

Response to the Brussels Consultation

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Proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom

Murray Dempster's paper on the kingdom of God provides an excellent platform for considering the integration of proclaiming the gospel and ministries of compassion in Christian mission. The recovery of the theme of the kingdom of God has proved crucial in enabling evangelicals this century to express the wholeness of the gospel. The kingdom of God was the framework for Jesus' own ministry. He came to announce, proclaim and demonstrate the reign of God over the whole of human life. This framework helps us address some of the bones of contention in Christian mission.

First, there is the issue whether Christian mission should concentrate on evangelism or social action. The issue has been, which has priority. As those who claim to be accountable to Scripture, we can look again at how

Jesus both announced and demonstrated the kingdom and how people entered into it.

Western views of humanity see people as fundamentally isolated reasoning individuals

To whom did Jesus announce and demonstrate the kingdom? It was to people, often individuals, who are presented as representatives of different groups. So there is the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) representing the Samaritan race, the offspring of many races intermarried with Jews; there are sick people, Pharisees both named and unnamed, wealthy people such as the rich young ruler and Zaccheus, and children. Murray

has described a number of cases in the gospels and showed what the gospel meant to each.

The groups that they belonged to shaped each of these people. The sick were shaped both by their experience of sickness, the poverty and sometimes exclusion this brought with it, and its resultant fatalism. The Pharisees were shaped by their understanding of the law and their position as religious leaders. They were not isolated individuals. They were shaped by their social role and position in society. It is my conviction that one of the reasons for the difficulties that western evangelicals have had in relating the evangelistic and compassionate ministries of the gospel is that we have had an individualistic anthropology. Our view of what is human is shaped by the enlightenment, rationalistic view. This is characterized by Descartes, a priest, who wanted to find what was absolutely certain. So he shut himself in an oven and doubted everything. The only thing he could be certain of was his own thinking processes. Therefore he coined the phrase 'Cogito, ergo sum', 'I think, therefore I am'. This located human identity in the power of reason and thought.

We only think and reason as individuals. So western views of humanity see people as fundamentally isolated reasoning individuals. Such a view sees people in isolation from their human relationships. But each person is someone's parent, sibling, child, employer or employee, colleague. Our relationships impact who we are and we need to be saved in our relationships. The relationship that God has with people is through covenant, and that covenant is with a family and community, Abraham and his seed forever.¹

As Jesus announced and demonstrated the kingdom, he showed how it encountered each of the groups of people represented by individual members whom he met. For example, the kingdom encountered the sick with a promise of healing and a challenge to their fatalism. It encountered children with acceptance into the kingdom. It encountered the Pharisees with a challenge to their understanding of the law, in which they neglected justice, mercy and faith. It encountered the rich with a challenge to share their wealth with the poor. These points of encounter were 'starting points' for people to enter the kingdom. Of course entering the kingdom would transform their whole life and all their relationships, with God, with other people and with the physical environment. But Jesus' example shows that the different contexts within which people are set will affect the nature of that initial encounter. Thus in some societies today, the point of first encounter will necessarily be in relation to people's poverty, illness and suffering. In other societies, where people's needs in this direction are by and large taken care of, the point of encounter will be in their family relationships, or their anxieties and fears, or their search for spiritual fulfillment, or the irresponsibility for their neighbours and especially the poor. And we must especially remember that in such societies, the call to enter the kingdom entails involvement in all the life and the values of the kingdom, which includes concern for the poor and the outcast.

It is quite clear from our discussions so far that the participants in the consultation are experienced in and committed to ministries of compassion. The question is who are the people who have difficulties with relating evangelism and such ministries. It is often people in our supporting constituencies. Such people who often belong to the 'baby boomer' generation, are strongly focused on 'what is in it for them'. This is understandable. The experience of many is that in reporting back to their supporting constituency, who often have a fairly rigid and untutored view of what is involved in mission, they have to tailor their story to their audience. The audience is looking for 'church growth' and 'the success of the gospel'. The result is that they often have to be reticent about the full extent of their ministries. This is a great shame,

because in so doing they short change what God is actually doing and the actual experience of their partner churches. But most of all they short change their supporters because God's purpose is that Christian communities in one culture are challenged, renewed and supported by those in other cultures. Mission partnership is not a one way process. Western churches may share their money and personnel generously. But God's purpose is that they also receive and are renewed in turn. Part of this renewal is in discovering the meaning of the good news.

Good news to the poor

For in the scripture the good news of the kingdom of God is described as 'good news to the poor'. By the 'poor' the Bible means what the newspaper means by 'the poor'. This can be seen for example in Luke 7:22. When the messengers of John come to ask Jesus if he is the one to come, Jesus tells them 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them'. It is clear that Jesus is talking about physical categories, including when he refers to the poor. The poor are those who do not earn enough to maintain a normally healthy life. They will not die of starvation tomorrow. But they will be hungry enough that their long-term health and their ability to earn to look after their families will be seriously prejudiced and they will be caught in the cycle of poverty, malnutrition and illness.²

Mission partnership is not a one way process

When Jesus spoke about bringing good news to the poor in Luke 4:18, I suggest that he meant that what the good news meant to those who are poor who receive it, is to define the meaning of the good news for everyone else. We can see this process at work in his own ministry. He announced and demonstrated the nature of the kingdom of God in Galilee, Galilee of the Gentiles, before he took his announcement of the kingdom to the centre of power in Jerusalem. Involvement with ministries of compassion among the poor gives a privileged insight into the meaning of the good news for everyone as people discover what it means to the poor. It may mean deliverance from the tyranny of fate; from the bonds of casteism and prejudice. It may mean the experience of a new identity as those who have been told they are nobodies

discover that in Christ they are sons and daughters of the creator and ruler of the universe. Those who are not poor need to hear this, lest their understanding of the gospel become the prisoner of their economically powerful culture and as a result they lose their ability to encounter their own culture with the challenge of the gospel.

Experience and theology

Here we have an example of how mission is the mother of theology. It is not the case that the Bible and the creeds give us the theology which we are to go out and apply. It is the case that as a result of the impulse of scripture we go into situations, experience the activity of God in those situations, and then come back to scripture, with new questions to put to scripture and new focused challenges from scripture to the situation. Pentecostals have a heritage, and a trust, of the role of experience in Christian life. They must witness strongly to that, and insist that theology emerges as a result of interpreting experience in the light of Scripture. Therefore experience of ministries of compassion among the poor is a critical source for both theology and ongoing renewal of the Assembly of God denomination.

Pentecostals have a heritage, and a trust, of the role of experience in Christian life

We can see the role of experience in the foundation documents of the church and its mission, in the book of Acts 2. In the account of the day of Pentecost itself, we see a pattern emerge which is repeated throughout the book. A public event takes place; this event is itself ambiguous in that it can be explained in at least two ways; the event gives an opportunity for a sermon; and the sermon gives an explanation of the event, which for those who believe is the true explanation. So, the public event is the sight and sound of the apostles speaking in strange tongues; it is ambiguous, as some say it is because they are drunk; Peter takes the opportunity to preach and explains the event as the result of the death and resurrection of Jesus, as a result of which God has poured out his Spirit.

The same pattern emerges in Acts 3. The public event is the sight of the man at the Gate Beautiful 'walking and jumping and praising God' in the temple. Peter takes the opportunity to preach and explain that it

is 'Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him'.

The social ministries of congregations and agencies are public events which can give rise to opportunities for explanations, either by conversation, electronic or print media, or sermons. 'Event – explanation' is a strategy for mission; and social ministries are the first step of that strategy. And the social ministries also expand the categories in which people expect to see God acting. So they provide an opportunity to explain further about the character and purpose of God. He loves people, especially poor people; he longs that people experience wholeness and fullness of life; and this fullness of life comes through Jesus Christ.

What then determines the starting point for Christian ministry? It is determined by what the encounter between the kingdom and the person or persons reveals as the difference the kingdom would make. It is not determined prior to the event irrespective of the situation of the people involved. That would be to turn God into a 'junk-mail' sender, who sends everybody the same package irrespective of their personal situation. Thus, Doug Petersen in a lecture on Pentecostalism at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, indicated that in situations of poor people, where access to health care facilities is almost impossible, it is quite natural that the starting point for many people should be miracles of healing. Professor Adrian Hastings bears this out in his account of Christian faith in Africa. He writes that in the nineteenth century 'In many areas African religion was tumbling and Christianity spreading like a bush fire. Who now was to care for the sick? Village life was too far away, anyway, from the rare mission hospital for the latter to fill the gap left by the collapse of traditional healing amongst the newly converted. The rise of movements of Christian healing was inevitable.'³

Every social activity undertaken by Christians has an evangelistic dimension

Therefore, every occasion of ministry of evangelism, of announcing the good news of the kingdom of God, will have a social dimension. Announcing the good news of the kingdom to poor people communicates to them (or should do) that they are called to be children of God in a society that removes

their identity; that they have infinite worth in a society that regards them as disposable; that they are called to be the stewards and managers of the creation in a society that has no work for them; and that they are called to be part of God's people in a society that excludes them. These are necessary social implications and expressions of the good news that they are called to enter God's kingdom. Similarly, every social activity undertaken by Christians has an evangelistic dimension. The very fact that Christians seek to heal the sick, visit the prisoners, clothe the naked, and comfort the dying is because of what they know and experience and want to share of the love of God.

In the current situation of the world today, in which the market defines and controls everything, compassion for people is both essential for people's humanity, and witnesses that there is more to the meaning of human life than the market. Those who have sought to analyse what happened in England following the death of Princess Diana have suggested that 'In promoting the idea that the impersonal market will solve most social problems, Thatcher abandoned the rhetoric of a caring society that had marked her predecessors. . . . I would suggest that Diana was mourned most in Britain and the USA because it is in these countries self-interest and profit have been most successfully preached. People loved Diana because she rejected these values, not because she expressed them.'⁴

Why have a ministry of compassion?

But, it may be objected, what is the point of such compassion and concern if Jesus is returning anyway? When we look at the material about his return and the fulfillment of the kingdom in Scripture, one image is of a new heaven and a new earth. It is not that earth is to be scrapped in favour of heaven. It is that both the earth and the heaven (the place of spiritual realities where even now there is war, and where we wrestle against principalities and powers in the heavenly places) will be remade. The critical question is what will be carried across that narrow bridge between this world and the world of the 'new heavens and new earth'. We have some clues. Clearly our resurrection bodies like the body of Jesus will form one continuity. The book of Revelation indicates that 'the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it (the city of God)' (Rev. 21:26). This indicates that the best of humanity's stewardship of the world will be transformed and find its place in the city that is the climax of creation. Thus human stewardship of the earth will be fulfilled.

The fact of Jesus' resurrection indicates that the quality of life of this kingdom has already invaded this current order; the powers

of the new age are already at work in the old order. And the evidence and expression of its presence is not that it takes people out of the world, or away from its suffering; but that it is present precisely in Galilee, among the sick and the outcast and the poor. The coming of the kingdom does not bring escape from this world, but involvement in every aspect of it. The coming of the kingdom cannot however be divorced from the King who brings the kingdom; nor can the expression of values of the kingdom be divorced from the power of the Spirit who enables us to live by those values.

Miracles of the kingdom

One of the expressions of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry and the Acts of the Apostles were miracles. How do they relate to social action? We must first understand the background of spiritual realities against which they are set. The New Testament speaks of principalities and powers. These are forces behind what we see. One of these, an elemental spirit of the universe, was the Jewish law, interpreted in such a way as to bring division between Jews and others. The function of the principalities and powers was to bring division out of difference. There are a number of complementary differences in the created order of gender and race. The principalities and powers of evil create division between these different groups. On the cross Jesus defeated these principalities and powers, and broke down the dividing wall between, for example, the Jews and Gentiles. One of the evidences of his work on the cross, one of the signs to the principalities and powers, is the reconciled community of people from these complementary groups in one fellowship, Jew and Greek, rich and poor, slave and free, male and female (Eph. 2:14–3:12)

Made in the image of God

The Bible gives other bases for involvement in social ministry. One is the concept that all human beings are the image of God. In Genesis 1:27–28 the call to be the image of God is the call to have dominion over the creation and develop it in the context of the family. The notion of image in the ancient Near East was that the representative or image of the invisible God was a statue in the temple or the king on the throne. Genesis is a very democratic document for it affirms that all human beings together, men and women, are called to represent God as the tenant or steward of the absentee, invisible landlord, and develop his creation in obedience to him. This theme is taken up in the New Testament in Romans and Colossians, where Jesus is the true image of God (Colossians 1:15), the true and second Adam (Rom. 5:12–21); and Christians are called to be conformed to the image of God's son (Rom. 8:29); that is that in Christ they become more truly human and true stewards of the creation. Therefore

Christians ought to be in the forefront of the proper stewardship of creation; ensuring that all can have access to its resources and manage them as God's stewards. The gospel of the kingdom addresses the distortion that rebellion against God has brought into humanity's stewardship. Christ's victory over the powers addresses the forces that inhibit humanity's proper stewardship of creation, greed, lust and the desire for domination over others.

Love your neighbour

Then there is the well-known double-command to love God and love the neighbour. This raises the question of how we can know who our neighbour is and how to love him/her, unless God tells us who people really are and how they are to be loved – as Jesus clearly does in the parable of the Good Samaritan, breaking the stereotypes of who the neighbour is. And we cannot love God unless we love those he identifies as our neighbour, a theme reiterated in the letter of James (2:14–26).

But we do not need to bring forward only scriptural evidence to show the importance of religion for social and cultural change. Any process of change in social or cultural life depends on a vision of how that life ought to be, compared to which the current order is inadequate. This therefore depends on a view of the human; a view of what constitutes abundant life. To state that all people are the image of God and therefore in some fundamental way deserving of equal respect is to make a profoundly religious contribution to the debate: for how do we know this? Such a view is certainly not founded on scientific observation. It is a statement of faith, a revelation.

What is love?

We do need revelation to help us execute love. It is clear that people the world over want to be loved and want to be thought to show love. But what is love? The Christian view begins from the cross where the love of God is revealed in love for enemies (Rom. 5:8). From this we deduce that if God loves all people despite their demerits, then each one counts as one. To enable each one to count, each one must receive their due from all the others. And what people's due is is to belong. Philip Wogaman writes: 'What is due to us is to belong. In the first instance it is to belong to God, the creator and sustainer of all. But derivatively it is also to belong to one another. No one who is loved by God may any longer be rejected by us . . . God's love has made us all family . . . belonging to one another in community must be undergirded by the

physical, legal and institutional conditions making our participation possible.'⁵ How does Jesus bring this about? We see that in Jesus' time there were very strict codes about who belonged to God's people. Jesus demonstrated that all should belong, and went out of his way to cross barriers to include those who had been excluded. Thus Jesus took the initiative to invite himself to Zaccheus' house. He indicated that Zaccheus was also a child of Abraham. Jesus took the initiative to create relationships and justice by crossing the social divide. Stephen Mott writes: 'The status boundaries that Jesus crossed are crucial to the stability of a society. That is why he provoked hostility. Status is one of the most basic elements of a social system. It is a way of controlling people. To those who claim that Jesus' ministry was merely personal, we reply that he could not have done anything more basic to challenge institutions and social structures.'⁶

Jesus demonstrated that all should belong

Paul's letter to the Romans is a treatise on justice. The major social division in the ancient world was between the Jews and the non-Jews. Through the gospel, people from both these communities had responded to Christ and joined the church. But tensions remained. The Jews who had suffered persecution for many years from the hands of Gentiles for their faith in Jahweh now saw these same Gentiles coming in as members of the Messiah's people. No wonder they saw them as 'Johnny-come-latelys'. In return the Gentiles, who had discovered the centrality of justification by faith saw the Jewish Christians seeking to burden them with their traditional observances, thereby adding to faith in Christ. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans to show that God established right relationships through the gospel (Rom. 1:17). So he argues that all are sinners, so that no one can claim a special relationship with God that sets them apart from others; and that all are saved through Christ.

The biblical material shows that love is not just restricted to compassion. It is about enabling people to have their due, to belong. Neither is love just our love: it is the love of God and the love of his people. The work of the Division of Mission therefore should be to enable the national churches to demonstrate the love of God. And the love of God requires that people be enabled to be stewards and to provide for their families. One particular way in which this is being done

most fruitfully is the approach of micro-enterprise development. This approach enables small loans and training in business skills to be made available to poor people through the co-operative work of consortia of established business people.⁷

And love cannot operate totally separate from structures. There is first of all the structure of the community of Christ, brought into being by the gospel. The community of Christ is a covenant community, where people are committed to one another. Covenant means commitment, grace (unmerited favour), empowering and intimacy. The concept of covenant may help analyse the situation of the poor and a Christian response. For the poor are disempowered, unable to develop their potential; they are denied grace and evaluated by the law of works and status to have failed and to deserve failure. Jesus' grace and forgiveness empowered people to live without fear or stigma. Regardless of their social origins or the stigma society attached to them, Jesus' actions gave them new beginnings and by grace a new identity as the people of God. Thus Christians may seek to build covenant communities which demonstrate the nature of the values of the kingdom, and also provides support and power to do so in a hostile environment. Vinay Samuel speaks of their efficacy in addressing bribery in business: 'I believe that the church should be covenanting with people and encouraging business to work on a basis of covenant. This is a daring thought, but is it possible that rightminded business people could propose that they work on a covenant basis with officials and agree on a

The community of Christ is a covenant community

set of mutual and shared expectations of certain standards of behaviour and obligations? It must be possible for business people to build covenant relationships with bureaucrats with interdependent rules and commitments. I believe that this is the only practical way forward in making progress against the corruption culture in business.'⁸ An illuminating example of such 'covenant communities' in a secular context is in the history of the East India Company. In its earliest days in India it was failing badly, and was reduced to five villages on the coast of what is now Madras. These five villages banded together to make honest contracts and make their word their bond. And from that a great trading empire grew. A further area for structural involvement is in building civil society. Civil society is those networks of voluntary

associations in society which are not part of government, but which any nation relies on for healthy functioning of its life.

Transition in mind-set

As Christian people come to see the centrality of ministries of compassion in Christian mission, two changes in mind-set either take place or need to take place. There is a change from a separation of the physical from the spiritual, and from a view of human beings which sees them essentially as unconnected individuals to one that sees them as persons-in-community.

First, the separation of the physical from the spiritual. Personal change and social change are matters of changes in people's vertical relationships with God and horizontal relationships with each other. The Bible does not separate these. In the covenant and the law there was no meaningful way in which a person's relationship with God could be sundered from his or her relationship with their neighbours. The laws of the Old Testament covenant community were given to enable the community to express its faithfulness to its righteous Lord but none of them relates exclusively to individual allegiance to God. They all relate to love of the neighbour. The vertical relationship with God is consciously acknowledged, but it is to be expressed in relationships of righteousness (love and justice) with the neighbour. Jesus stressed this in explicating the Old Testament law in the commands to love God and the neighbour (as we discussed earlier).

Society is but the aggregate of individuals

So there can be no separation between people's horizontal and vertical relationships. But it has been strongly argued that the vertical relationship has a priority in that the corruption of the vertical relationship must be addressed before any change can be brought to our horizontal relationships. Justification is then solely the rectification of the vertical relationship between God and the individual. This view is closely allied with the view that persons are distinct individuals and that society plays little or no part in their formation or identity. Society is but the aggregate of individuals. Thus social change comes about if there are a significant number of transformed individuals to change society.

This view is based on a dualistic understanding of existence which assumes that people live in two realms, an inner realm and

an outer realm. But this dualism cannot be sustained by biblical teaching or philosophical reasoning. The biblical teaching is that the vertical relationship with God is a covenant relationship with his community; no Israelite could relate to Yahweh separately from his people, and no New Testament Christian existed apart from the body of Christ. Secondly, the love of the individual for God is expressed in love for the neighbour. Thirdly, sin is a violation of the covenant with God and is expressed in actions which threaten the harmony of the covenant relationships in the community.⁹

The roots of such a stress (on dualism) lie in a philosophical presupposition which posits that humans live in two realms. The inner realm is the locus of the vertical relationship with God. This is a realm of unchanging spiritual realities within which people immediately apprehend God. It is a realm of religion, ideas, reason, concepts and language. This realm can only be experienced individually. Entrance into the life of this realm is through receiving words and responding to ideas and concepts. The outer realm is the locus of relationships with people, of physical and material existence. Anything that occurs in the outer realm is a consequence of prior activity in the inner realm. The outer realm cannot be acted on directly; it can be truly changed only by activity in the inner realm.

This dualism and individualism is reinforced by rationalism which posits that reason is constitutive of humanity. Since the centre of reason is in the individual, the only impact that can be made on people is through individual reason, and the only relationship people can have with each other is as single individuals.

With this grid, sin is then understood as an essentially spiritual problem which makes people incapable of relating properly to God. It has consequences in the outer realm, but can only be dealt with in the inner realm. The only means of transforming this inner realm is through evangelism understood as the verbal proclamation of a message of justification by faith. Any activity such as service or relief without going through the inner sphere of individuals has no transforming effect. It essentially witnesses to the transformed inner life of those who exercise such service and maintains the existence of the outer sphere.

The recognition of the integral nature of people's relationships does not deny that there is an inward aspect to a person's life, thought, feelings, conscience and hopes. But philosophically there is a major question over whether it is possible to give any meaning to statements about an inner realm which has no reference to any observable behaviour. In other words, suppose someone is sitting in an armchair in a perfectly relaxed position and smiles benignly and says 'I am in excruciating

agony'. It is arguable that that person is using language in a totally different sense from normal usage. Descriptions of a person's inner experiences are logically tied for their meaning to behaviour, without being reduced to being merely statements about behaviour. 'Inner language' and 'outer language' do not refer to separate realms. They are different languages about one set of human actions viewed from different perspectives.

Therefore it is not possible to separate a person's vertical and horizontal relationships nor to establish a priority to them on biblical or philosophical grounds. I would suggest that the disagreement between Christians on the relation of social ministry to mission is not over biblical texts; it is over the assumptions they have about human beings. Are we isolated individuals or are we persons in community? To recognise that people are persons-in-community, existing as someone's child, sibling, parent, spouse, employee or customer, does not undermine but rather defines personal responsibility. Do we live in two separate realms – invisible souls dwelling in visible bodies, or are we whole people, living bodies in relation to God, who will be raised in resurrection bodies at the return of Christ?

Are we isolated individuals or are we persons in community?

Transition in methodology

A second area of transition is in the area of methodology. Once we have identified a community's needs, how do we develop a strategy for addressing them? Colleagues who have worked in development ministry for some time have developed the following taxonomy for analysing the issue of needs. If we address for example a village's need for water directly, we may not accomplish our aim. We have to ask a further set of questions. First, we must ask about reasons. Why is this village without water? It may turn out that they are denied access to readily available water for social and political reasons. Second, we must ask about interests. In whose interest is it to deny them access? Third we must ask about the group which benefits from denying them water. Fourth we must ask about the values which drive a group to think that it can benefit from depriving others of access to water. So we have needs, reasons, interests, groups and values. The address of the gospel is certainly to the values

that some of the people are living by that give rise to the needs that other people have. So the process of ensuring people's access to water must also address the values that have so far denied access to them.

Having developed an analysis of the problem, how do we formulate a strategy to address it. A strategy we developed in India was as follows. First, to develop a profile of the people and the situation. That will include the process of analysis outlined above. It will probably involve getting to know the people in informal ways so as to discover 'what really makes them tick'. A second step will be to discover a core group who want to bring about change. A third step will be to discover an event which will encapsulate that change. A fourth step will be to invite prayer to surround the event. Finally, following the event, to provide an explanation of what has taken place in the framework of the love of God in Christ.

Thus to give a concrete example, a group of students got to know some quarry workers in a quarry outside Bangalore, India. They discovered that the real situation of the people was a terrible lack of security, expressed in their fear of spirits around them. Second, they asked to meet with a group of people who would like to change their lot for the better. In discussion with them they asked what would really bring a change to their life, and discovered their desire to own the contract to run the quarry. Third, they worked with this core group and put in a bid to run the quarry. Fourth, they called for prayer for the bid. The result was that the quarry owner doubled their wages. The people accepted, and were particularly pleased that for the first time in their lives they had prayed for good things to happen and they had; their prayers were previously only to ward off evil. Fifth the students were able to explain the love God had for them, both through the students' visit, the answer to their prayers, and a process by which local Christians would start schools for their children.¹⁰

Ministries of compassion are the events, and preaching is the explanation

This is an example of the process mentioned in the earlier presentation on the process of mission being event and explanation. Ministries of compassion are the events, and preaching is the explanation. This

combination of social ministry and mission is at the very heart of the modern missionary movement. The nineteenth century mission movement was born out of deep social concern as a concern to repay the debt to Africa for the slave trade. The abolition of the slave trade arose out of the fusion of Christian compassion with eighteenth century notions of the rights of man. The prohibition of slavery by the British Parliament precipitated a movement to repay the debt to Africa incurred through decades of slavery. This involved missionaries in encouraging trade and employment for Africans in the hinterland areas from where the slave traders had drawn their cargoes. In India, missionaries co-operated with British officials and Indians of good will to abolish such customs as 'widow-burning', and missionaries took part in protests against the indigo trade. The gospel of Christ brought tremendous social change to outcaste Dalit groups in South India.¹¹ It was only following the optimism of evolutionary development in which some Christians shared, but shattered for ever by the First World War, that a dichotomy occurred limiting mission in some cases to limited ecclesiastical activities.

A willingness to see the wide scope of mission as including ministries of compassion inevitably raises the question of how to view the activities of those people of good will who share our concern to serve the poor, and shame us in their commitment, yet do not share our allegiance to Christ. First, we must ask how and where has evil been overcome in the world. The answer is for the Christian, in the cross of Christ, where Christ triumphed over all powers of evil, bound Satan, paid for sin, and defeated death. Thus we must say that wherever we see life overcoming death, healing coming to people's lives and relationships, humans able to fulfil their calling as responsible stewards and parents, we see the result of the work of Christ on the cross, even if people do not acknowledge it as such or owe no allegiance to him. Second, what is the status of those activities? I suggest that we might call them 'salvific in intent'. That is that they are part of the 'abundant life' which God wants for his creatures; that they are meant to point people to the source of all good gifts, God himself, and the fulfilment of God's purpose of life abundant, Christ, in whom and for whom everything was made (Col.1:15). Experience of these blessings does not mean that people are thereby saved; but they do experience blessings that are 'salvific in intent'.

Transition in partnership

Very important partners in Christian mission are local churches and those whose giving supports Christian mission. Vinay Samuel has spoken of how the attitudes and

perceptions of home churches and supporters can help or hinder Christian mission. Take this scenario. A missionary from the United States is returning to visit his supporters and churches back in the USA. His own ministry has involved him deeply in ministries of compassion, working to support the agenda and programme of the local church on his assignment in wholistic mission. However, he knows that the real interest of his supporters is to hear of new congregations planted and growing numbers of believers. His dilemma is that if he speaks of what is really happening, there is a chance that his supporters will shift their support to those who appear to achieve more accurately their own conception of mission and he will lose support for the very work he is doing. If our missionary edits his reports to their tastes, two groups will suffer. First, his own colleagues in the situation of mission will not have their real story and struggles shared. They will be misrepresented. And secondly, the supporting churches will be short changed. For the very source of renewal to deliver them from their cultural captivity in their understanding of the gospel is as they hear of the gospel shared and growing in ways that challenge their own world-view and preconceptions. If they silence that source they hinder their own chance of growth and development.

The partners must be the local congregations

So there is an important challenge in the development of an understanding of wholistic mission; that is to challenge the supporting groups and churches to be willing to listen to presentations and expressions of the gospel that are different from their own preconceptions. Their willingness to listen and learn will indicate whether they are free of the hegemonic desire to impose their own cultural understanding on others, or develop their own understanding in dialogue with the understandings of those from different cultures who are equally committed to the authority of scripture, the lordship of Christ and the power of the Spirit in mission.

The issue comes down to the question 'Who are the partners in mission?' Increasingly the partners of supporting churches are being seen as local congregations in other parts of the world. Expatriate personnel are very important bridge people; symbols of that partnership, serving in one culture as members of another; representing the multi-cultural nature of the people of God, that sign to the principalities and powers that seek to bring division out of difference which we

discussed earlier. But in the end of the day, the partners must be local congregations.¹² **11**

Notes

1. See further the discussion in the author's *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* (Oxford, Regnum, 1997), chapter 8.
2. See further the author's 'What is good about good news to the poor?' in *AD 2000 and Beyond* edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Oxford, Regnum, 1991).
3. Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa* (Oxford, 1994), p. 530.
4. Tony Walter, 'Diana, Queen of Hearts: mourning and social solidarity' in *Death of a Princess: Making Sense of a Nation's Grief*, Chris Sugden, ed. (London, Silverfish, 1998).
5. 'Toward a Christian definition of justice' by Philip Wogaman in *Transformation* Volume 7, No. 2, April 1990.
6. *Jesus and Social Ethics* by Stephen Mott, page 11 (Grove Booklets on Ethics, Cambridge).
7. This work is described by Vinay Samuel and David Bussau in *How should we then lend? – a biblical validation of Micro-enterprise Development* (Opportunity International, Level 3, 175 Macquarie street, Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia).
8. 'Business and corruption' by Vinay Samuel in *Transformation*, January 1995, p. 27.
9. See Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden 'The Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility – a Biblical Study' in *In Word and Deed* edited by Bruce Nicholls (Exeter, Paternoster, 1985).
10. See Chris Sugden 'The impact of conversion' in *Entering the Kingdom* edited by Monica Hill (London, Marc, 1986).
11. See Samuel Jeyakumar *Dalit Consciousness and Christian Conversion: Historical Resources for a Contemporary Debate* (Delhi, ISPCK, forthcoming).
12. See Chris Sugden 'Partnership' in *Transformation* April 1997.