, embraced and affirmed, not without mutual critique and accountability, but certainly without instant rejection and condemnation of what is unfamiliar. We have most to learn*
2. We give thanks that the one church that God has called into being in Christ is drawn from every nation, tribe, people and language, with the result that no single ethnic identity can any longer claim to be 'God's chosen people'. God's election of Old Testament Israel was for the sake of the eventual creation of this multi-national community of God's people, and the Old Testament itself envisages and anticipates it. We observed again how prominently 1 Peter applies terms and truths that were used in the Old Testament to describe Israel to the multi-ethnic community of those in Christ. It is vital that we strongly affirm, therefore, that *while there are multiple ethnicities within the one church by God's clear intention, no single ethnic group holds privileged place in God's economy of salvation or God's eschatological purpose*. For this reason, we strongly believe that the separate and privileged place given to Jewish people today or to the modern Israeli state in certain forms of dispensationalism or Christian Zionism, should be challenged, inasmuch as they deny the essential oneness of the people of God in Christ.
3. We confess that ethnocentrism still manifests itself in the global church, tempting us to consider our own cultural, national, or tribal identity as superior to others. This fundamentally denies the oneness of the church in Christ, and should be challenged with renunciation

from those who are most different from ourselves.

and repentance, since it is the root of so much conflict even among Christians.

4. We rejoice in the phenomenal growth of the church in the majority world of the global south, and for that reason we understand the intention of the statement that the 'centre of gravity' of world Christianity has shifted to the south. However, we strongly discourage the further use of this term, for two reasons. First, Christianity has no centre but Jesus Christ. We are defined by no geographical centre, but only by our allegiance to the Lordship of Christ, and he is Lord of all the earth. The 'centre', therefore, is wherever he is worshipped and obeyed. Secondly, any talk of a centre (other than Christ) undermines the fact that Christianity, even since the book of Acts, has always been fundamentally polycentric. Anywhere on earth can be a centre, and any centre can rapidly become peripheral. *The global nature of the church as 'one throughout the whole wide world' subverts the language of a centre—whether geographical, numerical, or missionary. Mission is from everywhere to everywhere.*
5. The church as 'one' also speaks of integration. Repeatedly in our consultation we found ourselves longing to move beyond the dichotomies that so often and sadly divide us. Or rather, in most cases, to move back behind them to an evangelical understanding of the church in which such dichotomies are seen as invalid in principle. These are some dichotomies we need to recognize

as fundamentally false and damaging, or at best questionable. There are doubtless more.

- *Being and doing.* The Bible calls us to live out who we are.
- *Word and deed.* Both are essential parts of Christian life and witness, as our study of 1 Peter repeatedly showed (especially 1 Pet. 3). As Newbigin put it, the church by its life and actions is to be the hermeneutic, or the plausibility structure of the gospel. We will be heard because of our deeds as well as our words.
- *Evangelism and social action* (or any form of Christian 'action'). We believe that the struggle to articulate the relationship between these two was made necessary in the second half of the 20th century because of the mistaken separation of them that had taken place in the first half. That is why we say we need to go back *behind* this dichotomy. In our view, they are both integral to biblical mission—in the sense that while they may be conceptually distinguished, they cannot be separated. The relation between them is intrinsic and organic, as much as the relationship, say, between breathing and drinking in the human body. It makes little sense to speak of either having priority or primacy. Both are integral parts of what it means to be alive! Without either, there is death. *We therefore urge Lausanne to affirm an integral understanding of mission that*

inseparably includes both, rather than continuing chicken-and-egg debates about how they relate.

- *Church and para-church*: We wonder if there is more argument about this distinction among mission agencies and church bodies than exists in the mind of God, or in biblical concepts. While recognizing that there are valid pragmatic or functional distinctions that may be made for the sake of good order and administration, we need to affirm the biblical truth that ‘where two or three are gathered’ in the name of Christ, he is there, and the church is there—one, holy, catholic and apostolic.
6. The oneness of the church must also be seen as an integral part of the plan of God for the whole creation. It has a prophetic and eschatological dimension. *Paul sees the oneness of the church as the prophetic sign of that reconciled unity that will one day be true for all humanity and all creation in Christ* (Eph. 1:10, 22-23; Col. 1:15-20). Our concern for the unity of the church (and all the practical, ethical, ecumenical etc. implications of that), must therefore be seen as also intrinsic to our understanding of what we mean by ‘the whole church’ in its mission. It is significant that Peter includes the command to ‘live in harmony with one another’ (1 Pet. 3:8) within a chapter that refers to positive witness to unbelievers.

B. Holy

1. The holiness of God’s people is both a fact *and* a duty. It is a given

and a task. It is a status *and* a responsibility. It is ontological *and* ethical. The church is the community of those whom God has set apart for himself, and ‘made holy’ (Lev. 22:32; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:2). But it is also the community called to ‘be holy’, in every aspect of life on earth (Lev. 18:3-5; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Sanctification (like salvation), thus has a past, present and future tense. Once again we affirm the integration of being and doing. We are to live what we are. In this respect, *holiness is also essentially missional, for it describes an identity and a life that is grounded in the character and mission of God.*

2. So, we give thanks that God has called us, redeemed us and sanctified us to be holy in his sight. We observed in our study of 1 Peter (where we find the strongest New Testament echo of the Old Testament command to ‘be holy, for God is holy’), that there is a very powerful emphasis on ‘doing good’ (the phrase, or equivalent ‘doing right’, occurs 10 times in this one letter). And this manifestation of practical holiness—even by suffering believers, or believers in oppressive contexts (such as slaves or wives of unbelieving masters or husbands)—was expected to be *evangelistically* fruitful. Holy living, through doing good, is integrated with ‘giving an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason of the hope that you have’. In 1 Pet. 4:8-11, *speaking* the word of God is integrated with *servicing*, loving, offering hospitality, and all as a ministry of God’s grace, in God’s

strength, for God's glory. In other words, *holiness is integral to mission. Good evangelism happens when Christians do good things as the fruit of holiness.* The integration of word and deed is powerfully visible in this scripture.

3. Yet we confess our failure in manifesting such missional holiness in at least the following ways:

- We have failed to include the fact and the demand of holiness as an integral part of our missional outreach, when we put exclusive emphasis on evangelism and give insufficient attention to making disciples. Repeatedly 'the Great Commission' is understood only as an evangelistic mandate, when the explicit command is to 'make disciples', and the primary means is by 'teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'—i.e. practical obedience to the teaching of Jesus.
- We tolerate within the church a whole range of unholy, ungodly, unChristlike behaviours, without recognizing that they pollute our ecclesiology and undermine our mission. There are many varieties of such unholiness across different cultures, but they need to be recognized and addressed in humility.

4. We give thanks that God's work of sanctification applies to every area of life, including (for example) our care of creation, use of money, gender relationships, our ethnic identity and political choices. Yet we confess that we have allowed ourselves to be captivated by idolatries

and ideologies that militate against biblical holiness (which demands distinctiveness from the world around). Among these (but not exhaustively), we identified the following forms of idolatry that evangelical Christians often participate in, or find ways of condoning:

- *Consumerism or materialistic greed* (when we exalt prosperity over generosity);
- *Nationalism or patriotism* (when we prioritize our own nation's interests and agenda above the seeking first the kingdom of God);
- *Violence* (when we forget Jesus' warnings about the sword and his commendation of peace-making);
- *Ethnic pride* (when we let the blood of ethnic identity be thicker than the water of baptism in Christ);
- *Selfishness* (when we ignore international and structural injustice that creates and perpetuates poverty, or put short term convenience above the needs of future generations);
- *Gender injustice* (when we privilege male over female, and ignore the oppression of women within and outside the church).

In all such matters, *we see the need for the church itself to seek repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, and to pray for a more prophetic and missional holiness of life and witness.*

5. To speak of the holiness of the church is to speak of the eternal purpose for which God has created it—namely to be his people, for his glory, for all eternity in the new

creation; and also it is to speak of the historical purpose of the church, which is called to participate as God's holy (distinct) people in God's mission within history for the redemption of humanity and creation.

However, we confess that we often reduce that teleological understanding of the church (that the church exists for the eternal and historical purposes of God for his whole creation), into an instrumental understanding of the church, as if churches exist only to serve an agenda that is all too often imposed upon them by other agencies.

Of course every church ought to understand and live out its essentially missional identity as God's holy people in the world. But we want to stress that the church exists for God, and should not be used as a convenient local franchise for the delivery of external strategies, objectives and targets.

C. Catholic

1. The word 'catholic' in the creed speaks of the universal church, or the church 'as a whole'. It is an appropriate word to have in mind when we use the Lausanne expression 'The whole church', for 'wholeness' is intrinsic to catholicity.

We rejoice to affirm the biblical truths that the church of God is *universal in its membership* (for it is open to people from any and every nation); *universal in its extent* (for it knows no geographical boundary); *universal in time and eternity* (for it includes all God's people drawn

from all generations of human history who will populate the new creation); and *universal in the eyes of God* (for the Lord knows those who are his, whether they are visible to us or not).

2. We give thanks for the rich diversity that God has built into the whole church. Such diversity frequently stretches us beyond our relatively narrow experience or understanding of church, but it is a vital biblical part of the church's catholicity.

Yet we confess that often we fail to recognize the full contribution that is brought to the church by all those whom God has called to belong to it. In our consultation we particularly considered the following, whose contribution may be undervalued, diminished, overlooked, or even prevented:

- women;
- persons with disabilities (or 'differently-abled');
- immigrants;
- indigenous or primal cultures;
- 'insider movements'.

Case studies concerning these groups or movements stimulated our reflection and some will be published later.

When such groups are allowed (or forced) to remain voiceless or invisible, then we lose the wholeness of God's church.

In so many ways, we fail to appreciate the catholicity of the church by intentionally or unwittingly excluding from our consciousness those whom God himself has included within his church. To this extent, *our failure to appreciate and act upon the full catholicity of*

the church damages and diminishes the effectiveness of our mission.

3. We rejoice in the biblical teaching that God has given a great variety of differing gifts and callings and ministries to his universal church, for the benefit of all and for the equipping of God's people for ministry and mission (1 Pet. 4:10-11). We need to embrace this teaching more positively and avoid our tendency to elevate one form of gifting above another, or to relegate some forms of calling or ministry to secondary levels of importance—whether to God, or to God's mission through the church.

Since the Spirit of God, the one who gives and empowers all gifts and ministries within the church, has been poured out on God's servants, 'both men and women' (Acts 2:18), *we affirm that ministry gifting and calling are not defined by gender, or by ethnicity, wealth, or social status. Since the whole church is called to mission, the whole church is gifted for mission*—though in many diverse ways under the sovereign distribution of God's Spirit.

4. We give thanks for the many outstanding and very visible leaders God has given to the church, in our generation as in the past. Yet we confess that we may be guilty of so honouring them that we have failed to recognize the full contribution of the multitudes of those servants of God who remain unknown and uncelebrated on earth. In this we need to repent of our seduction by the idolatry of secular celebrity culture. We must not fall into the temptation of equating the church

with its most vocal and visible leaders. Such a mindset is very dangerous for those who are elevated and celebrated in that way, and very disabling for the rest of God's people. *Commitment to catholicity includes commitment to the priesthood of all believers, and priesthood is fundamentally missional, since it involves bringing God to the world and bringing the world to God. And that is a task for the whole church* (1 Pet. 2:9-12)

We also need to remind ourselves constantly that the biblical prescription and pattern for leaders within God's people is not one of power and prominence, but of Christlike servanthood and humility (this point is most strongly emphasized in 1 Pet. 5:1-4). *The Bible in both testaments warns us that leaders who wield or seek power and wealth radically undermine and pervert the mission of the church.* Evangelical leaders are not at all immune to this temptation; many in fact fall into it, bring the church into disrepute, and disgrace to the name of Christ.

5. We speak and write as evangelicals within that historic tradition and its particular manifestation in the Lausanne movement. However, in affirming the catholicity of the church, we gladly recognize that God's people include many followers of the Lord Jesus Christ within other traditions. For that reason, *we pray for the renewal of older historic branches of the world church, particularly Roman Catholic and Orthodox, through the power of God's Holy Spirit, and through the reform-*

ing and missional power of the Bible at work within them.

D. Apostolic

1. We rejoice in the apostolic nature of the church, and affirm the biblical meaning of this: a) that the church is founded on the historic apostles of Jesus Christ, whose authorized witness to Christ, in word, deed and in the writings of the New Testament, along with their acceptance of the authority of the Old Testament scriptures, constitute the primary authoritative and final source of our ecclesiology; b) that we are called to be faithful to the teaching of the apostles, by our submission to the authority of Scripture; and c) that we are to carry forward the mission of the apostles in bearing witness to God's saving work in Christ. *The word 'apostolic', therefore, can variously refer to*

- *our historical roots,*
- *our doctrinal faithfulness, and*
- *our missional mandate.*

The apostolic nature of the church is thus once again an integration of being and doing, of identity and mission. The church exists as the community of faith in fellowship with the apostles; and we are called to live as those who are 'sent' in mission as the apostles were sent by the risen Christ.

2. To define the church as 'apostolic' is another way of saying that the church is missional by definition. It cannot be otherwise and be church. *Mission is not something we add to our concept of church, but is intrinsic to it.* For this reason, while we

appreciate the desire that lies behind the growing use of the phrase '*missional church*', the phrase is essentially tautologous. What else can the church be but missional without ceasing to be church? Indeed, history (including contemporary history in some parts of the world, including Europe) would suggest that churches that are not missional will eventually cease to exist.

3. We rejoice in the zeal of many different strategies of evangelism that have arisen within God's church—not least under the umbrella of the Lausanne movement. We affirm and admire the commitment and energy of those who call the church's attention to those peoples and places where the name of Jesus Christ has never been heard yet, and who seek to mobilize effective ways of reaching them with the gospel. Such motivation and effort is wholly in tune with the church's apostolicity, for it reflects the heart of the apostle Paul himself, and it takes seriously the purpose of God that people of 'every tribe and language and nation', 'to the ends of the earth', will one day be gathered as God's people, worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ, in the new creation. *The apostolic church has to be the evangelizing church.*
4. However, as part of our reflection on the meaning of 'the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world', we are concerned that *it is possible to be driven by strategies of evangelism that lack adequate biblical ecclesiology, or that have implied but unexpressed ecclesi-*

ologies that are biblically defective. It is a criticism often levelled at evangelicals that we lack clear and robust ecclesiology, and it is not without justification.

Examples of such defective ecclesiologies could be described as:

- *Container church:* If the governing objective of evangelism is thought to be getting the maximum number of people into heaven, then the church becomes the container where converts are stored until they get there. The glorious nature and purpose of the church in itself, in God's plans, gets little attention.
- *Harvest church:* If the governing objective of evangelism is to get the maximum number of sheaves into the barn before the harvest ends, then haste is of the essence. This sometimes goes along with reading the Great Commission as an 'unfinished task' to which we can bring closure if only we work harder and faster to 'achieve' it.
- *Lifeboat church:* If the governing objective is to save souls from a sinking world heading for imminent obliteration, then the church becomes a lifeboat, and there is no rationale, motivation (or time) for engagement with the world itself—culturally, socially or ecologically.

These are caricatures, no doubt, but once again history shows us that haste breeds shallowness. We all readily lament the fact of widespread contemporary nominalism

in churches evangelized generations ago and the need for re-evangelism. To the extent that this may be due to a failure of in-depth discipling (which is in fact simple disobedience to the Great Commission), *we should be prepared to anticipate that haste-driven evangelism in the present without rigorous discipling will generate repeated nominalism in future generations. A robust biblical ecclesiology is essential to healthy and effective mission with long-lasting results. By contrast, to try to be apostolic in missionary zeal without commitment to holy discipleship, is to tear asunder two of the most essential marks of the church.*

5. Massive migration of many peoples, for all kinds of reasons, is one of the most notable features of our contemporary world. We recognize that God is using such migrations of peoples around the globe as the agents and means of his mission. We recognize (in line with Jeremiah 29, where the exiles of Judah were told to seek the welfare of Babylon and pray for it—i.e. to carry on their Abrahamic mandate of being a blessing), that migration may be a form of 'sending'—which, whether voluntary or enforced, may be one way in which God in his providence constitutes the apostolicity of the church. But we do not underestimate the profound suffering that such migration entails.

And we confess that the church's attitude to such immigrant populations has not always been characterized by love, and that we have failed to recognize the way in which God is using these

movements to achieve his purposes. *We need to see biblical patterns at work in the way such migration movements, and the opportunities they present for the gospel, represent mission from the margins, mission out of weakness, and a radical subverting of the whole concept of 'centre' and 'periphery'.*

6. From our study of 1 Peter, we realized that the issue of persecution and suffering of the church called for much more attention than we were able to give it. Biblically there is no doubt that it is an essential element of the church standing in the tradition of the apostles.

Conclusion

So we concluded that every word in the classic creedal definition of the church has intrinsic missional significance: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. To speak of the 'whole church' is a lot more challenging than thinking merely of 'all Christians', but demands that we

reflect on the church's identity and calling, its very reason for existence—in history and for eternity. And as we do so, we quickly discern those places where the church is far from 'whole' and we call for recognition, repentance and reformation—beginning with ourselves as those entrusted with theological leadership in the church of today. At the same time, we would not wish to give the impression that only a perfect church can participate in God's mission. If that were so, there would have been no mission throughout the whole history of God's people—Old and New Testament and beyond! We are 'jars of clay', in Paul's imagery (2 Cor. 4:7), and many of us are very cracked pots indeed. Yet God chooses to use us in the service of his glorious gospel. We commit ourselves to seek wholeness where we see brokenness, but at the same time to urge the church as a whole to live out the missional identity for which it has been created and redeemed.

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Kevin L. Anderson

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I. Howard Marshall

Kevin L. Anderson is an Assistant Professor of Bible and Theology at Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky.

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The Whole Church—A Brief Biblical Survey¹

Christopher J.H. Wright

KEYWORDS: *Community, Election, People of God, Church, Covenant*

I The Origin of the Church

If we think of the church as the community of people who confess Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Saviour, and who seek to live as his followers in the power of the Holy Spirit, then the historical origin of that community, defined in relation to Jesus Christ, must be traced back to the day of Pentecost in the New Testament. However, Christians believe that the church is a community that has been called into existence by God, a people constituted by God for God's own purpose in the world. And the roots of that calling and constitution go much further back than Pentecost. If we want to understand what happened in the Gospel and Acts, we have to set this New Testa-

ment story in the light of Israel in the Old Testament. That means going back to Abraham. But then we shall discover that we can't understand Abraham either unless we set him in the context of all that happened before him. So all in all, it really would be best to start at the very beginning—not with the birth of the church, but with the birth of the world. We need to look briefly at Genesis 1-11.

The Bible begins with the story of creation. The universe we inhabit is the creation of the one, living, personal God, who made it 'good'. He created us in his own image, to rule over the earth on his behalf, with spiritual and moral responsibilities: to love and obey God, to love and serve one another, and to enjoy and care for the rest of creation. However, with the entrance of sin and evil into human life, all of these dimensions of our existence have been fractured and distorted. We chose to rebel against our creator, and substitute our own moral autonomy for his authority. We live with all manner of personal and social sin—fear, anger, violence, injustice, oppression and corruption. And

¹ This is adapted from my article in Alister McGrath, *The New Lion Handbook, Christian Belief* (Oxford: Lion, 2006), pp. 208-259.

we exploit, pollute and destroy the earth he told us to care for. The climax of this sad catalogue of human sin comes with the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11. To prevent a unified humanity acting in total arrogance, God divides human languages with the resultant confusion of communication. But the further result is that by the end of this part of the biblical story, we find a humanity that is fractured, divided, and scattered over the face of the earth that is under God's curse. Is there any hope for the world—specifically for the nations of humanity?

God's answer to the question posed by Genesis 1-11 is the story contained in the rest of the Bible, from Genesis 12 to Revelation 22. It is the story of God's work of redemption within history. It centres on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it comes to its climactic finale in the return of Christ and his reign over the new creation. The remarkable thing is that this whole Bible story begins and ends with the nations of humanity. In Genesis 11 they were united in arrogance, only to be scattered under judgement. In Revelation 7:9 they will be gathered as 'a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.' This final picture of the nations in Revelation, however, is actually a portrait of the church—the multinational community of God's redeemed humanity. And its multinational nature goes back to the promise God made to Abraham, that through him all nations on earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

So the church, considered as the community of God's people throughout history, fills the gap between Babel and

the new creation. This is the community that begins with one man and his wife (Abraham and Sarah), becomes a family, then a nation, and then a vast throng from every nation and language. This is the church in its fully biblical perspective.

What can we learn about this community from the account of its earliest beginning in the call of Abraham? Three things stand out in the promise and narratives of Genesis, three things that should be essential marks of the people of God in any era: blessing, faith and obedience.

A Community of Blessing

Blessing was God's first word, as he successively blessed his own acts of creation in Genesis 1. After the flood, God blessed Noah and made a covenant with all life on earth. But repeated sin and failure seemed to reinforce only the language and reality of God's curse. Where can blessing be found? God's answer is to call Abraham and to promise to bless him and his descendants. So this new community stemming from Abraham will be the recipients of God's blessing. There is a fresh start here, for humanity and creation. But blessing is not just passively received. Abraham is also mandated to 'be a blessing' (Gen. 12:2). The covenant promise God makes to him is that all nations on earth will find blessing through him. It will take the rest of the Bible to show how this can be fulfilled, but it does mark out this community as those who both experience God's blessing and are the means of passing it on to others. Blessing received and blessing shared, is part of the essence of the church.

A Community of Faith.

'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness', says Paul (Gal. 3:6), echoing Genesis 15:6. Hebrews also strongly highlights Abraham as a man of faith (Heb. 11:8-19), having earlier said that 'without faith it is impossible to please God' (Heb. 11:6). So the community that stems from Abraham must be marked as a people who trust in the promise of God, rather than trusting in their capacity to build their own future security (as they tried at Babel). This is why one common name for Christians is particularly appropriate—they are simply 'believers'.

A Community of Obedience.

Because of his faith, Abraham obeyed God; he got up and left his homeland at God's command. And when he faced the supreme test of sacrificing the son who embodied all God had promised him, he was willing to obey even then, though God intervened to stop him. So at the climax of that narrative, God reconfirms his promise to bless all nations because of Abraham's obedience (Gen. 22:15-18). So Hebrews 11 and James 2:20-24 set Abraham's obedience alongside his faith as proof of his authentic relationship with God.

The church, then, in tracing its roots back to God's call and promise to Abraham, finds here some of its key identity marks (we shall see more later). It is the community that not only experiences God's rich *blessing* but also is commissioned to be the means of blessing to others. It is the community that lives by *faith* in the promise of God, and proves that faith by practical and sometimes sacrificial *obedience*.

II The people of God in the Old Testament

If the church as the biblical people of God began with Abraham, then we need to give some attention to the Old Testament part of its story. We need to see how some of the things that Israel believed about themselves in their relationship with God and the world are strongly reflected in what the Christian church believes about its own existence and mission in the world. So we shall list some of the key concepts in the Old Testament that governed Israel's sense of identity, and in each case see how the New Testament shows that the church has inherited the same self-understanding.

Election

The foundation of Israel's faith was that God had chosen them as his own people. They were the seed of Abraham whom God had chosen and called. They were not a nation who had chosen to worship this particular god. Rather, this God had chosen them as his particular people. They would not exist at all apart from that divine choice and calling. Two things need to be said immediately.

First, the Israelites were not to imagine that their election by God owed anything to their own numerical greatness or moral superiority. Far from it, they were a tiny nation, and no more righteous than other nations. The roots of election lie exclusively in the love and grace of God and for reasons known only to him (Deut. 7:7-10).

Second, they had been chosen, not primarily for their own benefit but for the sake of the rest of the nations.

Blessing Abraham and his descendants was God's intended means of bringing blessing to all nations whom Genesis 11 has shown to be in such a disastrous state. Election, then, is not primarily a privilege but a responsibility. It means being chosen for a task, being a chosen instrument by which God will fulfil his mission of universal blessing.

'You', said Peter in his letter to the scattered groups of early Christians, 'are a chosen people' (1 Pet. 2:9). The church stands in organic continuity with Israel as the elect people of God. But the same two vital points apply to the New Testament church as to Old Testament Israel. Such election is entirely by God's grace, not based on anything in us that made us 'choice-worthy'. And election is fundamentally missional in purpose. We are chosen, not so that we alone might enjoy salvation, but so that we should be the means of God's salvation reaching others—as Peter went on to point out in the following verses. The church exists in the world as the community that God has chosen and called in order to serve God's mission to bring the nations from the situation described in Genesis 4-11 to that portrayed in Revelation 7.

Redemption

Israel knew themselves to be a people whom God had redeemed. They looked back to the great historical deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt and saw it as the proof of the love, justice, power and incomparable greatness of their God. The language of exodus (redemption, deliverance, mighty acts of justice) filled the worship of Israel, motivated their law and

ethics, and inspired hope at both national and personal levels for God's future deliverance. The memory of exodus was kept alive in the annual Passover celebration. Israel was a people who knew their history. And through their history they knew their God as Redeemer.

The New Testament explicitly sees the cross of Christ through the lens of the exodus (Lk. 9:31). For on the cross God achieved the redemption of the world, the defeat of the forces of evil, and the liberation of his people. The Christian church therefore looks back to Calvary as much as Israel did to the exodus. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). Christians too are people of memory and hope, both of which are focused in their central feast, the eucharist or Lord's Supper. So the church stands in organic continuity with Old Testament Israel as the people whom God has redeemed.

Covenant

Another dominant concept in Israel's theology was their covenant relationship with God. This too goes back to Abraham. Covenant involves a promise or commitment on the part of God, and a required response on the part of the one with whom the covenant is made. God promised Abraham to bless him, make him a great nation, and to bless all nations through his descendants. Abraham's response was faith and obedience. God extended this covenant to the whole nation of Israel at Mount Sinai after the exodus. In the same context, God makes known his personal name, Yahweh. This name was forever associated in Israel's mind with the

exodus (in which Yahweh proved his redemptive power), and with Sinai (at which Yahweh revealed his character, covenant and law to Israel). So Israel understood themselves to be uniquely the covenant community of Yahweh God. He was committed to them in saving grace, historical protection and blessing, and long-term purpose for the world. They were to be committed to him in sole loyalty and ethical obedience.

Here again there is organic continuity between the testaments. For the church is the people of the new covenant, foretold in the Old Testament and inaugurated by Christ through his death and resurrection. So the church is a community in committed relationship with God. He is committed to those who are united to Christ through faith in his blood, and they are committed to him in exclusive worship and ethical obedience.

Worship

Jesus, it has been said, came to a people who knew how to pray. The people of Israel were committed to worship the one living God, and the rich heritage of that is to be found, of course, in the book of Psalms. The language of adoration, praise, thanksgiving, appeal, lament, and protest was well developed in the worshipping life of Israel. So much so that Deuteronomy could ask what other nation had their gods near them the way the LORD was close to Israel when they prayed to him (Deut. 4:7).

Naturally, therefore, the Christian church that sprang from the womb of Old Testament Israel began as a worshipping community. Indeed this is one

of the commonest postures of the church in the book of Acts—gathered for worship, prayer, and scriptural teaching, just as the Jews did. And it is presupposed in all Paul's letters that the churches to which he wrote were fundamentally communities that knew how to worship God, even if their enthusiasm to do so could itself present problems. And as we shall see, worshipping God is of the very essence of the church, and will be so eternally.

Struggle

Old Testament Israel had high ideals, drawn from their covenant relationship with God, but there was nothing idealistic about their historical existence. It is vital to remember that all the truths mentioned above were lived out in the struggle of being an all-too-human society in the midst of the world of nations just as fallen and sinful as Israel itself. So the Old Testament honestly and painfully records Israel's terrible failures alongside all the remarkable affirmations of their faith and aspirations. They sinned and they suffered. They failed internally and they were attacked externally. Their history is a long catalogue of struggle between those who brought the word of God to them and those who were determined to resist the will and ways of their God.

And in all of this too we see the church as in a mirror. In the paragraphs that follow we must survey many aspects of the Bible's teaching about what the church is and is meant to be. But we must not lose sight of the fact that, although the church is ultimately God's own creation, draws its identity and mission from God, and will accomplish God's purpose, the church

is also a community of sinners—for-given sinners, sure, but fallen sinners still.

In all these ways, then, and many more, the church stands in organic continuity with Old Testament Israel. Of course there are differences. However, the unity of God's people in the Bible is a far more important theological truth than the different periods of their historical existence. Throughout the whole Bible, the people of God are those who are chosen and called by God to serve his purpose of blessing the nations. They are those who have experienced the redeeming grace and power of God in history, ultimately accomplished through Christ on the cross. They are those who stand in committed covenant relationship with God, enjoying the security of his promise and responding in exclusive loyalty and ethical obedience. They are those who are set apart by him and for him to be, and to live as, a distinct and holy community within the surrounding world. They are those who live to worship the living God eternally, and yet also live within all the ambiguities of historical life on this sinful planet and are as yet far from perfect. In all these things, the church stands in continuity with Old Testament Israel, for as Paul puts it, we are sharers in the same promise, the same inheritance and the same good news (Eph. 3:6). In Christ Jesus, we belong to the same olive tree (Rom. 11:17-24; see below).

III The People of God in the New Testament

When we come, then, to the New Testament, in what new ways do we find

the church described? Clearly, the person of Jesus Christ becomes the central and defining presence, to which all descriptions of his followers relate. First of all, Jesus comes as the fulfilment of the promise of God in the Old Testament, so the followers of Jesus are those who live in the light of that fulfilment.

'The time is fulfilled'

In the earliest recorded preaching of Jesus (Mk. 1:15), we hear the note of fulfilment that dominates the Gospels. Throughout the Old Testament period and beyond, the people of Israel grew in expectation that their God would bring about a new state of affairs in human history and they looked forward to that future with hope.

That hope is now fulfilled, said the New Testament writers, through what was inaugurated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As Messiah (God's anointed one), Jesus embodied Israel in his own person—taking their destiny and fulfilling their mission. In his life and teaching he inaugurated the kingdom of God, demonstrating the power of God's reign in word and deed. In his death he took upon himself the judgement of God against sin, not just on behalf of his own people Israel, but for the whole world. In his resurrection, God fulfilled his promise to redeem Israel. As Paul put it, 'what God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus' (Acts 13:32). Before his ascension, he commissioned his followers to carry forward the Abrahamic mission of Israel, now focused on the name of Christ himself, to bring the blessings of repentance and forgive-

ness to all nations (Lk. 24:46-47). And to empower them for this, the risen Christ sent the Holy Spirit, whose outpouring had been prophesied as a sign of God's new age of salvation and blessing (Isa. 32:15-20; Joel 2:28-32).

The outpouring of the Spirit of God at Pentecost demonstrated that the new era of fulfilment had begun. The crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth had accomplished what God had promised. Those who were responding in repentance and faith could now belong to the restored Israel in Christ, whether they were Jews like his first followers, or Gentiles from the nations who were also now invited to belong to this new community.

As the community of those who have responded to God's action in Jesus Christ, then, the church is described in the New Testament by several simple terms. These are terms that were used even before the term 'Christian' was invented, and they remain perennially true as descriptions of all members of the church, for they are all related to Jesus.

Disciples

The original nucleus of the Christian church in the New Testament was the group of disciples of Jesus. 'Disciples', means learners—those who are the followers and adherents of a teacher or master. From the Gospels we learn that there were three main aspects to being disciples of Jesus, all of which are still marks of belonging to his church.

First, disciples are those whom Jesus has called to himself, *to be with him*. This is not just following the

teaching of a dead leader. To be a disciple is to be in a constant relationship with Jesus; or rather, it is to experience the truth of the last promise he made to his disciples, 'I am with you always' (Mt. 28:20).

Second, disciples are *those who obey Jesus*. It is a matter of personal loyalty, in which we take all Jesus said with great seriousness, and submit to his authority. That means submission of mind, heart and will to Jesus Christ.

Third, disciples are *commissioned and sent out by Jesus*, in his name (which means, with his authority), to make disciples of the nations. That is, discipleship is a self-replicating mission.

Jesus had a special group of twelve disciples, eleven of whom later became known as *apostles*. But the Gospels also speak of a wider group of disciples, ordinary followers of Jesus. And although the word 'disciple' itself is not greatly used in the New Testament after the Gospels, it is clear that the church is always a community of disciples, the followers of Jesus who live with his presence, submit to his teaching, and carry forward his mission.

Witnesses

'You are my witnesses', said Jesus to his disciples, after his resurrection and before his ascension (Lk. 24:48; Acts 1:8). Almost certainly Jesus was echoing the same words that God had spoken to Israel in Isaiah (43:10-12). Israel was supposed to be the people who bore witness among the surrounding nations to the reality of their God, Yahweh. The nations would come to know who is really God from the testimony of those to whom he has entrusted the task of witnessing to

their own historical experience of him.

Similarly, Jesus is entrusting the truth about himself to those who had witnessed him. Originally, of course, the words were spoken to the original apostles, who had personally witnessed the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 3:15). But by extension, all Christians are called to bear witness to what they have experienced of the saving love of God in Christ. The church is the guardian of that apostolic witness. Sometimes the cost of bearing that witness is high, as the earliest Christians found, and countless others down the centuries have also proved. The word ‘martyr’ originally meant simple ‘witness’. But since that witness so often ended in death at the hands of those who rejected the word of witness, it acquired the added meaning of one who gives his or her life rather than compromise their testimony.

Believers

The next common description of the earliest Christians (before they got that name) in the book of Acts is ‘believers’. This too goes back to the Gospels, of course, because Jesus so frequently called for faith, along with repentance. Faith is the key to entering the kingdom of God, and to receiving its blessings, including forgiveness, healing, and eternal life. Faith too, like discipleship and witness, is entirely directed to the person of Jesus himself. It is not just a matter of believing certain propositions, though it does include believing the claims of Christ. Rather it means an act of personal trust in God, focussed on Jesus as the one who has fulfilled God’s promises

and who died and rose again for our salvation. The church, then, is essentially a community of disciples of Christ, witnesses to Christ, and believers in Christ.

IV Pictures of the Church

The church is much more than just a collection of individuals who claim to be disciples of, witnesses to, and believers in Jesus Christ. The church as a *whole* is a significant entity. It is a historical reality in the world, with its spiritual roots going right back to Abraham. The Bible provides many metaphors to convey different aspects of this reality. Most of them are found in the Old Testament as ways of describing Israel, and are then extended in the New Testament to those who are in Christ. One metaphor, however, the concept of the church as a body, or as the body of Christ, is unique to the New Testament.

A household or family

Old Testament Israel was a kinship-structured society, divided into tribes, clans and households. The basic unit in this arrangement was the ‘father’s house’ or *beth-ab*. This was the extended family, of three or even four generations, including married sons and their children, household servants, agricultural workers and even resident foreigners practising their trade. This robust organism also provided the individual Israelite with vital support. The household was the place in which the individual found personal *identity* and *inclusion* (personal names always included the father’s house, as well as clan and tribal names). It was the place

of *security*, since the household had its inherited portion of the land. And it was the place of spiritual *nurture and teaching* in the law of God. Already in Old Testament times, the whole nation of Israel could be metaphorically described as a household: 'House of Israel' or 'House of Yahweh', picturing the whole people as an extended family belonging to God.

It is not surprising that the early Christians adopted similar language to speak of the church community. Paul calls it 'the household of God' (1 Tim. 3:15). 'We are his house', says the writer to the Hebrews (3:6). Applying this metaphor was undoubtedly made even easier by the fact that the first Christians met in homes, and the sense of being an extended family must have been strong. As in the Old Testament, the church as a household was the place of *identity* (in Christ), *inclusion* (in the fellowship of sisters and brothers), *security* (in an eternal inheritance), *nurture and teaching* (in the scriptures and teaching of the apostles). For those who had been severed from their natural family connections because of loyalty to Christ, the church as a new family in all these senses was of great importance, and still is.

A people

Old Testament Israel most often referred to themselves as a people ('*am*'), which is flavoured more by community than by ethnicity. In fact, although the core of Israel was the ethnically related community descended from the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob/Israel, in reality it was a very mixed society (cf. Ex. 12:37; Josh. 9; Lev. 19:33-34). What held Israel

together was not so much single ethnicity as *covenant loyalty* to the one God—Yahweh. So they were above all 'the people of Yahweh'. But that title could be expanded. The Old Testament envisaged people of other nations coming to be included in the people of Yahweh (Is. 19:24-25; Ps. 87; Zech. 2:11 etc.)—and that is exactly what the New Testament says has happened through the mission of the church.

So the church is a people, or rather it is *the* people of the biblical God, through faith in Christ. But it is also a *multi-national* people, in which membership is open to all, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free (Gal. 3:28). So the language that had first applied to Israel is now extended to people of all nations. 'You,' says Peter, 'are a people belonging to God...once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God' (1 Pet. 2:9-10). As a worldwide community of peoples, the church fulfils the promise of God to Abraham and anticipates the ultimate gathering of God's people in the new creation (Rev. 7:9, 21:3).

A bride

The relationship between Yahweh and his people, being one of love, could be portrayed in terms of the marriage covenant. Hosea seems to have been the first to make that comparison. The metaphor could also be used negatively to accuse Israel of being an unfaithful bride (Hos. 2; Jer. 2:1-2; Ezek. 16). Nevertheless, it is clear that God wants a people who are united to him in mutual loving devotion as husband and wife ideally should be.

In the New Testament the church is portrayed as the Bride of Christ. On the

one hand, the metaphor highlights Christ's love for the church, and especially his self-giving, sacrificial care for his Bride. On the other hand, it speaks of the beauty and adornment of the Bride, who will one day be perfect and without blemish for her divine husband (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2). In both directions, the picture is one of love, commitment, and beauty—and celebration (Rev. 19:9).

A priesthood

'You will be for me a priestly kingdom,' said God to Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:6). Priests stood in the middle between God and the rest of the people. They operated as mediator in both directions. On the one hand they taught the law of God to the people. On the other hand they brought the people's sacrifices to God. Through the priests, God came to the people. Through the priests, the people came to God. And it was also the job of the priests to bless the people in the name of Yahweh (Num. 6:22-27). Then, by analogy, God tells Israel that they will stand in a similar position between him and the rest of the nations of the earth. Through Israel, God will become known to the nations (Is. 42:1-7; 49:1-6). And through Israel God will ultimately draw the nations to himself (Is. 2:1-5; 60:1-3; Jer. 3:17). Israel's priesthood among the nations would fulfil the Abrahamic role of blessing them.

That priestly identity of Old Testament Israel is now inherited by those who are in Christ (1 Pet. 2:9-12). So as God's priesthood, the church consists of those who are to declare the praises of God and what he has done. And as a holy priesthood, Christians are to live

in such a way that the nations are drawn to praise God for themselves. Priesthood is a missional concept, for it puts the church between God and the world with the task of bringing the two together in Christ—making God known to the nations, and calling the nations to repentance and faith in God and to the sacrifice of the cross. This double direction of movement seems to have been in Paul's mind when he spoke of his own missionary work as a 'priestly duty' in Romans 15:16.

A temple

The temple in Jerusalem was one of the central pillars of Israel's faith and identity. It had a double significance.

First of all, the temple (like the tabernacle before it) was regarded as the place of God's dwelling. Israel knew, of course, that the creator of the universe did not actually live in any little house they had built, nor did he need to (1 Kgs. 8:27; 2 Sam. 7:1-7). But nevertheless, this temple was the place that God had chosen to make his name dwell (1 Kgs. 8:29), and where his glory would be tangibly felt.

I will keep my covenant with you...
I will put my dwelling-place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people (Lev. 26:9-12).

Secondly, the temple was a place where Israelites would come to meet with God (as the tabernacle had been called a 'tent of meeting'). God was everywhere, but the temple provided a 'direction' for their prayer (1 Kgs. 8), and pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem became a significant and

joyful (though never obligatory). Psalms 120-134 are songs for such pilgrimage, and they express the joy (in the midst of struggles too), of knowing, meeting, trusting, and worshipping God in Zion—the place where the temple stood and where God's people celebrated his presence—provided they did so with moral integrity (Pss. 15, 24; Isa. 1:10-17; Jer. 7:1-15).

Since Jesus, as the Lord's anointed messiah and king, had fulfilled God's purpose for Israel, this had major implications for the physical temple. Jesus himself took over its double role. Jesus is the person (no longer the place) in whom God's presence is among us (Immanuel), and Jesus is the person through whom people must now come to meet God in worship (Jn. 4:2-26). So, the writer to the Hebrews points out that by coming to Christ, Christians have already come to Mount Zion (i.e. to the temple), just as in him they have an altar, the perfect sacrifice, and God's great High Priest (Heb. 12:22).

Paul goes further and sees the church itself as the temple of God. Not in the sense of a physical building (Christians did not start building 'churches' in that sense for a long time after the New Testament period). Rather, the church is the community in which God dwells by his Spirit, and to which people gather to meet with God—the double function of the Old Testament temple.

Actually Paul uses the temple imagery at three distinct levels: the individual Christian, the local church, and the whole church, but all with the basic idea of a dwelling place for God.

- In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul warns Christians that they cannot use

their bodies in any way they like, especially not for sexual immorality for 'your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit'. This is the only individual application of the concept.

- In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul extends the picture to include the local Christians in Corinth as, collectively, God's temple. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 6:16, Paul warns the Corinthians that they must not take part in things that were connected with pagan temples, 'for we are the temple of the living God'.
- In Ephesians 2:21-22 Paul is addressing Gentile believers. He has been explaining how they have now been united with believing Jews into one single community through the death of Christ. He uses temple imagery to describe how all Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are being built together into a temple for God to dwell in by his Spirit.

The temple image as applied to the church implies that there is only one church—the people of the one living God, who has only one dwelling place, through his one Spirit. There was only one temple in Old Testament Israel. But God had promised that it would be 'a house of prayer for all nations' (Is. 56:7). And indeed Solomon had prayed for it to be a place of blessing for foreigners when it was first dedicated (1 Kgs. 8:41-43). Now, through Christ and the gospel, that was a reality. The temple of God is now truly the multi-national community of believers from all nations.

A vine and an olive tree

Two pictures of the people of God are

drawn from horticulture. Both in the Old and New Testaments, they are compared to a vine and an olive tree. Jesus uses the first and Paul the second.

In John 15, Jesus says he is the true vine. Doubtless he is referring to the fact that in the Old Testament, Israel is likened to a vine that the Lord God had planted in his own land (Ps. 80). Unfortunately, God's expectations from his vine were rudely disappointed. Isaiah pictures God looking for a harvest of good grapes from his people to reward his loving investment in them, but instead of justice, finds bloodshed, and instead of righteousness, cries of the oppressed (Isa. 5:1-7; cf. Ezek. 15).

Jesus similarly is concerned about the fruitfulness of his followers. Abiding in Christ is the only way to fruitfulness as God's people.

In Romans 11:13-36, Paul compares Israel to an olive tree (cf. Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6). Paul, however, builds a whole theology around the horticultural practice of stripping some branches off a tree and grafting in others—in order to rejuvenate the original tree and increase its fruit-bearing. Paul sees an analogy to the way Gentiles are being grafted into the original covenant people of God, Israel, while some of those original people were being cut off because they failed to respond to what God had now done in Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that God's response to the failure of many Jews to believe in Jesus was not to chop down the olive tree and plant a completely new one. Some branches may be lopped off, and other branches wonderfully grafted in, but the roots and the trunk remain. Paul thus confirms the

continuity between Old Testament Israel and the church, and the unity of believing Jews and Gentiles in the one new people of God. There is only one olive tree—only one covenant people of God throughout both testaments and all of history. And there also remains the opportunity for branches that have been cut off to be grafted in again, if they turn in repentance and faith to God through Christ.

A flock

Another picture of the church that is found in both testaments is also drawn from the world of agriculture—a flock of sheep. It is, perhaps, a rather passive and not very flattering image, but it is used in two significant ways, depending on who is pictured as the shepherd or shepherds.

God as Shepherd. 'We are his people, the sheep of his pasture' (Ps. 100:3). The main point of this metaphor was to highlight God's providential and tender care for his people, as a shepherd cares for his flock. Individuals could take comfort from this (Ps. 23), but the whole nation could envisage itself being led by their divine Shepherd (Is. 40:11).

Leaders as shepherds. It was common to speak of kings as shepherds of their people. Care, provision, guidance and protection was what was expected of them—in theory at least. In reality, in Israel, the complaint was that their 'shepherds' more often exploited the sheep than cared for them. So Ezekiel vigorously condemns such shepherds (meaning the kings of Israel), and says that God himself will take on again the job of shepherding his own flock (Ezek. 34).

It is against this background that Jesus claimed to be the good, or model, shepherd in John 10. This was not just a promise of tender care (like Ps. 23). It was a bold claim to be the true king of Israel, indeed to be the divine king himself, as promised by Ezekiel. Not surprisingly, it led to a violent reaction (Jn. 10). But Jesus went on to describe his followers (i.e. the embryonic church) as his own known sheep and then pointed forward to the inclusion of others, within a single flock under a single shepherd (Jn 10:16—echoing Ezek. 37:22-24).

As a natural extension, those who are called to leadership within the church are portrayed as shepherds also. Peter calls them under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, who is Jesus. Christian leaders are to work with love, without greed, with servant hearts, and as good examples to the rest of the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-4). Paul adds the additional duty of defending the flock from ravaging wolves—his matching metaphor for false teachers who seek to devour the sheep (Acts. 20:28).

A body

Finally we come to the one major picture of the church that is unique to the New Testament, and indeed, unique to Paul—that is, the church as a body, or specifically as the body of Christ.

We may note four key points that emerge from Paul's rich development of this picture of the church.

- Unity and diversity of members. Paul first uses the human body simply as very effective simile. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, he likens the believers within the church to the different members of the human

body. There are many physical parts of a body, but they all cohere within the one body; they all assist one another; they all experience joy or pain together; and they all contribute to the healthy functioning of the body as a single organism. His main point in this context is that God has arranged things in this way for the good of the whole. So no single part should think that it is so important that it has no need of any other part of the body; and no single part should consider itself less important than some other more prominent part. Paul's point in relation to the church is that all the spiritual gifts God has distributed among different members of the church are actually given for the benefit of the whole. So, in Romans 12:4-8, using the same comparison, he urges those with different gifts to use them wholeheartedly and with humility. There is diversity within the church, but it exists within the fundamental unity that we all belong by baptism to the one Christ and share the one Spirit. The church, then, like the human body, is an organic unity with functional diversity.

- Christ as the head. The main emphasis in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 on the 'horizontal' relationships within the body. But in Colossians and Ephesians, Paul develops the picture in a more 'vertical' direction by speaking of Christ as the head, in such a way that the church relates to Christ just as the rest of the human body is related to the head. There seem to be three elements to this picture.

First, in both letters Paul puts this description of Christ as the head of his body, the church, in the same context as Christ's sovereignty over the whole of creation (Col. 1:15-18; Eph. 1:19-22). The implication is that Christ exercises Lordship and control over the church. This, however, as Paul stresses elsewhere, is a headship that is exercised in tender love and servanthood, with self-sacrificial, self-giving care (Eph. 5:23-30).

Second, in Ephesians 1:23, Paul speaks of Christ 'filling the church' as his body (just as he fills the whole of creation). This may mean something like our human consciousness, in the way our minds are conscious of our bodies—as if the mind 'fills' the body with its presence and direction. Likewise, Christ is everywhere present and active within his church.

Third, just as a body grows as a living organism under the direction of the head, so Paul describes the church as growing up, both 'from' and 'into' Christ (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:12-14). So the body metaphor is useful for Paul's passion for maturity among his churches. As a body cannot grow if it is severed from its head, neither can the church grow if it does not remain vitally connected to Christ.

- Reconciliation of Jew and Gentile. The most fundamental division in his world was that between Jews and Gentiles. And it was central to Paul's understanding of the gospel and of the church that God had dissolved that barrier through the death of Jesus the Messiah. So, in

Ephesians 2:14-18 he describes how God has brought both together by uniting the two in a single new humanity through the cross and by presenting them both together to God. He uses body language again, saying that Christ's intention was 'in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility' (v. 16). 'This one body' here clearly means the church of believing and reconciled Jews and Gentiles in Christ. This was so important to Paul that he seems to have coined a new Greek word to describe it in Ephesians 3:6, where he says that Gentiles constitute a 'co-body' (*syssoma*) with Israel, as well as being co-heirs and co-sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus. The church in *this* sense is a new and unprecedented reality in history—nothing less than a new humanity. A new body.

- Appropriate behaviour. There is no place among the members of the same body for either a superiority complex (rejecting others as less important than oneself), or an inferiority complex (rejecting oneself as of no importance in comparison with others). This is the message of 1 Corinthians 12: 14-26. Paul takes the metaphor in an even more positive direction to speak about Christian behaviour within the church. In Ephesians 4:15-16, 23, Christians should speak the truth in love with one another, because they are to be growing up in love as a whole body under Christ and 'we are all members of one body'. So, we have completed our survey of

major biblical pictures for the church as the people of God. We should not set one up as dominant, at the expense of the others, or neglect any of them. Also, we should not imagine that these are pictures only of some idealized or mystical church. These are ways in which the Old Testament spoke about historical Israel, and the New Testament speaks about the actual assemblies of Christian believers in the early church. Both Israel and the church

were filled with very ordinary people with many faults and failures. By means of these metaphors and images, however, God reminded them of the real identity that they had, and emphasized different aspects of their relationship with Christ and with each other. We need all of these teachings and models to inform our understanding of what we mean by 'The whole church'.

Canon and Biblical Interpretation (Scripture and Hermeneutics Vol. 7)

Craig Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, Christopher Seitz,
& Al Wolters (editors)

A key concept in current hermeneutical discussions of the Christian Scriptures is the idea of canon. It plays a pivotal role in the move from critical analysis to theological appropriation. Canon has to do with the authoritative shape in which Scripture has been received by the Church, and which must be taken seriously if it is to be read aright by people of faith. In this extraordinary collection the notion of canon is illuminated from a number of different perspectives: historical, theoretical, and exegetical. A particularly valuable feature of the volume is its interaction with the work of Brevard Childs, the pioneer of the canonical approach, and its focus on the fruitfulness of a canonical reading for a broad range of biblical material. Contributors include Brevard Childs, Scott Hahn, Tremper Longman III, Gordon McConville, Christopher Seitz, Anthony Thiselton, Jean Vanier, Gordon Wenham, Christopher Wright, and Frances Young.

Craig Bartholomew is the H. Evan Runner Professor of Philosophy, Redeemer University College, Canada; **Scott Hahn** is Professor of Theology and Scripture at the Franciscan University of Steubenville; **Robin Parry** is the Editorial Director for Paternoster; **Christopher Seitz** is Professor of Old Testament and Theological Studies, University of St Andrews; **Al Wolters** is Professor of Religion and Theology/Classical Languages at Redeemer University College, Canada.

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Biblical Perspectives on the Role of Immigrants in God's Mission¹

Charles (Chuck) Van Engen

KEY WORDS: *Immigrants, strangers, migration, mission*

Introduction

We know that throughout history we have seen great movements of peoples and groups from one place to another. This includes the Latin American con-

tinents where the history of many peoples, ancient and modern, tells the stories of periodic migrations of peoples from north to south, from east to west, from rural areas to the cities, from small towns to large cities, and so forth. There are immigrants who have fled very negative socio-economic and political situations. There are hundreds of thousands of people who have fled dictatorships, civil wars, and international conflicts. There are immigrants who have been transported from one place to another by force as slaves. Many immigrants voluntarily have left their homes seeking better living conditions. Some immigrants have been forced to leave because of natural disasters. And many of these immigrants have contributed in remarkable ways to the new nations to which they have gone, in terms, for example, of technology, science, industry, new cultural forms, the arts, education, and agriculture. The missions established by the missionary orders of the Roman Catholic Church in California during the nineteenth century are an example of the impact that immigrants can have

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Rev. Charles (Chuck) Van Engen, Ph.D., is the Arthur F. Glasser Professor of the Biblical Theology of Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission. He is the author of God's Missionary People; The Good News of the Kingdom; God so Loves the City; Mission on the Way; Footprints of God; The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions; and Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible.

on their new environments.

In Los Angeles, where I live, we are all immigrants and/or descendents of immigrants. I am an example of this phenomenon. My grandparents emigrated as young people from the Netherlands to the central plains of the United States, to the states of Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa. My parents immigrated from the U.S. to Chiapas, Mexico. And I emigrated from Mexico to Los Angeles. I am an immigrant and the descendent of immigrants who in our history represent at least three cultures and languages.

Biblical perspectives

The Bible offers us various perspectives concerning the stranger and the alien.

1. The stranger as enemy

There are occasions when the Bible presents the stranger as an enemy of the People of God. See, for example, Is. 1:7; 2:6; 5:17; Mt. 17:25,26; and Heb. 11:39. More dominant is the perspective of the stranger and 'the nations' (meaning all those peoples and cultures that are not a part of the People of God) as being unclean, sinful, unholy, those who could cause the People of God to lose their true faith in YHWH. At times 'the nations' are represented as those who will take possession of the land and belongings of Israel as God's punishment for the unfaithfulness of the People of God.² It

² See, for example, Gen. 31:15; Lev. 22:12, 13, 25; Num. 1:51; 3:10, 38; 16:40; 18:4,7; Deut. 17:15; 31:16; 25:5; Judg. 19:12; Neh.

would seem that this perspective is affirmed over a long period of time in spite of the fact that in both testaments one finds an even stronger emphasis on the role of the People of God as special instruments of God's mission to impact and bless the nations.

2. The stranger is to obey the law of God

Alongside the perspective mentioned above, another viewpoint is strongly affirmed in Scripture: that the stranger who lives in the midst of the People of Israel is to obey the same norms and keep the same commandments that the Israelites were to keep.³ For example, Leviticus 24: 21-22 says,

Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. You are to have the same law for the

9:12; Job 15:19; Ps. 69:8; Prov. 2:16; 5:10, 17, 20; 6:1; 7:7; 11:15; 14:10; 20:16; 27:2, 13; Eccles. 6:2; Is. 1:7; 2:6; 5:17; 61:5; 62:8; Jer. 2:25; 3:13; 5:19; 51:51; Lam. 5:2; Ezek. 7: 21; 11:9; 16:32; 28:10; 30:12; 31:12; 44:7,9; Hos. 7:9; 8:7; Joel 3:17; Obad. 11, 12; Mat. 27:7; and Jn. 10:5. In John 10:5, for example, the stranger is the foreign shepherd whose unknown voice the sheep do not recognize and will not heed. See also, Acts 17:21; Heb. 11:39.

³ See, for example, Gen. 17:12, 27; Ex. 12:19-49; 20:10, 20; 23:12; 30:33; Lev. 16:29; the entire chapter 17; 18:26; 19:33; 20:2; 22:10, 18; 24:16, 21-22; 25:6; Num. 9:14; 15:15, 16, 26, 30; 19:10; 35:13; Deut. 1:16; 5:14; 14:14, 17, 21, 29; 16:11,14;24:14,17; 18:43; 19:11, 22; 26:11; 27: 19; 29: 11, 22; 31:12; Josh. 8:33,35; 20:9 (with reference to the cities of refuge); I Kgs. 8 (the prayer of David); 2 Chr. 15:9; 30: 25 (the prayer of Solomon); Ps. 18:44,45; Ezek. 14:7; and Acts 2:10.

alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.

3. The care of the stranger who lives in the midst of the People of God

God does not only require that the stranger who lives in the midst of the People of Israel be treated fairly and equitably, but God also commands that the immigrant / stranger is to receive the care and compassion of the People of God. In many texts the Bible couples the idea of the immigrant / stranger with that of the orphan and the widow. And compassion and intentional care are required, especially for the orphan, the widow and the stranger who lives in the midst of the People of God.⁴

4. Biblical perspectives of the instrumental role of the immigrant in God's mission

Generally speaking, we think of the immigrant / strangers as recent

arrivals in our midst, ones who have come with 'only the clothes on their back', so to speak. So we associate the immigrant / stranger with the marginalized, the needy, with minority groups, and those who are under-represented in social, political, and economic arenas. In the Bible there exists a clear emphasis on compassion toward, and care for, the immigrant / strangers as receptors of just and compassionate treatment on the part of the People of God, by other folks in general, and on the part of governments. These biblical perspectives concerning the immigrant / strangers are well known and important.

However, the Bible offers us other and different perspectives of the immigrant / strangers as partners, co-labourers, co-participants in the mission of God to the nations. In this short essay, I will focus on the composite of viewpoints that see the immigrant / strangers as active agents of God's mission, God's instruments who contribute to the creation of human history and participate in the mediation of the grace of God to the nations.⁵ It is not my intention to present an exhaustive biblical theology of the immigrant / strangers as found in the Bible, nor do I intend to present a detailed study or

⁴ See, for example, Lev. 19:18; 19:33; 25; Deut. 10: 18 (reference coupled with the orphan and the widow); 14:21; 16:14; 26:12, 13 (reference coupled with the orphan and the widow); 19:11; 27:19 (reference coupled with the orphan and the widow); Ps. 94:6 (reference coupled with the orphan and the widow); 146:9 (reference coupled with the orphan and the widow); Prov. 3:19; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Ezek. 22:7,29; 47:22,23; Zach 7:10; and Mal. 3:5. The New Testament emphasizes the love of neighbour and of one's enemy. See, for example, 'you shall love your neighbour' in Mt 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mr. 12:31; Lk. 10:27; Rom.12:20 (ref. Prov. 25:21, 22; Ex. 23:4; Mt. 5:44; Lk. 6:27); Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; 1 Tim. 5:10; Heb. 13:2; James 2:8; 3 Jn. 55.

⁵ Here I follow the spirit of Paulo Freire who taught us the important transformational dynamism of conscientizing the people such that the poor and marginalized begin to catch a glimpse of the possibility that they may themselves be active agents of their own history and creators of their own destiny. See, for example, among other related works, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

a minute examination of all the narratives or all the biblical passages having to do with this theme. Rather, I want to offer here a wide panorama by following a thread of the tapestry of the Bible⁶ that will serve as a kind of outline signalling the way in which God uses the immigrant / strangers in God's mission to the nations.

This emphasis begins already with Abraham whose story is the story of all immigrants / strangers, including our own stories.

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me (Deut. 26:5-10).

When the Bible first introduces us to Abram, he is presented as an immigrant / stranger.

This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth....Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran. The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there (Gen 11: 27-12:5).

The People of Israel recognized that an important aspect of their self-understanding, their identity as a special people, derived from being strangers, sojourners, aliens, immigrants. (See, for example, Job 19:15; Ps. 69:8; Eph. 2:12; and Col. 1:21.) God himself says to Abram, 'Know for certain that your

⁶ In relation to reading the Bible as a tapestry that presents the *missio Dei* in narrative form, see Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 17-43.

descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure' (Gen. 15:13-14; see also Gen 23:4; 28:4; Ex. 3:13-15; 6:2-4.).

Thus an integral aspect of Abraham's missionary call to be an instrument of God's mission to the nations implied that he and his family would be strangers, aliens, sojourners, immigrants.⁷ Sharing this vision, Luke, for example, presents Jesus as a 'stranger' in Jesus' encounter with the two who were walking to Emmaus after the passion week (Lk. 24:18).

Thus in what follows I will examine the place of the immigrant / stranger in relation to four of the classic categories of missiological reflection: the motivations, agents, means, and goals of the mission of God to the nations.

1. The motivations of the immigrants / strangers in the mission of God to the nations

There are numerous indications in the Bible that demonstrate how God used the very history of the People of Israel

as pilgrims, immigrant people, to motivate them to participate in God's mission to the nations. For example, in Exodus 22:21, God says,

Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.

In Exodus 23:9 God repeats,

Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.

In 1 Peter 2:9-11 the writer offers an echo of this same motivation to be instruments of God's mission to the nations, drawing his vision from Deuteronomy.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

In addition to participating in God's mission to the nations, the People of God were to treat the stranger who lived in their midst with compassion and justice precisely because they had themselves once been strangers and aliens in Egypt. Thus in Leviticus 19:33-34 we read.

When an alien lives with you in

⁷ See, for example, Gen. 12:10; 15: 13; 17:8; 21:23,34; 23:4; 28:4; 36:7; 37:1; Ex. 6:4; 1 Chr. 29:15; 37:1; Job 19:18; Ps. 39:12; 69:8; 119:19; Obad. 11; Acts 13:17; Eph. 2:12, 19; Col. 1:21; Heb. 11:13; and 1 Pet. 1:1.

your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

Having experienced the life of the pilgrim and sojourner, the People of Israel should also care for the land with a special sense of stewardship because the land belongs to God and not to Israel (Lev 25:23).

The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.

The judges were to judge the stranger on the same basis as the Israelite (Deut. 1:16) and Israel was to love the immigrant / stranger for two reasons: (1) because God loves the stranger and the alien; and (2) because Israel was also a foreigner and stranger in Egypt (Deut. 10:17-22).

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

In Deuteronomy 23:7 Israel is commanded,

Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country.

This aspect of Israel's self-understanding of Israel as a pilgrim people had profound spiritual and existential implications. In his prayer for the temple that his son Solomon would build, David recognizes the fact that the People of God are immigrants and strangers (1 Chron. 29:14-15).

But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope.

The psalmist also emphasizes that precisely because they are immigrants and strangers God will hear their cry (Ps. 39:12; 119:19. See also Jer. 35:7; 1 Pet. 1:1 y 2:11).

How powerful could this motivation be to move our churches to participate in the mission of God locally and globally, participating in the movement of the Holy Spirit in mission because we too were and are immigrants / strangers? It seems to me a great shame—and I consider it a sinful omission—that many immigrants and descendants of immigrants in southern California, for example, have forgotten who they are, that they themselves are also immigrants / strangers, a forgetfulness that appears to produce an attitude such that those of us who are early-arrival immigrants / strangers

and/or descendants of early arrivals should demonstrate little or no compassion, nor receptivity, much less hospitality, for the new immigrants / strangers who have recently arrived in our neighbourhoods and communities.

2. The immigrants / strangers as agents of God's mission to the nations

A second aspect of this missiological and instrumental perspective of the immigrants / strangers role in the mission of God has to do with the form in which various personalities are presented in the Bible as agents of God's mission precisely because they are immigrants / strangers. Let me highlight a few examples.

Abraham would participate in God's mission to the nations as a response to his call to leave his homeland and his extended family clan and begin a pilgrimage to a new land that God would show him. God would bless the nations through Abram precisely through his being a stranger, pilgrim, foreigner and immigrant. To be a stranger and an alien was such a fundamental aspect of the self-understanding of Abraham's family that Isaac also understood this quality as being an integral part of God's vision for him, a self-portrait that Isaac sees as fundamental to his being an instrument of God's mission to the nations. Thus God tells Isaac in Gen. 26:1-6.

Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to

Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.' So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

This biblical perspective of the immigrant / stranger as an agent of God's mission acquires deeper roots and broader significance throughout the history of Israel. We can see how the story of Joseph sheds light on this missional viewpoint. Sold as a slave and sent to Egypt, Joseph is forced to become an alien, stranger, immigrant. Joseph lives through deceit, mistreatment, false accusations, undeserved imprisonment, and utter loneliness in being forgotten in prison, a situation which many of today's immigrant / strangers have also experienced. But precisely as an immigrant / stranger, Joseph saves his family from famine, saves all of Egypt, and feeds all the peoples surrounding Egypt. Egypt grows in its international influence and power because of the work of this immigrant in the halls of power in Egypt. Joseph adapts to the Egyptian culture to such an extent that when his own brothers come asking for food they do not recognize him. In the end, Joseph himself acknowledges his special role as an immigrant / stranger

when he speaks to his brothers in Gen. 45:4-8; 50:19-21.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God...'. Joseph said to them, 'Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.' And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Thus, even after his death Joseph's embalmed body would immigrate via a long journey through the desert back to the land of his origins.

The Bible develops this missiological perspective in a significant number of narratives about persons whom God uses precisely as immigrants / strangers. We could mention Daniel and his missional role in Babylon, another administrator who is a special agent of God's mission although initially he is an exiled prisoner, a cross-cultural missionary sent against his will to a strange land. Daniel devoted his life to serving as counsellor and

friend of the kings of Babylon and Persia even though he was a foreigner.

We could also mention the two women whom Jesus highlights in Luke 4 as special agents of God's mission. Both are immigrants / strangers. One was the widow of Seraphath (1 Kings 1:8-16), the other a young Israelite girl taken captive and serving as a slave in the household of Naaman the Syrian. As an agent of God's mission, the little girl's simple testimony brings about Naaman's healing from leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-4). Precisely as foreign women God uses them in God's mission to the nations.

Interestingly, during the exile in Babylon, the People of Israel found themselves having to choose between two different perspectives. On the one hand, they could see themselves as victims as expressed in Psalm 137:4 where the Israelites—as captives in Babylon—cry, saying, 'How can we sing a song in a foreign land (or as foreigners in this land)?' On the other hand, they could choose a self-understanding as active agents of the mission of God, even though they were strangers in a new nation. It is fascinating that during the exact same moment in history, with reference to the same persons experiencing the same exile, in the same context, God says to them through Jeremiah, 'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it

prosper, you too will prosper' (Jer. 29: 5-7).

This second perspective involves the Israelites seeing themselves as being sent to Babylon by God with a missional purpose as agents of God's mission for the well-being of the land to which they had been sent.

We could mention Esther, a woman who as a descendent of immigrants / strangers adapts so well to her new culture that she is chosen to serve in the harem of the king of Persia. And even as an immigrant / stranger, Esther allows God to use her both to save her people from being destroyed, and to be the catalyst through whom all Persia comes to know about the God of Israel. Similarly, Mordecai the Jew, an immigrant / stranger ends up exercising great influence in the realm.

If we had space, we could mention David, exiled among the Philistines, an immigrant / stranger whom God uses among them. David becomes a companion at arms with, and counsellor to, Achish, king of Gath (1. Sam. 27). Maybe this is why the New Testament writers seem so easily and naturally to take note that Jesus himself was an immigrant / stranger, exiled as a child to Egypt. Luke brings this to mind once again on the lips of the two who are walking to Emmaus after the passion and resurrection of Jesus, describing the one who joins them as being a 'stranger' (Lk. 24:18).

This perspective of the immigrant / stranger as an agent of God's mission appears to be so compelling that Ezekiel speaks of God using foreigners themselves in God's mission of judgment against Israel when Israel refuses to be an instrument of God's mission to the nations (Ezek. 28:7).

This vision is echoed in Habakkuk 1:5-6 where God says that he will use the Chaldeans in God's mission. Paul makes reference to this same passage from Habakkuk in his first major sermon in which he develops his mission theology (Acts 13:41). Paul's use of Habakkuk echoes the way in which Isaiah states that, due to the infidelity of Israel, God will use other nations in God's mission (Isa. 61:5).

Can we imagine what God might want to do through the Hispanic/Latino, Korean, African, Filipino, and Chinese diasporas (to name a few) now spread all over the earth if we were to view them as agents of God's mission in the re-evangelization of North America, Europe, the Middle East and the globe?

3. The immigrants / strangers as means of God's mission to the nations

A third aspect of this missionary and instrumental perspective of the immigrant / stranger in God's mission has to do with the way in which immigration itself is presented as a fundamental method of God's mission to the nations. There are indications in the Bible that on occasion God used immigration to fulfill certain important aspects of God's mission. Clearly there is an intimate relationship between the agents whom God uses in God's mission and the means by which God chooses to carry out that mission. Yet in this essay I will make a distinction (though it may at the outset appear to be somewhat artificial) between these two aspects of God's mission in order to be able to read with new missiological eyes the history of God's mission as

it is portrayed in the Bible.

When one thinks of immigration—that is, the phenomenon itself of being a stranger/alien/foreigner—as one of the methods that God uses in God’s mission, a number of biblical narratives come to mind. The first we might mention is the story of Moses. Raised in a bi-cultural and bi-lingual environment (Aramaic and Egyptian) Moses was still not a useful instrument for God’s mission. It was necessary for Moses to spend forty years as an immigrant / stranger among the Midianites, learning how to survive in the desert, learning how to shepherd sheep (God was preparing him to be able to shepherd a large human flock in the desert), and being shaped personally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for the leadership role that would be his. Moses describes himself as an immigrant / stranger. The narration in Exodus 18:1-3 tells us,

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land...’ (See also Ex. 2:22; Acts 7:29.).

The theme of the desert as the womb from which mission is born represents a strong and consistent emphasis in the Bible. John the Baptist came from the desert to begin his ministry. As another example, in Luke 4, Jesus begins his ministry surviving the temp-

tations in the desert. And in the case of Saul of Tarsus, after being encountered by Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul—known later as Paul—spends quite a few years in the desert rereading the Old Testament. In the desert, all are strangers. And in the desert they are shaped, formed, reborn to participate in God’s mission. It appears that at times God places people in situations of being immigrants / strangers with the purpose of forming them in preparation for their participation in God’s mission.

A second figure we could mention is a woman, a widow, a Moabite, who precisely because she was an immigrant / stranger was used by God to heal the bitterness of Naomi, her mother-in-law, illustrating in her person what God wanted to do for Israel. In the history of Ruth the agent of God’s mission is combined with the means of God’s mission. Here I want to emphasize an aspect of the narrative of Ruth having to do with immigration itself as a means of God’s mission.

The entire story derives from the way in which Boaz treats Ruth. Clearly the narrative is meant to be a love story in the midst of which the bitterness of Naomi (representing Israel?) is healed by and through the love Ruth and Boaz have for each other. But the relationship of Ruth and Boaz flows from the faithfulness of Boaz as a righteous Israelite. He knows the Scriptures. He knows that in Lev. 19:10 and again in Lev. 23:22 God signals the way in which the People of Israel were to treat the immigrants / strangers in their midst. Ruth describes herself as a ‘stranger’ in Ruth 2:10.

At this, she bowed down with her

face to the ground. She exclaimed, 'Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?'

The form in which Boaz receives her and the compassion that Boaz shows to Ruth demonstrates that Boaz was a just and righteous Israelite who follows the Levitical norms.

Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God....(Lev. 19:10)

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God. (Lev. 23:22) (See also Deut. 24:19, 20, 21; 26:12, 13.)

Let us remember what we have already noted: God has a special care, compassion, and love for the stranger, widow, and orphan (See, for example, Ps. 94:6; 146:9.). It is precisely because Ruth is a stranger, a widow, an alien, that God was able to use her in the environment of the faithfulness, compassion and love of Boaz to bring about the healing of the bitterness of Naomi. The woman, the widow, the stranger, is the means and the example of the compassion of God.

The New Testament offers us an echo. In Luke 17, when Jesus heals the ten lepers, only one returns to give thanks to Jesus and praise God for being healed. And that one was a Samaritan, considered a stranger and alien by the Jews at the time of Jesus. It is precisely because he was a stranger and alien (in the eyes of the Jews) that Jesus points him out as an

example.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!' When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, 'Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.'

There are many other examples of this third aspect of immigration as a means of God's mission to the nations. The exile itself was a means whereby God created a great *diáspora* out of which resulted the Septuagint, the synagogues, Jewish proselytism, and a network of human relationships that spread over the entire Roman Empire, contacts that Paul would later use as the pathways for his missionary journeys. Later in this essay I will highlight the Parable of the Good Samaritan as one more illustration of the way the stranger and alien are presented as examples of the means of God's mission to the nations.

Could this biblical perspective of immigration as a means of God's mission offer us a lens through which we might better understand what is hap-

pening in this century? Is it possible that God is using immigration itself as a means to proclaim in word and deed the coming of the Kingdom of God among the nations?

4. The immigrants / strangers as goals of God's mission to the nations

A fourth aspect of a missiological and instrumental perspective of the role of immigrants / strangers in God's mission sees immigration in relation to the goals of God's mission among the nations. Immigration seems to play an eschatological role that propels God's mission and the participation of the People of God in that mission toward the future. This futurist vision appears early in the Bible in the call of Abraham in Gen. 17:3-8.

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.'

All immigrants think and dream of

going to a promised land that will offer better conditions of life. This hope of the future as a fundamental aspect of immigration can be seen in numerous biblical narratives. For example, when God raises up Moses to call the People of Israel to come out of Egypt, Moses speaks of their going to a new land. In Exodus 6:1-8, we read,

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.' God also said to Moses, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD."'

God's mission toward the future is

closely connected to his love of Israel as a pilgrim and immigrant people. In one of his psalms, in 1 Chr. 16:15-26, David cries out,

He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: 'To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.' When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He allowed no man to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: 'Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.' Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

This eschatological perspective of immigration includes the hope that the nations will one day come to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creator of heaven and earth. This is the vision of Isaiah, for example. In Is. 56:3-7, we read the following.

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, 'The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.' And let not any eunuch complain, 'I am only a dry tree.' For this is what the LORD says: 'To the

eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.'

The writer of Hebrews associates this eschatological hope of the immigrant / stranger with the expectation of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11:13-16. 'All these people,' the writer states, 'were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.... Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.'

The vision the Bible offers us is that all immigrants / strangers are invited to the great banquet of the Lamb (Matt. 22:1-14; Lk. 14:15-24). Every stranger is invited to the table of the Lord. This eschatological perspective of the immigrant / stranger is emphasized also in Revelation. Repeatedly the author of the Revelation announces that a great

multitude of every language, family, tribe, and nation will gather around the throne of the Lamb. (See, for example, Rev. 1:7; 5:8; 5:13; 6:12; 10:6; 11:15; 14:6; 15:1; 19:6 and chapter 21.) This great gathering will occur as the result of a great migration to the holy city. In Revelation 21:1-2, 23-26, John describes the event.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.... The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it.

What impact—and what changes might there be—in our Christian churches and ecclesiastical institutions if we really believed that in the final analysis, at the end of history, the immigrants / strangers are specially invited to the Great Banquet of the Lamb? (See Lk. 14:15ff; Matt. 22:1ff.) What are the implications for our nations and our Christian churches in the thought that the hope of the world resides with the immigrants, aliens, strangers, and foreigners in our midst? And what if in their future we find our own global future?

Conclusion

The four aspects of this instrumental and missiological perspective of the role of immigrants / strangers in God's mission to the nations converge in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke places the parable within the narrative in which Jesus sends the 70 on a mission. They are sent as envoys of Jesus' mission which is thus their mission. And the primary example of such a mission is the Samaritan.

In the parable we find the motivation for mission in Jesus' response to the question posed by the young noble as to how the young noble is to keep the law. As Jesus tells it, the 'neighbour' in this story is not the one who stands beside the young noble. Rather, it is the one who acts neighbourly. The 'neighbour' is the one who lives out the norms of the Older Testament in being 'neighbourly' to others. In the parable, the one who demonstrates such a way of life is in fact the Samaritan. The Samaritan is the 'neighbour'.

The parable clearly presents the Samaritan stranger/alien as the agent of God's mission. And the way Jesus tells the parable shows that Jesus also wants to highlight the alien Samaritan as the means by which Jesus can offer the young noble a new path of participating in God's mission.

Finally, the parable also focuses on the future. With the words, 'Go and do likewise', Jesus points toward a future in which the young noble can fully receive God's mercy. The young noble himself will no longer be a stranger. And because of God's mercy the young noble can also begin to create a new reality in which immigrants / strangers are no longer excluded from his care,

his compassion, and his love.

I believe that when we begin to fully understand the Bible's missiological and instrumental perspectives with regard to the immigrant and stranger, we may possibly gain a better grasp of, and live more fully into, the missionary vision expressed in 1 Peter 2. If the church of Jesus Christ truly saw itself as a pilgrim community whose land and nation are not of this earth, then the Christian church would begin to understand that it is itself a community of immigrants—ambassadors, yes (2 Cor. 5)—but even so, immigrants.

Out of all the nations of the earth, God has chosen the Christian church to be 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God'. Being who we are, it is not acceptable for us to reject the call of God to participate in God's mission in this world—especially God's mission because of, by means of, with the participation of, and on the way toward immigrants and

strangers. Is it possible, in this century, to express the canticle that gives concrete expression in real life to the vision of the psalmist in Psalm 146: 1, 5-10?

Praise the LORD...Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the LORD, who remains faithful forever. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

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J. D. Payne

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J.D. Payne is a national missionary with the North American Mission Board and an Assistant Professor of Evangelism and Church Planting at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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The Whole Church as a Transformed and Transforming Society

Dewi Hughes

KEY WORDS: *ecclesiology, transformed, church, community*

WHEN EVANGELICALISM was defined at the international conference convened in London in 1846 to establish the Evangelical Alliance the definition explicitly excluded an ecclesiological statement. The reason for this was that the great evangelical revival of the eighteenth century had created a situation where members from most of the Protestant denominations that existed at that time could be one in heart and mind as long as they ignored their differing ecclesiology. A good example of this non-ecclesiological unity was the formation of the London Missionary Society [LMS] in 1795. Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Independents formed an overseas mission to send out missionaries that would simply preach the gospel, translate the scriptures and allow converts to organise themselves into the sort of churches that suited them. However, for most evangelicals

this proved to be a step too far and most mission work was carried out on denominational lines for the first half of the nineteenth century.

Following the pioneering example of William Carey, overseas evangelization within denominational church structures was delegated to volunteer societies that ran the business of overseas mission—raising funds, selecting candidates, transporting missionaries to the field and overseeing their work on the field. The links denominational societies had with their sponsoring churches varied in strength but they all recognized at least some accountability to church.

With the emergence of the interdenominational faith missions in the second half of the nineteenth century a very significant non-denominational stream became a permanent fixture and eventually the predominant factor in evangelical mission from the West to the majority world. This weakened further the link between mission and the church and since the great expansion in their prevalence happened when

Dr Dewi Hughes taught Religious Studies at the Polytechnic of Wales [now the University of Glamorgan] from 1975-87. Having left academia to become Tearfund's first Co-ordinator for Wales he is currently Tearfund's Theological Advisor. His latest book is Power and Poverty: Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need, [Nottingham/Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008].

premillennialism was sweeping through the evangelical community, particularly in the USA, the focus moved from forming communities of disciples to making converts. By the middle of the twentieth century the US culture of planning, marketing and measuring had come to dominate the scene and evangelism felt very much like a business enterprise. With this as the dominant model the worldwide evangelical movement was poised to relegate ecclesiology even further to the periphery of its concerns.

The Lausanne Movement was born out of this manifestation of the primary evangelical imperative to convert people everywhere to faith in Jesus Christ. But at the Lausanne Congress in 1974 a significant number of delegates led by majority world leaders managed to persuade the congress to look again at the dominant US model and seek a more adequate and more biblical model of evangelism. The result was that repentance and social action came to be linked with evangelism as an essential component of Christian mission.

The Church as a transformed society

With the emphasis on the importance for evangelism that people change the way they live and relate to others within and outside the Christian community, it became very difficult to ignore the church. So, it is not surprising that the Lausanne Covenant has a paragraph focusing on the church:

6. The Church and Evangelism

We affirm that Christ sends his redeemed people into the world as

the Father sent him, and that this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break out of our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the Church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. The Church is at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is his appointed means of spreading the gospel. But a church which preaches the cross must itself be marked by the cross. It becomes a stumbling block to evangelism when it betrays the gospel or lacks a living faith in God, a genuine love for people, or scrupulous honesty in all things including promotion and finance. The church is the community of God's people rather than an institution, and must not be identified with any particular culture, social or political system, or human ideology.¹

The Lausanne Covenant as a whole marked a very important watershed in the history of twentieth century evangelicalism but in this paragraph on the church we see a movement stumbling towards an adequate biblical understanding of the significance of the church in the mission of God. On the one hand there is a deeply biblical appreciation of what the church is as a

¹ The scripture references attached to this paragraph were John 17:18; 20:21; Matt. 28:19,20; Acts 1:8; 20:27; Eph. 1:9,10; 3:9-11; Gal. 6:14,17; 2 Cor. 6:3,4; 2 Tim. 2:19-21; Phil. 1:27.

cross-centred community at the centre of God's cosmic purpose but on the other hand the church is seen as merely a means to an evangelistic end. This paragraph may have provided what has become the Lausanne Movement's strap line—'the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world'²—but it left the movement without an adequate ecclesiology.

A third of the Manila Manifesto that was drafted at the second Lausanne Congress in 1989 is devoted to 'the whole church' because by that time 'the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world' had become the movement's motto. However, the Manila Manifesto is disappointing because the instrumental aspect of the ecclesiology of the Covenant is strengthened with a pervasive emphasis on the evangelistic action of individual members of the churches. Many good things are said in the Manifesto that still need to be said—that if every member of the church is to fulfil their calling the distinction between clergy and laity has to be undermined; that there is a crying need to encourage women to exercise their gifts; that homes and places of work should be seen as places of witness; that the strength of the church's witness is

linked to the quality of the individual and corporate lives of the members; that 'the local church bears a primary responsibility for the spread of the gospel'; that churches and denominations, evangelicals in the West and the majority world and, where possible, evangelicals and non-evangelicals should cooperate in evangelism.

As with the Covenant there are also hints of a non-instrumental ecclesiology here and there:

Our message that Christ reconciles alienated people to each other rings true only if we are seen to love and forgive one another, to serve others in humility, and to reach out beyond our own community in compassionate, costly ministry to the needy.

The church is intended by God to be a sign of his kingdom, that is, an indication of what human community looks like when it comes under his rule of righteousness and peace. As with individuals, so with churches, the gospel has to be embodied if it is to be communicated effectively. It is through our love for one another that the invisible God reveals himself today, especially when our fellowship is expressed in small groups, and when it transcends the barriers of race, rank, sex and age which divide other communities.

In these paragraphs the church is not just a means to an end but the end itself. The church does not just exist to fulfil some task or other but its existence is the fulfilment of God's purpose for humanity. This non-instrumental view of church means that it communicates the gospel as much as by what it

² Charles van Engen pointed out at our Panama consultation that much of this strap line was not original to Lausanne but had been circulating in World Council of Churches circles since as early as 1951. For a discussion of the meaning of this strap line in the WCC and evangelical context see Charles Van Engen. *The Growth of the True Church: An Analysis of the Ecclesiology of Church Growth Theory* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981), pp 379-385.

is and does as by what it says.

The view that the church is a 'sign of the kingdom' of God and 'an indication of what human community looks like when it comes under [God's] rule of righteousness and peace' reflects more adequately the sweep of the biblical story. The vision of the end of the story of God's dealings with the earth and its peoples in Revelation 21-22 provides many clues to understanding the significance of the church in God's dealing with humanity in history. John saw a vision of a new heaven and a new earth devoid of disorder. Into this renewed creation he saw the New Jerusalem descending from heaven like a bride in all her splendour ready to meet the bridegroom. This holy city or bride is actually renewed human society living fully in the presence of God as a result of which everything that has ever made human life sorrowful—including death—has been banished for ever. In his dealing with recalcitrant Israel God often declared that a time would come when they would obey him and then they really would be his people and he would really be their God. This is the reality John sees as prevailing in the end not only with Israel but with all nations, who will gladly bring of their best into this holy city. The crucial legacy of Israel and the Old Covenant was marked by the fact that the names of the 12 tribes were over the 12 gates into the city but its foundations were the 12 apostles of the Lamb and the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, was its glory and light. This glorious scene is a picture of a human society living in complete peace and security under the authority of the servant king, the Lamb.

The reference to the New Jerusalem

as the bride and to the foundations of the city as the apostles of the Lamb suggest strongly that the glorious society that we will be one day is but a greatly intensified version of the society that the church is now and always has been since the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. There is plenty of biblical evidence to indicate that the society that has submitted to the rule of Jesus has the characteristics, if only in shadow, of the glorious society that it will be one day. We may bemoan the failings of churches but if the church is church in any meaningful sense it is a foretaste of heaven. Jesus did not say to his company of disciples that they ought to be the light of the world or a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. The simple fact that they had gathered around Jesus and recognized him as the Messiah, the anointed Ruler sent by God, meant that they would reflect something of his effulgence as *the* light of the world. The fact that they were listening to his radical moral teaching and that in due course they would seek to live in obedience to him in the power of the Spirit meant that people outside their society would see the light of God's glory in them and come to praise their Father in heaven.

As someone that has spent a substantial proportion of his life trying to convince churches and individual Christians that they should share their possessions with the poor through Tearfund, which is a Christian relief and development agency, I have been asked on a number of occasions why it is that in the New Testament the emphasis is almost always on Christians looking after their own poor. The answer is that Jesus is establishing a specific type of society on earth that

prefigures the glorious society that will be fully revealed at his second coming. What happened in Jerusalem after Pentecost clearly points to this. If we bracket all the caveats raised by wise and materialistic western theologians what we see happening in Jerusalem after Pentecost is the formation of a wonderfully new way of being a society.³ Here were people from different nations and classes delighting in each other as they joined the society of Jesus the Messiah. They loved to be together, to eat together and to share their material possessions with one another. We know that problems were around the corner and that the realism of being imperfect would soon hit them but it would be folly to lose the sense of wonder, security, mutual respect and community that characterised this first Christian society blessed by the powerful infusion of the Holy Spirit of God as a result of Messiah Jesus' exaltation.⁴

What is also very significant about this description is the powerful evangelistic impact of this community that should satisfy the most ardent advocate of evangelisation in the Lausanne Movement. It was the quality of the communal life of the church that caused the church to enjoy 'the favour of all the people', which in turn provided the platform for sharing the good news of Jesus Messiah.

There is so much that could be said

about the renewal of human society in the mission and purpose of God. Beginning with the declaration on the eve of the giving of the law at Sinai that Israel was to be a holy nation and ending with Peter's reminder that the Christian community he addressed in his first letter was called to be a holy nation the Bible is full of God's heart for the corporate renewal of humankind. Peter's encouragement will suffice as concluding evidence that the good news that we call the gospel is not just about the salvation of individuals but the creation of an alternative community now in the midst of this sinful world that points to the eternal community that is to come:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. [1 Pet. 2:9-12].

The impression has often been created within the Lausanne Movement that the task of evangelization has not been completed because of a lack of evangelizing zeal coupled with a lack of planning, strategy and finance but in light of the biblical picture of the sig-

³ For a discussion of the Jerusalem church that takes note of the western caveats see Dewi Hughes, *Power and Poverty, Divine and Human Rule in a World of Need* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008/Grand Rapids: IVP, 2009), pp. 210 ff.

⁴ Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35.

nificance of the church the cause of failure is just as likely to be a lack of holiness among the people of God.

As the Lausanne Movement prepares for its third congress in Cape Town in 2010 it is an opportune time for us to draw attention to our defective ecclesiology and for evangelicals to grasp that there are certain biblical truths about the church that they must share and celebrate. Our evangelical forefathers were wrong to exclude church from their minimum definition of evangelicalism because it is possible to include some fundamental truths about church without betraying our denominational allegiance. Without this the task of evangelization will be profoundly hindered.

In summing up the deliberations of the Theology Working Group at the Lausanne Leaders gathering in Budapest in June 2006, Chris Wright said that his hope for Cape Town 2010 was that it would 'launch nothing less than a 21st Century Reformation among evangelicals...for there are scandals and abuses in the world-wide evangelical community that are reminiscent of the worst features of the pre-reformation medieval church in Europe.'

One of the worst scandals is *the consumerist captivity of the western and westernized church*. It is now over two centuries since European intellectuals began declaring independence from the traditional political and religious structures of Christendom that made 'freedom' one of the key concepts of our modern era. There has been much discussion about the precise nature of this freedom and the best political structures that need to be put in place in order to secure it but at the heart of

all this discussion has been the assumption of the autonomy of the individual self—to be truly free is to be able to make what *I* want of *my* self. For a considerable proportion of the last 200 years the capitalist-libertarian and the socialist-Marxist ideologies competed for ascendancy as the means to deliver self-centred freedom. It now seems that the capitalist-libertarian ideology has won the day. Under the banner of post-modernity it is now busily persuading the whole world that the essence of human freedom and self-fulfilment is found in the ability to consume. Kant's noble call to reject traditional authority in the interest of individual autonomy and 'Dare to know' has ended up as a price tag in the quintessentially post-modern western shopping mall! The tragedy is that all too often western and westernized evangelicals in the majority world are deeply compromised with this self-centred consumerism, which in New Testament language is nothing more or less than the idolatrous worship of mammon/money—and all that money can buy.

The irrefutable evidence that this is so is the growing meanness of western evangelical Christians as they have become immensely richer in the last 25 years. Ron Sider draws attention to this fact in his *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* Sider's thesis has been amply confirmed by an academic sociological study entitled *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don't Give Away More Money*. In his review of this book in Christianity Today Sider says that 'the level of self-centered materialism systematically described here is truly

staggering. The publisher should have used an earlier title that was considered: *Stingy Believers*. The book should drive us to our knees.’ The primary cause of this stinginess is conformity to consumerism because ‘the widespread consumerism and materialism of the culture—expressed above all in our incessant advertising—seduces many people into making extravagant decisions about major purchases like houses and cars and smaller things like recreation, eating out, vacations, etc.; and the result is that most families are financially pressed in spite of enormous wealth.’ The authors ‘think there are five primary reasons for the fact that “the wealthiest national body of Christian believers at any time in all of church history end up spending most of their money on themselves”’. The most important is our society’s ‘institutionalized mass consumerism’.⁵ It just happens that the evidence is available for US evangelicals but anecdotal evidence leads me to think that the same principle applies in the UK—the richer evangelicals become the more consumerist and mean they become. Even in the majority world those who work among the poor testify to the meanness of the rich middle class evangelical churches towards their charitable work. The pressures of consumerism can be subtle and Jesus himself warned us against the danger of the cares of this world but conformity to the consumerist world would be far less likely if evangelization was seen as a process of incorporating people

into a new type of society under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

A very pernicious manifestation of the consumerist spirit within evangelicalism is the so-called prosperity gospel. In this sacralisation of the American dream devotion to God is seen as a deal—we risk our little on God and he pays back with abundance for us to enjoy on ourselves. Even when our giving to God is presented as giving to our poor brother or sister the approach is destructive of true human community because the needy are reduced to just a means to an end. But the most destructive manifestation of this teaching is the way church leaders in situations of great poverty use it to exploit the poor for their own comfort. Prosperity preachers by definition have to be prosperous in order to have credibility. So, their technique is to put pressure on the poor to risk the little that they have on their ministries with the promise that since they would be giving to God by giving to them God will bless them with abundance—and if the poor lose out they do so because of their lack of faith in giving.

Another scandal is *the ideological captivity of significant sections of the western evangelical church*. The war on terror—which for some mysterious reason to objective observers is said to include the Iraq war—prosecuted under the leadership of the evangelical George W. Bush, who was voted into office with the support of the overwhelming majority of US evangelicals, has done, and is doing, unimaginable damage to the evangelization of the most unevangelized populations in the world.

At the Lausanne Forum in Pattaya in October 2004 a group of the dele-

⁵ Quotations taken from the review in www.christianitytoday.com/2008/006/5.11.html

gates led by Rene Padilla approached the leadership of the forum to discuss the possibility that the Lausanne Movement could publicly distance itself from the military policy of the Bush administration. The leadership of Lausanne, which was dominated by US citizens at the time, was resolute in its opposition to the suggestion.

The consultation that launched the Micah Network met in Oxford, England two weeks after 9/11. In the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission we expressed 'our abhorrence at this atrocity' but we also recognized 'the symbolic meaning of this act of terrorism. In his day Jesus interpreted the butchery of Pilate against the Galileans as an opportunity to repent. Could it be that this act against the symbols of Western economic and military power is a call to repentance?'⁶ This suggestion caused deep offence to many in the US in particular.

In his book, *Myths America Lives By*, Richard T. Hughes has made a strong case that at different periods in their history Americans have adopted stories that have no foundation in truth to justify actions that are very obviously unjust. The myth of 'manifest destiny' that justified the extermination of Native Americans is an obvious case in point. At the moment it is the myth of the Christian or Millennial Nation that is causing even evangelicals in America to believe that the use of the most terribly destructive weapons can be justified as a Christian activity. The evangelical church in America and in

the West generally must distance itself from this destructive ideology so that the kingdom of the Prince of Peace can grow in the most unevangelized places in our world.

In 1846 evangelical Christians from many parts of the world gathered in London in order to form a global evangelical alliance. The attempt failed because some of the delegates from the US insisted that slavery was consistent with their evangelical faith despite the overwhelming international evangelical consensus at that time that it was not. It would be a tragedy if the US and other evangelical churches stood to one side once again because of their perceived commitment to western imperialism at this critical point in the history of evangelicalism.

The church as a transforming society

As Jesus prayed for his community of disciples in the prayer recorded in John 17 he affirmed that because they were identified with him they were not of the world. What they needed above all else was to be sanctified by the word of truth from the Father revealed through Jesus. Just as Jesus had resolutely determined to sanctify himself by doing his Father's will, which ultimately took him to the cross to die for sinners, so he prayed that his followers would sanctify themselves so that they too, as a community of grace, would be able to resolutely dedicate themselves to serve God and their neighbours. But then he prays to the Father: 'As you sent me into the world I have sent them into the world' (Jn. 17:18, cf. 20:21). The church is both called out of the

⁶ Tim Chester [ed.], *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral Mission and the Poor* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 17,18.

world to be an alternative society under the rule of Jesus but also, empowered by the Spirit, sent into the world to be a blessing to those who do not belong. In the Lausanne movement this mission of the church has been defined as mission in word and deed—‘holistic mission’ or what is now often called ‘integral mission’. This is how the Lausanne Covenant describes the social aspect of this mission:

5. Christian Social Responsibility

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judg-

ment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.

There is little in this paragraph to suggest that social action is a *church* responsibility. There is some advance on the Covenant in the Manila Manifesto but again in the context of a strong commitment to an instrumental ecclesiology. Affirmation 16 states ‘that every Christian congregation must turn itself outward to its local community in evangelistic witness and compassionate service’. Paragraph 7, which is in the section on the whole church, says that ‘our message that Christ reconciles alienated people to each other rings true only if we are seen to love and forgive one another, to serve others in humility, and to reach out beyond our own community in compassionate, costly ministry to the needy’. Again paragraph 6, which is also in the section on the whole church, states that a local congregation/ church ‘might decide to organize a visitation of their whole area, to penetrate for Christ a particular place where people assemble, to arrange a series of evangelistic meetings, lectures or concerts, to work with the poor to transform a local slum, or plant a new church in a neighbouring district or village’.

Churches need integrity and they need to transform slums but the motivation for either activity is not some overriding evangelistic strategy. Churches are not a means to evangelism but communities under the benign rule of Jesus the Messiah learning what it means to love God with all their heart and their neighbour as themselves. It is not some programme or strategy for evangelization that determines the shape of the church but the shape of the church that determines the programme or strategy for evangelization. Neither must social action be seen as a means to evangelization. The church should not 'work with the poor to transform a local slum' as a means/method of evangelizing the local slum. The church works to transform the local slum because of love—born of their experience of the love of God in Jesus—for the people in the slum that births practical action to bless them.

Those of us that have been advocating the vital importance of deeds in the mission of the church—especially social action with and on behalf of the poor—also need to remember that an instrumental ecclesiology is defective. Tearfund, the evangelical Christian relief and development agency that I serve as Theological Advisor, has a ten year vision of seeing '50 million people released from material and spiritual poverty through a worldwide network of 100,000 churches'. I rejoice that Tearfund has become convinced that churches are vital to transforming the lives of the poor in their societies but we must also avoid thinking of the church as a means to an end. The church does not exist to deliver our relief and development agenda any more than it exists to serve an evange-

lization agenda. The true church is a transforming society and it is our privilege as an agency to serve its agenda. The most we can and ought to do is to encourage the church to be what it is.

It is a cliché but with a strong element of truth that the church is the only society that exists for the benefit of non-members. Churches do need to attend to the serious and challenging task of growing as the peace [shalom] communities that they are but they are probably more successful in becoming peace communities when they seek the peace of the societies in which they are located. We know as the society of Jesus that our citizenship is in heaven and that we are strangers and aliens in this world that is organized in opposition to God. We also know that this world will be subject to God's judgment. Jeremiah knew that Babylon, which had been the rod in God's hand to punish the Jews for their sin, would one day itself be brought low in the purpose of God. Even so in his divinely inspired letter to the exiled Jews in Babylon he told them to 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city' and to 'pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers you too will prosper' (Jer 29:7). It is in the spirit of Jeremiah that Jesus commands his disciples many years later to love their enemies and that Paul commanded the church in Rome to love their enemies before going on immediately to exhort them to pray for the imperial administration that despite all its failings was put in place in order to make sure that what is good for all citizens was protected. And, of course, they were to continue loving their neighbour rulers and seeking their blessing even when they soon started persecuting them.

Rwanda and other examples

I could tell many stories that have convinced me that evangelicalism developed what can only be described as tragic defects in its theology in the twentieth century and I believe that many of those defects are concentrated in the area of ecclesiology. The most glaring example is the terrible tragedy that engulfed Rwanda. There are heroic tales of evangelical individuals risking their lives—and sometimes losing them—because of their refusal to join in the genocide. I am yet to hear a story of a church that stood for justice. Then there are many other stories that are not dramatic but witness to the same problem. I was told about a city centre Baptist church in Latin America that refused to let an evangelical agency that was working with vulnerable girls abandoned to the streets to use their excellent buildings because they were not meant for such work but as a place to worship God. Friends working in the slums of India testify that it is very difficult to get support from middle class evangelical churches that must be doing very well financially as a result of the current economic boom in their country. I have myself visited evangelical churches in India that are located very close to slum colonies where there was no sense of responsibility at all for the needy people on their doorstep. I have walked through a slum in an African city with a senior evangelical pastor born and bred in that city to be told by him that he never knew that people lived in such appalling conditions in his city. I have stood in the compound of a large evangelical Baptist church in an African city, which was in the process

of spending an enormous sum of money on its buildings, from where I could look down into a most appalling slum and learnt that the church had done nothing to reach out to the suffering people on their doorstep—who also happened to be Muslim.

Such anecdotes could easily be multiplied by many others from all over the world to highlight the evangelical ecclesiological malaise that the third Lausanne Congress must address as a major priority. Successful world evangelisation depends upon it. The picture is not totally bleak by any means because there are an increasing number of stories of evangelical churches being the transforming societies that they were meant to be. It is the voices of these churches that need to be heard loudly in Cape Town. These are the churches that have become convinced that their calling is to be communities of blessing to the societies in which they are placed. In these churches transforming society is not seen as the task of individuals in the church or of para-church agencies but of the church as a whole. In many cases they are churches of the poor who choose to stand in solidarity with their fellow poor so that they may all be lifted up in the name and power of Jesus. Together they dedicate themselves to God, to each other and to the needy outside their community. The best way to catch something of their vision is through case studies. Here are just 2:⁷

⁷ These case studies have been researched and written up by Tulo Raistrick, Tearfund's Church and Development Advisor. These and many others can be found at <http://tilz.tearfund.org>—see the box headed 'Welcome to

1. The Church that Mobilised— Trapeang Keh, Cambodia

Trapeang Keh is a very poor village in rural Cambodia. Up to three years ago it appeared a very unpromising environment for church-led community transformation. The land was dry and hard, and the water wells were dry most of the year round. Men had to go off to the cities for months at a time to earn money, but often came back broken and sick. Many in the village were in debt to powerful money-lenders. Like most Cambodian villages, there was little trust or co-operation between people, the legacy of the horrendous Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge regime during the 1970s. And the church itself consisted of only four members, and they were persecuted and marginalised by the rest of the community.

However, things began to change three years ago. Two Christian community facilitators from FAITH project began to visit the village and spent time with the local Christians. They visited for two days every fortnight, and would stay overnight in the village. This surprised most of the villagers—visitors who ever came to their village seemed only too quick to leave and escape the primitive living conditions that were there. Each visit, the two Christian facilitators would spend time doing bible studies, helping the Christians to see how God wanted them to be agents of transformation in their community and building their confidence in

the fact that *they* could be used by God in this way.

The local Christians began to realise that if they helped the village to begin to work together things could change. They invited the community to join them for a meeting, but the villagers were very sceptical. They were not sure they could trust these Christians. So the Christians then went and visited every person in their home, one by one. Gradually they began to win people's trust, and then one day, when they called a community meeting, almost everyone came. Helped by the two Christian facilitators, the community began to discuss their problems. Over the next few meetings they began to realise *why* they were poor, and then they began to realise that *they* could do something about it!

The community began to work together to address some of the problems. They helped dig more and better wells and they improved the irrigation to people's fields. No longer is the village reliant on one unhealthy pond during the dry season. With better irrigation, they were able to start vegetable gardens, and now grow crops all year round. The men no longer need to leave for the cities. And they have formed a development committee to help manage all the changes taking place in the village.

But the village has experienced not just physical changes. Attitudes and relationships have changed too. There is less social disruption, as men stay with their families all year round. The community discussions had encouraged men to listen to women, often for the first time, and the result is that men's respect for women has increased. There is less wife-beating,

tilz' and [Click here](#) to go to the new section of this site about mobilising churches' for many more case studies and guidance on how to go about mobilizing churches.

and more sharing of the tasks that had always previously been left up to the women—gardening, water collection, and cooking. There is less quarrelling and fighting in the village, and less alcoholism. The village is more united, and decision-making within the village is fairer and more inclusive.

And, significantly, attitudes to the church have changed too. The Christians themselves have grown in confidence to care for their neighbours and to share their faith. There is less persecution. In fact now people respect the Christians as they have shown themselves willing to help others. And the church has grown. All but two of the households in the village now attend the church! It is a story of remarkable, holistic transformation.⁸

2. The Church that Rediscovered its Confidence— An Anglican Church in East London

The church of this case study is in an area of East London in one of the poorest parts of the UK. There is high unemployment, poor health, low levels of literacy, and large numbers of single parents. The specific church reflects this situation: it is a church made up of people with low incomes and little confidence.

The minister of the church is a visionary and activist, and was keen for the church to have a big impact in

its community. He had long negotiations over a four year period with a big donor who finally agreed that they would provide over a million pounds to help the church build a community centre. However, throughout these negotiations, the minister had not involved the church members. He had assumed that they would be in favour. At the final meeting before the funding was to arrive, the church was asked to sign the contract. However, the church members were somewhat unsure, and when they were told that *they* would be responsible for running the centre they got scared, and said 'no'. It was devastating for the minister—years of hard work had gone down the drain and what he saw as a great opportunity had been lost. The church too was very upset—they liked their minister and felt that they had let him down.

However, the church members were right to say 'no'. The community centre project was far too big for them. The problem had been that the minister hadn't spent enough time listening to their views or thinking through their skills to realise it would not work.

A Tearfund facilitator was invited into this situation to help the minister and the church think through what should happen next. Their starting point was the failed community centre project, helping all sides to be heard and understood, and to enable healing of people's hurts to take place. They then began to help the church to see themselves as God saw them. The church members, low in confidence and self-esteem, began to discover that they did have many gifts and skills for community work—not for running a big community centre, but for doing many other useful things instead.

⁸ For another a striking case study from Cambodia see David Evans with Kathryn Scherer, *Creating Space for Strangers: Thinking Afresh about Mission and the Church* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), pp. 84-89.

Gradually, the church members began to want to get more involved in their community again, but this time in a more realistic way.

The church began a process of listening to their community. Through house-to-house visits they discovered that a big worry for people was that a large building renovation scheme was about to take place that would leave people without electricity for two weeks. As most people cooked and heated their homes with electricity this was quite a concern. The church realised they could help. They realised that there were people in their church who could cook meals, others who could open up the church building so that people could stay in there to keep warm, others who could drop round leaflets to people's homes to let them know that the church was offering help, others who could chat with people and make them feel welcome, and others who could pray. Suddenly the church felt they were able to make a difference.

As a result of this practical initiative, the church grew in confidence. When it became apparent that the local government was corrupt and misusing public money, it seemed a natural action for the church to decide to take a stand. They headed up a coalition of community groups calling for greater accountability in the local government, and for the return of squandered money.

The church has changed hugely since the day they said 'no' to the community centre project. They have grown in confidence and discovered their gifts. As a whole church they now get involved in serving the community, not just a few isolated individuals. The

church has become more relevant to the community. People are now more ready to listen to their message. And the church has discovered that 'small can be beautiful'—that it is not always necessary to do big projects but that small projects with love and compassion can make just as big a difference.

Conclusion

Part 3 of Chris Wright's *Mission of God* provides a compelling biblical and theological foundation for what has been argued in this paper. It is fitting to conclude with just one quotation from this magnificent volume:

The question is, Is the *church as a whole* reflecting the wholeness of God's redemption? Is the church (thinking here of the local church as the organism effectively and strategically placed for God's mission in any given community) aware of all that God's mission summons them to participate in? Is the church through the combined engagement of *all* its members, applying the redemptive power of the cross of Christ to *all* the effects of sin and evil in the surrounding lives, society and environment?

The ringing slogan of the Lausanne movement is: 'The whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world.' Holistic mission cannot be the responsibility of any one individual. But it is certainly the responsibility of the whole church.⁹

⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham/Grand Rapids: IVP, 2006), p. 322. See Part 3 'The People of Mission', pp. 189-392.

Ethnicity and The People of God

Milton Acosta

KEYWORDS: *ethnocentrism, ethnicity, race*

Introduction

There is one element of our biblical understanding and Christian speech that must be revised at least within popular circles of Christianity, which includes, by the way, the majority of Christians around the world: the identity of the people of God regarding race and ethnicity. The issues of ethnicity, culture, national identity and nationality are rather complex, and I do not claim to be an expert on this, but there is at least a minimum that can be said.

Using a biblical example, ethnocentrism is what made Naaman, the Aramean general, reject Elisha's treatment (2 Kgs. 5).¹ Initially, Naaman gets angry because Elisha did not receive him as the general he was, but sent a servant with instructions for his healing. He also rejects the instructions

themselves: to bathe seven times in the puny Jordan River when in Damascus they had such rivers as the Abana and Pharpar. His identity had been deeply offended on two unacceptable counts.

Ethnicity will be used in this article in the sense of boundary markers that separate one group of people from another. It 'refers to the social ideology of human division sorted according to common culture'.² Ethnocentrism is therefore produced by one's culture. In that sense, ethnocentrism is natural.³

Negatively, though, ethnocentrism could be defined as a 'sociopsychological syndrome'⁴, characterized by a 'tendency to discriminate against the stranger, the alien, the physically different'; it 'is a virtually universal phe-

¹ Other authors also think ethnocentrism plays an important role here. See Efraín Silva and Roberto Fricke, '1 Reyes', in *1 y 2 Reyes, 1 y 2 Crónicas, Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispánico* (El Paso, Texas: Editorial Mundo Hispánico, 2000), 211.

² J. A. Manickam, 'Race, Racism and Ethnicity', in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 718.

³ David Matsumoto and Linda Juang, *Culture and Psychology* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 61-91.

⁴ Daniel Druckman, 'Ethnocentrism in the Inter-Nation Simulation', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 12, no. 1 (1968).

nomenon in group contacts⁵, obviously including Christians.⁶ Since phenotypical differences are included in some definitions of ethnocentrism, we could then subsume racism under ethnocentrism, understanding that each term is a field of study in and of itself.

Ethnocentrism, in its most common expression, is this general attitude by which we determine who is below us, who deserves to be treated completely as an equal human being and who doesn't. This is so much a part of us that we do not notice it. Through these invisible lenses we classify large groups of people and large sections of the world's geography.⁷

The purpose of this article is to explore ethnicity and ethnocentrism in relation to the identity of the people of God and its mission in the world. What I share here is a testimony of some personal challenges that I have faced liv-

ing in a very ethnocentric region of my own country where I am considered a foreigner just because of my accent (and the whole culture behind it). What I have discovered is that I am no less ethnocentric! In the words of D. Smith, 'I came to realise how deeply my faith was conditioned by culture and how little I really understood the strange world of the Bible.'⁸ Ethnocentrism can be one of the greatest obstacles to Christian mission, even in situations where the classic concept of tribe or 'urban tribes' do not apply. Smith suggests that 'if the church is to obey Christ in relevant and faithful witness' in today's context, we need mental, structural and theological changes.⁹ This article is an attempt to address some of those mental and theological issues.

Ethnocentrism, when mixed with pride, is one of the most difficult sins to overcome. But just the awareness of its presence in us gives us a new perspective on what it means to be the people of God and what we are here for:

... mission involves the discovery that our faith and theology have been conditioned by culture to a far greater extent than we had ever realised. Cultural conditioning is not something that happens only to other people, we too carry cultural

5 George Fredrickson, 'Social Origins of American Racism', in *Racism*, ed. Martin Bulmer and John Solomos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 75.

6 Some studies from the first half of the twentieth century claim that Christians in some parts of the world tend to be more ethnocentric than atheists! See, for example, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, 'Atheists: A Psychological Profile', in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 303-04.

7 Edward Said has shown the important role that ethnocentrism has played in the East-West international relationships. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1979). But we should not forget that there is also 'Occidentalism'. See also Kaushik Bagchi, 'Ethnocentrism', in *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History*, ed. William H. McNeill (Great Barrington, Massachusetts, U.S.A.: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2005).

8 See David Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2003), xii. For the sake of simplicity, we will use 'culture' and 'ethnicity' as synonyms in this article. It could be said that ethnocentrism is the elevation of one's ethnic and cultural identity above that of others. For more detailed definitions, see Manickam, 'Race, Racism and Ethnicity'.

9 Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 11.

baggage which needs to be declared 'excess' and left behind when we seek to share Christ with others.¹⁰

This article is divided into two sections. In the first part we will deal with stories from the Old Testament where we see how the promise given to Abraham comes true: people are both saved and judged by faith, not by ethnicity. The second part has two examples from the New Testament where ethnicity is clearly relativized.

I The People of God in the Old Testament

Many times we assume that the promise given to Abram begins to be fulfilled only when Jesus came and when Paul said that there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28). But there is a long tradition in the Old Testament where the promise is fulfilled. This tradition helps us see the grace of God in the Old Testament and it is essential for our reading of the Bible as a whole.

1.1 The Exodus

We begin with the constitutive event of Israel as a people: the exodus. The biblical author finds no problem in telling us that there was a significant number of non-Hebrews who left Egypt along with the Hebrews, 'A mixed crowd also went up with them' (Ex. 12:38). Why is this bit of information there? The way this is expressed in Exodus is theologically suggestive. The Hebrew word used here is defined as 'mixed people or race'. So from the very beginning of

Israel's history as a nation, salvation was possible not just for Israel, but for all sorts of people. So if there ever was a 'peasant revolt' it happened in Egypt and it was very inclusive.

The problem of 'mingling with the nations' is neither in the mingling nor in the nations *per se*, but in 'doing as they do' (Ps. 106:35). The same Hebrew root used in Exodus 12:38 is also used in this Psalm and in Ezra 9:2. The doing is clear in the Psalm, but not as much in Ezra.

It may be that in Ezra we see the beginning of a distorted idea of purity. Or maybe something else. We should not forget that one of the big problems after the return of the exiles was Jews oppressing Jews (Neh.5).¹¹ This shows that it is possible to do as the nations do without mingling with them; which brings us back to the spirit of the law. What gives identity and permanence to the people of God is faith and obedience to the word of God (*cf.* 1 Sam. 12:24).

1.2 Rahab and Achan

The book of Joshua is not an easy one to read these days. The way out of this is not to fix the text or the theology of those who wrote it. We do need to consider, however, that the book is neither as nationalistic as some critics have thought nor as triumphalistic as some Christians think it is.¹²

¹¹ Another bad example in the Bible is king Solomon, who is blamed for marrying foreign women; not because they were many or were foreign, but because he inclined his heart to follow their gods (1 Kgs. 11:1-13).

¹² For a fresh reading of Joshua, see K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Ancient Conquest Accounts* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1990).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

Two personal and elaborate stories in this book deal with the issue of inclusion and exclusion. Rahab is the Canaanite prostitute who becomes part of Israel, along with her relatives, because she understood what God was doing at that point in history with Israel. She became Israel (Josh 2; 6:22-27). Achan, on the contrary, was an Israelite who did not understand what God was doing with Israel, by taking from Jericho souvenirs he was not supposed to take (Josh. 7). He was punished. The Canaanite woman enters the hall of faith while Achan joins the hall of shame. In both cases the only criterion is a combination of what they believed and what they did. Another example in Joshua is the Gibeonites, where a whole people group becomes part of Israel, tricks and all (Jos. 9).

In Acts we find parallels to the stories of Rahab and Achan. Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5) are the Achans, while Cornelius (Acts 10) and many others are the Rahabs of the New Testament. The latter are those who manifest right speech about God and right action in God's name, as Vanhoozer defines theology.¹³ In all these cases we find 'insiders' caught up in greed and 'outsiders' as models of piety.

1.3 Do you have an accent?

It is hard to imagine that accent played any role in Israel's history as a way of differentiating between tribes. Such is the cruel case in Judges 12: the pro-

nunciation of one Hebrew consonant became at one point a matter of life and death. When the Israelites seemed to have lost track of who they were as a people,¹⁴ the way to establish identity was, as it sadly is today, accent. Due to some confusing circumstances, the Gileadites went to war against the Ephraimites. Many Ephraimites died at the hands of the Gileadites. Apparently they were not able to distinguish one another by their height, colour or clothing but only by their accent. Ephraimites pronounced the word for ear of grain as 'Sibolet', while the Gileadites said 'Shibolet', apparently the 'right way'.¹⁵

The reason for including this story here is that it is a bad example. Even the people of God can forget what it is that makes them a people and reduce their identity to the most insignificant of all elements, accent, as if there were people without one.

1.4 Ruth

Ruth was from Moab. Moab was one of Israel's enemies for most of Israel's Old Testament history. Feelings of hatred were mutual. Moab oppressed Israel for some time at the hands of Eglon (Judg. 3). Mesa was the Moabite king who refused to keep paying tribute to Israel; Israel attacked with a

¹³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 165.

¹⁴ Some have argued that they did not know who they were just yet.

¹⁵ S. Niditch holds that besides showing differences in accent or dialects within Israel at this time, this case testifies to 'Israelite awareness concerning the "mixed multitude" that constituted the people'. See Susan Niditch, *Judges* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 138.

coalition of two more kings (Judah and Edom) but were not able to subdue him (2 Kings 3). Later Mesa celebrates his liberation from Israel by his god Chemosh.

The history of these bad relationships is found in Numbers, chapters 22-25 and 31. Here Moab does two things that seem to justify Israel's hard feelings towards them: Balak hires a seer (Balaam) to curse Israel; later on some Moabite women lead the Israelites to idolatry, an issue where Balaam seems to have been involved. So Moab is a different ethnic group and it is also Israel's enemy.

But this is the Moab Ruth came from! Not only did she become Israel, but also king David's grandmother. Why? Simply because this woman showed her mother-in-law a godly and 'biblical' love and adopted her mother-in-law's faith and fate (Ruth 1:16-18). Her ethnicity was a non-issue.¹⁶

1.5 Naaman and Gehazi

Naaman is the Aramean general (2 Kings 5) remembered by Jesus (Lk. 4:27) as the leper healed by Elisha at a time when there were many lepers in Israel (2 Kings 7). This enemy of Israel, by the way, won many battles against Israel because Yahweh, the God of Israel, gave them victory over Israel. Very shocking indeed, but that is what the Bible says. Naaman initially feels offended by Elisha's lack of deference and by the prescription to be healed of his leprosy, but in the end,

thanks to his aides, Naaman bathes himself in the Jordan River and is healed of his leprosy. Then he wants to compensate Elisha for the miracle, but the prophet rejects the gifts.

In the same story, Gehazi, Elisha's helper, is the delinquent. The story is parallel to that of Rahab and Achan. In this case, leprosy being the problem, 'Naaman the outsider is delivered from it; Gehazi the insider is delivered to it'.¹⁷ There is another ironic contrast in the story. Gehazi states, 'As Yahweh lives, I will run after him and I will take something from him' (v.20). Moore has said it eloquently, 'There is tragic irony in this oath statement, for Gehazi will get Naaman's leprosy! It is as if Gehazi has unwittingly cursed himself. Thus the ultimate fate of Gehazi is anticipated unwittingly by an opening speech, just as was the fate of Naaman in the previous sequence.'¹⁸

Gehazi is presented here as a pragmatic man. He cannot accept Elisha's decision to reject Naaman's gift and runs after the Aramean general before it is too late.¹⁹ Gehazi makes up a story and is able to extract three pairs of things from Naaman, who, quite willingly, gives them to him: two talents of silver, two sets of clothes, and two servants to carry them (v. 23). Once every-

¹⁷ Terence Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 152.

¹⁸ Rick Dale Moore, *God Saves: Lessons from the Elisha Stories* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1990), 81.

¹⁹ Gehazi's greeting to Naaman, and the Shunammite's greeting to Gehazi reflect how the word 'shalom' was used in conversation as a mere greeting without further meaning.

¹⁶ There is no suggestion in the book of Ruth that Elimelek and his family are blamed for going to Moab to look for food.

thing is hidden and Naaman's servants dismissed, Gehazi goes back to Elisha.

In comparison with Naaman who takes a couple of detours to get to the knowledge of Yahweh, Gehazi's actions show how quickly and directly a person deviates from the path of righteousness. Here we find another contrast that Cohn has observed, 'A subliminal contrast: "For while Naaman would support his lord with his 'hand' in the 'house' of Rimmon, Gehazi has taken from others' hands and uses his house to betray his lord."²⁰

Scholars debate what kind of wrong Gehazi has done. For T. Fretheim his sin is more than greed or deception:²¹ 'Gehazi's sin is, finally, a *theological* sin, for it endangers the very nature of faith and obscures the gracious work of God. The effect of the judgment is that Gehazi is returned to the pre-healing situation of Naaman, and he now stands in need of a Naaman-like journey.... The insider has experienced God's judgment; the outsider has received salvation. The outsider has become an insider and the insider an outsider. The boundary lines of the community of faith are less clear than the insiders often suggest.'²²

In brief, Naaman's journey of faith is evident in the form of the text. Alonso Schökel has observed that the story

uses the Hebrew root for leper/leprosy seven times. It is used by the narrator, the Israelite girl, the Aramean king, the Israelite king, Naaman, Elisha, and the narrator (2 Kgs. 5:1, 3, 6, 7, 11, 27 [2x]). As Alonso Schökel has put it, Naaman, a magnate, has to go down from the king to the prophet, to a servant, and later to the Jordan River.²³ As a character, Naaman 'develops from arrogance to humility'. This 'circle' is accomplished with the 'little girl' of verse 2 and the 'little child' of verse 14 and with the leprosy of verse 1 and the other leprosy of verse 27.²⁴

This is a story that exemplifies narrative art as form that is put at the service of meaning. The story is theologically powerful because of its artistry. Cohn points out what the story teaches because of its form, 'The power of Israelite prophets (v. 8); the universal reign of Yahweh (v. 15); the denigration of magic (v. 11); the condemnation of theft (vv. 11, 20). At the same time, the narrative explicitly approves of the "conversion" of Gentiles (v. 19) and implicitly assumes the holiness of the land of Israel' (v. 17).²⁵ The only thing missing in Cohn's list of lessons is the role of the little girl and of Naaman's servants as the ones who make the story possible.²⁶ But Ngan has picked it

²³ Alonso Schökel, *Reyes*, 184.

²⁴ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 181.

²⁵ Cohn, 'Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch', 183-84.

²⁶ Nelson argues that the theme of 'universalism' is introduced in v. 1 with Yahweh as the one who gives victory to Naaman and is later confirmed with his conversion. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 177. I. W. Provan adds

²⁰ Robert L. Cohn, 'Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 182.

²¹ This has been argued by many. See, for example, Luis Alonso Schökel, *Iglesias González, Manuel, Reyes*, Los Libros Sagrados (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1973), 188.

²² Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, 155.

up: 'If power is the ability to effect change, whether for good or for evil, the servants in this story demonstrate through their effectiveness that they too have power.'²⁷

Conclusion

All these stories are the chosen samples in the history of Israel that communicate how the promise given to Abraham came true long before Christ came. With Christ, of course, the promise is democratized. What all these examples tell us is that Gentiles do not become part of the people of God for the first time when Christ comes. Gentiles have been part of the people of God all along on the same grounds that Abraham was justified, by faith.

Ethnicity does count in the Old Testament. As Goldingay has said, the faith of Israel in the Old Testament is ethnic. Ethnicity, however, does not make Israel better or worse. God chose a family, the Hebrews who later became the nation of Israel. There are valid reasons for it. Choosing a family brings stability to the relationship: 'If God's election depended on human response of faith, people could escape or resign from that election. But through the choosing of a certain peo-

ple, God's name is bound to the world in a way that cannot easily be dissolved.'²⁸

But this is, as Goldingay says, an open family, a family that welcomed Jethro the Midianite, the 'mixed crowd', Rahab, Naaman, Ruth, Uriah the Hittite. Some of these stories show that when a choice has to be made between ethnicity and faith in Yahweh, faith wins the day. Even ethnic Israelites must 'confess that Yahweh is God, as Christians will later confess that Jesus is Lord' (Gen. 12:1; 17,14; Deut. 26:16-19; Josh. 24; Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:7-14).²⁹ The fact that some prominent cases have been chosen to be part of Israel's history may be an indication that there were many more.

What we see in these stories is that Old Testament authors at some key points in Israel's history included episodes that trivialize economic, geographic and ethnic boundaries as the way by which the great promise of God for humanity comes true. There is a sense in which from an Old Testament perspective, knowledge of Yahweh is available to all peoples.

II The People of God in the New Testament

I, of course, cannot compete here (or anywhere!) with N. T. Wright's book on this issue.³⁰ My intention in this section is simply to single out some stories in

that 2 Kgs. 5 is 'yet another narrative that picks up themes from the Elijah story; the LORD is seen to be God, not only of Israelites, but also of foreigners (1 Kgs. 17:17-24) and is acknowledged as the only real God (1 Kgs. 18:20-40).' Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995; reprint, 1999, 2001), 191.

²⁷ Lai Ling Elizabeth Ngan, '2 Kings 5', *Review and Expositor* 94 (1997): 591.

²⁸ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, Illinois, EEUUA: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 176-77.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁰ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, *Christian Origins and the Question of God V.1* (London: SPCK, 1992).

the New Testament that help us see this struggle of inclusion-exclusion within the people of God that Christians today need to pay attention to.

What we see in the Old Testament should not come as a surprise in the New Testament since this is the time when the promise given to Abraham to bless all nations comes true in a more general fashion. But several stories in the New Testament show that the promise has many obstacles to its fulfillment. One of them is again ethnocentrism. It could be argued that the stories selected in both Testaments are there for the same reason: ethnocentrism. We will look at two examples from the New Testament: Jesus' genealogy and the story of the Syrophenician woman. The second story we will develop in more detail.

2.1 A theological genealogy

We have a tendency to pride ourselves on our ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This is something that has value in and of itself and it helps us measure ourselves against other people. But it is really shocking to see the people Matthew selected for Jesus' genealogy. It is rather appalling. Those who speak of Jesus as a 'full-breed Jew' when he talks to the Samaritan woman (supposedly a 'half-breed') should read their Bibles again.

This genealogy is especially disturbing because here Matthew is establishing Jesus' legitimacy as the Messiah, someone from the lineage of David and Abraham.³¹ But in order to

do that, the first Evangelist includes people that some would consider not so 'legitimate'.³² There are five women in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary.³³ All of these women had some kind of 'marital irregularity',³⁴ and the first four were not of Israelite origin. Nevertheless, all of them were worthy of a place in the genealogy of the Messiah. So Jesus counted Moabites, Hittites, and Canaanites among his ancestors.

One author says that the emphasis of this genealogy is not in the women themselves but in the stories that they embody.³⁵ Maybe so, but these women are their story. No women, no story. These women, their story and the biblical theology that comes out of it tell us that the inclusion of non-Israelites within the people of God is not a novelty in the New Testament. Ethnicity, like one's past, is not a problem for God or an impediment for anyone to have a worthy place within the history of God's salvation. If God's Messiah can come from such a genealogy, he can also be the redeemer of all sorts of people, even if their past is 'questionable'.³⁶

32 A detailed explanation of this genealogy can be found in Christopher J. H. Wright, *Conociendo a Jesús a Través Del Antiguo Testamento*, trans. Daniel Menezo (Barcelona: Publicaciones Andamio, 1996).

33 There were other more 'worthy' patriarchs in Jesus' genealogy, but Matthew excluded them.

34 R. T. France, *Matthew* (Leicester, Reino Unido: InterVarsity, 1985), 74.

35 John C. Hutchison, 'Women, Gentiles, and the Messianic Mission in Matthew's Genealogy', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 152.

36 See Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 199.

31 Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville, Tenn., Estados Unidos: Brodman and Holman, 1997), 199.

This seems to be an important element in the theological agenda of the Evangelists. The reason is that ethnocentrism is very hard to overcome. We need to be reminded time and again that the foundation on which the identity of the people of God rests is not ethnic or geographic or linguistic, but theological. This is how Matthew does theology with a genealogy.

2.2 A theology of dogs and crumbs

The following is a true story of border crossing. This is a story where we see the problem of ethnocentrism very clearly. The reason we're looking at this, let's not forget, is that it is a serious human problem that jeopardizes both our theology and God's mission in the world.

Jesus throws his disciples into a very uncomfortable situation in order to bring them out of their rigid religious and cultural mould in which they have lived all of their lives. He does this because he wants to free them from this thick ethnocentric shell common to all human beings. It is important to note here, as in other Gospel stories, and contrary to what one would expect, that quite frequently Jesus' disciples are for the message of the gospel, the worst example.

In one of his few international trips, Jesus went to the region known as Syrophenicia, west of Galilee (Mt. 15:21-28). In this trip, Jesus crossed several frontiers. As they arrive, a Canaanite woman comes out shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' She has gone against some cultural rules, has used all the appropriate lan-

guage, but Jesus says nothing.

Perhaps thinking that the woman was annoying Jesus, his disciples asked him to send her away because of her shouting.³⁷ We do not know what they thought, but they want to dismiss her. There is a similar story in the Old Testament. As Hannah prayed earnestly to God for her situation, Eli, the priest thought she was drunk (1 Sam. 1:14-16). Evidently, sensitivity and discernment are not always the virtues that accompany God's representatives.

Finally, Jesus says something. But what Jesus does with his words is even more confusing than his silence, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Now, that is theological ethnocentrism at its best! In his response, Jesus seems to side with his disciples and approve of their attitude. 'Jesus is a typical Jew of his time', one might say.³⁸

This woman is perhaps the opposite of the rich young man, for whom one difficult answer was enough to turn away from Jesus (Mt. 19:16-30). She does not give up and does not leave. Not only that, she comes closer to Jesus and says the most simple and powerful words, 'Lord, help me.' But, when we expect a 'typical Jesus

³⁷ See R. V. G. Tasker, *Matthew* (Leicester, Reino Unido: InterVarsity, 1961), 150-51.

³⁸ Two examples of authors who hold that Jesus behaves like a typical Jew of his time are: Judith Gundry-Volf and Miroslav Volf, *A Spacious Heart: Essays on Identity and Belonging* (Harrisburg, EEUUA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 21. Theodore W. Jennings and Tat-Siong Benny Liew, 'Mistaken Identities but Model Faith: Rereading the Centurion, the Chap, and the Christ in Matthew 8:5-13', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 3 (2004): 478.

response' we get 'a typical first-century-Jew response': 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

To be called a 'dog' is not very nice, even if it is a 'little dog'. In most cases in the Bible dogs are associated with feelings of rejection.³⁹ In fact, in the biblical world, dogs are not pets as they are today. It is a dirty animal, a scavenger that marauds cities around garbage dumpsters; dogs are a symbol of impurity. If Jews considered Gentiles as dogs it was because they did not live according to the Torah and its laws of purity; a gentile is therefore ritually unclean.⁴⁰ Not very kind, especially coming from Jesus.

But again, the woman has an answer for that: 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' She seems to accept that Jesus was sent to the Jews, that is 'the children', but 'dogs', that is, Gentiles, also eat from the crumbs that fall from the table. She uses the same metaphor and states that Gentiles also have a part in the food, which is the kingdom of God. Israel's priority with respect to Gentiles is historical, not social or psychological. And what Gentiles participate of is not just crumbs. What will Jesus do now?

At last Jesus gives the persistent woman a favourable answer. And it is not only favourable; he praises her as he never praised any of his own disciples. In matters of faith, the disciples earned more reprimands than anything else: 'men of little faith'.⁴¹ To this Canaanite, Gentile, Greek woman Jesus says: 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.

The way the story is told shows that for Matthew the miracle itself is secondary. His main interest is in the dialogue and what happens there. There is no question that the woman's faith and persistence are praise-worthy, but one has to ask why the conversation has gone to such a humiliating extreme for this woman.

First of all, the woman has no name. She is identified by geography and culture. In some cases namelessness in literature is a form of oppression and discrimination; in this case it could be the result of a male-dominated culture.⁴² This argument is very appealing today, but does not work for at least three reasons: (1) the men in the story, except for Jesus, do not have names either; (2) the woman in the story is the good example; and (3) in the New Tes-

39 There have been found cemeteries exclusive for dogs in the Ancient Near East, but there is no certainty as to why they were buried in a specific place. Cf. Edwin Firmage, 'Zoology (Fauna),' in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

40 1 Kgs. 14:11; 16:4; 21:19, 23; Psalm 59:6; Prov. 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22; Rev. 22:15. See Leland Ryken, and Wilhoit, James, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 29.

41 It is a favourite theme of Matthew. Out of the six cases of 'little faith', five are in Matthew and one in Luke (Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Lk. 12:28); not counting those where their lack of faith is not mentioned but evident.

42 See, for example, Janis Jaynes Granowski, 'Polemics and Praise: The Deuteronomistic Use of the Female Characters of the Elijah-Elisha Stories' (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1996).

tament there are stories of men without names (Lk. 7:9; Mt. 8:10; 9:18-26; 19:16-30), as well as stories of women with names (Mt. 28:1-10). So the argument of the narrative about the Syrophenician woman, who is never called 'disciple', is that she is more of a disciple than the disciples themselves.⁴³

Perhaps a better explanation for the woman's namelessness in this case is that the biblical author does not want to turn the woman into an inaccessible hero. As it is, it is easy for the reader to identify himself or herself with the character⁴⁴ and feel that he or she can be that character. This should work both with the woman's good example and with the disciples' bad example.

Secondly, there still remains the question of why Jesus did not heal the woman's daughter immediately at her first request. We might say that he wanted to test the woman's faith, as he did in other situations with the disciples. But still we need to ask why the whole exchange was so humiliating for the woman. This is a complex issue for which there is no easy answer. Let us explore some possibilities.

Some authors have suggested that Jesus needed the woman's insistence

in order to change his opinion about gentiles. This implies that Jesus up until this day was a typical first-century Jew and thought just like his disciples did.⁴⁵ In other words, this was the moment in his earthly ministry when Jesus realized that Gentiles also had access to God's salvation. But, what sense could this make in a Gospel where Jesus is God who has become man? He has already crossed so many other borders, he talks to prostitutes, Publicans, Samaritans and all kinds of people. And he even sets these people as examples of faith.

There may be a better alternative to this rather uncomfortable dialogue. It is more likely that Jesus crossed the Galilean border⁴⁶ to teach his disciples a fundamental lesson: the mission of God does not see geographic or ethnic borders like we do just as his justice does not 'see faces' nor 'fear certain faces' (Dt. 1:17). Jesus brings his disciples out of their comfort zone in order to give them a theological tour:⁴⁷ (1) the

⁴³ There are other positions on this issue. See W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 230-34. It must also be pointed out that even though the region is specified, there is no information about the exact location. See also P. Bonnard, *Mateo* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1976), 348.

⁴⁴ For a complete feminist version on this, see Patricia Daniel, 'Feminism', in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward, *Blackwell Companions to Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 438.

⁴⁵ This separation is also evident in Qumran. Cf. Bonnard, *Mateo*, 350. There is, however, the possibility of God's favor for those Gentiles who are friends of Israel (Cf. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Londres: SPCK, 1982), 174.). But it seems like official Judaism of the first century did not allow Gentiles to enter any of the thirteen gates leading to the temple. See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land*, 5a ed., Oxford Archaeology Guides (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88-89.

⁴⁶ Perhaps the boundaries between the disciples and this woman is not economic but only ethnic.

⁴⁷ This may have been a trip that took several weeks. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michiga, EEUUA: Eerdmans), 404-05.

previous episode in Matthew had to do with the issue of uncleanness; Jesus tells them how wrong they are in believing that ceremonial rites are what make a person clean; (2) the gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy that includes four women who would be among the 'dogs'; and (3) this gospel ends with the great commission to all the peoples of the earth.⁴⁸ So with this encounter with the Syrophenician woman, Jesus challenges his disciples' prejudices and shows what it means and what it takes to make disciples of all nations: ethnical boundaries are harder to cross than geographical ones.

But still, what do we make of Jesus' harsh words to the woman? There is no way to prove this, but some authors have suggested that Jesus' words are accompanied by a wink in his eye and a certain tone of voice. This obviously cannot be seen in writing, but it can be assumed. In other words, Jesus talks to her just as she would expect any Jew would do. But his purpose, just as in the parables, is to surprise them with an unexpected theological twist. The effect should be felt both by the disciples that day and by readers today. What he does then is to make them and us believe for a moment that he thinks like they do and like we do. As he transcends cultures and nationalities, Jesus invites his disciples to do the same,⁴⁹

'True cross-cultural mission thus widens our perspectives and involves the renunciation of all forms of ethnocentrism.'⁵⁰ Here, as in many other examples in the New Testament, the marginal (the Syrophenician woman) becomes central and the central marginal (the Jewish disciples). And as the examples multiply, we see that Christianity is polycentric.

Conclusion

What we say about the Jews here is not an accusation that renders them worse people than anybody else. Ethnocentrism is a human thing. What Stott says about culture could easily be applied to the issue of ethnicity and all that it entails, 'Being part of our upbringing and environment, it [culture] is also part of ourselves, and we find it very difficult to stand outside it and evaluate it Christianly. Yet this we must learn to do. For if Jesus Christ is to be Lord of all, our cultural heritage cannot be excluded from his lordship. And this applies to churches as well as individuals.'⁵¹ God has no favourite culture (Rev. 21:26-27). Jesus, by the way, had a recognizable Galilean accent (Mt. 26:74).

There have been periods, long periods in the history of the people of God when their behaviour does not clearly communicate what their identity and

48 Cf. Theresa Okure, 'The Global Jesus', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

49 Bonnard, *Mateo*, 351.; France, *Matthew*, 247. Morris also holds that Jesus' words alone sound harsh, but perhaps he said them with a smile (just for the woman to see?). Cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 404-05.

50 Smith, *Mission after Christendom*, 57.

51 John Stott, *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, EEUUA: Eerdmans, 1996), 40-41. The point is not to abandon one's culture or to lose appreciation of its good things.

their mission is. This may happen when the people of God are assimilated to the surrounding culture or when the people of God shelter themselves from the world around. There might even be a point when the people of God look more like a curse to the world than like a blessing.⁵²

Ethnocentrism is a consequence of our human finitude: 'We cannot stand utterly free from our culture and our place in history.'⁵³ But it is also a result of our sinfulness. It is one thing to interpret things from our cultural and historical point of view and it is quite another to conclude that others are inferior or worthless. So, since ethnocentrism is so difficult to remove completely and since we do believe in the 'first principles' of revelation, the Bible helps us with stories where we see at least three things: that the promise given to Abraham is indeed for all peo-

ples from the outset, that Jesus has a plural ethnic background, and that field trips can be very useful in developing a more relativistic view of our own culture and appreciation for that of others. Our goal is not to stop being who we are ethnically and culturally, but to understand what it means to be in Christ, to understand how our ecclesiology and soteriology are impacted by our anthropology (Gal. 3:28).

Therefore, we are called to believe in word and in deed that the kingdom of God is multiethnic and multicultural. As we cross human borders we evidence the presence of Christ in us. If culture is the podium on which we stand to judge and despise others, Christ invites us to get down, to be like him. Let us all get out of our circle, find our Syrophenician and live out the gospel. The inclusion of all people in our hearts, in our theology and in our praxis is an essential element of the gospel throughout the Bible. In terms of our mission today, we need to cross borders towards those who speak another language and towards those who speak with a 'theological' accent. The first step might be just to talk.

52 Stott, *Cristianismo básico*, p.114.

53 Kai Nielsen, 'Richard Rorty', in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Malden, Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell, 2006), 133.

Congregational Evangelism in Philippians

The Centrality of an Appeal for Gospel Proclamation to the Fabric of Philippians

Mark J. Keown

Did Paul want his congregations to pick up the ministry of evangelism or did he envisage himself and other 'specialist' proclaimers continuing the ministry of the gospel? Keown argues persuasively that Paul envisaged 'specialist proclaimers' leading the evangelistic mission and equipping 'general believers' to share the gospel.

Mark J. Keown is Lecturer in New Testament at Bible College of New Zealand.

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'Unwanted Sectarians': Spirit, Migration and Mission in an African-led Mega-Size Church in Eastern Europe

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

KEYWORDS: *Pentecostalism, African immigrant Christianity, Pastor Sunday Adelaja, Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations, Embassy of God, Ukraine, evangelism, interventionist theology*

The following article was written and accepted prior to the news that Pastor Sunday Adelaja is under investigation for fraud. Even if it transpires that Pastor Sunday is guilty in some way, we cannot judge the whole church, or the whole work of God, on the basis of failings of a single leader and so the following article (as is the case with all our articles) must be read with discernment.

THE PHYSICAL SIGNS of the Southern shift in Christianity's centre of gravity from the Northern to the Southern continents include the rise of immigrant churches in Europe and North Amer-

ica. The recession of Christian presence in the former heartlands of the faith has, since the closing decades of the 20th century, coincided with the accession of different types of churches full of African, Caribbean, Asian and Latin American immigrants in those contexts. A new book on Christianity and migration by Jehu J. Hanciles concludes that the United States, for instance, would have been moving much more rapidly toward a post-Christian status were it not for the fresh infusions of believers from the Third World, particularly Africa.¹ The evangelical and theologically versatile nature of Christianity in the non-western world means that the South to North migrations of recent times has translated into the formation of new

¹ Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

churches and Christian communities. People have moved—whatever the reasons for such movements may be—carrying their ‘ideas, beliefs and religious practices with them’.²

It is therefore not insignificant that at the turn of the 21st century the largest Christian congregations in both Western and Eastern Europe are led by African immigrants. Matthew Ashimolowo leads the 10,000 member strong, Kingsway International Christian Center in London, UK. Enoch Adeboye’s Redeemed Christian Church of God started in Nigeria but now has more than 18,000 members in Europe and Sunday Adelaja leads the Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations in Kyiv, Ukraine. It has about 25,000 members. The three churches, as with a number of immigrant and particularly African-led congregations in Europe and North America, belong to the Pentecostal/charismatic traditions. Pentecostalism and its charismatic progenies now constitute the representative face of Third World Christianity. The movement’s dynamism in worship, interventionist theologies, success in raising mega-size congregations and enthusiasm in the midst of harsh Diaspora conditions invite reflections on the role of the Holy Spirit in migration and mission in the 21st century. As Hanciles would have it, ‘the religiosity of the new immigrants potentially transforms the religious movement into missionary engagement’. And it does so by implicating western societies as sites of new religious interactions.³

Paradigm Shifts in Immigrant Christianity

The phenomenon of immigrant churches is now the subject of a number of both popular and academic studies. Several others appeared ahead of Hanciles’ *Beyond Christendom*.⁴ Most of the churches studied in these volumes have an ethnic dimension to their membership. Immigrant churches have usually attracted minority groups disenfranchised with the dry denominationalism and racial insensibilities of historic mission denominations in the host continents of Europe and North America. Thus most African churches functioning within the northern continents are not only led by Africans but are also populated by Africans. The reasons for this development are beyond the scope of this essay but suffice it to mention that whereas in most western contexts Christianity is primarily a system of doctrinal ideas, in African lives, religion constitutes systems of power through which divine interventions in everyday activities are sought and appropriated. African immigrant Christianity with its interventionist theo-

² Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 4.

³ Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 5.

⁴ Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani ed., *African Immigrant Religions in America* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2007); Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007); Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff and Klaus Hock, *Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora: The Appropriation of a Scattered Heritage* (London: Continuum, 2008); Jehu J. Hanciles, ‘Migration and Mission: The Religious Significance of the North-South Divide’, in Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross ed., *Mission in the 21st Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 118-129.

gies therefore appeals greatly to the religious worldviews and sensibilities of those who patronize it.

Embassy of God

This presentation focuses on a type of African-led church in Europe whose membership is European. It draws most of its members from the host context. Pastor Sunday Adelaja's 'Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations' or Embassy of God, as I refer to it here, started in 1994. The Soviet regime for many years pursued a vision of modernity and development built on the ideologies of Marxism and enlightened by science and 'free from superstitious belief' that 'rendered religious communities and religious practice anathema': In the words of Wanner:

Antireligious legislation chased the expression of religious sentiment and practice into private, atomized domains, where knowledge of religious practice and doctrine was often, with each passing generation, replaced by ignorance or indifference, even if the sensibility often remained. For some Soviet citizens, however, religion became a refuge, a meaningful identity and mode of living in an alternative moral universe, in defiance of the numerous risks and penalties involved.⁵

In the midst of this 'hunger and thirst' after God, following years of the deliberate persecution of evangelical religion and its followers, a single African Christian has become the instrument through whose ministry

God is turning Eastern Europe upside down. They have developed a new community of believers, who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, seek to present to the society a 'visible alternative to the hedonism and libertinism of secular society'.⁶

Pastor Sunday Adelaja came to Soviet Belarussia from Nigeria as a newly born-again Christian in 1986 to study journalism. During the period of study he also led the African Christian Students' Fellowship in the then Soviet Union and went on to found the Word of Faith Church in Belarus in 1989. He did not return to Nigeria after studies because of what he described to me as the 'unstable nature of the situation at home'.⁷ Pastor Sunday Adelaja speaks fluent Russian, and preaches mainly in that language. He started the church because, as he claims, God gave him a specific word in 1993 saying: 'I will use people from the former Soviet Union to gather the end-time harvest before the coming of my son... though I am a foreigner, God has given me the ability to go and minister beyond race, culture, and denominational barriers.'⁸ The 'Embassy of God', undertakes aggressive evangelism which has ensured that the church now has congregations all over Eastern Europe and beyond.

For our purposes, there are three main identities that are critical to the self-understanding of 'Embassy of God'. The first is the thoroughly evan-

5 Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 2.

6 Hanciles, 'Migration and Mission', 125.

7 Personal recorded interview, Kyiv, May 2004.

8 Sunday Adelaja, *Life and Death in the Power of the Tongue* (Kiev: Fares Publishing House, 2003), 25.

gelical content of its message. The second is the Pentecostal/charismatic orientation of the church which also defines its strong interventionist theology; and the third is the deliberate pursuit of a transnational agenda aimed at influencing and transforming society. Indeed from its logo to the use and display of banners in worship and the international agenda of its founder, the transnational significance of 'Embassy of God' is evident. Catherine Wanner captures succinctly the meaning of the logo as follows:

The symbol of the Embassy of God is a globe with Africa forthrightly positioned in the center. The globe is capped by a golden crown with a cross. Just below the crown is a light emanating from Ukraine, which remains otherwise unmarked. The light from Ukraine shines throughout Europe and the Middle East. Africa figures prominently, but the light and energy of the church emanate from Ukraine around the world.⁹

The name of the church was also chosen to reflect the transnational understanding of Christian mission:

The Church is the representative of God on the earth—His 'Embassy'. Therefore, we—children of God are the citizens of His Divine Kingdom and not citizens of this world! The Blessed Kingdom of God [is] a place of destruction of curses. At the head of every kingdom is a king. Our King is Jesus Christ! He is the Lord of all nations;...Jesus Christ is the Savior for everyone,

irrespective of his age, color or skin, nationality and social status.¹⁰

What are the means and strategies by which 'Embassy of God' attempts to impact Eastern Europe with the gospel and reach the world for Christ? First what 'Embassy of God' challenges or responds to, as far as Ukrainian society is concerned, is what we have referred to as the dry denominationalism of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the spiritual poverty of the society through which the devil is believed to have blinded people. The level of social deviance and dislocation is phenomenal. In an autobiographical work on both his personal life and the church, one of Pastor Sunday Adelaja's Ukrainian pastors says this of him:

This is the chosen of God; he has been planted in Ukraine to help turn around the lives of the people, the country and the history of the Ukrainian people. He is a person of destiny through whom God is saving not only some individuals but a whole nation. A country that was so oppressed, firstly by communism and then poverty and corruption, is now starting to experience freedom.¹¹

In attempting to understand the transnational appeal of 'Embassy of God' it is important not to lose sight of the religious dimension of the life of the church and its global resonances.

¹⁰ Stated in *Church of the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations: 8th Anniversary Brochure* (Kyiv, 2002), 5.

¹¹ Galina Korobka in Alyona Dobrovolskaya ed., *Olorunwa: The Roads of Life-There is God: Portrait of Sunday Adelaja* (Kyiv: Fares Publishing, 2007), 180, 181.

⁹ Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 214.

Spirit and Experience

'Embassy of God', we have noted, belongs firmly to the new Pentecostal/charismatic stream of Christianity with its emphasis on the experiences of new birth, graces of the Spirit and empowerment for ministry. Like the global Pentecostal movement, it challenges the staid, silent, and ordered forms of religion offered by such older denominations as the Eastern Orthodox Church. As forcefully argued by Wanner, all of the Orthodox Churches in Ukraine consider Orthodoxy an attribute of Ukrainian nationality. In other words, a Ukrainian is by definition Orthodox and therefore Christian. In her words: 'Orthodox identity is geographically defined and automatically inherited.'¹² In contrast to the routine processes of incorporation into membership associated with such historic denominations as the Orthodox churches, 'Embassy of God' offers an experiential religion that challenges the inherited Christian identities of the older traditions as inadequate for the Spirit-human encounter. The elements of supernatural interpretations of the enigmas of life, interventions through healing and powerful conversions as Adogame observes, 'appeal to the spiritual sensibilities of Ukrainians' and this is significant if seen against the backdrop of 'a context and people barely getting over the hangover of a Marxist-socialist *Weltanschauung*'.¹³

12 Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 136.

13 Adogame, 'Up, Up Jesus! Down, Down Satan! African Religiosity in the Former Soviet Bloc—the Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for all Nations', *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research*, vol. 37 (2008), 321.

Sunday Adelaja's 'Embassy of God' is popular because, as members testify, it offers a religious menu that satisfies the spiritual hunger, thirst and emptiness fostered by socialism on the people of Eastern Europe. The sense of release, empowerment and fulfillment that I experience among the members during my visits to 'Embassy of God' are palpable. Adogame further observes, and rightly so, that these features bordering on the supernatural in religion were not totally alien to the Eastern European context but only marginalized through years of 'secular thinking' that characterized the Soviet regime.¹⁴ In addition to his alien background, obviously worsened by his being African, it is the fact that Pastor Adelaja is responding to seemingly mundane complexities of life with religious answers that makes Ukrainian society see his religion as 'foreign'. It is thus not surprising that the Eastern Orthodox Church has become his bitterest critic and opponent.

Mission Strategies

At the root of this approach to the life of the church is how 'Pentecostals *interpret* and *preach* the Bible'. Consequently, Ogbu U. Kalu calls attention to the importance of paying attention to Pentecostal hermeneutics as 'a specific lens for reading the Bible seriously'.¹⁵ The religious discourse reaffirms that Pentecostalism is preeminently a religious movement and

14 Adogame, 'Up, Up Jesus!', 321-322.

15 Ogbu U. Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiii.

should be studied as such. The nature of its presence, self-understanding, what it says, does, and how it witnesses are important. People are attracted by its message and by its hermeneutics of trust, its certitudes and claim to stand on the word. Therefore, we should study its theology and practices.¹⁶ Pastor Sunday Adelaja's Christian story and the theological orientation of his church means the Holy Spirit obviously features prominently in the movement he leads, giving it its Pentecostal character. Paul Tillich indicts Protestantism for replacing ecstatic experiences in religion with doctrinal and moral structure.¹⁷ Even before Tillich, Rudolf Otto in his classic work, *The Idea of the Holy*, bemoaned the fact that Orthodox Christianity had not been able to keep the non-rational element in religion alive. Orthodox Christianity had failed to recognize the value of the non-rational dimensions of religion and by this failure, he said, it 'gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation'.¹⁸

My December 2007 visit was during the church's Winter Fast, the second of two that are held annually. The meetings which lasted twelve days were divided into two sessions of about six hours each. Praise and worship alone took two full hours during each six-hour session. This was followed by the word, testimonies, presentations of the various ministries of the church and then

prayer sessions. The prayer sessions were loud, emotional, aggressive and seriously and thoroughly Pentecostal with mass praying in tongues and singing in the Spirit. The focus was not simply on 'Embassy of God' but on seeking the Lord's face to break through in world mission and evangelism and help establish the kingdom of God among all peoples. On the last day, the colours of nations available were prayed over using them as points of contact for God's word to reach and touch the peoples of those countries. This is therefore a thoroughly Pentecostal movement that has set its sights on world mission and transformation. But exactly how is this being accomplished?

The Message

One of the most striking things about 'Embassy of God' is the large numbers of previously 'un-churched' persons who have responded to its evangelical message. This is a message that stresses the born-again experience, that is, acceptance of Christ as personal Saviour as the only way to become a Christian. The evangelical practice of the Altar Call in which persons convicted by the message are invited to make a public confession of sin and acceptance of Christ is standard practice. Being a Pentecostal church Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Speaking in Tongues are also integral to the spirituality of 'Embassy of God'. The presence of converted members of mafia gangs, prostitutes and drug addicts and their public testimonies are having a great effect on Ukrainian society in particular. It is impossible to meet any of the over three thousand leaders and pastors of 'Embassy of God' who has

¹⁶ Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, xiii.

¹⁷ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 117.

¹⁸ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 3.

not been an ex-prison convict. Their dramatic and profound conversion stories have brought 'Embassy of God' to a stage where government agencies bring social deviants to Pastor Sunday Adelaja to do with them what has been done to all the others.

The fundamental message that is preached by Pastor Sunday Adelaja that Jesus is the Saviour of the world has also brought about many dramatic conversions involving former members of the Orthodox Church. As a result, 'Embassy of God' is included in the numbers of new religious movements that the Orthodox Church classifies as 'unwanted sectarians' in Ukrainian society.¹⁹ Former members of a historical church with a proud past and tradition are turning their backs on an Orthodox Church that is part of the political establishment and embracing a new movement led by a theologically unsophisticated alien who is literally turning their world upside down. It is these transformations evident in the lives of former drug addicts, prostitutes, leaders of mafia gangs and converted politicians that have brought Adelaja to attention and given him international significance.

Interventionist Theology

The strategy that Pastor Sunday Adelaja has employed is to bring nonbelievers under conviction and 'to yield such impressive and rapid growth', Wanner notes, 'trades on spiritually rooted understandings of illness and cure.' The original and core membership of the church is made up of recovering addicts and their grateful family mem-

bers, who see the addict's cure and transformation as a 'miracle', testimony to 'God's grace'. In December 2007 I discovered that each of the groups of people who had received the Spirit's intervention and been transformed from all kinds of social vices has been constituted into different ministries that reach out to their own. Former alcoholics, prostitutes, the homeless and the like now have ministries that reach out to those struggling with the problems they had until God found them through Adelaja's ministry.

Natasha was an alcoholic wreck when she met Adelaja. She is now one of the most senior pastors at Embassy of God and for those who knew her in her previous life Natasha symbolizes for them a clear case of return from 'death' to 'life'. Indeed, Pastor Adelaja himself considers that he broke through in ministry as a result of the conversion experiences of his initial membership. The story is best told in his own words:

People ask me where my breakthrough in ministry started....My breakthrough came when I left the pulpit and went to the streets to look for the outcasts....when I reached out to them, doors opened wide for my ministry. Someone in our church knew of a hospital where drunkards were kept, so I began to go there and beg for the doctors to give me an hour to be with the patients. I would bring along Natasha who testified to how she was delivered from alcoholism, and then I prayed for the patients. There, my ministry began.²⁰

19 Wanner, *Communities of the Converted*, 4.

20 Adelaja, *Churchshift*, 97-98.

It is testimonies like these that brought Pastor Sunday Adelaja and his 'Embassy of God' to attention. The testimonies were powerful, they brought in the numbers and it is these numbers that have given him transnational significance as one who is charismatic and who has a credible and proven ministry.

Influencing Society in the Power of the Spirit

The socio-economic dislocations that Soviet society suffered in the wake of the collapse of communism meant that people were looking for hope in the midst of hopelessness. Thus one of the key strategies of 'Embassy of God' is to empower people through physical wealth that they might in turn influence Ukrainian society. The church encourages members to bring Christian influence into economics, real estate, banking and industry, entertainment and indeed into any other area of life in which the Spirit chooses to locate an individual. Pastor Adelaja gave them a practical example by getting actively involved in the Orange Revolution. At our December 2007 meeting, his explanation for getting involved in Ukrainian politics was simple: 'communism edged religion out of public space but democracy ensures freedom of religion and worship'. He therefore figured that getting involved in such a revolutionary movement helped to restore democracy and contributed to the great influence that he now has in the society. As Adogame notes, the involvement of local influential figures, captains of industry and

leading political figures in 'Embassy of God' 'will undoubtedly have visible political, economic and strategic implications for its continued visibility and growing institutionalization'.²¹

Conclusion

'Embassy of God' is but one example of how God is using minority groups such as single immigrants to impact Europe and North America with the gospel. This has been referred to by some as a process of the reversal of Christian mission in which the geographical origins of the early missionary enterprise have become the mission fields of the 21st century. The exploits of African led mega-size churches in the contemporary West recall for me the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, 'But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.' It was unthinkable just two decades ago that African Pentecostal Christian immigrants could be the people through whom God might restore vitality to the lives of people in the former heartlands of Christianity. However, through these minority groups, the Spirit is working by drawing attention to the viability of the gospel of Jesus Christ in former Christian contexts that have jettisoned Christian values in favour of moral relativism and secularization.

²¹ Adogame, 'Up, Up Jesus!', 319.

New Faces of the Church: An Indian Case Study

Paul Joshua Bhakiaraj

KEY WORDS: *Yesy Bhaktas, India, Hinduism, culture*

Introduction

'*Matta, Pitta, Guru, Devam,*' is an oft quoted maxim in India. It simply means, 'Mother, Father, Teacher, God,' and signifies the order of priority that many adopt in their lives. In the Indian view of life, therefore, fidelity to one's family and caste community is of paramount importance. Not only is this the foundation of life as known in the present but it also represents the route for the life hereafter.

Standing alongside that allegiance lies an equally pervasive perception that Christianity is not an Indian religion, rather it has been forced on India by westerners. Becoming a Christian therefore entails turning your back on thousands of years of religious and cultural heritage, rejecting the role your family plays in your present and future life and, not least, jettisoning the caste system on which India's social life is based.

It will be obvious to the reader that these attitudes and practices have far-reaching implications for Christian discipleship, not least membership in the church.

ing such sensitive issues of fidelity to one's community and membership in an institutional Church has been *Churchless Christianity*. Theologically speaking, of course, this is a misnomer. A disciple of Christ is by definition a member of the body of Christ, the church. However, since the phenomenon itself was rather novel, its coinage seems to have made sense.¹ The term 'Non Baptised Believer' and the term 'Yesu Bhakta' (Devotee of Jesus) are also employed to refer to this group of people. An able proponent of this form of discipleship, Swami Muktanand, avers:

To become a Christian means that one has to leave one's birth community and join another community. It also means that one has to reject one's culture (one's way of life). However it is not a necessity that to be a follower of Christ one has to become a Christian. This false teaching has come from the Europeans who saw the Hindustani life as demonic and convinced people that in order to become a follower of Christ one has to reject the Hindustani lifestyle and adopt a European lifestyle... A Hindu follower of Jesus also known as a Yesu Bhakta stays in his Hindu

Yesu Bhaktas

One distinctive approach to negotiat-

¹ Herbert Hofer, *Churchless Christianity* (Madras: GLTC&RI, 1991), p. xiv.

community practicing his Hindustani culture and giving allegiance to Christ and Him alone.²

This brief paper seeks to first describe this phenomenon and then discuss some issues it raises.

How do Yesu Bhaktas come to be attracted to Christ?

It is instructive to note that many come to learn of Christ from their neighbours and often attending a Christian school is seen as influential. This initial knowledge of Christ through personal relationships is often further strengthened when prayers to Jesus are answered and healing for sickness is received. Growth in morality and an assurance of forgiveness of sins also figure prominently in their spiritual biography. Clearly then many Yesu Bhaktas have a deep spiritual experience of Christ; theirs is not a case of syncretism, the practice of praying to all gods, considering them equal and valid paths to one ultimate goal.

Yesu Bhaktas and the Institutional Church

While on the one hand, if Yesu Bhaktas desire to have a relationship with the church, it appears to be a strained one, on the other hand it seems that many have little connection with the institutional church. One description of this phenomenon is helpful here.

The businessman does not go to Church, but reads his Bible and

prays before a picture in his home. He had studied in a Christian school and thereby learned of Jesus. He has experienced Jesus' help in response to his prayers. He listens to Christian Radio programmes. He celebrates only Pongal. (N.B. Pongal is the three-day festival in January which is primarily a social event involving the whole village community. Many village Christians also participate in the festivities though avoiding the one or two traditional home rituals).

When queried further about the nature and reasons for these practices, the businessman and his friend admitted:

They fear the reactions of relatives if they take baptism.

They want to have a Christian burial. They attend Christian public meetings but their wives do not come along.

They expect Jesus to take them to heaven and to take care of their children.

They do not feel bad about not taking baptism, nor do they feel that God is displeased because of it.

God expects of them that they lead a decent life as a follower of Jesus.

They feel they should go to church.

If they take baptism, they feel that they should leave going to the cinema, smoking and other bad habits.

They do not try to persuade their wives to join their Christian faith, as it would only cause conflict in the home and among the relations. Now they are still accepted by their caste people and family members.

The best way to reach their wives would be through Christian litera-

² <http://margdarshan.blogspot.com/2007/10/hindu-devotee-of-yeshu.html> Last accessed January 8th 2009.

ture, if there were Bible women, they could possibly speak with them, otherwise, only prayer for them is possible.

They would not be interested in joining a cottage prayer meeting even if it was nearby.

They understood Jesus as teaching us to avoid a sinful life and to do good to others.³

Men and women, young and old believers in Christ are legion, but are largely invisible to the general population.⁴ They all seem to have in common an allegiance to family and community, a deep attraction and devotion to Jesus Christ and a genuine desire to forge a mode of discipleship that will enhance personal and family spirituality but yet avoid the stigma of being considered as outcasts of their community. They seem to be attempting the impossible; holding together the complex socio-religious context they inhabit and their indisputable devotion to Jesus.

Identity that is integrally linked to family and community among other things, finds in the institutional church and all that it represents an existence that robs them of their socio-religious mooring and security, indeed an offence to their sensitivities. Instead of either submitting themselves to this existential violence or being content to remain in their old state, in their own ingenious manner Yesu Bhaktas are seeking a mode of existence that does not shake and threaten family and

community anchors but yet allows the deep yearning for the spiritually fulfilling and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ to flourish.

How do Yesu Bhaktas nourish themselves spiritually?

Most of the time, these believers in Christ relate to Christ only in their private prayers and meditations. Occasionally they venture to church but do so anonymously. For the most part however, they are on their own. More recently though, Christian radio programs and Christian TV have come as a boon to Yesu Bhaktas, who relish this unobtrusive and perhaps safe way of being fed spiritually.

What is the numerical significance of this movement?

With regard to demographic distribution of these non-baptised believers one researcher comments that, '[t]he most dedicated followers of our Lord, then among the "other sheep" are to be found among teenagers, the housewives, the high schools educated and the poor, from all caste communities.'⁵ In Chennai alone:

Statistics have shown that there is a solid twenty-five percent of the Hindu and Muslim population in Madras city which has integrated Jesus deeply into their spiritual life. Half of the population have attempted spiritual relationships

3 Herbert Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity*, pp. 5-6.

4 Also see Andrew Wingate, *The Church and Conversion: A Study of Recent Conversions to and from Christianity in the Tamil Area of South India*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), pp. 139-151.

5 Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity*, p. 110

with Jesus and had satisfying and learning experiences through it. Three fourths speak very highly of Jesus and could easily relate to Him as their personal Lord if motivated. In addition to this population we have ten percent who are 'of the fold', formally Christian. It would be fair to say that a good one-third of the Madras city population relate to Jesus fairly regularly and deeply in their spiritual life.⁶

It seems therefore that Yesu Bhaktas do not represent a few isolated and idiosyncratic cases; they seem to represent an influential movement.

Ministering to Yesu Bhaktas

Since the discovery of these Yesu Bhaktas, effort has been expended to cater to their needs in relevant ways.⁷ Assuming the title of an older movement, 'Rethinking Christianity', contemporary activists see a lot of promise in these patterns of discipleship. Seminars and practical efforts at contextual witness and contextual forms of worship are being encouraged. Some critical reflection also seems to have been initiated. Recently, a whole issue of a journal was dedicated to this movement, where a select group of leaders addressed some of these important issues. The evident 'success' of a Hin-

duised devotion to Christ has prompted them to subscribe to one basic assumption: 'I am convinced that the Christian faith will permeate India only as part of Hinduism, what I call "Christ-ized Hinduism"'⁸ For his part, H.L. Richard, another leader, echoes that sentiment when he says, 'The Rethinking agenda will never die and western Christianity will never deeply impact India.' He goes on to declare, 'One of the lessons of history...seems clearly to be that deeply Indian Christianity will not arise from the existing Churches.'⁹ It is salutary to note that this deep disappointment with the church is akin to a sentiment one notices among well-known pioneers of Indian Christianity and is perhaps reminiscent of their effort to advance contextually relevant forms of discipleship. In that sense the Rethinking group is to be encouraged, for their motive seems laudable.

However, it appears that in their eagerness for reform, some basic notions are not being sufficiently thought through and the grand alternatives being proposed seem to lack a rigour that would in actual fact help their case. First, if the vast majority of the church is painted with the same brush and thought to have had a negligible impact on the nation, the very notion of discussing alternative shapes to Christian discipleship will be superfluous since the Christian presence will be so miniscule it will perhaps attract little attention in its own right, let alone effort to rethink its shape. For

⁶ Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity*, p. 109. It must be noted however that the statistics mentioned here have not been made public and therefore this claim could be contested.

⁷ It must be said that my attention here is devoted to one vocal section of the Protestant effort alone, though there are significant movements in the Catholic Church, particularly in Hyderabad and Varanasi.

⁸ Herbert Hoefler, *Jesus, My Master: Jesu B*

⁹ H.L. Richard, 'Rethinking "Rethinking": Gospel Ferment in India among both Hindus and Christians', *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19.3 (Fall 2002), pp. 7-17, pg. 9.

good or bad, the fact that Christianity, and one has to take the whole of the church into account here, is a well known, viable and live option for many in the region is testimony to the impact that it has had on the nation. As it is often said in the popular press, though only about three percent of the nation's population, the impact Christianity has had has been significantly more than its numerical strength will have us believe. The 'ferment' that the gospel has unleashed is testimony to the power of a little yeast. It appears then rather myopic to declare on the back of that: 'The real move toward an indigenous Christian faith can never come from the Christian community. It must grow out of the "Churchless Christianity", with the help and encouragement of the church.'¹⁰ Strong language indeed; stressing that point he once again notes:

If the Rethinking goal of deeply contextual discipleship to Jesus in Hindu contexts is to be realised it will surely only be through new movements that are born in Hindu society. The way of contextual discipleship to Jesus in the Hindu world must be through the birthing of Christ centred movements within Indian cultures and communities.¹¹

The lack of appreciation for the diversity, vitality and legitimacy of the existing forms of Christianity, it seems, smacks of a less than noble approach

that affords little patience for alternate visions. Though it contributes a great deal to the discussion of contextual discipleship and perhaps even offers a possible way forward, if the zeal of this proposal, as encapsulated in the above comments, is allowed to overtake its more sober intents it may eventually end up with no different a fate from its progenitors found early in the last century. Zeal for growth is to be tempered with patience and forbearance, a virtue Christ preached and exhibited in his own life. Furthermore, if indeed these leaders have discovered a successful approach that prides itself on its contextual suitability, is it not ironic that in such a pluralistic milieu like India, it is promoted as the 'only' approach for the gospel to impact the nation?

The Way Forward

Clearly this is an important development in Indian Christianity and close attention must be paid to the phenomenon of *Yesu Bhaktas*. We cannot afford the luxury of assuming that conventional methods and patterns will alone suffice in our mission effort. Yet it would not be helpful to reinvent the wheel, as it were, as far as the church is concerned. A mature dialogue is necessary for a healthy approach that seeks the welfare of the people concerned as well as the long term theological and spiritual health of the church.¹² It is indubitable that close study and action arising from such informed perspectives is the need of the hour.

¹⁰ Richard here quotes Herbert Hofer. H.L. Richard, 'Rethinking "Rethinking"', p. 15. Emphasis mine.

¹¹ H.L. Richard, Rethinking "Rethinking", p. 16.

¹² It is encouraging to note that one scholar pursuing research in this area is Dasan Jeyaraj of OM, India.

Lessons from My Daughter

Reflections of Church and Ethics

J. Daniel Salinas

KEYWORDS: *Utilitarianism, ethics, life, death, disabilities, handicap, Church, value, Peter Singer, compassion, personhood, church mission, strategy, theology.*

ON NOVEMBER 23, 1993 we were suddenly thrown into the unknown country of people with disabilities and their families. Our daughter Karis was born with cerebral palsy. All four hemispheres of her body suffered movement damage. She depended completely on us for all tasks like eating, getting dressed, brushing her teeth, combing her hair or using the toilet. She never talked. Communication was limited to her eyes, crying and smiling. We never knew her favourite food, her dreams or feelings, her likes or dislikes. Karis never walked, nor sat up by herself. Holding her head up was impossible. She lived her life strapped to a wheel chair or some other therapy apparatus. During her seven years of life she visited more doctors and therapists than my wife and I combined.

Slowly we realized this was a huge and wide-open country. We asked ourselves, where was it before? Why had

we not seen it? Certainly there are people with disabilities around. What does society do with such people and their families? Families bear the stigma and feel embarrassed. Therefore, these people are ignored, institutionalized, or abandoned to public charity. This forced us to evaluate our ethics of life and society.

We also noticed, with horror, that influential philosophers and ethicists have proposed that these individuals are not even persons and do not have the same rights as normal people. These scholars created a 'Quality of Life' concept and applied it to people with special needs. The argument is that since the quality of life of these individuals does not reach their criteria, their life could (and even should) be terminated. This includes people of all ages; children like our daughter, elderly who cannot work, quadriplegics, fetuses with health or mental problems and so on. Further complicating matters, the ethicists redefine personhood, adding the category of 'non-human persons' (basically primates) and bestow upon them the same rights that 'human persons' have. Therefore, technically, and legally in some coun-

tries, such ‘non-human persons’ have, according to this philosophy, more right to life than our daughter had.¹

This was just the beginning of our journey in this new world for us. We thought that we would find compassion, understanding, empathy, help, rest, and a friendly hand in the church and the Christian community. Instead, we found the same utilitarian ethics as in the secular world. For most believers, including the majority of our family members, there were two options: either God heals her or takes her away. They asked, ‘What sense does it make to live like that? Isn’t it better that God takes her away instead of letting her suffer here?’ Innocent questions, but behind them we discovered the same argument secular scholars proposed. These questions also showed us the urgent need to evaluate seriously our ethics. The church, where supposedly the ethics of the Kingdom of God is proposed and practised, has bought into, consciously or unconsciously, the secular ethics of the day. The church should be the voice for the mute, eyes for the blind, hands for those who cannot produce, and feet for the lame. Rather, it seems to want to eliminate these people because they cannot contribute, or bring a monetary offering, nor can they help with numerical

growth. Some pastors even go as far as telling the parents of special needs children that they are welcome in church, but without their children.

Just think for a moment: how many congregations do you know with an intentional ministry to special-needs people and their families? How many include simultaneous translation for the deaf? How many Sunday schools include Down syndrome kids? Are people with special needs involved in the leadership of the church? We could go on and on. This reality should make us feel at least embarrassed. This shows us clearly the need for believers to consider their ethics seriously.

Such an ethical void, or ethical adaptation, became even more acute when our daughter died in January 2001. The death of a child is unnatural. It isn’t normal for parents to bury their children. As believers, death makes us cry out loud from the deepest part of our heart, ‘let your kingdom come’. Death is our enemy. But, in our case, for most of the believers who came to comfort us, our daughter’s death was the best thing that could have happened to her and to us. For those people she was better off dead. They were not that blunt, but the message was clear, she is better off now, no more suffering and pain. That was too much for us to bear. Would anyone in their right mind say that to parents who are burying their seven-year-old ‘normal child’? Yes, Karis lived with much pain and suffering, but how much better to search for ways to alleviate the pain and not celebrate death. Is not our God pro-life? Are we not supposed to promote life? So then, why did they keep telling us that it was better for our daughter to die?

¹ See, Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer, eds., *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996), Joseph Fletcher, *Humanhood: Essays in Bio-medical Ethics* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1979), Helga Kuhse, ed., *Unsanctifying Human Life: Essays on Ethics / Peter Singer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death: the Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994).

The church has let the world convince her that the criterion to define the value of life is its utility, its capacity to produce. If anyone, like our daughter for example, cannot produce, her life is meaningless, worthless. The church has adopted an ethics in which utilitarian criteria are predominant.² For utilitarian ethics the moral task today is to reach the highest happiness and the lowest pain. It does not matter if that implies induced death for a terminal patient, or abortion of fetuses with genetic or other malformations. Indeed, isn't life with limitations unhappy?

The same utilitarian ethics can also be found in the church's mission strategies and theories. Most Christian mission today is about reaching the highest numbers, in the shortest time, with the lowest costs and the best profits. Such a definition of mission leaves out the weak, the orphan and the widow, the poor and displaced, because they bring only problems and meagre offerings. This is definitely related also to a deficient theology.

We need to recover the doctrine of creation. God is the Creator of everything, and all people, including people with special needs. He is also the Sustainer of the whole universe. He is very much involved in all aspects of his creation. He did not create us to abandon us. Also as important, is the doctrine of

God's providence and sovereignty. God has always had control of the universe. In his self-revelation he presents himself as compassionate, merciful, just, holy, eternal, and loving. He is the redeemer; he takes the initiative to reach us. His mission is to restore his rebellious creation through his transformed people—the church. God created human beings as his image-bearers independently of how much they produce. However, after sin entered the world, death was manifested in all areas of human life. We see the effects of death in the oppression of the poor, in economical inequality, in kidnapping, unjust laws, political corruption and violence.

My wife and I experienced the effects of death not only when our daughter passed away, but in the uncomfortable rejection of many, including believers. Today those who grieve are to be left alone. We have forgotten the biblical text, 'Mourn with those who mourn'. As a couple and as a family, we constantly grieve the death of our dreams. Our daughter will never play sports, graduate, or get married; milestones in the process of life. Death hurt us every time someone told us, that for her, she was better off in heaven. Death was better for her. Even though our daughter could not produce, neither could she invest anything in the economy, she was a bearer of God's image and that was more than enough reason to have lived. How come the church has accepted so much utilitarianism without even thinking twice about it? I think we need to return to Jesus' model of life.

Jesus' importance goes beyond soteriology. He is God's personal revelation in human form. Jesus came to

² Utilitarianism is defined as *'the rightness or wrongness of an act or moral rule is solely a matter of the nonmoral good produced directly or indirectly in the consequences of that act or rule.'* J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 433.

show us how to accomplish God's mission. He was God incarnate, dwelling among us. He came to serve, to give his life for many. Jesus constantly departed from the orthodoxy of his time. He let children come to him. He included women among his followers. He did not care about the ceremonial contamination when touching the dead body of a widow's only son. He took time to restore the dignity of a chronically unclean ill woman who had touched him. He stopped a successful meeting to heal a paralytic who came through the ceiling. He confronted the religious leaders who wanted to kill him for doing good on the Sabbath. He promoted life, and paradoxically, it was through his death on the cross that he conquered death to give us life eternal. Jesus is the Saviour of the world and the incarnate one *par excellence*.

Therefore, what can we do to stop the assimilation of utilitarian ethics by

the church? Our praxis has to follow Jesus' model of promoting life. We need to learn and practise the Kingdom's ethics. The church must be compassionate towards those in need. It has to include the poorest of the poor, the needy, orphans, widows and those who suffer daily the results of death. The church is called to respect the dignity of human life, because we are the bearers of God's image. We are to become the advocate of those whose basic rights are denied. The church needs to say 'no' to big numbers and big investments, and return to defending and promoting life in its fullness. We are called to reject any and all systems that promote death and support wholeheartedly those that respect all human life. Let's be actively searching for people with special needs in our neighbourhoods to serve them and their families with the love of Jesus.

Faith Lacking Understanding Theology "in a Glass Darkly"

Randal Rauser

In an attempt to put mystery back at the heart of Christian theology, Randal Rauser leads the reader on a riveting and, at times, unsettling journey through the major doctrines encapsulated in the Apostles' Creed. In each case he illustrates how a theoretical understanding of the doctrine as yet eludes us. We simply do not know, for example, what it means for God to be Trinity, or how Christ can be both human and divine, or how the atonement works. However, Rauser shows that the journey of thinking theologically – which arises out of a love for, and worship of God within a communal atmosphere – is as important as the end result of achieving doctrines that approximate reality. In this way the author seeks to steer us on a middle course between the twin errors of evangelicalism (heightening the doctrine) and liberalism (heightening the process). This is a gripping, clearly written and unique introduction to honest and humble Christian theology for an emerging culture.

Randal Rauser is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Taylor Seminary, Edmonton, Canada.

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Way of Hope in Cambodia

Stephan J. Bauman

KEY WORDS: *Cambodia, Way of Hope, cell movement*

Introduction

Cambodia's approximately 12 million people have suffered decades of civil war, including genocide under the Khmer Rouge holocaust, where as many as 2 million people died. This extended period of destruction has devastated Cambodia's social, economic, and intellectual infrastructure, limiting its ability to break itself from the grip of poverty. Child mortality rates are alarmingly high: one Cambodian child in ten dies before reaching the age of five compared with one death in 85 in most developed countries. About 85% of Cambodians live in rural areas with inadequate access to education, water, credit, and medical services. More than one half of Cambodian children are malnourished. The spread of HIV/AIDS has been a more recent phenomenon but Cambodia now has the highest HIV/AIDS infection rate in all of Asia.

Cambodia is one of the least Christianized countries in the world. Only 0.7% of Cambodians are Christ-followers, about 60,000 Christians in a population of 12 million. While Buddhism

shapes the very core of the religious, social, political and cultural life of Cambodia, Cambodians are strongly influenced by animism, seeking to appease spirits and ancestors through worship and use of talismans. Cambodians are just as likely to visit a traditional faith healer as a medical practitioner in response to illness and disease.

The church in Cambodia is young and lacks experienced leadership. Although evangelical activity began in Cambodia in the 1920s, the church struggled to grow and develop. Only one Protestant denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), was allowed to work in Cambodia until the Khmer Rouge regime came to power when all religious activity was shut down. At the time of the Khmer Rouge takeover, there were only 12 evangelical Khmer pastors. Almost all of these died under the Khmer Rouge so that when Christian denominations, including the CMA, Assemblies of God, Baptists, and others, were allowed to work in Cambodia in the early 1990s, they essentially had to begin anew. All of Cambodia's current pastors and church leaders are from among those who became Christians in the 1990s.

Way of Hope

Way of Hope is a movement of six thousand Cambodian Christ followers, organized into more than 800 cell churches, reaching out to children and families in more than 162 villages in five provinces. Over 37,000 children are involved in the associated community health program, and more than 5,000 volunteers are active in raising HIV/AIDS awareness, providing education and home visiting.

World Relief,¹ the initiator and catalyst of the Hope initiative, began working in Cambodia in 1991. The Hope initiative grew out of a child health and evangelism (CHE) program launched in 1993 in tandem with World Relief's microfinance initiative, now a separate institution called *CREDIT* serving in excess of 20,000 families through loans and savings.

The aim of World Relief's child health and evangelism program, called *Hope for Cambodia's Children*, was simple: evangelism and preventative health messages aimed at children ages 5-12. As children were impacted, parents began to enquire and many adults began to follow Christ. In response, World Relief organized the adults into cells giving birth, in 1997, to the *Way of Hope* cell movement. *Way of Hope* models an 'every member in ministry' approach, where each cell member is engaged in ministry to their greater community. *Hope for Cambo-*

dia's Children became one ministry vehicle for the *Way of Hope* cells. In 2002, World Relief launched *Mobilizing for Life* (MFL), to promote behaviour that prevents HIV/AIDS transmission and support families affected by HIV/AIDS. The *Way of Hope* cell churches became a primary vehicle for reaching out to the wider community. Today, all three aspects of the Hope initiative, *Hope for Cambodia's Children*, *Way of Hope*, and *Mobilizing for Life*, work together and complement one another. The Hope initiative also partners beyond World Relief with, for example, *Christian Service International*, in training volunteers about nutrition and the benefits of the Moringa tree.

Way of Hope's cell churches generally consist of 8-15 people, multiplying to 16 or less.² *Way of Hope* is known as a 'church without walls' meeting, primarily, underneath homes built on stilts. Meetings are short in length to allow for the daily demands of village life. First level cell groups are called 'Paul Groups' (currently about 420) while subsequent groups, birthed by the Paul groups, are called 'Timothy Groups'.

World Relief 'Adult Educators' train volunteer leaders chosen by the cell members through a voting process. Discipleship-focused training, which includes theology, health, HIV/AIDS, and cell multiplication, occurs on a weekly basis at the provincial level.

¹ World Relief (www.worldrelief.org) is U.S. based nonprofit working worldwide to empower the local church to serve the most vulnerable through health, economic development, refugee assistance, and disaster response.

² Note, the Cambodian government requires registration once a group exceeds 30 people so, from the practical perspective of avoiding the bureaucracy involved, the cells have remained small.

Local institutional churches provide a venue, and some resources, for a three month, second level training for cell leaders. The volunteer leaders do not, as a norm, have a high level of education; some are illiterate. Participation, story-telling, and interactive methods are used to overcome these barriers. For some, Bible lessons through *Transworld Radio* complement the training initiatives.

The notion of 'church' in Cambodia usually connotes a building, 'a big flat or apartment to worship the Lord'. For *Way of Hope*, church is defined from the Book of Acts: 'For us, church means a group of people in the community where people can meet, can talk about God's word—not only on Sunday. So our church is that we want them to come together, five people or ten people. *Our church is a church with no walls.* For others, they have money or funds, so for us the obstacle is that other denominations have funds to build a church. For us, we only have a relationship with God to give them.'³

Still, cell members tend to view *Way of Hope* as an 'impoverished' version of church when compared to its institutional counterpart. As such, leaders regularly emphasize the Acts view of church along with its communal life and emphasis on outreach.

To complement and support the cell movement, World Relief has placed 'Community Life Mobilizers' in each province with the aim of connecting the cells to the greater community. Various committees, organized along the-

matic lines, such as 'Church Growth', 'Health Knowledge', 'Teaching Skills and Arts', 'Evaluation', and 'Counseling' have been implemented to ensure quality impact.

Since its inception, the Hope initiative has emphasized four key values: prayer and worship, local ownership, child participation, and relationships. Integrating prayer and worship into all programmatic activities has reinforced a vision of holism; local ownership has resulted in significant empowerment, well beyond World Relief; child participation has produced a leveraging, or multiplying affect, and; the emphasis on relationships has allowed the volunteers and staff to be responsive to the needs of the community.

Theological Reflection

The *Way of Hope* cell movement models at least three important characteristics for theological reflection. *First*, 'Way of Hope' *moves beyond an instrumental, or utilitarian, ecclesiology.* In para-church circles, it's common to view the church primarily as a means to an end, as a vehicle to serve the poor and oppressed. Others resist this narrow definition,⁴ saying the church itself is also the goal of mission, 'in constant need of repentance and conversion' to become all it's meant to be as the bride of Christ.⁵ The *Way of Hope* movement

³ Based on an interview with Nareth, World Relief provincial leader, in September 2007.

⁴ See for example, Harper, P. and Metzger, P.L., *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Brazos Press, 2009).

⁵ *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, from Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Maryknoll Orbis, 1991).

is both a *vehicle of mission*, in reaching out to the greater community, and an *object of mission*, for renewal, discipleship and, most importantly, worship. The cells are little communities of hope, *ecclesiolae*, fully incarnated within the pressing problems of the rural Cambodian landscape.

Importantly, the non-instrumental character of the cells allows them to define, and redefine, their outreach mandate according to emerging issues. The cells are able to outlive their initial outreach task, adapting to the changing needs of the community, primarily because their *raison d'être* transcends its current instrumental cause.

Second, 'Way of Hope' moves beyond common dichotomies. The cell movement is facilitated by a para-church organization, World Relief, in loose partnership with the Cambodian institutional church. *Way of Hope* emphasizes both 'word and deed' expressions of the gospel not merely 'alongside each other',⁶ but rather in an integrated, interdependent fashion. To be a cell member is to worship; to worship is to reach out.

Further, *Way of Hope* leadership consists primarily of female volunteers, very few of whom are formerly trained for the ministry but who are deeply engaged in the community. By moving beyond 'male/female' and

'clergy/laity' dichotomies, the cells significantly empower those closest to the needs. It allows the movement to remain incarnational, allowing Christ to dwell deeply, through a 'church without walls'.

Third, 'Way of Hope' moves beyond working 'on behalf of the poor' to allowing the poor to become their own actors of change. Too often, well intended outsiders seek to work 'for the poor'⁷ or even 'with the poor' but, in so doing, snuff out local initiative.⁸ Such posture, and corresponding models, can further entrench poverty, especially the form of poverty that results when our friends feel inferior relative to the west.⁹ Ministry 'by the poor', within their own communities, has the potential to transform from the inside out. Moreover, the likelihood for these interventions to sustain is higher because ownership is higher. *Way of Hope* allows the poor, those marginalized and on the periphery, to become actors in solving their own community problems. This represents empowerment in its truest form.

⁷ Often characterized as becoming 'a voice for the poor'.

⁸ In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Books, 1990), Paulo Friere refers to this as 'conscientization', that is, when the poor move from being mere objects in the process of change to actually becoming subjects, or change agents.

⁹ Bryant Myers, and others, tackle this subject by identifying 'poverty of being' and 'poverty of vocation' as the deepest and worst forms of poverty. See *Walking with the Poor* (New York: Maryknoll Orbis, 1999).

⁶ Quoted from the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission, developed at the Micah Network consultation on Integral Mission held in Oxford during September 2001.

A Neopentecostal Experience of Aimara people

Marcelo Vargas

KEYWORDS: *Neopentecostal, Aimara, indigenous communities*

I Background to the case study

The ideology used to design Bolivian State institutions to date is just another example that reveals the system of ethnic discrimination that makes Bolivia what it is today. The present indigenist government is making huge efforts to change this deeply rooted, unjust reality, but it is proving to be a long, difficult road. Daily life and lifestyles throughout the country show how most people are still victims of segregation because of their indigenous appearance and socio-cultural patterns. Production, education and health structures have forced them to leave their homelands because of poor state policies that fail to reach rural areas. These structures have marginalised indigenous groups because of their identity, relegated their indigenous languages, and rejected their traditional forms of practising medicine. The same is true of their vernacular justice system and forms of transmitting indigenous identity to new generations. Bolivia is quite different from neighbouring countries, like Brazil and Chile, where the indigenous population is the minority, or even Peru and

Ecuador, which have a higher percentage of indigenous population, but still not the demographic index found in Bolivia which has a high percentage of indigenous people both in rural and urban areas.

The religious ideas and practices of the native indigenous peoples of Bolivia, which were both well-defined and deeply-rooted, remained beneath a veneer of Roman Catholicism, which was alien to their existence and forced upon them by the Spanish in the 16th century.¹ From its earliest days, Protestant evangelical Christianity,² brought to Bolivia by European and North American missionaries more than hundred years ago, has also maintained a relationship with Bolivian culture in which there has been mutual influence. This exchange has become more dynamic and diversified, as evangelicals have increased in numbers and influence.

The capital La Paz is the most cul-

1 José Carlos Mariategui, *Siete Ensayos de Interpretación de la Realidad Peruana* (Lima: Amauta, 1976), 172-173; Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: the evolution of a multi-ethnic society* (New York: Oxford University Press Blackwell, 1992), viii.

2 'Evangelical' is a word that in Bolivia identifies what in other places is known as Protestant. In most Latin American studies these two words are interchangeable.

turally indigenous Latin American capital. Of the Andean nations, Bolivia preserves the most indigenous identity inherited from the two most influential pre-colonial cultures of the region: Aimara and Quechua. Herbert S. Klein says: 'It is also the most Indian in the American republics: as late as the census of 1976 only a minority of the population were monolingual speakers of Spanish.'³ These cultures remain despite a systematic opposition to their existence from the colonizing Spaniards and the Creoles of the Republican era. The invaders used the sword and the cross as their weapons to subdue the people and with them they pursued and fought the natives. However, even if their intention had been peaceful and respectful—which was obviously not the case—they brought an exogenous, cultural system from foreign lands. This system represented very different political, economic, religious and social realities that could not substitute the strong Aimaran identity and related lifestyles.

In addition to all this background, the Aimaras have been affected by new and numerous impacts during the last century. They have been moulded by political, social, economic and religious influences and changes. Modernity and globalization have hit them with all their force via education, democracy, legislation, trade unions, and non-Catholic religious groups. The proliferation of new forms of Christianity has brought new sources of tension and profound changes. Evangelical or Protestant denominations have made inroads into Aimara indigenous com-

munities, none with more success than the Neopentecostals, although these, just like previous invasions, have failed to erase the fundamental components of their ethnic identity.

At first sight, Neopentecostals are blazing a trail for indigenous women to play leadership roles within a context of gender equity. They are also using their own language for services and adopting symbols and rituals that come from their own indigenous identity rather than Protestant tradition. Whether it is recognised or not, the Aimara identity proposes new ways of living and representing the Christian faith. It is, therefore, important to learn to read and interpret these languages. The urgent task is to listen to what people are feeling and understanding about their decision to join a Neopentecostal congregation and to share with people who possibly have very little theoretical or theological knowledge what they think and believe, even when this does not coincide with the official position of the church that represents their new-found faith.

It is the purpose of this analysis to concentrate our attention on the identity and mission of Neopentecostals from the city of La Paz, Bolivia's administrative capital, where the Aimaras are the largest, dominant ethnic group, particularly those who belong to the 'Power of God' Church.

II The distinctive nature of Aimara culture

This section will take different aspects of the Aimara, including their worldview, indigenous spirituality, lan-

3 Klein, *Bolivia*, vii.

guage, multi-ethnic sense, three-dimensional logic, and integral epistemology as the basis for the analysis of Neopentecostals.

1. Worldview, spirituality

What makes the Aimara culture distinctive? What do the Aimaras think about themselves and about the world? How do they perceive who they are and the world around? How do they conceive the spiritual and material worlds? The great obstacle when trying to respond to these questions is that our effort to understand these issues tends to be monocultural. In other words, we try to mould our understanding based on a modern western paradigm. Our mind tends to conceive life divided into separate, independent compartments. We automatically dichotomize and by doing so impoverish the reality. The mind of the native Aimara conceives life in a way that is different from and, often, contradictory to the westernized mindset. Life and the world for them are an integrated whole that is fundamentally spiritual and in harmony with the cosmos.

How do the Aimara understand their world and how do they fit into it? With the arrival of Christian spirituality and morality, a foreign worldview was incorporated into the Aimara metaphysical outlines. It was an adaptation that both left their own continuities alive and strengthened them. However, inevitably, changes and modifications occurred which, in turn, became apparent in their own discontinuities. For example, the western world view makes a clear moral distinction between heaven and earth,

while, for the Aimara, even today, the '*alajjpacha*' (heaven) and the '*manqhapacha*' (hell) have mixed elements of wickedness and kindness. Not all the bad is in the '*manqhapacha*' not all the pure is in the '*alajjpacha*'. Although there are forces that work for wrong, these same forces can work for good and this is part of the framework of the belief and morality of the ancient Aimara.⁴

2. Social life: Multicultural and intercultural

The interrelationships found in each event and in the Aimara personality are a vital foundation for their identity and this aspect is utterly contrary to the individualism prevailing in globalized societies, where relationships and events have a marked anthropocentric character. In the Aimara conscience, however, the human being is not the centre. Man and woman are not taken into account in an isolated or individualized form. Nature and the cosmos coexist, they feed each other, they protect and mutually respect each other. Community life is where needs, preferences and a sense of life are generated. The human being is placed in the physical and spiritual atmosphere surrounding, to form one indivisible, integral whole. It is impossible to live without the diverse fabric and multifaceted nature of interdependent cosmic relationships.

However, not everything is perfect

4 O. Harris & T. Bouysse-Cassagne, 'Pacha: en torno al pensamiento aymara' in Xavier Albo, *Raíces de America: El mundo Aymara* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial & UNESCO, 1988), 246.

in the Aimara *ayllu* (the community life as an ancestral base of coexistence). Community life, be it in the rural areas or urban context, combines values that are highly human and integrating with anti-values of domination, perversion and discrimination. The historic context of marginalisation, poverty and suffering influences many aspects of Aimara life. Their creativity is expressed with a sense of originality; their sense of festiveness in the imaginary of celebration; interdependence in reciprocity and complementarity. However, there are also shadows of fatalism, where fate is stained with pessimism; accommodation to the belief that natural and supernatural forces are pigheaded and unavoidable. Frivolity, cheating and vengeance are seen as acceptable forms of behaviour and despair is commonplace because life is seen only in terms of the present, with few positive roots in the past or indications of a better future.⁵

3. Language

The Aimara culture is a spoken relational culture. Its channels, its sources are not written documents produced by isolated individuals. There are no enlightened individuals who apply a discursive rationality. The Aimara do not determine tradition by conceptualizing or idealizing their utopias in written texts. The Aimaras' main 'text' is a colourful fabric of live 'perceptions' in minds and hearts. It is a treasure of accumulated community wisdom shared by means of an oral ancestral

tradition that manifests itself in beliefs, customs and forms of life. Rather than being textual, Aimara communication has been and still is a living experience. Language, as a result, is central. The Aimara language gives its speakers an abundance of linguistic resources. It is enough to know some of the grammatical system to have a clear idea of the wealth and complexity of this language. The extensive demarcation of the sources of information, the affirmation of humanity and its differentiation from the non-human by means of language, and the dynamic interaction between language, culture and the perception of the world are also aspects of the Aimara language. Neither the Aimara culture nor the language is sexist as are the Spanish and English languages. When the Aimara speaks about human beings, they do not exclude half the human race by referring to someone only in masculine terms.⁶ The language gives the Aimara woman an equal social level in a way that could serve as a model for the contemporary world, with its glaring inequities in terms of gender and justice.

4. Three-dimensional logic

Implicit within the cultural Aimara language is a trivalent logic.⁷ The logic of its beliefs, for example, is not bipolar.

5 Juan J. Tancara, *Teologiapentecostal: propuestas de comunidades pentecostales de la ciudad del Alto* (La Paz: ISEAT, 2005) 5.

6 M.J. Hardman, 'Jaqi aru: la lengua humana' in Albo, *Raíces*, 155-216.

7 Blithz Lozada Pereira, *Identidad y vision del mundo Aymara'II Seminario Internacional del Pensamiento Andino Cuenca* (UNESCO, 2005) 10.

In other words, it is not conclusive or absolutist on one hand, or static and individualistic on the other. It does not have the binary logic of belief or non-belief, of the legitimization of a unique, exclusive, closed system of beliefs. This trivalent logic implies the compassionate submission to its imaginary religious community and its syncretistic practices, but at the same time, the construction of elements that modifies the established 'pantheon'.

The Aimara worldview starts, in the same way as the Vedic tradition of India,⁸ in the non-duality of reality. Reality is not conceived in dimensions that are in conflict or opposed to each other—good and bad, sacred and profane; masculine and feminine, visible and invisible, true and false. Neither one nor the other can exist without the possibility of there being a third alternative. God exists and so does the Devil; human beings and Nature; spirit and body. In the Aimara concept of cosmos, there is room for a third alternative of equal importance. The parts do not counterattack each other; on the contrary, they are complementary, inclusive. This three-dimensional—and sometimes more—Aimara logic is sustained by the relational cosmic system mentioned earlier with its principles of reciprocity and solidarity.

Is the Neopentecostal experience at Power of God Church specifically and

profoundly Aimara? Is its vital identity moulded by the singularity of this culture? Do their principles, values, sacred holism, their cosmic interrelationship, orality and linguistic inclusivism, their three-dimensional logic and thirst for the unknown, place them outside inadequate overseas moulds?

III Conclusion

The indigenous worldview, so essentially different from the globalized one, exercises a powerful influence in Bolivian society and defines the religious and social behaviour of the majority. The advance of Neopentecostalism is taking place specifically in the Aimara cultural context in the city of La Paz, without completely eliminating or replacing indigenous religiosity.⁹ The indigenous Aimara identity still builds values, behaviour and spirituality in Bolivia. All evangelicals, and Neopentecostals in particular, are strongly influenced by this indigenous worldview.

There is a lack of wholeness in the church witness and mission in relation to cases like the Aimara people. Instead of establishing the kingdom of God in each culture with the purpose of home-grown wholeness and redemption, the most common experience has been prejudice in imported forms, contents and spirit.

8 Josef Estermann, *La filosofía andina como alteralidad que interpela: una crítica intercultural del androcentrismo y etnocentrismo occidental* (La Paz: ISEAT, 2004), 6.

9 Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press & Orbis Books, 1995), 215.