

CHILDREN IN CRISIS

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INTRODUCTION

As you look at the group of orphans, your heart is touched because there is such an expression of hopelessness on their faces. The AIDS tidal wave is sweeping across Africa's children. In the corner, there is a young mother named Veronica and her newborn daughter. Veronica's baby looks calm and alert, loose curls framing her face. Her long fingers curl under her chin, tucked into a soft, fringed blanket. But beyond the blanket, the baby's world looks much less secure. Her mother's dejected hands barely keep her from sliding off her blue cotton lap.

According to a report, the baby was conceived when Veronica was raped, and infected with HIV, in an AIDS cleansing ritual in western Kenya. Veronica's baby, yet unnamed, will be affected by AIDS her entire life.

A few miles away in the capital, Nairobi, a policeman is searching the streets for some of the kids who have been stealing in order to live. In Nairobi alone, there are 70,000 street children, many of them surviving by theft. As the policeman enters into a public toilet, he finds a little baby boy still in the placenta. He couldn't have been born but a few hours earlier. Knowing of the New Life AIDS Baby Home in Nairobi, he takes the baby to the home, hoping that somehow the people who cared for AIDS babies there will clean the child and give him at least a decent burial.

Newspapers are highlighting what seems to be a running rampant problem in Southeast Asia. What would be considered child molestation and rape in the U.S., it is just a lucrative and thriving business in Asia, particularly Cambodia. Rising economic development and a fear of AIDS have contributed to the success of this "business" and driving its customers to younger and younger children who are considered to be disease-free. In September last year, the National Public Radio reported that approximately 40 percent of all the prostitutes in Cambodia are children. Even items on the Internet advertise that in Cambodia, "a 6-year-old is available for US\$3." And just across the border in Thailand, there are tens of thousands of child prostitutes. According to one U.S. professor, some 800,000 children are prostitutes in Thailand—including 200,000 below the age of 12. About 90 percent of the kids who quit school end up in the sex trade.

In what was commonly known as Manchuria, China, in the city of Yanji, there is a young girl whose name is Shuyen. She is North Korean and because of the lack of food and the threat on her life of being exploited by others much stronger than her, she crossed the frozen river into China. Both of her parents had died, victims of the famine that had struck the nation for the last four years.

Without family, she joined a group of wandering children that survived in the mountains by picking edible weeds from the ground and eating certain kinds of tree bark. It didn't taste good but it did, at least, take the gnawing away in her stomach.

When Shuyen crossed the Yalu River into China, she became part of 100,000 children who began to roam the streets of the cities along the border in order to survive. Hiding at night in culverts and trying to eke out a living by going through garbage and begging food from kind Chinese, she has no hope for a better future. Now, Chinese policemen are going through the cities, hunting for children and forcing them back into North Korea where they are beaten and molested by the soldiers. There is no hope for Shuyen.

As we start the 21st Century, the challenge of "children at risk" is great. Today, it is estimated that 1.3 billion children live in inhumane situations of poverty, war, child labor, prostitution and other problems. In the next 25 years, approximately five billion children will be born, around 95 percent of them in the less developed world and millions of them as "children at risk". Evangelical organizations and churches are making a difference but there is still much that needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of ministries to reach these children who are living at the edge of life. At the "Children at Risk" Conference in 1999, it was suggested that there are somewhere around 20,000 Christian projects reaching two million children in full-time care and tens of million children in partial care. These are operated by no less than 100,000 full-time Christian workers supported by more than a thousand mission and para-church groups working in more than 200 countries.

CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD

The realities of the globe at the beginning of the twenty-first century is rapidity of change. Even though the world is going through a time of unprecedented expansion, capital and the increase of the funds of the "have" nations, there are still many parts of our world where poverty, disease, violence and war are taking their impact on society.

Futurists refer to three waves that have touched mankind. The first is that which is often called the Agricultural Age. This was a time when better crops were produced and there was means to transport food over long distances. The Agricultural Age changed the nature of life in general.

The second wave that superseded the Agricultural Age is often called the Industrial Revolution. It didn't supplant the first wave but rather started an increase of certain aspects of life. This wave co-existed with the Agricultural Age. The power of the second wave became much stronger than that of the first wave.

In recent history, the second wave has now been superseded by the third wave which is called the Information or Knowledge Age. This fast-paced wave which is breaking across societies touches narrow segments of society rather than being broadcast to all peoples. For example, today's niche marketing seeks out certain kinds of buyers but not everyone. In the same way, many people who have great needs and who are the poor of the world have no opportunity to become part of this great Information Age.

The sad reality is that this unprecedented economic growth in the developed world has left the developing world far in the past to the extent that the gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" has increase significantly in the last several decades. The *Harvard International Review* recently published an article that articulated this significant problem.

A torrent of international capital, unprecedented in world history, has been unleashed in the past decade. Yet this capital has had little impact on the day-to-day lives of most of the world's population. In the past ten years, US stock market capitalization has grown by over US\$10 trillion, while 20 percent of the world's households survive on less than one dollar per day. Between 50 to 70 percent of these impoverished families are self-employed, scraping out a living selling goods on the street, running cottage industries or small-scale agricultural operations with the simplest of tools. When the recent, rapid flow of capital out of Indonesia led to massive bankruptcies throughout the country, Indonesian banks and development organizations that lend to these poor farmers and market traders saw their arrears rates increase by only a few percentage points. . . .

The majority of the world's poor live in the 48 least developed countries. Although these countries constitute 30 percent of the world's population, they earn only 0.1 percent of the world's income.¹

The reality of the problems of the world cannot be overlooked by the Church. Jesus Christ came to not only redeem people but also to place people in a redemptive society where they could have hope. Here are just a few of the facts that confront a worker of the gospel who targets children in crisis:

- Half of the world's six billion people are mired in poverty, trying to eke out a living on \$3 a day or less.
- Over 1.5 billion people live on less than the equivalent of \$1 a day.

¹*Harvard International Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, Winter 1998/1999.

- The fortune of the world's three richest people exceeds the gross national product of the poorest countries and their 600 million inhabitants. The three have total assets of \$156 billion.
- The assets of the world's richest 200 people exceed the combined income of 41 percent of the world's population.
- A Bangladeshi would have to save all of his wages for eight years to buy a computer; an American would need to save just one month's salary.
- Organized crime is estimated to make 1,500 billion dollars a year and sexual exploitation of women and girls makes seven billion.
- Tanzania spends nine times its health budget and four times its education budget on repaying its debts.¹
- Six young people are infected with the AIDS virus every minute.
- Nearly 600,000 children under 15 and 2.5 million people age 15-24 got the Human Immunodeficiency Virus last year.

- During 1998 more than 8,500 children and young people were infected with the AIDS virus each day. Nearly eight million African children have been orphaned by the immune-stripping disease, and at least one million are infected. Nearly 1,000 AIDS orphans are living or dying miserably on Nairobi's filthy streets.¹
- World-wide, 10 million children will become orphans as a result of AIDS in the next five years.²
- By the year 2000, half of the global population will be children. Two billion of them will live in extreme poverty or be at risk.
- There are 100 million street children in the world and by the year 2020, the number will have reached 800 million.
- The United Nations estimates that one million children enter the trade of child prostitution every year.
- 200 million children who are under the age of five suffer from chronic hunger. Every day 35,000 of them died because they do not have enough to eat.
- More than 25 million children don't have even a hovel to call home.
- Millions of children are working up to 16 hours every day of the week in deplorable conditions and paid almost nothing.

¹U.N./UNAIDS quoted in *Hope for Children in Crisis*, Fall 1999, 15.

²*Children At Risk* (Oxford, England: Viva Network) [database on-line].

- In the United States alone, more than three children die each day as a result of child abuse.¹

War still takes its toll on humanity, especially on those who are the weakest—children and older people.

Take as an example of the last four centuries, in the microcosm of Europe alone. In the 17th century, 3.3 million people died in warfare. In the 18th century, 5.2 million. In the 19th century, 5.5 million. In the 20th century, over 28 million people have been killed in Europe alone. The 20th century has clearly become the bloodiest century in history. In fact, according to some estimates, we have possibly killed more people in this century than in the previous 19 centuries put together. These numbers do not even include the millions who have died in Russia, or the more than 60 million in China, or the 2 million in Cambodia.²

As I travel in many countries of the world, especially the developing world, I am overwhelmed by the poverty which is impacting almost all of these societies. It is hard to explain the affluence that is taking place in certain pockets of the world and yet to see the incredible problems of nations like Cambodia, Romania, India and Ethiopia in a time of “plenty” is overwhelming. Not only are disease, war and famine destructive forces in the world which cause concern to world Christians but also the growth of poverty is increasing at a rate similar to the economic growth in the developing world.

When one is faced with such overwhelming problems, it should not lead to political action but rather to spiritual activity. The Church can no longer neglect its place in the world and the power of the Kingdom to overthrow poverty, disease, war, violence, for those who are the marginalized people of society. It is God’s will that these people have an opportunity to enjoy His blessings. Without a doubt there are sufficient finances within the Church to feed all the people of the world. If we understand anything about the Kingdom of God and its power in the world, we would understand that God will supply through the Church that which is needed in the world to overcome poverty, disease and the effects of war.

At the beginning of the third millennium, World Vision with all of its resources, began to speak about the needs of the millennium generation. It’s

¹Jennie Woods and Sandra Levinson, “It’s Time for Children Everywhere” in *Children in Crisis: A New Commitment*, Phyllis Kilbourn, ed. (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996), 89-90.

²Ravi Zacharias, “God and the Problem of Violence” in *Children and Violence* (Federal Way, WA: World Vision, 1995), 8.

interesting to note that this is the first generation of children born that could inherit a world free of poverty and full of promise. The means are in the Church yet this is not taking place. The truth of the matter is that for about a third of what the world now spends on war, man could meet basic human needs and ensure fundamental human rights for all people. The bottom line is not a question of money. It's all a question of our willingness to follow the Lord and the Kingdom principles.

The writers of World Vision's document, "What are the Ten Urgent Issues?" began to articulate their thinking in the following manner:

At the beginning of the First Millennium, Jesus Christ spoke of a world of justice, harmony and peace. Yet at the dawn of the Third Millennium, many of the world's children live in poor, hostile and unjust conditions as bad, or worse than those of the first century Palestine.

After 2,000 years, we can do better. Much better. Many of the developed countries have promised to eradicate world poverty through international co-operation. The rich nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have pledged to commit .7 percent of their Gross National Products to help poor nations. But they have not delivered. Official assistance to the world's poor is less than one-quarter of one percent of the rich world's wealth.

By seriously addressing these 10 urgent issues, the developed world could end needless poverty and suffering. It could effect the structural changes that would free children from misery and despair. The children of the next millennium could enjoy safe, healthy and sustainable life.³

The ten things World Vision said the world can do to eradicate poverty, marginalization, disease and violence are:

1. A liveable income.

More than half of the world's 6 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. Poverty heightens infant mortality, disease, illiteracy, and unemployment and shortens life itself.

Poverty can be reduced by policies that promote good governance, micro-

³*10 Urgent Issues for the Millennium Generation*, World Vision, 19 January 2000 [database on-line].

enterprise, small-scale agriculture, income equity and access to credit, education, and training.

2. Food for everyone.

In developing countries, malnutrition leaves four of every 10 children stunted. The diet of the a third of the world's population is either insufficient or lacks the essential vitamins and minerals necessary for good health.

3. Primary education for all children.

More than 130 million children are growing up without schooling; 150 million children drop out of school before grade four. . . . Education of children is essential to their well being and the future of their nations.

4. Clean water.

About 1.7 billion people do not have clean water. One billion lack the 25 liters per day for a survival level of drinking water, sanitation and food preparation.

5. Debt relief.

Onerous debt service deprives poor nations of revenue for education, health care, and economic development. Children pay the biggest price, forgoing immunizations, schooling and proper nutrition.

6. Peace building.

During this decade, four million people have been killed in more than 100 wars and conflicts. Eighty percent of those victims were women and children.

7. Girls growing as equals.

In many countries, girls are more likely to be aborted, abandoned and neglected. They are fed less than boys and are less likely to attend or stay in school.

8. A sustainable future.

Air and water pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, desertification, global warming and depletion of natural resources imperil the future of the Earth.

9. An end to child exploitation.

More than 250 million children now work so their families can eat. Many are forced into prostitution, drug trafficking and debilitating jobs that adults refuse to do.

10. Freedom to believe.

Intolerance has fueled many of the world's conflicts and prevented the mutual understanding that brings peace.

The right of all people to believe and to act on their beliefs through full participation in society is fundamental to human well being.¹

In view of such incredible lists of problems in our world, what should be our response? What should Christians do in a world that seems to be moving toward chaos? Without a doubt we should do what Jesus did. Obviously, we should not do less. Jesus preached and healed, He taught and He acted. He modeled what He taught. He not only announced the arrival of the Messianic time of justice and help for the poor and oppressed, He also fed the hungry and welcomed those who are ostracized by society into His fellowship. His diverse circle of men and women, rich and poor, crippled and well, was a visible demonstration of the Kingdom that He announced.

The core of Jesus' ethical thrust, however, is precisely his summons to begin living now in this fallen world according to the values and demands of the dawning kingdom. In the power of the Holy Spirit who works signs and wonders, it is now possible to live out Jesus' new challenge to the status quo. Jesus' gospel of the kingdom does indeed produce a disturbing community. But it is a community that lovingly challenges the evils of the status quo precisely because it shares the Creator's love for the good creation and dares to strive now toward that wholesomeness in personal, socio-economic and political life that Christ will bring in its fullness at his return.²

There is an extreme within the Pentecostal-Charismatic community which tends to place all demonic powers in the heavenlies and to spiritualize the evil that is upon the earth. Without a doubt, we fight not against flesh and blood but the Church must be redemptive in the world today and not be "other worldly" only. Jesus ministered to whole persons. He healed sick bodies. He touched broken spirits. He restored those who were out of relationship with God. All peoples, regardless of their place in society, received His healing touch. He forgave the sins of those who were outcast. He touched lepers and to the amazement of the religious community, He talked with women. In fact, in Luke's Gospel, it is recorded that He spoke with women 63 times. The miraculous healings of the blind and the lame were not overshadowed by His confrontation with the powerful economic and religious leaders. He demanded that all, whether rich or poor, powerful or not powerful, to repent and change. He brought a

¹*10 Urgent Issues for the Millennium Generation.*

²Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 71.

comprehensive healing to the body and the soul, both of the individuals of society as well as communities. He even began a new community in a covenant relationship which we call the Church.

Many rejected His message. They did not accept Him as the Jewish Messiah because they did not understand His ministry in the world and what the Kingdom was all about. But even though He was not received by the Jewish nation, He invited all people to enter into His Kingdom and experience its power to raise people up and to give them dignity in this world. It is because of Jesus' ministry that the Church must endeavor to overthrow the power of darkness and to establish communities of hope, or as the Old Testament called them "cities of refuge" for children who are in crisis.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The central truth of Christianity to which all Christians must be committed is that the God of history, out of sheer love for mankind, intervened into man's fallen state. He came into this violent, diseased and fractured world through His Son, Jesus Christ, and is now redeeming sinners unto Himself that they may be reconciled into the household of faith. It is by His Holy Spirit that He is establishing a new community or a new order of these redeemed ones in the world. Jesus, from the very beginning of His ministry, called this new order "the Kingdom of God." In this Kingdom, Jesus Christ is king and the Kingdom workers are His disciples who go about the work of the Kingdom. The work of the Kingdom has to do with several things:

- First, it is the proclamation of the Word of God calling people unto repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.
- It is a call for these redeemed ones to be part of the community of the King and live out their new lives in relationship with other Christians in acts of mercy.
- It is also a demonstration of God's love with compassion to the poor and righteousness and justice to be given to society.
- It is this responsible work of stewardship and care of God's creation and His precious resources.
- It is also spiritual warfare against the kingdom of darkness and its leader Satan which has a plan to destroy people everywhere and establish a power structure that is controlled from Satan's world.

All these dimensions and aspects of the Kingdom of God are closely

interwoven and will come in fullness at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and establishment of a millennial age. The day is coming when Jesus will make all things new (Rev. 21:1-4). Even though the Church as a whole would ascribe to the statements listed above, how this is implemented has brought great division in the body of Christ. Some would proclaim only by word and not by deed. Others proclaim by deed or just presence and somehow the unity of the Kingdom of God would be weakened.

Then, the truth of “already, but not yet,” the Kingdom has started but not come in fullness has a correct interpretation for holistic ministries. God started His work in the world as the planting of a mustard seed that will grow. It was to grow by the Kingdom community overcoming the power of sin, evil, pain, poverty and anything that would destroy man created in the image of God.

Therefore, the ministry of the Kingdom of the Church must be to all people because all have been created in the image of God. Because God bestows human dignity on all people, no matter what culture, what people group, what ethnic identity they may have, they deserve the Kingdom of God’s full attention. To follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus Christ, the community of faith must therefore address all the needs that Jesus addressed—spiritual, personal, social, economic and physical (Matt. 25:35-40). In this way, the Kingdom of God and specifically the Church offers a visible representation of God’s force in the world. Life in the Kingdom should look like what the Kingdom people do. If the world wants to see what the future Kingdom is like, then the Church should be a true representation of that, serving God in the same way Jesus did, touching people in the various areas of their needs.¹

To bring a more holistic approach to the gospel of Christ and to continue to emphasize the need for radical conversions, the Church needs to repent of some of its misuse of the word of God and its lack of living by a full understanding of God’s meaning in conversion. Roger Greenway has suggested that this repentance needs to take the form of five important areas:

1. We need to repent of our dichotomizing between “word” and “deed” in evangelical missiology and return to the holism of the Kingdom that is plainly biblical.
2. We must repent of the truncated vision and the narrow goal-setting which many of our organizations have invested in during the past forty years, and come to an agreement on what the Lord has called us to do together.

¹*Brussels Statement on Evangelization and Social Concern*, n.d., 4.

3. We all need to take a closer look at ourselves and to admit to the middle-class “captivity” of evangelical thinking about ministry among the poor, and repent.
4. We must repent of a number of attitudinal evils that has driven a wedge between Kingdom workers and their ministries for several decades. The only cure for these evils begin with repentance and a profound change of attitude.
 - We must repent from the evil of our “priestly” tradition which is the tradition of a clergy class controlling the church and its ministries.
 - The evil of elitism is among missionaries that places one class of Kingdom workers on a pedestal above others.
 - The evil of avoiding or muting the verbal presentation of the gospel and sometimes even arguing that “deed” ministries are enough by themselves.
 - The evil of avoiding the organized church overseas, or merely using the church when it serves our purpose, but not really taking the church seriously or seeking its best interest.
 - The evil of private “empire building,” which has been a driving force behind many of the separate agencies begun in the past four decades.
5. We need to repent from practices and procedures that treat people as “clients” and which replace honest and durable relationships with a string of numerical goals, glowing reports and short-term solutions.¹

MISSIONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

In chapters 24 and 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, four parables are given about an absent lord or master. The first is in Matthew 24:42 and speaks of keeping watch because you do not know the day of the Lord’s return.

The second parable has a similar emphasis when it speaks of the master who puts his servant in charge over his household and what will happen if the master returns and finds out that servant has been lazy. The Scriptures goes on to state that when the master stayed away a long time, the servant began to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. Of course, when the master returned unexpectedly, he began to punish that servant.

In chapter 25, the first parable is of the ten virgins. The bridegroom was gone a long time and they all began to be drowsy and fell asleep. But five were

¹Roger S. Greenway, *Together Again Kinship of Word and Deed* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1998), 22-28.

foolish in that they did not have enough oil because they did not know when the bridegroom was going to return. The emphasis is upon the last verse of the parable, “Therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or hour.”

The fourth parable has to do with a man going on a journey and as he goes, he entrusts everything to his servants. After a long time, he returned to settle accounts and then he gave to some a double reward but to the one slothful servant, he took away his one talent and gave it to the one who had ten.

The emphasis of these four parables has to do with an absent master or lord of the house. In the conclusion of chapter 25, the Scripture states that there is going to be a judgement time when the Son of Man will separate the sheep and the goats. To some, He will give eternal reward, to the others eternal punishment. The amazing thing is that neither the good servants nor the slothful servants knew when they had really served God. In this context we have this Scripture:

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”
(Matthew 25:35-40, NIV)

The emphasis of these parables and this conclusion is that God has disguised Himself. To us, it seems like the Lord is not here, He is on a long journey and we do not know the day or the hour when He is returning. The truth of the matter is that God has disguised Himself as the poor, as the hungry, as the thirsty, as the stranger, as the sick and as prisoners. And when we minister unto these, we in effect, minister unto the Lord. The work of the Church is to minister as unto the Lord to the least of these until the King returns.

In a day when there is much tension in missions and missionary strategies are becoming more complex, God still calls us to simple acts of mercy.

Global appeals of cyberspace escapism, economic gluttony, violent outbursts, and unlimited indulgences mesmerize people deeply hungry for a sense of personal significance and particular value in today’s world. Our missionary response to these peoples must emerge from three strong commitments. First, we must understand the significance of past and currently emerging societal

and global trends as the contexts in which Christ's redemptive love is learned. Second, we must retire all paradigms, programs, and individuals whose insightful light and salty significance no longer relate to the world's changing life contexts. And, finally, we must return to the Lord in honest humility, prepared with knowledge of the signs of the times but peacefully awaiting the anointing of his Spirit for the adventures ahead. He calls us his friends. He yearns to take us into the best life of all, a walk of total integrity with Christ in a world hungry for such integrity.²

Many evangelicals scholars tend to think that emphasis on compassion ministry automatically de-emphasizes conversion and personal experience in redemption. However, nothing could be further from the truth. When the gospel comes in fullness, it not only transforms the individual, it also transforms communities and societies. There is no doubt that many Christians are suffering and it seems like they are not in a position to have a great impact on society. However, if we view the Church over the period of time, we can see that God's work does bring redemption and lift. These two components go hand-in-hand. Wherever the gospel goes, it not only redeems individuals but it also lifts them out of the quagmire of worldly systems and gives them hope. The long term impact of the gospel is that it not only redeems souls but has an economic impact on society. This is certainly true in the work of the Pentecostal church in Central and Latin America. Many of them have turned to religion for help, given no other option, and have found it to be a source of economic mobility as they gave themselves in commitment to Christ. Their initial response was that the community of the King helped them and began to provide a means whereby they could come out of the destructive power of poverty and economic exploitation.³

It is also interesting to note that Dr. Gary McGee, a Pentecostal church historian, stated that some of these issues facing the Church are critical. Two of the most important are the need to define the meaning of the Church and then a challenge to understand the concept of holistic mission to the world in addressing the dark side of spirituality: satanic activity. In Dr. McGee's reflection on the second item, he stated,

If Pentecostals prophetically challenged social and economic injustices, would this necessarily dilute the redemptive power of the gospel? Generally speaking, North American Pentecostals, while historically responding to charitable appeals, have been reluctant to emphasize social concerns too strongly, lest

²Lynn Joesting Day, "Considering the Contexts of Twenty-First Century Missions" in *With an Eye on the Future*, Duane Elmer and Lois McKinney, eds., (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996), 119-120.

³Petersen, 130.

it diminish their goal of converting unbelievers before the imminent return of Christ. In contrast, Scandinavian Pentecostals have been less restrained about their involvement in such endeavors. For some charismatics, less influenced by dispensational premillennialism, evangelization should be followed by the Christianization of society. Given the staggering problems facing the larger part of the world's population today, many Pentecostals and charismatics will follow the lead of the Lausanne movement in emphasizing that the preaching of the Word (proclamation) should be complemented by deeds (social concern) announcing the good news of the kingdom of God.⁴

When I entered my career as a church planter in Japan, there was one issue I wanted to communicate to the leadership that I had covenanted to work together with. These were great men, well trained and with a zeal for the Lord that exceeded pastors and leaders in many Western countries. However, it seemed that a weakness was in their definition of the Church. Because of Japanese society and the Western cultural baggage that had come with the early missionaries, they saw the Church as a small community, struggling to survive in the alien and resistant society of a culture that is 2500 years old. A proper understanding of the Church helps Christians realize their position in the Kingdom of God and that they are the very heart and hands of God in bringing Kingdom goodness to the world so that the lost can see what will come in fullness of the future. The Church must be a proclamation community. It must speak the word of truth. It must always communicate God's voice in the midst of a dark world. It must give hope to people who have no understanding of a covenant God. It is by word that His love can touch the hearts of those who have been marginalized by the systems of this world.

The Church must be a reconciling community. It is by this work that the world is reconciled unto God through Jesus Christ. Reconciliation can take the form of acts of mercy and kindness that help estranged people see that God lives within His community. There is hope because of the acts of kindness and mercy which issue from the heart of God and are expressed by His people in the times of difficulty in this world.

The Church must also be a unifying community. Its purpose is to not only bring people unto God but also to bring individuals into relationship with each other under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The New Testament church had a great impact on society because those outside of fellowship with God recognized that they lacked something from those who were inside. "Behold, how they love one

⁴Gary B. McGee, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Missions" in *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 50.

another.” God’s Kingdom had come and had changed people’s hearts and made them one. Nothing unifies the Church like a balance in word and deed, with acts of compassion which speak of God’s Kingdom combined with the message of hope of redemption.

The Church must also be a proactive community. Because of the influence of westernism, there is a fear of imposing one’s view on other people. Even acts of kindness given in honesty are judged by others as trying to get something or as forcing one’s opinions on someone else. The truth of the matter is that the Kingdom of God does acts of kindness because it’s the nature of the Church. People help the despised, the depressed, those who are marginalized because it is the heart of God. Until the Church can begin to move more proactively, it will not be able to complete its mission in the century. God calls us to lively activity. We are living stones. We have a living hope because we have a living Lord.