
Pro Rege

Volume 21 | Number 2


Article 1

December 1992

Mission in the Evangelical and Ecumenical Traditions

Michael W. Goheen
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Goheen, Michael W. (1992) "Mission in the Evangelical and Ecumenical Traditions," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 21: No. 2, 1 - 10.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol21/iss2/1

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.



A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

Mission in the Evangelical and Ecumenical Traditions



by Michael W. Goheen

Introduction: Crisis and Mission

During the last 200 years a certain paradigm for mission has dominated the understanding and practice of mission in the West. Mission was the Western church taking the gospel to the rest of the world. It referred to sending missionaries to a designated territory, to the activities undertaken in that particular place, to the geographical area where the missionaries carried out their work, and to the non-Western, non-Christian world known as the mission field.

In the past three or four decades, a number of factors have challenged this view of mission. The

Rev. Goheen is a graduate of Westminster Seminary and Instructor of Theology at Dordt College.

West, which until recently played a dominant role in the world church, has now lost its position. The majority of the Christian church has shifted to the so-called third world. The West has been immobilized by the guilt produced by 200 years of colonial and imperialistic mission. The growing gap between rich and poor produced by unjust international structures of oppression and exploitation exacerbate the guilt of the Western church, paralyzing any mission endeavors. Years of secularization have enervated the church's life and produced questions of the place of technology in mission. Third World churches are challenging the superiority of Western creeds and Western ways of worship. Cultural and religious pluralism has raised questions about the relationship of the gospel to culture and to non-Christian religions that have become pressing in the mission of the church. Finally—to mention only one more factor—the twin threats of nuclear and ecological danger have forced the Church to reflect on its priorities in its mission. As a consequence a crisis exists today in missiological studies. These factors have combined to make obsolete the understanding of mission held for over 200 years. The problem now is to seek a new paradigm for understanding the nature of mission. This article will briefly survey the two dominant Western paradigms of mission of this century—i.e. the evangelical and ecumenical views.¹

In this article my use of the word mission will sometimes follow the evangelical understanding, which sees mission primarily as proclamation. At other times my use of the word will follow the ecumenical understanding, which understands mission primarily as a social and political program. I

find both of these uses inadequate. Therefore at other times in this paper my use of the word will push at the boundaries of these words as understood in these two traditions. At that point I will be pressing toward what I understand to be a more biblical understanding of mission.

Two Dominant Mission Paradigms: Evangelical and Ecumenical

What polarizes the evangelical and ecumenical traditions of understanding and practicing mission is how evangelism—that is, verbal proclamation that calls unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel—relates to social involvement. Flowing from the revivalist tradition of the late 19th century and early 20th century, the evangelical tradition stressed verbal proclamation. Flowing from the social gospel tradition of the late 19th century and early 20th century, the ecumenical tradition has emphasized social action. What factors shaped these traditions?

The Evangelical Tradition and Mission

The Great Reversal

By 1920 a “great reversal”² had taken place in the evangelical church with respect to their views on mission. According to Timothy Smith, the church connected evangelism and social responsibility for most of its history. However, that changed between the years 1865 and 1930 in the North American evangelical church because of at least three factors: premillennialism, individualism, and a reaction to the social gospel.

a. Premillennialism. The majority of the protestant church was postmillennial in the middle of the 19th century. A theological journal could state confidently in 1859 that postmillennialism was the “commonly received doctrine” among American protestants. That changed dramatically at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. This eschatological shift spelled the doom of social concern in the evangelical church. Timothy Weber summarizes this situation.

Though not all premillennialists accepted the extreme position on the futility of reform activities, one must finally conclude that premillennialism generally broke the spirit of social concern which had played such a prominent role in earlier evangelicalism. Its hopeless view of the present order left little

room for God or for themselves to work in it. The world and the present age belonged to Satan, and lasting reform was impossible until Jesus returned to destroy Satan’s power and set up the perfect kingdom. Consequently, though there were significant exceptions, premillennialists turned their backs on the movements to change social institutions. In time, the social conscience of an important part of American Evangelicalism atrophied and ceased to function. In that regard, at least, premillennialism broke faith with the evangelical spirit which it had fought so hard to preserve.³

This change in eschatology dramatically affected the evangelical church’s practice and understanding of mission. In the first place, early 20th century North American premillennialism stressed (sometimes exclusively) the future consummation of the kingdom. With this focus, the present stage of the kingdom was neglected or even downright rejected.

Secondly, premillennialists viewed history and the world pessimistically. Earthly affairs would get progressively worse and would culminate in terrible tribulation. With such a philosophy of history, it is not hard to see why social action lost any urgency in the mission of the church. Why polish the brass knobs on a sinking ship?

Thirdly, early 20th century premillennialism viewed sin as only personal and in no sense as structural. For example, Moody stressed personal sins like dancing, disregard of the Sabbath, drunkenness, and so forth.

If sin is private and individual only—and this is my fourth point—then salvation would also be personal. Again, Moody’s attitude exemplifies this position.

I look at this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat, and said to me, “Moody, save all you can. God will come in judgment and burn up this world . . . The world is getting darker and darker; its ruin is coming nearer and nearer. If you have any friends on this wreck unsaved, you had better lose no time in getting them off.”⁴

Finally, when these premillennialists did view the kingdom as present, they viewed it as inward. The kingdom of God is within you. The kingdom of God in Jesus’ ministry was “purely religious, supernatural, future oriented, predominantly spiritual and

inward''; it had ''no political, national, or earthly design.''⁵

The shift from postmillennialism to premillennialism with its accompanying pessimism and personalism diminished social responsibility from the mission of the evangelical church in the early 20th century. Bosch summarizes:

As revivalism and evangelicalism slowly adopted premillennialism, the emphasis shifted away from the social involvement to exclusively verbal evangelism. In the course of time virtually ''all progressive social concern, whether political or private, became suspect among revivalist evangelicals and was relegated to a very minor role . . . By the 1920's the 'great reversal' . . . had been completed; the evangelicals' interest in social concerns had, for all practical purposes, been obliterated.''⁶

b. Individualism. The first reason for this great reversal, then, was a change to a premillennialist view of eschatology and history. But the second reason was the individualistic view of man that dominated all discussions of sin and salvation. Revivalist evangelists reduced sin to personal vices, ignoring structural evil. They pictured salvation as getting off a sinking ship onto the lifeboat, one person at a time.

Even when some expressed an interest in social problems, individualism caused evangelicals to be interested only in relief efforts with little concern for addressing the structural causes of the problem. John Stott comments on this approach.

Too often evangelical Christians have interpreted social responsibility in terms only of helping the casualties of a sick society, and have done nothing to change the structures which cause the casualties. Just as doctors are concerned not only with the treatment of patients but also with preventative medicine and public health, so we should concern ourselves with what might be called preventative medicine and higher standards of moral hygiene. However small our part may be, we cannot opt out of seeking to create better social structures which guarantee justice in legislation and law enforcement, the freedom and dignity of the individual, civil rights for minorities and the abolition of social and racial discrimination.⁷

c. Reaction to the Social Gospel. The postmillennialism of the 19th century was secularized in

the United States in the Social Gospel. The evangelical unity of the 19th century in which commitment to social reform was a corollary of evangelism was about to be shattered. Lovelace comments as follows:

The broad river of classical evangelicalism divided into a delta, with shallower streams emphasizing the ecumenism and social renewal of the left and confessional orthodoxy and evangelism on the right.⁸

Gradually mainline churches abandoned the transcendent dimensions of classical postmillennialism. History was no longer regarded as an antithesis between the kingdom of God and the

*The West has been
immobilized by the guilt
produced by 200 years of
colonial and imperialistic
mission.*

kingdom of darkness. Progress in history was no longer regarded as the powerful working of the gospel by the Spirit of Christ. Progress was now regarded as an immanent process by virtue of human programs and effort. Sin was identified with ignorance and with the structures of society. Salvation meant reforming society through education and developmental programs. The social gospel embodied an optimistic view of history inherited from the Enlightenment. History was moving ahead toward a golden age. However, this progress was identified with social progress established exclusively by human efforts. The kingdom of God was a purely immanent and present reality. Salvation was entirely this worldly in that human programs would usher in the kingdom of God. There is continuity between creation and redemption. The old earth is being renewed and transformed. The social gospel was activist as salvation depended on human efforts. Human beings were viewed primarily in their corporate and communal dimension. It was simply the social structures that needed addressing.

Many Christians during the early 20th century did not share the optimism of the social gospelers. Evangelicals especially feared the eclipse of the transcendent elements in liberal theology. They reacted to almost every point of the social gospel theology. Instead of the horizontal dimension of the

social gospel, evangelicals stressed the vertical dimension. Instead of the corporate and social concern, evangelicals concerned themselves almost exclusively with the salvation of the individual. Instead of emphasizing the body they stressed the soul. While the social gospel viewed the progress of history optimistically, evangelicals became pessimistic. With the stress the social gospel put on the earth, time, this world and the present, evangelicals reacted by stressing heaven, eternity, other world, and the future. While the social gospel advocated a gradual coming of the kingdom, evangelicals stressed the sudden apocalyptic dimension. Social gospel theology highlighted the Bible's teaching on the present stage of the kingdom initiated by Jesus in his earthly ministry, while evangelical theology embraced Scripture's teaching on the future consummation of the kingdom of God at the return of Jesus Christ. For advocates of the social gospel, the kingdom was the work of man. For evangelicals it was strictly a work of God. Instead of the continuity of the old earth with the new, emphasized by the social gospel, evangelicals moved toward an annihilistic discontinuity. Instead of the activism of the social gospel, a fatalism reigned in evangelical circles. If the social gospel was concerned to change society, evangelicals were concerned to save souls. Evangelicals stressed God's judgment on society instead of human efforts to transform it, as in the social gospel. In evangelical theology, human beings were considered primarily as individuals in opposition to the stress the social gospel put on the corporate dimension of human existence. For evangelicals there was redemption with no creation while for the social gospelers there was creation with no redemption.

Secularized postmillennial social gospel theology and premillennial evangelical theology clashed, polarized and fed off the imbalance of the other. Evangelicals lost any social conscience. They viewed social concern with suspicion at best and at worst, as a betrayal of the gospel.

The uneasy conscience of Evangelicalism

A turning point came in 1947 when Carl F. H. Henry challenged the evangelical world to again take seriously the social calling of the church as tremendous social problems were coming to light around the world. Henry said:

Whereas once the redemptive gospel was a world-changing message, now it was narrowed to a world-resisting message . . . Fundamentalism in revolting against the Social Gospel seemed also to revolt against the Christian social imperative . . . It does not challenge the injustices of the totalitarianism, the secularism of modern education, the evils of racial hatred, the wrongs of current labor management relations, and inadequate bases of international dealings.⁹

While much of the mood of early 20th century evangelicalism still prevails—especially at the level of the pew—the main body of evangelicalism has shifted since 1947. Evangelicals saw social concern as a part of the church's mission but struggled in the following years with how to relate this social responsibility to the verbal proclamation of the gospel in the mission of the church.

The relation between verbal proclamation and social involvement

In the early part of the century the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility was an *either/or* relationship. That is, one must choose either social responsibility or evangelism. After Henry's book the uneasy conscience of fundamentalism was awakened to see that separating evangelism from social concern was unbiblical and inadequate. Other ways were sought.

In recent years it has been popular merely to *add* social concern to evangelism. Both are seen as legitimate parts of the mission of the church so they exist together side by side. Evangelism and social concern exist in a *both/and* relationship. The evangelical tradition has sought to relate evangelism to social concern in this *both/and* relationship in three ways.

First, social activity is a *consequence* of evangelism. Social concern will result from changed lives produced by acceptance of the gospel. Billy Graham in his address to the Berlin Congress advocated such a view in 1966.

I am convinced if the church went back to its main task of proclaiming the gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral and psychological needs of men than any other thing it could possibly do. Some of the greatest social movements in history have come about as the result of men being converted to Christ.

McGavran, the father of the church growth movement in North America, says that the greatest single step the church can take toward creating a new world order is to multiply "cells of the redeemed" in society. The mission of the church is to plant churches and when this takes place God will "inevitably . . . cause them to seek a better social order."¹⁰

A second way of relating the two aspects of the church's mission is that social activity can be a *bridge* to evangelism. It can break down prejudice and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain a hearing for the gospel. As an African proverb has it "An empty belly has no ears." Harold Lindell is an advocate of this position. "Service is a means to an end. As long as service makes it possible to confront men with the Gospel, it is useful."¹¹

Thirdly and finally, evangelicals have seen the relationship between these two aspects of the church's mission as social concern accompanying evangelism as its *partner*. Evangelism and social involvement are like two blades of a pair of scissors or two wings of a bird. John Stott believes that this is the most biblical.

This brings me to the third way of stating the relation between evangelism and social action, which I believe to be the truly Christian one, namely that social action is a *partner of evangelism*. As partners the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other.¹²

Stott sees the two tasks of the church's one mission as equal partners—who can deny that this is a enormous step forward? But I agree with Harvie Conn when he says:

But the fact remains that we are far from a holistic solution that integrates the two components . . . Formerly, the emphasis was on either soul or body, church or society, evangelism or social action. Two abstractions do not make a whole. But two are better than one.¹³

When two tasks are partners the question of primacy is bound to follow. Which of the tasks is primary? The evangelical tradition, in general, has affirmed the Lausanne Covenant made in 1974. There the covenant affirms that evangelism and social/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

neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ." However, that same covenant also states that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary."¹⁴

When the Lausanne paper states that evangelism is the primary partner, it is holding to a tradition entrenched among evangelicals. Evangelism has a priority that is not temporal but logical. Evangelism speaks to people's eternal destiny in bringing them the good news of salvation. Seldom will Christians have to choose between evangelism and social action, but "if we must choose, then we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all mankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and that

*The evangelical tradition
has emphasized Christ's
headship over the church to
the exclusion of his lordship
over the whole creation.*

therefore, a person's eternal, spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal well-being."¹⁵

Other evangelicals have reacted to this kind of thinking. At the Lausanne conference several hundred delegates signed a statement that said there is no biblical dichotomy between the word spoken and the word made visible in the lives of God's people. It repudiates as "demonic" the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelism and social concern. This statement, as well as other signs, are encouraging, but are still not the dominant position in the evangelical tradition.

A preliminary evaluation

The either/or split of the early 20th century started with an artificial dichotomy of life that resulted in the abstraction of two dimensions of the church's mission from the total mission of the church. The non-material was separated from the material, the supernatural from the natural, the invisible from the visible, the sacred from the secular, the body from the soul, the eternal from the temporal, the future from the present, and the public from the private. As soon as these things were divided up in dualistic fashion and given a life of their own, there was a choice for one or the other. So while liberals and evangelicals disagreed as to which one should be

chosen, they were fundamentally agreed on the dichotomy.

This dichotomy, when allowed to stand, tears apart numerous strands of scriptural teaching. The Christ of Scripture who is Lord of heaven and earth is reduced to the head of the church. The cosmic salvation that he accomplished is reduced to forgiveness for individuals in the church. The present epoch of the kingdom is emptied of its meaning for the world, as God's work is reduced to the past (gospel events), the future (millennium, heaven), and the inner man. We are left with an "emaciated gospel"¹⁶ that is not the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed.

The way to proceed is to challenge the existing dichotomy at its root. We must provide a context in which social concern and evangelism are embedded. However, before I do that, it would be profitable to look at how the ecumenical tradition treated the same problem.

The Ecumenical Tradition and Mission

Seeds of the social gospel

While contemporary evangelical theology finds the seeds of its present development of mission theology in the revivalism of the early 20th century, the ecumenical tradition finds its origin in the Social Gospel movement of the same period.

Gerald Anderson has discussed the shift in mission in the ecumenical tradition in the social gospel in the early 20th century. He concludes that four shifts took place by the year 1915. First, other religions were no longer thought to be entirely false. Secondly, mission involved less preaching and verbal proclamation and more transformational activity. Thirdly, salvation was considered primarily in terms of this present world, both in its manifestation and its source. Finally, the accent in salvation now shifted from the individual to society. This analysis opens up for us motifs that have continued to set the agenda for the ecumenical tradition of mission.

I would highlight three characteristics of the Social Gospel movement that continue to infect the ecumenical tradition. First, the social gospel was *inner worldly* and *naturalistic*. The postmillennialism of the previous century was stripped of its transcendent elements. The kingdom of God was identified with social progress. God was no longer the Creator

and Redeemer who could not be absorbed into the historical process. Salvation was equated with well-being brought about by Western technological progress. Mission was the spread of the Western culture to the rest of the world. Mission was dominated by social and political considerations.

A second feature of the Social Gospel movement that continued to find a voice throughout the ecumenical tradition was that of *anthropocentrism*. The idea of the *missio Dei* was replaced by technique and programs of human effort. The future reign of peace was identified with human aspirations, hopes, dreams, and plans.

A third characteristic was a turn to *the social at the expense of the individual*. This led to social involvement at the expense of evangelism. The gospel of the kingdom was reduced to social and political ethics. Sin was found only in social structures. Salvation and redemption were reduced to a change in society. Mission was reduced to social action, and proclamation of the gospel to individuals was eclipsed. There was less preaching and more transformational activity.

The dramatic shift and reorientation of the Student Volunteer Movement between 1886 and 1917 amply illustrates this. In 1886 evangelization was understood as leading people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. At a conference held in 1917, the primary question was no longer the evangelization of the world as it had been, but rather, "Does Christ offer an adequate solution for the burning social and international questions of the day?"

A major shift: from charity to revolution

In their mission theology, the ecumenical tradition has generally promoted the social task of the church to the relative neglect of proclaiming the gospel. There are three different periods of development during the 20th century. In the early part of the 20th century, mission that was socially involved was concerned primarily with *charity*. The church concerned herself with mercy ministries such as disaster aid, care for orphans, and rudimentary health care. These ministries were primarily aimed at relief and did not challenge the macro-structures of society.

We can make the following distinction in the social dimension of the church's ministry: between relieving human need and removing the causes of

human need; between social service and social action; between philanthropic activity and political/economic activity; between ministering to individuals and families that are victims of injustice and seeking to address the unjust structures of society; between works of mercy and works of justice; between aid and relief, on the one hand, and development on the other; between short term treatment of symptoms and long term treatment of the disease. It has been the 20th century church that has discovered the second of these aspects of *diakonia*. Charity and relief occupied the attention of the church in earlier years. However, the trend in the 20th century is an increasing recognition of the structural dimension of sin. The shift from charity to later stages of social involvement shows a deepening understanding of this dimension of sin.

It was the Social Gospel that opened up the eyes of the church to the structural dimensions of sin. In this regard, Hopkins has suggested that the Social Gospel is, in fact, "America's most unique contribution to the great ongoing stream of Christianity."¹⁷ The church sought to deal with this newly revealed dimension of sin. The approach that was given institutional status in 1928 at the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem is known as the *comprehensive approach*. The church cannot continue to deal with the symptoms but must attack the root disease.

According to the comprehensive approach, the root of the disease was ignorance. Therefore, a comprehensive approach became extensively involved in education and health care. Disease and death can be prevented by a better knowledge of hygiene and medicine. Hunger came as a result of limited knowledge of farming; therefore, a comprehensive approach advocated agricultural training. This paradigm is dominated by understanding sin/salvation as ignorance/education. Mission is primarily education.

Over the next few decades the comprehensive approach continued to be the model for mission work. It did not go unchallenged, however. Under the powerful influence of Karl Barth, the optimism of the comprehensive approach was contested. However, Barth's formidable influence turned out to be a mere interlude in the progression of ecumenical social thought. In the 1960's the comprehensive approach was revamped and broadened in the *developmental approach*. What prompted this

shift was the fact that it was recognized that education alone would not solve the social problems of the third world. The poor countries of the world did not have the technological skill to put the ideas into practice. All the education and training in the world could not make up for what the Third World countries lacked. The mission of the church was to help these third world countries develop technologically.

This developmental model was criticized by the middle of the 1970's because it was not working. Situations in the Third World got worse instead of better; the poor got poorer and the small elite got richer. Before World War I a Brazilian could buy

*Ecumenicals neglect
Scripture's teaching on the
inner man, but recognize
that bodily existence is part
of the new creation.*

a Ford car for five sacks of coffee but near the end of the "developmental era" (1968), the equivalent car cost two hundred and six sacks of coffee. The socio-economic situation was becoming more desperate because the developmental aid was pouring in. Ignorance, lack of skills, intranational social and cultural factors were not at the root of the problem. The problem was international and global structural relationships. The relation of the West to the Third World was not one of educated to ignorant nor development to underdevelopment but oppressor to oppressed. The problem could not be resolved by education or by pumping developmental dollars and technology into these countries. Rather, the international structures of injustice had to be broken down and the oppressed Third World liberated from the oppressive dominance of the West. Needless to say, the West could not get enthusiastic about such a project! Therefore, it lay in the hands of the Third World people themselves to solve their own problems. They must liberate themselves. While development implied a degree of evolutionary continuity, revolution and liberation implied revolutionary discontinuity. Development was out, *liberation* was in.

While liberation theology is primarily a Third World phenomena, it has influenced the World Council of Churches and their agenda for under-

standing salvation and mission. The Bangkok meeting of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches held in 1973 confirmed the new emphasis, and terms like salvation were now translated as liberation. At Melbourne in 1980 the poor were placed at the center of theological reflection.

In the ecumenical tradition, then, social and political involvement has become the overriding concern in the mission of the church. Evangelism has been either eclipsed or neglected. Understanding of social action has moved from charity to the comprehensive approach to the developmental approach and finally to the liberationist approach. However, critical voices have been raised in the ecumenical tradition throughout the 20th century. Moreover, it seems that in the past 12 to 17 years there has been a positive movement in the World Council of Churches that has put more stress on the evangelistic mandate of the church. But we are still far from an integrated solution to this problem. If the evangelical tradition of mission can be summarized by social involvement plus evangelism, with evangelism being primary, the ecumenical tradition can be summarized as evangelism in the context of social involvement, with social involvement as being primary. The evangelistic dimension of the church's mission has not been integrated into the total mission of the church. It functions as a lesser task in the total mission of the church. The prominence given in Scripture to this task simply is not found in the literature of the World Council of Churches.¹⁸

A preliminary evaluation

As in the evangelical tradition, so in the ecumenical tradition, the gospel has been reduced. With the stress on the social dimension of salvation, the need for conversion, understood as a decision made by the individual person, was eclipsed. Sin was structural evil and salvation was societal redemption. With the loss of the importance of individual response the floodgates of universalism were thrown wide open.¹⁹ Secondly, the future consummation of the kingdom was jettisoned. The gospel is no longer proclaimed as a present gift and a promise of future bliss but is reduced to a present task. Thirdly, the Kingdom of God and salvation are identified with societal change and justice. The yeast is not distinguished from the bread or the salt

from the meat. Finally, the church as the concentration point of God's kingdom salvation in the world recedes from view. The church as the embodiment of kingdom salvation is lost. We are left with a "diluted gospel."²⁰

There has been a renewed interest in the evangelistic mandate in the last couple of decades. In the three latest official documents from the WCC concerning mission, the evangelistic mandate has been affirmed. However, it also seems that this explicit affirmation has not been organically integrated into the total mission of the church. Social involvement seeking justice clearly dominates the mission of the ecumenical tradition. Social responsibility holds a clear priority in the mission of the church that cannot allow the evangelistic mandate to have its biblical significance.

Early in this century the evangelistic aspect and the social aspect were abstracted from the total mission of the church and given a life of their own. This has created a problem that has cast its ominous shadow over the mission of the church, both in the ecumenical and evangelical traditions, throughout the whole century. As one aspect of the church's total mission is emphasized, the gospel the church embodies and proclaims is reduced. We need to struggle to find a way ahead that reintegrates these two aspects into the total mission of the church in such a way that each is given their due.

The Broader Theological Context

The evangelical abstraction of proclamation cannot be isolated from the broader evangelical theological tradition. Similarly the ecumenical theological tradition provides the context for the emphasis on social involvement. Each tradition has emphasized a certain aspect of biblical christology, soteriology, pneumatology, anthropology, ecclesiology, view of the kingdom, an interpretation of history, and the world.

In Scripture we see that Christ is Lord of the cosmos and head of the new humanity—the church. The evangelical tradition has emphasized Scripture's teaching on Christ's headship over the church to the exclusion of his lordship over the whole creation. In reaction the ecumenical tradition has stressed that Christ is Lord over the whole creation, including the political and social dimension of life. In Scrip-

ture the salvation that Christ has accomplished is cosmic in scope, and yet there is a concentration of that salvation in the people of God as the firstfruits of the new creation. Evangelicalism has highlighted the participation of the church in Christ's kingdom salvation while ecumenicals have recognized that the salvation Christ has accomplished extends beyond the bounds of the church. The work of the Spirit is closely tied with this. At Pentecost the Spirit was poured out on the church and Christ continues to dwell in the people of God by His Spirit. However, Luke (especially) and John portray the Spirit as a Spirit of mission who is at work in the world convicting people of the truth of the gospel. Evangelicals have emphasized the work of the Spirit in the church while ecumenicals have called attention to the Spirit's work in the world.

We find in Scripture that man is viewed primarily in his corporate and relational context. This does not hinder a strong emphasis on individual responsibility in terms of the promises and demands of the gospel. Evangelicals tend to stress the implications of the gospel for the individual. The individual must respond if she/he is to be converted. On the other hand, the ecumenical tradition has seen the implications of the gospel for society and culture. Ecumenicals have stressed the extensive benefits of the kingdom for society while evangelicals have highlighted the intensive benefits for each participant. In Scripture, a human's bodily existence in this world can be distinguished from the inner man (soul, spirit, heart, etc.), but never separated. Evangelicals are concerned for the conversion of the inner man. Neglecting Scripture's teaching on the inner man, ecumenicals recognize that a person's bodily existence is very much a part of the new creation.

In the evangelical tradition the future/not yet dimension of the kingdom is stressed as well as the discontinuity with history. In the ecumenical tradition the present/already existence of the kingdom and the continuity of history finds frequent treatment. Again, both are biblical, yet reductionistic. While evangelicals highlight Scripture's teaching on the church as institution, ecumenicals see the church primarily as the people of God in the world. The church's legitimate priestly role is highlighted in evangelical thought and practice while it is the prophetic role of the church that receives attention in the ecumenical tradition. The evangelical tradition

has tended to focus on salvation history which narrates God's work in His people for the sake of the world while the ecumenical tradition puts emphasis on world history wherein we find God's work in the world. Finally, Scripture's teaching on the world as *fallen* creation which manifests Satan as the god of this world finds expression in the evangelical tradition while the teaching of the Bible that the world is God's good creation being redeemed by Christ who has defeated the powers is emphasized in the ecumenical tradition. Thus in the evangelical tradition we are aliens—this world is not my home; I'm just a passin' through. In ecumenical piety this world is my home, and as a citizen I take responsibility for its well being.

In all these cases we find an emphasis on one aspect of the Bible's teaching. Reactionary polarization has tended to blur the scriptural emphasis of the other. Evangelical and ecumenical theologies of mission flow from these reduced emphases. It might appear that the way ahead is to simply add the two together. However, this would be the artificial joining of two emaciated abstractions. When one dimension of Scripture's teaching on any subject is highlighted to the exclusion of the remainder of the biblical picture, the whole biblical doctrine is distorted. What is needed is a new way ahead that finds a fresh starting point that can organically integrate the emphases of each.

End Notes

- 1 David Bosch the South African missiologist structures his book *Witness to the World* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, GA, 1980) around these two dominant mission paradigms. He writes, "The evangelical and ecumenical approaches to mission have to a large extent dominated the theory and practice of mission in recent decades" (39f).
- 2 This term was coined by Timothy Smith, in (1957) *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. New York: Harper and Row.
- 3 Timothy Weber (1979) *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism: 1875-1925*. (New York: Oxford University Press).
- 4 George Marsden (1980) *Fundamentalism and American Culture. The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925*. (New York: Oxford University Press) 26.
- 5 David Bosch (1990) *Transforming Mission*. (Maryknoll: Orbis) 272.
- 6 Bosch, *ibid.* 318.
- 7 John Stott (1975) *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. (Downers Grove: IVP).
- 8 Richard Lovelace (1981) "Completing an Awakening" *The Christian Century*. Volume 98:298.

- 9 Carl F. H. Henry (1947) *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans).
- 10 Donald McGavran (1983) "What is Mission?", *Contemporary Theologies of Mission*. (Grand Rapids: Baker) 28.
- 11 Harold Lindsell (October, 1965) 'A Rejoinder' *International Review of Missions*. No. 216:439.
- 12 John Stott (1975) *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. (Downer's Grove: IVP) 27.
- 13 Harvie Conn (1982) *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 62.
- 14 Lausanne Covenant, paragraph 6.
- 15 Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 21, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*. (1982) 25.
- 16 David Bosch's term in *Witness to the World*, 202ff.
- 17 Charles Hopkins, (1940) *The Role of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism 1865-1915*. (New Haven: Yale University Press) 3.
- 18 In my opinion, the high point of mission theology in official documents of the WCC, is in *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (1982). Here are the best statements that can be found on the significance and integration of the evangelistic dimension of the church.
- 19 In a document made in preparation for the WCC assembly in Uppsala in 1968 we read these words: "Through the resurrection of the New Man, Christ Jesus, every human being has become a member of the new humanity." There is no need for a decision on his part!
- 20 David Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 212ff.