

maintained by force. Revolution by force can never be more than a partial solution. Only the heart revolution of Christ produces a "final solution."

In looking at utopianism, it was noted that all utopias can only be arrangements for organizing fallen men whose sin will break down the systems. Systems depersonalize people; in God's kingdom they become fully personal remade men. Systems only change conditions; God changes men. Utopian systems, such as Marxism, may in fact demand the same action as Christians desire in a given situation. For the Marxist this will be the solution. For the Christian it can only be a step to cope with the present situation; he will not commit himself to it as a solution. Only God's bringing his Kingdom will be the solution.

## THE BIBLICAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN WORSHIP, WITNESS, AND SERVICE

*Hector Espinoza*

*PART ONE: The present perplexity concerning the mission of the church*

The "*sui generis*" character of the church resides in Jesus, its Lord. The authority of this sovereign is found in all circumstances and all the decisions of this living organism. Nevertheless, the church, being a human structure, the realization of its mission has depended on the image or idea that in fixed time it has made of itself. That image was born of a particular historic situation. The consequence is not completely desirable since the church could stay prisoner of the image it has formed of itself.

There exists uncertainty concerning the mission of the church, caused in part by the enormous tasks with which the church is faced in our days; the unrest, the society in which it develops, and the issues with which it communicates. Before her is presented with unavoidable priority the unfinished task of the proclamation of the Gospel to every creature. In its redemptive role the church nourishes the certainty that each task to be fulfilled represents a glorious opportunity; and that as numerous, urgent, and overbearing as are the issues, tasks, and circumstances that demand its immediate attention, so equally as numerous are the opportunities.

This crisis of the church has not been only caused by the characteristics of the society in which we live, but by the church itself. Hans Kung says that we should not think of, "An ideal church in the abstract spheres of a theological theory, but a real church in the middle of this world and in the history of this world." Neither does the New Testament begin with a doctrine concerning the church that later would be realized, but with the reality of the church concerning that which was reflected upon before. The real church is in the first place, a happening, an act, and an historical event." We are living that reality and confront ourselves with certain issues that reflect the enigma that exists in the business of the church.

1. *Rationalism versus faith* God is found bound earthward in an action of salvation to the world. This work in our days is seen hindered by the confrontation of rationalism and faith. In the first place, thinking is more important than being. Meanwhile for the Christian thinkers like Paul, Augustine, and Pascal, reason should be subordinated to faith. For example, "The justice of God by means of faith in Jesus Christ for all that believe in him. Because there is no difference, inasmuch as all have sinned and come short of the glory of God". "It is not understood in order to believe, it is believed in order to understand"; "the heart has reasons that reason does not know. This is what faith is: God perceptible to the heart, not to reason". For them, then, existence which is in the revealed God precedes thinking.

At first we observe a frequent hesitancy in the work of evangelization. Allowing itself to be carried by the rationalism of an incredulous

world, many are dedicated to convincing the people, instead of calling them to believe. Nicolas Berdyaev said that the problem of man originates in the fact that not only does he find himself lost on the way, but he has lost the direction. The Gospel is the good news to that lost and disoriented man so that he might believe in the action of God manifested in Jesus Christ and align himself towards him.

### 2. Institutionalism versus personal conversion

There exist many that, like the Roman Church, make synonyms of evangelization and institutionalization, identifying in this way Christ with the organization of the church in an indissoluble way. The idea is communicated that the invisible spiritual church of the believers is equivalent to the juridical-hierarchical organization of the church.

Basing itself on the authority of dogmas and traditions believed by man, institutionalism precedes personal conversion, and submission to human precepts is demanded in place of the radical transformation of man. The individual is made a servant of the institution, instead of the church being an instrument of life for the sinner.

### 3. Politics versus worship

The definition is heard also of the church as a revolutionary ferment of society. Some denounce with evangelistic passion "the scandalous separation between worship and politics," and based on this, say that the elements of worship as the very structures of the church ought to be instruments of conscientiousness in favor of the emancipation of the disinherited. The *Kerygma* has to center around the physical liberation of the person.

Notoriously absent from the mission of the church conceived by these political agents is the Pauline interpretation of worship as a sacrifice of our bodies "alive, holy, pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1); the practice of worship as the stimulus "to love and good works" (Heb. 10:24); and the church as the "chosen lineage, royal priesthood, holy nation, people purchased by God," whose mission consists in "announcing the virtues of him who called you from darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9).

### 4. Body versus spirit

For others, the church exists with the end of satiating the physical necessities of the individual. They justify their activism with the well known phrase, "No one will be interested in the Gospel if he has an empty stomach." Saying this, they expose the false base over which their reasoning lies: the piece of bread is going to be the conditioning for the spiritual liberation of man.

Even when it is certain that the church should not negate the right of each man to obtain or receive the necessary material sustenance, under no circumstance should it invert priorities or substitute the temporal for the permanent. Before Christ taught his disciples to pray for "daily bread," he taught them to say, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done."

### 5. Proselytism versus reconciliation

For those who understand evangelization as proselytism, the emphasis is fixed on convincing men so that they might be members of their culture, ecclesiology, or religion; or on the other hand, the spiritual conflict is understood as a controversy between "church of the good"

and "church of the bad," and he wins who carries off to the other side the most initiates.

In this context the biblical concept of the necessity for all men to be reconciled recedes, and the superiority of the forms of government, the dogmas, or the practices of the church are placed before the word of reconciliation.

### 6. Universalism versus sacrifice

Also there have arisen those who consider the possibility of a unique universal message as the solution to the spiritual problem of humanity. Here they endeavor to adapt the message of Christ to the mentalities of the followers of other religions, and find the similar elements and those of a common denominator that could facilitate their coming together to form from all the religious precepts one sole, universal brotherhood. It is obvious that to obtain such an amalgam, the claims concerning the exclusivity of the ministry and the Gospel made by Christ are obscured, and very specially the notion of sacrifice by him.

### 7. Moral obligation versus revelation

With some frequency we listen to even another alternative to the business of the church among humanity. It is interpreted as the task of succeeding in the moral transcendence of the individual. Dr. Bergmann has well warned us against this danger saying, "Kant exercised a strong influence over generations in the east and the west, the north and the south. We are grateful for it. But the Gospel is not a categorical imperative, neither is it a personal moral achievement. The true nature of the Gospel is based on another thing, that is, the 'revelatio dei' the revelation of God. The Gospel is the reflection of this self-communication of God. Owing to this revelation of God, the Gospel is exclusive and unique. This revelation of God culminates in Jesus Christ, He is the theme of the Gospel. The true nature of the Gospel is found then inseparably united with the true nature of Jesus Christ. And the true nature of Jesus Christ is derived at the same time from the fact that he is the eternal Son of God."

### 8. Humanism versus transformation

The conflict between humanism which saturates the mentality of men of this century and the radical transformation that the Gospel can bring about in a man by the Holy Spirit is distinguished today. It is true that man constitutes the principal preoccupation of the Creator and that the love of God has been focused plainly on the human creature, but it is essential to reflect upon the means which that Creator has laid out to liberate the human being from his condition and follow the plan devised for his spiritual and physical liberation.

Obsessed by an exaggerated, superficial humanistic concept, and interpreting society and its structures as the center of the action of God, some Christian thinkers lately have directed their attention from the church towards these secondary objectives, interpreting them as their mission, and not towards the radical transformation of the human being.

### 9. Ghettos versus service communities

One alternative that has captivated the attention of many is the concept of "the church for others." Based on the theological developments of Bonhoeffer, its basic enunciation at simple view seems to

embrace the redemptive, social, humanistic, and spiritual elements for a balanced combination. This idea of the German theologian seems to provide us with the necessary formula to finish once and for all with the desperate and egocentric attitude of the church. In effect, it tends to point out a wholesome way to the destruction of the spiritual ghetto and make the people of God a centrifugal rather than a centripetal community, sending the Christian to serve the world and putting him at the disposal of others.

But if it is certain that the church should not be a privileged ghetto for a select minority, it is also certain that it should not be converted into an agency that reduces into a unique mission helping society in its renovation of the economic, social, and political structures. The service of the people of God, ought to be a continuation of the compassion of Christ for men, as he fed the multitudes after preaching to them the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healed the sick during his exhaustive rounds of preaching about the necessity of all men to come to repentance.

#### 10. *Syncretism versus the message of the Cross*

Between a church which focuses its mission and fixes priority in serving humanity in its political, economic, and social unrest, and syncretism, there exists not more than a step. Entangled in a work of this nature, "the church for others," will soon find itself fighting together with Hindus, Marxists, Agnostics, or Muslims in the conquest for the dignity of man. On this plane, its action will allocate Christ to the vanguard of the fight for the transcendence of the individual, together with Buddha, Mohammed, Marx, or Che Guevarra, but stripping him of the Cross, the empty tomb, and the reconciliation with the Father.

"The great temptation of this century, according to Dr. Visser't Hooft, is syncretism: the human soul is not 'naturally Christian, but naturally syncretistic.' The temptation of syncretism is intensified from the moment that the contemporary world searches for a universal faith. This search is totally legitimate. The preoccupation of all those who are interested in the destiny of mankind, says Dr. Radakrishnan, is 'to give a spiritual base to a world unified by human techniques.' Why not unite, then? At least among the four 'greats' of universalism: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, to promote the universal religion". We should overcome this great temptation.

#### 11. *Ideologies versus Christian message*

There are many powerful or different ideologies that compete for the attention of modern man, demanding priority in action, citing superiority and desiring to impose their own ideas. Such a cause has as an immediate threat the nullification of the Christian message, the incompleteness of the genuine mission of the church, and the subordination of the sovereignty of Christ to the demands of human thinking.

#### 12. *World versus supreme calling*

From other circles a dialogue with the world is urgently required. It is insisted that we permit the world to present to the church the plan to follow in communication. Under this, the church should be preoccupied with the conflicts and uncertainties in the world today. Its

action should be directed towards the unrest that the world suffers. If society is discussing economic, political, or racial afflictions, the message of the church should be limited to such necessities. Of secondary importance seems to be that which the church has to say to the world. In this case, the supreme calling delivered to the early Church is wanting in force. Nevertheless, it is urgent that the church sustain within itself the character of the circumstances in which it moves as proclaimer-witness-servant.

#### 13. *"Isms" versus repentance*

The matters of ecumenism, denominationalism, and others "isms" as primary concern and fundamental mission of the church, is another tension today. The people of God should not lose its calling to repentance for all men and busy itself with temporal and secondary goals.

#### 14. *Activism versus redemptive proclamation*

In accordance with the first concept, the purpose of the Gospel does not reside in persuasive action, but in the presence of the church in society. The proclamation of the Gospel becomes unnecessary upon understanding that the social changes constitute the mission of God, and that in those transformations of the structures is brought about the advent of the Kingdom of God. We ought to recognize also that others have substituted the organizations, projects, and events of an exaggerated activism in place of the redemptive proclamation of the Good News.

#### 15. *Unrest in the world versus eschatological vision*

In some cases the Christian has been infected with the restlessness of the world which searches out as a chief end, peace, bread, or conveniences and has lost the eschatological vision of the sovereign reign of Jesus Christ. Before the frantic race of the world to obtain pleasures and passing delights, the voice of the people of God should be that of the Irish hymnist, "Be Thou my vision, oh Lord of my heart."

#### 16. *Identification with the world versus identification with Christ*

We ought not to contribute to the manouvers of those desiring to manipulate the biblical concept of the identification with Christ and transform it into the identification with the world. If the people of God are called to be converted into an "extension of the incarnation" of Christ, it must be remembered that this finds its highest expression in the Christian discipleship described by the Master as a denial of the self, taking the cross, and going after him.

In view of the perplexity of the church's mission manifested in the penetrative crisis that we have tried to touch upon here, it is good to remember that prior to Christ's visit to the world, God had already been involved in the missionary act by sending his angels to announce the good news of a Savior "who is Christ the Lord," who "will save the people from their sins." Orlando Costas says, "The missionary enterprise finds its foundation in the very character of God. God is a missionary God, who from the beginning goes, and therefore chooses and sends. He is at the same time sender and emissary. It is said of him that he stoops over the earth to see the work of men, separates those who he wants to use as messengers and orders them to go as instruments of his justice, love and peace. The Triune God, who goes ahead in

accordance with his purpose, is involved in history and recruits messengers to go everywhere to give testimony of his active presence in history."

It is not the church has imposed the task upon itself. The centrifugal movement originated in God and at the same time has its culmination in him. It is God who sends, it is God who achieves, and it is to God that man must return. By heeding the command, the church participates in the divine effort for the reconciliation between God and man. To that end the Father sent the Son to send his people "and by his means reconcile with himself all things, those on the earth and those in the heavens, making peace by virtue of the blood of the Cross" (Col. 1:20).

The church has been sent clearly and specifically to "all the nations" (Luke 24:47; Matt. 28:19), to "all the world" (Mark 16:15), and "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:9). And its distinctive mission consists unmistakably in "making disciples" (Matt. 28:19), "preaching the Gospel," including on its behalf "repentance and pardon of sins in all nations" (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47), and acting as "witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

#### *PART TWO: The Biblical mission of the church*

The Christian church through the centuries has yielded to being under the strict orders of the worldwide evangelistic pronouncement as it is found recorded in the five books (the four Gospels and the book of Acts) of the New Testament which has been given the name of "the Great Commission." We consider this ordinance and the completion that we can give it in the context of the church as a community that worships, evangelizes and serves.

##### *1. A community of worship*

Whether we think that the five versions of the "Great Commission" represent one occasion on which it was expressed by the Lord, but afterwards narrated differently by the various writers, or whether we think that during the forty days that transpired between the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord, he repeated the same words in different places with small variations, it is certain that in either case the disciples were found reunited and the vision of Christ produced in them a profound feeling of adoration. This adoration seems to be clearly founded in the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Worship of the Son of God is subject to the reliability of an historical event. John the apostle wrote, "We have seen him, we have seen him with our own eyes, beheld him and felt our hands touching the Word of life" (1 John 1:1).

Of the report concerning the activities of the early church, according to its narrative in the book of Acts, we conclude that this original Christian nucleus was a community that worshipped. A.B. McDonald has written, "They possessed nothing more tangible than their congregations of worship. They had no buildings, no sacred book particular to them, neither a definite creed, nor rules or norms, such as those of Benedict or Bernard — they had nothing, except their worshiping congregations, which served as a stimulus for their loyalties."

In these congregations, the early Christians shared the outcomes of their public testimony ("and as soon as they were discharged went back

to their friends and told them everything that the chief priests and elders had said," Acts 4:23), and obtained inspiration and courage for their evangelistic work ("and now, Lord, mark their threats and enable thy servants to speak thy Word with all boldness," Acts 4:29).

Worship is an opportunity for evangelistic witness. Through worship we exalt Christ and present him to an unredeemed world. Why proclaim him to the people without explaining to them who he is? The advice of Paul to the Romans was that they confess with their mouths Jesus Christ as the "Lord," and this means worshipping him and proclaiming him. At the same time our approach in being involved in worship constitutes an eloquent testimony of the faith which unites us, the love that we practice, and the pardon that we share. What the world wants to see is not only identification with him in suffering, injustice, and poverty, but the objective demonstration that we are brothers and are disposed to reunite ourselves around one God only and exalt him as our common Father. Bruce Larson has said, "The ministry of all believers doesn't mean that we should do away with ministers, but rather that we ought to convert ourselves into ministers to serve one another." The Christians who worship under a genuine sense of community, evangelize through their words, example and service.

##### *2. An evangelizing brotherhood*

The second element that stands out in the "Great Commission," is the order to evangelize that Christ gave his disciples; and this concept appears in the five books already mentioned, through the use of the three main verbs: *kerussein* ("to proclaim"); *euaggelizesthai* ("to tell the good news"), and *marturein* ("to give testimony"). In these three verbs we find the fullness of the significance of the evangelistic work that Christ charges to his church as an inescapable mission.

The order of evangelizing embraces the idea of proclamation. John Strott reminds us that, "If the majority of versions translate 'that it be preached' well, they treat in reality the Greek word *keruchthenai*, which means 'to be publicly known.' It is found fixed at the beginning of the sentence in Greek, which means that over it falls the main emphasis. The intention of Christ is that a definite message 'be preached' throughout the world, and for this he establishes his church as the messenger of his Gospel."

While in one sector of the church preaching is an obsolete method, for another it constitutes a very important method of evangelization. Without underestimating the ministry of healing the sick, helping the poor, being involved in politics, or participation in causes of social justice, the proclamation is the outstanding element of the Great Commission. Jose D. Camacho has written, "From the point of view of the Christian Church we are looking to expand a bridge over the abyss between the church and the world; the sacred and the secular; the public and the private. We are looking for something that gives cohesion and coherence to an unsettled world and man. How can this succeed? If we take seriously the theological implications of the evangelism of Christ; that is, if we take it seriously as we take the structural, organizational and administrative realities of our society — the powerful structures — we will find the answer."

### 3. *A body that serves*

A third element we encounter in the Great Commission is that act of witnessing (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47; John 20:21-23). Christ ordered his disciples to walk the whole world giving testimony of that which they had witnessed. To witness does not only mean to make a verbal announcement, but it ought to include as well the proof of the transformation made in the life of the witness.

It is in this living witness that the church lends it services to the world. It is necessary that the element of service be included as an essential part of the mission of the church, as part of the evangelization that has been commended to it to be fulfilled among all men. Rolando Gutierrez-Cortes wrote, "When Jesus said, 'I have not come to be served but to serve', it was totally a revelation of the dimensions of the heart of God for man. In these words Jesus described the more profound intimacies of the divine purposes, and only when we serve in this same dimension is it that we are united in a Christian activity."

In its service to the world the church should be careful that it does not fall in either of these two extremes: one is the ministering of help to the individual with only evangelistic ends. Regeneration should not only be a "religious" subject, but rather a total transformation of the man should occur, including a change in his attitudes towards his fellow man. Ministering service only as an excuse to bring the unconverted to the church, or to make him accept our religious convictions, is not honest. In the missionary fields of the world much has been suffered by the sincere but mistaken efforts of missionaries who distribute clothing, food, and medicine to those who attend the worship, while impartial service assisting those who suffer oppression, injustice, or pain, remains outside their agenda.

The second extreme of which we should be careful, is thinking that we should leave all social action outside of the proclamation of the Gospel so that it can be effective. It indicates that the proclamation itself is social action. When the Gospel is presented completely and correctly, it has a transforming effect, such that men change their relations with others, rectify their conduct, and openly declare themselves in favor of justice and truth. The great revivals of the past had this characteristic. Men having been transformed in their inner lives, society also experienced a notable change in its action and in its structures.

By means of worship, proclamation, and service, the church should recognize that the mission that its Lord put to them was over all things that of the individual obtaining reconciliation with God. The evangelistic command given to the church should be completed and to this work the church should dedicate its best men, its most valuable resources, and its most ardent prayer.

## THE BIBLICAL MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN WORSHIP, WITNESS AND SERVICE REPORT

Discussion among the participants of this group based on the paper by Hector Espinoza reflected the fact that uncertainty and perplexity concerning the mission of the church is indeed a problem faced by the church today. This uncertainty, it was recognized, has its roots in a number of unresolved issues, sixteen of which were outlined in Mr. Espinoza's paper.

Any approach to a solution of this problem must be based upon a fresh, widespread response of the Christian community to the Lord of the church, and such a response may well be considered in terms of worship, witness and service, as the paper suggests.

Many aspects of our uncertainty tend to disappear as the people of God gain a more mature understanding of who God really is, especially as they meet him afresh in the risen Christ. Any true response to the risen Christ vibrates with joy and adoration, as well as reverence. Expressions of worship may involve the gathered community in a particular area, either as whole congregations or in small group settings, or may characterize the expression and attitude of the individual believer. In developing our expression of worship, we should be less concerned about the binding elements of tradition, and more concerned about a joyful response to the Word of God and the Lord of the Word.

It was recognized that worship implies certain essential elements including praise and thanksgiving, confession and affirmation, intercession and petition, proclamation and exposition of Scripture, consecration and commitment and the sacramental celebration of the believing body around the table of the Lord.

Worship should also function as the means by which the people of God are built up in the Spirit in order to move out into the unredeemed world with an authentic, effective witness to the reality of God and to his great love made known to us in Jesus Christ. In the course of worship, even though it is primarily directed to the needs of the believers and represents the Godward expression of the Lord's people, the unbeliever may well catch sight of God and thus be brought to faith.

As believers move out into the world, thus refreshed in their witness to Christ by participation in worship, they are called to reflect the love of Jesus Christ, in their attitudes, their behavior and their explicit witness. The Christian community must remember the Scriptural injunction that all men should recognize the believers by their love and, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples because ye have love one for another" (John 13:35).

Further effective witness on the part of the church will depend heavily on the involvement of the laity — all the people of God — in the total ministry of the church. This in turn suggests the great need for further recognizing authentic gifts and carefully developing those gifts