

¹⁵ Samuel Escobar in "The Social Impact of the Gospel," in *Is Revolution Change?* (ed. Brian Griffiths), InterVarsity Press, 1972, pp. 100 and 98. This chapter is the English text of the message on the subject presented at the Bogotá Congress on Evangelism and published with the other papers of the Congress under the title *Accion en Cristo para un Continente en Crisis* (ed. Caribe), 1970.

¹⁶ G.B. Duncan, *ibid.*, pp. 60, 62.

¹⁷ John R.W. Stott in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, vol. I, pp. 39-40.

¹⁸ C.R. Erdman, "The Church and Socialism," in *The Fundamentals* Vol. XII, 1911, pp. 116, 118.

¹⁹ C.F.H. Henry, *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology*, Eerdmans, 1957, pp. 46-47.

²⁰ Documents of the Interamerican Congress of Catholic Action, quoted by Stanley Rycroft, *A Factual Study of Latin America*, 1963, p. 207.

EVANGELIZATION AND MAN'S SEARCH FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND AND FULFILLMENT

Samuel Escobar

In the first place, I want to thank God for the hundreds of brethren whose encouraging words have come from around the world in relation to my paper. This fact shows that the evangelical community is grappling with these issues and that there is a ferment of renewal that, in my opinion, comes from the Holy Spirit. He is moving his people to look to the world around with the compassion of Jesus Christ, and to be obedient to the clear teaching of the Bible in relation to human needs and the total liberation that the Gospel brings for man. I think that the organizers of the Congress were not mistaken when they chose as a motto, the words of Jesus Christ in the synagogue of Nazareth, defining his mission and ours:

"To preach the Gospel to the poor;
To heal the brokenhearted,
To preach deliverance to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised."

These are words that cannot be spiritualized in a world like ours, where there are millions of persons who are poor, brokenhearted, captive, blind and bruised.

It has been pointed out in different responses that evangelicals are doing many things in different parts of the world in order to meet with the whole Gospel the men who are searching for freedom, justice, and fulfillment. I praise the Lord for that fact, and I only wish that instead of my standing here this morning, we could have some of those who are deeply involved in service to the needs of men. I am thinking of men like Justo Gonzalez, Sr., and Arturo Parajon, who have been traveling and living sacrificially, opening the eyes of Latin American churches and mobilizing them to serve the needs of the people in literacy and medical work. I think of men like William Bentley, a pastor working among the black minority in Chicago, one of the toughest cities of the world. I think of Ted MacDougall working out of his farm in Prince Edward Island in Canada, dealing with drug addicts and drug pushers, inmates in jail and kids in trouble by the hundreds, winning them to Christ and helping them to readjust in society. I think of Michael Patterson, an Anglican medical doctor in the north of Argentina, serving forgotten Indian minorities, a specialist in tropical diseases who spends his life in a remote area where no other doctor wants to go.

I think of Walter Hearn, an outstanding chemist and university professor, who has decided to live in a simple way and to identify with students in their way of dressing, their needs, and their fights in the University of California at Berkeley. I think of the brethren in the People's Coalition group in Chicago and their brave radical evangelical paper *The Post American*. I think of Mark Hatfield, an evangelical voice, sometimes lonely but always clear in the Senate of the most powerful Western nation.

I think of hundreds and hundreds of anonymous servants of God who are creatively working to alleviate the needs of people around them and help them in their efforts in search of better social structures. I also think of men like Solzhenitsyn and other Christians in different parts of the world who are refusing to accept passively and in silence the impositions of unjust authorities. And I think of a good friend who is a prisoner for the cause of the Gospel in Cuba and who in prison not only has given a verbal testimony of his faith but has done his best to alleviate the needs around him, turning sheets into shorts, for instance, so that his fellow prisoners would not go completely naked.

And as I know that some people like these are here in this audience, I would like to say to all of them a word of thanks and encouragement, praying that they will keep faithful in what they are doing. Some of them have been criticized and told that they should abandon their efforts for the pursuit only of numerical growth of congregations. I hope they will not believe that such is the official position of the Congress.

Many of the questions I have received can be answered by pursuing a point that Howard Snyder has clearly stressed in his paper "The Church as God's Agent for Evangelism" (II. B. 1-4). I especially would like to call your attention to his eloquent quotation from John Howard Yoder: "Pragmatically, it is self-evident that there can be no procedure of proclamation without a community, distinct from the rest of society, to do the proclaiming. Pragmatically, it is just as clear that there can be no evangelistic call addressed to a person inviting him to enter into a new kind of fellowship and learning if there is not such a body of persons, again distinct from the totality of society, to whom he can come and with whom he can learn."

I think that the first and powerful answer to the social and political needs of men, to the search for freedom, justice, and fulfillment, is given by Jesus in his own work and in the church. Jesus takes seriously the problems of property, power, relationships, which are essentially the problems that cause social and political maladjustment and injustice. As Yoder himself has emphasized, Jesus creates a new people, a new community where these problems are dealt with under the Lordship of Christ. This is the community, *distinct from the rest of society*, that we find around Jesus first, then growing in Jerusalem and then expanding into the world. In this community there is a new attitude to money and property (Luke 6:29-31,35; Acts 2:43-45, 4:34, 20:35; Jas. 2:14-16; I John 3:16-17). In this community there is a new attitude to power and its exercise (Luke 22:23-27 and parallels in Matthew and Mark; II Cor. 10:8, 12:10-15; I Pet. 5:1-3). It is a community where human barriers and prejudices have been overcome under Christ's rule (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Philem. 15-17). It is a community ready to suffer for justice and good (Matt. 5:10-12; Acts 7:51-60, 16:16-24; I Pet. 3:13-18).

This is the biblical model of evangelism, the radically different community that calls men to faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ that has transformed their lives, and the new life in the Spirit that enables them to follow the example of Christ. Such a community has a revolutionary effect in changing a society.

Let us take a specific example. It is false, as some have written, that

Paul did not do anything about the evil of slavery. He did at least three things. *First*, he announced the Gospel equally to masters and slaves. His own life-style and training added credibility to his message in both social classes. *Second*, as part of his message he taught basic truths about the nature of man (Acts 17:26, a common origin for all men) and the new type of relationship that human beings had under Christ (Gal. 3:28). These truths were contrary to the basic tenets of the then prevalent philosophy, in which slavery was based. *Third*, he asked specifically for an application of his teaching in the context of the Christian community (Philemon). It has been demonstrated that by addressing himself to the slaves as moral agents (Col. 3:22-25; Eph. 6:5-8), he was doing something completely new in his day, treating them like responsible persons, not like things or animals, which was the way in those days. Moreover, Paul asked from masters in the same passage what not even the most advanced moralists or philosophers would have asked at that point.

Thus Paul, in his teaching and practice in the primitive church, was attacking slavery in its very base. The example and influence of the church in the first century and later the active involvement of Christians in civil life brought eventually the abolition of the system.

When the south of Africa was discovered by the Portuguese in the fifteen century, slavery soon appeared again, and in a matter of decades Christendom had accepted it. However, in 1774, in the wake of a spiritual revival, a great evangelist, John Wesley, published his short treatise *Thoughts upon Slavery*. After an historical and a restrained though ghastly portrayal of the inhumanity of slavery, he pierces prophetically to the moral issues involved. Countering the argument that the slave traffic was a legitimate business, he asks: "Can human law turn darkness into light or evil into good? Notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right and wrong is wrong still . . . I absolutely deny all slave holding to be consistent with any degree of even natural justice". . . . Proceeding he dealt a timely blow at such "loyalty" as conceives Empire and patriotism in terms only of mercantile or geographic expansion, for concerning the British West Indies he urged: "It is better that all these islands should remain uncultivated forever; yea, it were more desirable that they were altogether sunk in the depth of the sea than they should be cultivated at so high a price as the violation of justice, mercy and truth."

In today's language, we could say that for Wesley, development without social justice was unacceptable. I pray that God will raise in this Congress evangelists like Wesley, who also care about social evils enough as to do research and write about them and throw the weight of their moral and spiritual authority on the side of the correction of injustices. Wesley, however, did *more than writing*. He encouraged the political action that eventually was going to abolish slavery in England. Six days before his death, Wesley wrote to the famous evangelical politician William Wilberforce, encouraging him in the name of God to fight against slavery.

More than sixty years ago, a group called Peniel Hall Society bought some land in Bolivia, in order to help Aymara peasants with a school and a hospital. As was the practice until recently in Latin America,

the land was sold to them with 250 Aymara serfs who belonged to the estate. After a long period of failures and hesitations, the project in 1920 was handed to the Canadian Baptist Mission Board who eventually brought an agricultural missionary. After the fruitless efforts of several years, "it finally dawned on the missionaries that their position as land owners and serf masters was overriding every benevolent attempt to uplift the people."

Finally, in 1942 economic serfdom was abolished, the land was parceled and the Indians were given title of property to their plots. Norman Dabbs, the missionary martyr, comments: "Both missionaries and peons felt that a crushing weight had been lifted from their lives."

When ten years later a nationalist revolutionary government passed the desperately needed law of land reform, the pioneer experiment of the Baptists in Huatajata was recognized as a valid antecedent. The amazing fact is that the freedom of Indians and the distribution of land was immediately followed by church growth in the area; and also after the revolution of 1952 a wave of church growth started in Bolivia.

These examples are illustrations of how Christians in what I have called first and second situations can be obedient to God's Word. We need a revival of life in our churches around the world, so that they again will be communities "distinct from the rest of society." We need evangelists that are also prophets like John Wesley. Where possible, we need Christian politicians like Wilberforce. We need imaginative missionaries, ready to pioneer in areas of social justice and evangelism.

Please notice that the simple liberation from human masters is not the freedom of which the Gospel speaks. Freedom in Christian terms means subjection to Jesus Christ as Lord, deliverance from bondage to sin and Satan (John 8:31-38) and consequently the beginning of new life under the Law of Christ (I Cor. 9:19), life in the family of the faith where the old human master becomes also the new brother in Christ. However, the heart which has been made free with the freedom of Christ cannot be indifferent to the human longings for deliverance from economic, political, or social oppression. And that is what many expect from the one who evangelizes. Not that he says: "I come to announce to you a spiritual freedom and because of that I do not care about your social, economic, or political oppression." But rather that he says: "I care for your oppression. I am with you in your search for a way out, and I can show you a deeper and most decisive deliverance that may help you to find a better way out of your social and political oppression."

That is what Christ did. He identified with the oppressed. For instance, he became poor both in taking upon himself the human limitations and in the social strata that he chose to live in when he came. When Jesus, who made himself poor, tells me, "You always have the poor with you," I listen to him. He added to that, let us remember, "And whenever you will, you can do good to them" (Mark 14:7). But when a rich man tells me the same sentence, I have the suspicion that he really means, "You always have the rich with you . . . and that should not change."

What is the image that our missionary and evangelistic work projects? Do we stand with the rich or with the poor? Do we stand usually with

oppressors or with the oppressed? What a contradiction it would be, says James, if not being rich we would be forgetting the poor and favoring the rich (Jas. 2:5-9). Please consider that in my opinion the tough question is not, "Are you rich?" The question is, "Where do you stand when you preach the Gospel?" "Where did your master stand?"

A dramatic example of the dilemma was recently presented to me by a missionary friend who works among a tribe in Latin America. He was torn apart by the dilemma of standing with his poor unknown tribe of "savages" or rather with the oil company that wanted to use him to move the Indians out of the area, getting them away in order to continue with exploration, thus eliminating "the Indian problem." This may become a difficult area for decisions, especially for those willing to reach parts of the so-called "fourth world," remote areas, where the desperate search for raw materials and oil also is going to center now.

If this is not taken seriously by the evangelists, in both their style and their message, the credibility of the Gospel is at stake. I do not think we can measure the effects that were registered in the conscience of evangelicals and of the hearers of the Gospel by the firm stand that evangelist Billy Graham took on racial issues from the very beginning of his career. His refusal to preach to segregated audiences closed some doors and provoked disaffection. I think that it stems from his biblical convictions about the nature of man and God's design for him. I praise the Lord for it! He did not downgrade the demands of the Gospel in order to have access to a greater number of hearers or in order to have the blessing of racists that would consider themselves "fundamental Christians." A stance like this is already communicating something about the nature of the Gospel that gives credibility to the Gospel itself when it is announced. This is especially so for those who are the victims of injustice and are conscious of it.

In some societies and nations, there is desperate need for healing in the area of interracial relationships. In those cases, the Christian church might be the only place where the miracle of encounter, acceptance, and coexistence can happen because the redemptive power of Christ acts. To perpetuate segregation for the sake of numerical growth, arguing that segregated churches grow faster, is for me yielding to the sinfulness of society, refusing to show a new and unique way of life. This would be an example of reducing the Gospel to make it more palatable. Such "numerical growth" might not be the numerical growth of the church of Jesus Christ. I wonder sometimes if — taking into account the demonic forces at work behind racism, prejudice, oppression, corruption, and exploitation of the weak and the poor everywhere, and taking also into account evangelistic and missionary efforts which are totally unaware of those facts — the Lord would not tell us: "Woe to you zealous evangelists, hypocrites, for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (Matt. 23:15).

Thus, in some parts of the world there is this kind of subtle opposition to the Gospel when it is seen as a threat to entrenched prejudices

and privileges. But I also recognize that there are other societies where hostility to the Gospel goes to the point of forbidding its proclamation in public and even persecuting the believers. In the face of this type of open opposition in what I have called the "third situation," concerned prayer and expectancy are very important. The initiative in missions and evangelism comes from the Holy Spirit and he might be preparing the way for the Gospel in unexpected ways. Leslie T. Lyall, a veteran missionary from Asia, says, "The Christian world has become familiar in recent years with the dangerous talk of 'closed doors.' Such talk however, may betray an old-fashioned 'colonial viewpoint.' Closed to whom? Presumably to the unwelcome emissaries, the 'neo-colonialists' of the West. But if 'closed doors' in Burma have shut out the Western missionary, they have also shut in the Christian church which remains as a witness to the living Christ behind those doors. Since missionaries were asked to leave by the government, the number of baptisms annually has been maintained and even increased, while there are more students in the theological colleges than ever."

There are places where hostility is even greater. New strategies have to be developed. *First*, it will be necessary to support and encourage the Christians in those areas without embarrassing or endangering them. *Second*, to build a new system of promotion of missions that is not based on glamorous pictures and statistics of success. *Third*, to mobilize laymen of different nationalities into areas of life where their presence could be accepted. These steps demand a change of political attitudes, the recognition of what is good in other systems and regimes, and the disposition to work humbly under the limitations that they create.

Another area that has been pointed out in responses is the danger that if we concentrate on working out the social implications of the Gospel, we will forget evangelism, and that history proves that fact. I would like to affirm that *I do not believe in that statement*. I think that the social gospel, for instance, deteriorated because of poor theology. The sad thing is that those who have the right theology have not applied it to social issues. The practical answer must be seen in a different area. We have to rediscover the ministry of teaching in the church, the close link between evangelism and church life, and the role of the layman in the world. Let me explain.

In the life of our Lord, and in the life of the Apostles, there was no separation or gap between preaching and teaching. Both were important and essential to their ministry. I think that the idea that you can "evangelize" and leave teaching for ten years later is anti-biblical. Teaching is an indispensable part of the life of the body and if it is not provided, a group called church can degenerate into nothing but a social club or a sect. Part of the teaching is *how to live in the world as a Christian*: the ethics of the Kingdom. Laymen then penetrate society by a *way of life* that is new in family relations, business, citizenship; and every area of daily life. Consequently, to mobilize the laymen is not only to teach them short summaries of the Gospel, mini-sermons, and to send them to repeat these to their neighbors. It is also to teach them how to apply the teaching and example of Christ in their family life, in their business activities, in their social relationships, in their studies, etc. Those who teach need to be solidly rooted in the Word of God but also very aware of the world

around them, so that they can help in the application. In societies that are increasingly hostile to Christianity, this task is more crucial and necessary, because you cannot take for granted that the value system and the social uses are "Christian." We desperately need this ministry in the Third World! We desperately need this ministry in the Western nations!

I agree with the comments of some responses that oppression and injustice is not only something that comes from powerful nations, but that within every country, including especially the Third World, there are local oppressors, privileged elites, and conservative middle classes that oppose any change that may disturb their privileged position, even if that change is going to benefit the majority. I know that in some Latin American countries, while there are foreign missionaries spending their lives among the poor or the Indian minorities, for instance, there are hundreds of national graduates who attend "fundamental" churches but show no concern for their own fellow countrymen. They have no concern for their material or spiritual welfare. This is the result of an evangelism that has not presented Christ as Lord and has not been followed immediately by training in discipleship. Moreover, I think that many of those second-generation evangelicals are pagans in need of conversion and if we do not realize that, we are only mobilizing them to reproduce pagans like them under "evangelical" disguise. It is a fact that this type of church is not able to communicate the Gospel to either the rising masses or the restless youth at the university.

I agree that heads of governments are wrongly blamed for decisions and policies that simply reflect the general trend of their societies or the interests of powerful groups in them. It has also been pointed out to me that evangelicals in North America or England are not as influential or powerful as I had thought in my naive Third World view. But, on the one hand, I still believe that one man empowered by the Holy Spirit can be used by God to turn the tide of life in a nation or shock its conscience. Preachers and evangelists we need, and we should pray for men of the stature of Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter Waldo, Savonarola, Calvin, Luther, Knox, Wesley, Niemöller, and so on. There is almost general agreement in the responses about the pagan and anti-Christian forces that are shaping the life and policies of nations in the West. If that is recognized, why should we defend those policies, legitimize them, and become defensive when they are attacked?

Because of my specific reference to aspects of the international situation, I must say, of course, that I do not believe that the so-called West has the monopoly of abuse, exploitation, and oppression of the poor and small nations. The energy crisis in the world has demonstrated how even nations that are "not developed" can exploit the less developed ones, not to mention the dependency created in other areas, and also exploited by the so-called socialist blocs of nations.

But please remember that precisely the freedom that Christians have in the Western nations, and the possibility of intelligent participation at decision-making levels, is a talent that has to be used, unless the day comes when it will be taken from us. But if we take refuge in a non-biblical, unethical eschatology, to use the expression written by some of the respondents to my paper, we are simply refusing to use our hands for fear,

trying to keep them clean, not realizing that they are already dirty. It is commonly a forgotten lesson that in the very land where Marx studied the conditions of the working class and forged the notion of revolution as the only way to change, his doctrine could not be applied. A spiritual revival brought also an alignment of the Christians with the poor and the oppressed, not only a sentimental alignment but a definite political and social alignment for change. Contrariwise, it was in those countries where Christians as a majority aligned themselves with the powerful or else refused to let their influence be felt in a transforming way upon the masses, where violent revolution finally became the only political alternative. This is not a rule without exception, of course.

Moreover, for the time being, Christian resources are concentrated in the Western nations and if they are going to be mobilized for the missionary task, the need for Christians to become aware of the complex issues and the ambiguities by which the missionary task is surrounded has to be taken seriously. I hope that the same eagerness and use of technology which is used to give us figures of populations in need could be used to clarify, as far as possible, the unique character of the Christian message as different from what we call today Western culture. I have found the younger generation of North American evangelical students far more aware of world issues and problems than some of the leaders who forge the policies of mission boards. May the Spirit give us ears to hear what he is saying through the impatience and critical attitude of youth. May our structures not crush missionaries before the end of their first term but be flexible to change as New Testament structures were.

We live in a fallen world which is trapped in injustice and sin, and what happens at the political and financial level is what also happens in our own personal daily life. I see sin in East and West, corruption in North and South. We have come to a point in history in which it could be said that if a world war comes, none of the parties will be "defending Christianity." The idea of a "holy war" is absurd and untenable for me in 1974. Because of this, I think that in this Congress we should come as *brothers and sisters* from among all nations, who live in a hostile world where we have been called to be salt and light. We come here to encourage one another in the task of evangelization. We come here to encourage one another in the difficult task of living as sheep among the wolves everywhere, and not to defend our governments or our social and political way of life. There is very little that can be defended in this world today! As part of this mutual encouragement, we reaffirm our hope that the Kingdom may come soon in fullness. But as an evidence of that hope we should also reaffirm our willingness to be the community of disciples of Christ which tries to demonstrate in the context of development or underdevelopment, affluence or poverty, democracy or dictatorship, that *there is a different way* for men to live together dealing with passions, power, relations, inequality, and privilege; that we are not only able to proclaim that "the end is at hand" but also to encourage one another in the search to make this world a bit less unjust and cruel, as an evidence of our expectation of a new creation.

THE CHURCH AS GOD'S AGENT IN EVANGELISM

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The Church is God's agent of evangelism. To speak of the evangelistic task without relating this to the Church is to lose the biblical perspective and develop an incomplete evangelism.

But the statement, "The Church is God's agent of evangelism" can be either a meaningless cliché or a profound insight — depending on how the words "church" and "evangelism" are understood. The aim of this paper is to ask how the Bible presents the Church, and what it means biblically to say the Church is God's agent of evangelism.

The Church is the *only* divinely-appointed means for spreading the Gospel'. As Melvin Hodges has written, "The Church is God's agent in the earth — the medium through which he expresses himself to the world. God has no other redeeming agency in the earth."² Further, evangelism makes little sense divorced from the fact of the Christian community. The evangelistic call is a call *to something*, and that "something" is more than a doctrine or an experience or the exercise of faith or even, narrowly, Jesus Christ. The evangelistic call intends to call persons *to the Body of Christ* — the community of believers, with Jesus Christ as its essential and sovereign head³.

I shall attempt to show how the Church is God's agent of evangelism by responding to three questions: first, what is the Church, biblically understood? second, how does the biblical Church grow? and finally, what insights for church structure emerge from this understanding of Church and evangelism?

PART ONE: THE CHURCH BIBLICALLY UNDERSTOOD

The Bible says the Church is nothing less than the Body of Christ. It is the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:9); the flock of God (I Pet. 5:2); the living temple of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). Virtually all biblical figures for the Church emphasize an *essential, living love relationship* between Christ and his body. This underscores the overwhelming importance of the Church in God's plan and reminds us that "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). If the Church is the *body* of Christ — the means of the Head's action in the world — then it is an essential part of the Gospel, and ecclesiology is inseparable from soteriology.

1. Traditional views of the Church

The biblical view of the Church may be contrasted with two traditional views which correspond roughly to the "visible church" — "invisible church" distinction⁴.

a. *The institutional view* identifies the "visible" institutional structure with the essence of the Church and makes no significant distinction be-