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MISSION TO THE WORLD



*Essays to celebrate the 50th anniversary
of the ordination of George Raymond Beasley-Murray
to the Christian ministry*

Edited by Paul Beasley-Murray

A supplement to the Baptist Quarterly Baptist Historical Society 1991

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George Raymond Beasley-Murray
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Paul Beasley-Murray

A supplement to the *Baptist Quarterly*

BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1991



George Raymond Beasley-Murray, MA, DD (Cambridge), BD, MTh, PhD, DD (London), Hon.DLitt (CNA), Hon.DD (McMaster, Canada), LRAM

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FOREWORD

As I have reflected on my father's past fifty years of ministry, no theme seemed to be more appropriate for a collection of essays in his honour than 'Mission to the World'. It was no accident that on 29 April 196, in his Baptist Union Presidential Address, he chose to speak on the subject *Renewed for Mission*, for down through the years my father has been passionately concerned to see the lost won for Christ. Even in his retirement, along with his writing, he is still seeking to befriend those who know not the Saviour. As he declared on that Presidential evening, 'There is a Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved, *and that Name must be heard*. To make Him known is to give men and women the possibility of life from the dead in the here and now; to withhold the News of Him is to withhold this life from them.'

It is this theme of mission that we have chosen to treat and examine from a variety of scholarly standpoints. All the essays have been written by men who were previously students under my father at Spurgeon's College: John Colwell (Pastor, King's Church, Catford, London), Athol Gill (Tutor at Whitley College, Victoria, Australia), Colin Marchant (President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1988), Bruce Milne (Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Vancouver, Canada), Mike Nicholls (Vice-Principal of Spurgeon's College), Derek Winter (now retired after a distinguished missionary career), and Nigel Wright (Tutor, Spurgeon's College). A member of my father's college batch, Jack Brown (President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1972) kindly wrote the personal appreciation. The one non-Spurgeonic contribution was made by Larry Kreitzer, a former student of my father's from the years spent at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

It has been a great delight and joy to me to edit this collection of essays. I am most grateful to all the contributors for their willingness to take part in this enterprise. Likewise special words of gratitude must be expressed to Roger Hayden, the Secretary of the Baptist Historical Society, who has given most generously of his time in helping me with the editorial task; to Audrey Jones and Caroline Lovejoy, two of the Spurgeon's College secretaries who have transferred the manuscripts to computer disc; to Faith Bowers of the Baptist Historical Society who has overseen the production process; and finally to Sir Cyril Black, a former member of the Spurgeon's College Council, who has made a generous subsidy to the publication of this volume.

PAUL BEASLEY-MURRAY

GEORGE RAYMOND BEASLEY-MURRAY

A Personal Appreciation

On 23 March 1937 George Beasley-Murray made a formal application to enter Spurgeon's College, London, to be trained for the Baptist ministry. He was born in Hackney, London, on 10 October 1916, the son of George Alfred Beasley and Kathleen Brady. Before he was a year old, his father was killed in a road accident while serving in the First World War. In 1920 his mother married George Murray and the family moved to Leicester. George won a scholarship to the City Boys' Secondary School and matriculated in English and History. He left school at sixteen and went to work for the City Gas Department where he was employed both as a clerk and salesman.

At the age of eighteen he was awarded the Licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music for pianoforte teaching. Music was his major pre-occupation. In his contribution to a book edited by C. A. Joyce, *My Call to the Ministry*, he admits that he spent so many hours at the piano that his mind was never free from music in any waking moment. A poster of 9 October 1933 pictured George at a grand piano giving an Invitation Recital at Leicester's Edward Wood Hall. It was his mother who first joined Beasley with Murray, as the poster indicates, so that concert-goers would know that George Beasley was in fact Mrs Murray's son! The matter was regularised when George changed his name by Deed Poll in 1938, thus honouring his father and stepfather.

It seemed very likely that he would become an accomplished concert pianist. However, a team of students from Spurgeon's College conducted an evangelistic mission at the North Evington Free Church in Leicester and the challenge of the Gospel was a totally new experience. George remembers his baptism at the age of four in a Roman Catholic Church but he had little church contact in childhood. He responded eagerly to the message of the Gospel which captivated his heart and mind: 'It was like the coming of day I went home walking on air.' Whereas until that moment he would have said 'to me to live is music', he could now say 'to me to live is Christ'. He was baptised on 18 December 1932 at North Evington, and from the beginning of his Christian life he had a strong desire to communicate the Gospel so that others might come to know Jesus Christ for themselves. The 'Young Life Campaign' and the 'Christian Endeavour' contributed to his spiritual growth and opened up opportunities for Christian witness. He taught in the Sunday School, took part in the open-air work, and preached in local churches. He spoke with confidence, conviction and courtesy and was an able preacher. When he applied to Spurgeon's College for ministerial training he stated on his application form: 'Two causes have impelled me to enter the ministry: the first is a whole-hearted desire to dedicate my life, with every talent and gift that it can possibly yield, to the glory of God. The second is the utter indifference of men concerning the things of God, and their ignorance of the consequences of unbelief have made me long to win them to Christ and be the means of their salvation.' No one at Spurgeon's had any doubt regarding his suitability for the task, but for George it was a hard choice. At one stage he gave up playing the piano for six months lest he be tempted to give up the call of God. His parents strongly disapproved of this new direction to his life, and even called a family conference to try to dissuade him.

The Student

Head down, back bent over a book-laden table, pen poised, oblivious to the presence of his three room-mates, a picture of intense concentration - that was George

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Beasley-Murray making the most of the compulsory study period. Able and diligent, he set a pace which few could match and which has never slackened during fifty-four years of study and ministry. The discipline and hard work which characterised his student life are still in evidence. Alongside the college curriculum George applied himself to the syllabus of the external B.D. of London University. His all-round ability won the respect of his fellow-students, but lest Juniors should become 'exalted above measure', Seniors felt called to administer deterrents to pride. In a poem commissioned by the student hierarchy, George ventured to refer to his elder brethren as 'cacophonous cads'. Punitive action followed, but he survived! It was all very hilarious. Each intake of students was known as a 'Batch', and the member of the group whose surname stood highest in the alphabetical list became leader. So the lot fell on Beasley. He had responsibility for calling and presiding over Batch meetings, arranging prayer times and representing the Batch at consultations with student officers and staff.

At this time George made the acquaintance of Ruth Weston, the daughter of a well-known preacher and convention speaker among the Christian Brethren. John Weston and his future son-in-law were at one in their admiration for Charles Haddon Spurgeon. John possessed a full set of the *New Park Street Pulpit* and the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* and revelled in Spurgeon's sermons. This gracious Christian gentleman warmed to the student in training at Spurgeon's College, readily received him into the hospitable Weston household and later into the family.

The outbreak of World War II on 3 September 1939 did not seriously disrupt the college course for the members of the Beasley-Murray Batch. It was thought that the college premises might be requisitioned by the Government and that theological students would not be exempt from military service. Neither of these eventualities materialised. Students on vacation in the summer of 1939 were invited to return, albeit at their own risk, to resume their studies in October. Everyone accepted the invitation, except the South African member of the Batch who returned home. The students grew accustomed to the wail of air-raid warning sirens, the drone of bomber planes, the crack of anti-aircraft guns, the screech of falling bombs and the sight of searchlights sweeping the night sky. Trenches were dug across the college lawn in an exercise worthy of *Dad's Army*! Preaching engagements were fulfilled as far as possible Sunday by Sunday. George accepted a 'call' to the Ashurst Drive Baptist Church, Ilford, in East London, and was ordained there on Sunday, 27 July 1941, by college tutor, Dr Frederick Cawley. The Induction Service the following Thursday had as the guest preacher Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones, the minister of Westminster Chapel.

The Family Man

George and Ruth were married at Ashurst Drive Baptist Church on 4 April 1942. Ruth proved herself to be a devoted and supportive partner, playing a full part in the life of the local church. They have four children, Paul, Elizabeth, Stephen and Andrew, of whom their parents are justifiably proud. Ruth has made her own significant contribution to Baptist life, serving as President of the Baptist Ministers' and Missionaries' Wives' Prayer Fellowship, and in 1972 as National President of the Baptist Women's League. At Spurgeon's College Ruth began regular meetings for the wives and fiancées of students.

The Pastor

When George was inducted at Ilford it was said he had the mind of a scholar and the heart of an evangelist. Both were energetically employed in the context of the life

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and work of the local church. In all his preaching, teaching and writing there was an evangelistic thrust. His presentation of the Gospel had reasoned argument and winsome appeal, as was apparent in his first book, *Christ is Alive!* (1947). The book was born out of a deep conviction that the truth concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ urgently required proclamation. Sixteen years later, when invited by the BBC to broadcast four talks during Lent, George enquired whether any previous speaker in the Lenten Series had dealt with this subject. None had. The talks were published in 1964 in response to many requests. He wrote: 'I could not think of anything so important to talk to men and women about.' For him the resurrection was the beating heart of the Christian faith, and it provided the motivation of his preaching and pastoral care.

He lectured at the London Bible College and contributed erudite articles to religious journals, but nothing diverted him from his essential ministry. In the first year at Ilford he baptised twenty-seven candidates and welcomed forty new members. His exposition of Scripture built people up in the faith, and his evangelistic preaching and leadership kept them aware of the church's mission and active in it. After seven years of effective service in Ilford, George accepted an invitation to become the minister of Zion Baptist Church, Cambridge, where he maintained his high standard of preaching and pastoral ministry. At this time the church gave him the opportunity to advance his academic work through Jesus College where he took Part III of the honours degree in theology.

The Tutor

In 1950 the Council of Spurgeon's College invited George to become New Testament Tutor. This marked the commencement of a long career in theological education. Once more he set a fast pace, stimulated by high spiritual and academic ideals. His colleagues admired his commitment, competence and intellectual honesty. His students testified to his integrity, graciousness and devotion to Christ. Not only the language and literature of the New Testament, but also Church History and Homiletics were part of his teaching programme. He was Secretary of Spurgeon's College Conference, trained the student choir, served as Librarian and had responsibility for the Principal P. W. Evans' Memorial Fund, a task which appealed to him since it commemorated the man who was Principal when George was a student and for whom he had a very high regard.

George gave himself wholeheartedly to each assignment and everyone in the college community felt the impact of his vitality. His lectures were clear and interesting. His leadership in devotional sessions evoked deep spirituality. His sense of humour was never far below the surface and his 'silent laughter' was proverbial.

In 1956 he moved to the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschnikon, Zürich, where he became Professor of Greek and New Testament Interpretation. Frank Fitzsimmonds succeeded him at the college, and during George's Principalship was a trusted friend and valued colleague. George spent a fruitful two years at Rüschnikon where he had unparalleled opportunities to meet European scholars on the one hand and the Southern Baptists on the other. It broadened his horizon in regard to scholarship and the world Baptist community. But there was an unexpected turn of events.

The office of Principal at Spurgeon's College fell vacant as the result of an unresolved difference between the incumbent, Eric. H. Worstead, and the college's governing body. An air of crisis, uncertainty and sadness pervaded college life. George Beasley-Murray's name was mentioned as a possible successor. It was decided that the Chairman and Treasurer of Spurgeon's College should journey to Switzerland

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to approach George personally, requesting him to give prayerful consideration to the proposal that he might return to the College as Principal. He faced no small dilemma. At the personal level he was immensely happy in Zürich: his teaching work, his colleagues, the environment were all very much to his liking, but he came to the conviction that he should respond positively to the College's pressing invitation.

At his Induction Service at the College on Speech Day, 26 June 1958, he said: 'God led me out. He has even more surprisingly led me back', adding that against all human reasoning he had felt it right to accept the compelling call. On the same occasion the President of the Rüschnikon Seminary, Dr Nordenhaug, was gracious enough to say that, while he was glad to be present at that significant event, he could now understand why the mother of the bride usually wept at the wedding! It was not a smooth transition for the Beasley-Murray family. Accommodation at the Principal's Flat in the college building was scarcely suitable for a family of six which meant that structural alterations were needed. The initial period of re-adjustment was not easy for those immediately concerned, but the future was promising. New concepts were developed, coupled with ideas which had been initiated by previous Principals and Tutors, especially in the field of academic excellence and in the more thorough preparation of pastor-evangelists who could minister effectively in local churches.

The Principal

Writing about his return to the college in 1958, George commented that nowhere in Europe could Baptists afford to be content with a poorly educated ministry, nor could they afford to have ministers unable to do their job properly. High academic standards were to be maintained. At the same time students were encouraged to become evangelists, pastors and teachers sensitive to the need of the hour and to the possibilities of meeting that need with the Gospel presented in fresh and untried ways. By precept and example he put the students to work. He was patient enough with students whose academic potential was limited but whose preaching and pastoral gifts were evident. He sometimes overlooked the fact that others were less gifted than himself and not everyone had his enthusiasm for exacting study. His intense concentration could be mistaken for aloofness. But it takes time to descend from the dizzy heights of advanced academic exploration. Once down to earth, however, no one could have been more caring about the needs which were drawn to his attention.

He combined the duties of Principal with those of Warden. Since his residence was part of the college's main building, he was constantly 'on call' to meet the demands of people and premises. His pastoral concern was evident when at the Friday morning act of worship in the chapel he named past members of the college fraternity and prayed for them. He arranged post-collegiate residential conferences for former students who had been in the ministry for eighteen months. They were encouraged to come with their wives and families to talk about their experience in their first pastorate, to voice their problems, their disappointments and their hopes for the future, and to consult with staff members and senior ministers.

To improve academic standards he initiated enquiries with the Council for National Academic Awards, hopeful that the college would obtain validation for its own degrees and be able to shape and control courses suitable for Baptist ministerial students.

The Principal's commendation of the presentation of the gospel in fresh and untried ways encouraged a number of students to form a music group, called 'The Venturers'. They sang lively gospel songs to the accompaniment of various instruments: stringed, woodwind and drums, and they gained popularity as they

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conducted evangelistic missions in churches and in the open air. The group attracted reports in the tabloid press and provoked criticism from those who judged the method was undignified and 'worldly'. The students, they said, would be better employed with their books. George saw no reason to prohibit an activity which was breaking new ground in evangelistic outreach. It gave him a further opportunity to emphasise the point that academic excellence and evangelistic outreach go hand-in-hand. He was personally involved in front-line evangelism when in 1963 the teaching staff and the students combined to form a team of sixty which joined with the four Baptist churches in the vast housing estate in Dagenham for the purpose of evangelistic mission. They engaged in church services and meetings for all age groups, participated in visits to numerous homes, as well as public-houses, clubs, schools and factories. The Principal played his part and encouraged the team and the churches.

George's Principalship was characterised by change and progress. The annual gathering of the College Conference in the summer of 1958 took place in the recently opened college chapel. This sanctuary, designed by Clifford Measday, a former student, was a much-needed focal point for worship where prayers were offered each day, where academic terms began and ended and where graduation services and other significant events in the college year were held.

Relationships with other theological colleges were developed. George implemented the arrangements whereby six students from Spurgeon's College interchanged for a week with a similar number from the Church of England Theological College in Lincoln.

1961 saw the acceptance of the first woman student at Spurgeon's College in the person of Margaret Jarman. Already an accredited deaconess, trained at Struan, she was appointed Organizing Secretary of the Deaconess Department of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1963. The following year she was ordained, and in 1987 she became the President of the Baptist Union, the first woman minister to hold this office.

Ernest Willmott was appointed full-time College Secretary to deal with the growing administrative work. Geoffrey Rusling had combined the secretaryship with his duties as Tutor and Vice-Principal. Increasing numbers of students and the extension of premises added to the management load carried by both Secretary and Principal. In 1964 a new block was built, linked to the existing library building, which consisted of a large lecture room, nineteen study bedrooms and a spacious recreation room.

Rex Mason was appointed in 1965 to teach Old Testament History, Religion and Literature. Three years later Lewis Drummond of Louisville, Kentucky, became the college's first Tutor in Evangelism and Pastoral Instruction. In 1971 Raymond Brown was appointed Tutor in Ecclesiastical History and Christian Doctrine.

Faced with an increasing number of married students, the college had to find suitable accommodation for couples and families. In 1972 thirty-three of the fifty-five students were married. New interviewing structures for prospective students were formulated to explore in greater detail the character and personality of the candidates, to examine more carefully their sense of call to the ministry, their academic ability and potential, and their suitability for training as pastors. Modern technology was introduced in the form of a videotape camera and recorder with related equipment which added to the tribulation of the sermon class! George encouraged the annual appointment of a leaving student to serve on the staff of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas for a year. This provided the nominee with a splendid opportunity to gain pastoral and administrative experience in a different environment before beginning to work in the UK.

For fifteen years George Beasley-Murray carried a heavy burden of responsibility as leader of the faculty team, organiser of college life and work, teacher and warden,

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to say nothing of committee meetings and preaching engagements week by week. It was fortunate that he had such an astonishing capacity for work.

Staff colleagues valued his friendship and responded to his leadership. With equal warmth students expressed appreciation of his participation in student affairs, his scholarship, and his humanity, shown as he leaped up and down on the touchline in excitement at soccer matches between the college and some rival institution. George brought the college to the threshold of recognition by the Council for National Academic Awards. It was the crowning achievement of his Principalship. He never begrudged anything he did for the college and enjoyed the whole range of the work.

It was at this moment he received and accepted an invitation to become Professor of New Testament Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. For some time he had felt frustrated by the lack of time to apply himself to programmes of advanced research and writing. He longed to be free from the weight of administration. He believed that in the new situation in Louisville he would be able to fulfil long-held intentions to publish works of scholarship for the benefit of students and ministers.

The loss to the college was alleviated to a great extent by the appointment of Raymond Brown, a distinguished son of the college, as the new Principal. He was a student at Spurgeon's when George was Tutor and later served with him for two years on the staff. In his capable hands and with the co-operation of able colleagues, the arrangements with the CNAA were finalised.

The Scholar

The scholarship which emerged in George Beasley-Murray's student years developed quickly. He was encouraged in this by a comment from Douglas Johnson, then secretary of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship who, knowing George's great desire to be an evangelist, suggested that he would be of more use as a 'backroom boy' and should develop his gift for biblical scholarship. Soon after beginning his ministry he consulted with F. F. Bruce, then of Leeds, regarding a possible research programme. Professor Bruce recalled the conversation later and commented, 'His [George's] subsequent research has shown that he did not really require much help!' In 1944 he contributed to the *Evangelical Quarterly* a not uncritical review of H. H. Rowley's *The Relevance of Apocalyptic*. F. F. Bruce remembered that the editor was somewhat perturbed that a young and largely unknown writer should review a work of so eminent a scholar. 'However,' continued Professor Bruce, 'he had no need to be perturbed, Dr Rowley had a high opinion of George's ability.' In the Foreword to *Christ is Alive!*, F. F. Bruce wrote: 'Though this is not a work of scholarship in the strict sense, the discerning reader will recognise the exact, thoughtful and well-informed scholarship which underlies it.'

In 1953 George submitted his doctoral dissertation to London University. The accepted thesis was published under the title *Jesus and the Future: An Examination of the Criticism of the Eschatological Discourse, Mark 13, with Special Reference to the Little Apocalypse Theory* (London 1954). This 'biggest problem in the Gospel' appealed to his agile mind! He set out to read everything of repute written on the subject since 1864. Bibliography and copious notes reveal the enormity of the task. Scholarly critics noted the author's thorough preparation. One reviewer stated: 'The whole investigation cannot be ignored by any school of eschatological insight either as a positive help to the elucidation of these perplexing issues or as a warning against facile over-simplification of the problem.' Three years later George wrote *A Commentary on Mark 13*, unusual in that it was a commentary on a single chapter. It was done in response to repeated suggestions from readers of *Jesus and the Future*,

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who wanted maximum benefit from the research which had been so carefully mastered. The commentary deals with the authenticity of Mark 13 as an original discourse of Jesus, giving a detailed exposition of each verse.

George's well-established reputation as a scholar with a specialist interest in eschatology led to an invitation to contribute a commentary to the New Century Bible series on *Revelation* (1974). G. B. Caird said it was written with 'clarity of style, soundness of judgment and a comprehensive knowledge of recent scholarly literature'. The *Church Times* review described it as first class, 'all that a commentary should be'. In 1972 the Broadman Press, USA, had published George's *Highlights of the Book of Revelation*, which was an extended version of lectures given at the Nationwide Baptist Convention at Dallas in 1971. George gave the Drew Lecture on Immortality at Whitefield Memorial Church, London, in October 1972, when his chosen theme was 'The contribution of the Book of Revelation to the Christian Belief in Immortality'. The lecture likened John's symbolism to the political cartoon, using images readily understood by contemporary readers; and it contains a fascinating exposition of the promises to the 'conquerors' in the letters to the seven churches.

Years of reading and reflection on the subject of apocalyptic resulted in another major publication, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (1986). Howard Marshall commented on George's 'meticulous, well-informed, and creative New Testament scholarship'. The Roman Catholic scholar, R. E. Brown, wrote: 'This challenging work will have to be weighed and discussed by all who are seriously interested in these crucial and theological matters.'

Another important area of study which has occupied George's mind is the New Testament doctrine of baptism. In 1959 he contributed a chapter on 'Baptism in the Epistles of Paul' to *Christian Baptism*. In this volume, edited by Alec Gilmore, eleven Baptist scholars combined to make a fresh attempt to understand the rite in terms of scripture, history and theology. In 1962 George published *Baptism in the New Testament*, based on his 1959 Whitley Lectures which had been given at Regent's Park College, Oxford, and at University College, Bangor, in north Wales. The reviewer in the *Expository Times* wrote: 'The work shows all the careful scholarship which [the author's] earlier writings on eschatology have led us to expect. At every point he has something illuminating to say. His account of the New Testament theology of baptism will become a standard work'. The treatment was thorough and courageous. George was not afraid to challenge the position of eminent paedobaptist scholars, Jeremias and Cullmann. Twenty years later Dr Michael Walker, presenting a paper on 'Baptist Worship' at a Baptist Historical Society Summer School, claimed that, along with R. E. O. White's *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*, George's book revolutionised contemporary Baptist understanding in Britain. It showed that baptism was not simply a confession of faith but 'an integral part of that process of conversion by which a man or woman is raised from death to life in Christ and endowed with the gift of the Spirit.' In 1966, a little against his will, George produced *Baptism Today and Tomorrow*, a consideration of some of the controversial issues facing churches regarding baptismal practice. Originally given as the Adolph Olsen Memorial Lectures at Bethel Theological Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota, the book dealt with the significance of the baptismal controversy in and between local churches. George admired the work of Rudolf Schnackenburg in relation to the New Testament study of baptism, and was the translator of the German Roman Catholic scholar's *Baptism in the Thought of St Paul*.

George became secretary of the European section of the Faith and Order Commission which produced *One Lord, One Baptism*. In this he worked alongside well-known scholars such as Anders Nygren, Geoffrey Lampe, Oscar Cullmann, Edmund Schlink, T. F. Torrance and John Marsh. He was, in this capacity, one of

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eighteen Baptist representatives present at the fourth World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963.

George made a special study of the Gospel of *John*. His commentary was published in the Word Biblical Commentary series in 1987. In the introduction he reveals something of himself. As a teenager he found the fourth Gospel thrilling, though the first sentence baffled him! As a theological student he discovered unsuspected depths of meaning. As a pastor in war-time London he learned the comfort of this Gospel's message for the shattered people to whom he ministered. He had listened with keen appreciation to C. H. Dodd and other scholars. Now, with busy local ministers in mind, he set out to pass on some of the treasures of modern study, believing that to read John's Gospel with integrity and openness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit would lead to a deeper understanding of the person of Christ and result in a more adequate witness to Christ in the world.

An avowedly conservative scholar, George was nevertheless prepared to translate into English Rudolf Bultmann's commentary on *John*. This illustrates his life-long concern to learn from fellow-searchers after truth whatever their presuppositions might be. 'Where scholars divide', he said in his Drew Lecture, 'one has to make one's own decision and maintain it with respect for the opinions of others.' His integrity in such matters is seen in his handling of one of the most difficult questions in historical theology, namely, the time of the Parousia. It demanded courage and honesty, revealed in his two books, *Jesus and the Future* (1954) and *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (1957), when he concluded that Christ's unfulfilled prediction concerning the imminence of the Parousia in no way discredited the Lord's teaching. The Son of God has limited knowledge, since the last word is with God the Father, who alone has full knowledge of the End. Therefore all the words of the Son of God are subject to that word.

George carries his scholarship lightly, and it is all dedicated to Christ, his Church and its mission. In addition to degrees which he has received for work done at London and Cambridge Universities, he received a D.D. from Cambridge in 1989 for his achievements in New Testament scholarship and for *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* in particular. In the same year, Spurgeon's College, under the auspices of the Council for National Academic Awards, conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters, which recognised his scholarship, his contribution to theological education and his profound influence on the Christian ministry and life of Baptist churches.

The Preacher

George Beasley-Murray has always been in demand as a preacher of the Word. His sermons are an enriching contribution to the worship of the people of God whether offered in Sunday public worship or on special occasions such as Ordination and Induction services. The preaching is not lightweight. It has the stamp of thorough preparation, and shows that he never offers to his Lord that which costs him nothing. He is happiest when expounding scripture: careful explanation combined with unashamed fervency, vivid illustration and touches of humour ensure compulsive listening - a preacher who demands a response. He may sometimes forget that his hearers neither possess his depth of knowledge nor share his breadth of perception, yet he constantly seeks to present 'the truth as it is in Jesus' and to evoke an appropriate commitment to Jesus Christ and the work of God's Kingdom.

George earnestly desires his scholarship to inform and enliven Christian proclamation. This is well illustrated in *Preaching the Gospel from the Gospels*, published in 1956, in which he expanded some lectures given initially to a joint meeting of the London Baptist and Congregational lay preachers. The *Expository*

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Times said: 'Surely there can never have been a more closely packed book than this. An amazing amount of ground is covered and the author touches nothing that he does not illuminate. Every sentence will expand into a sermon!'

George's sermon given at the Missionary Meeting of the annual Baptist Assembly in Leeds in 1965 provides an excellent example of his method, style and power. His text was Isaiah 42.4, the climax of the first song of the Servant of the Lord. He dealt with the identity, the task, the way and the spirit of the Servant. He concluded by urging those present to develop Servant attitudes in the missionary work which confronted the churches. 'In such a spirit let us go to our mission. Chicken-heartedness and pessimism have no place in Christianity, nor feeble knees, helpless hands and hang-dog looks. We are the people of the resurrection with the message of life for the world. Share the faith of Jesus. Do not fail nor be discouraged. Set the Gospel in the earth. For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'

The Denominational Leader

The Principals of affiliated colleges of the Baptist Union of Great Britain have a place on the Baptist Union Council through which the denomination transacts its business. For fifteen years, as Principal of Spurgeon's College, and again more recently as a past President of the Baptist Union, George has played a significant part in denominational life. He brings a keen mind to the cut and thrust of debate, expressing his convictions forcefully but not harshly. In 1969 the Council decided to elect a chairman for three years to ensure continuity of its leadership and to relieve the annually-elected President of this arduous task. Having every confidence in his judgment and ability, the Council elected George as the first holder of this office.

It was another occasion for a hard choice when, shortly before his term of office was completed, George relinquished the Chair. An issue of weighty theological importance had arisen regarding which he wished to speak freely according to the dictates of his conscience. Continued occupation of the Chair would have imposed too great a restriction. The crisis sprang from an address delivered by the Revd Michael Taylor, then Principal of the Northern Baptist College, at the 1971 Annual Baptist Assembly. The subject was 'How much of a man was Jesus Christ?', chosen by the President, the Revd Dr G. Henton Davies, as part of the development of his Assembly theme, 'The Incarnate Presence'. George was not alone in detecting in the address a view of the person of Christ which differed significantly from generally accepted Christian belief.

In a statement issued by Dr David Russell and published in the *Baptist Times*, two reasons were given for George's resignation from the Chair: 'first, his desire to dissent in the strongest possible manner from the Council's decision not to affirm the inadequacy of a view of Christ, propounded in our Assembly, which he believes seriously departs from the New Testament teaching about Christ and the Gospel, and is irreconcilable with the Union's Declaration of Principle; secondly, his desire for complete freedom in making known his convictions relating to these issues.'

George recognised the grave theological implications of the address, and he was equally aware of the practical consequences of failure to face the issues. The threat to denominational unity, for example, was alarming. The ensuing debate inevitably drew into the arena the principles of freedom and tolerance in theological encounter. George was deeply concerned for the health of the Union, for the faith of Baptist people, and for the preservation of essential Christianity in the Union's churches.

The matter was debated in three meetings of the Baptist Union Council and a resolution was presented at Council for presentation at the Baptist Union Assembly

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in 1972. The resolution called for the whole-hearted acceptance of and belief in the Baptist Union Declaration of Principle, set out in the Union's Constitution, as the basis upon which the denomination could go forward united in the work and extension of Christ's Kingdom. Moved by Sir Cyril Black, MP, it was seconded by George who noted that many in the denomination had felt that the heart of their faith had been called in question by the Assembly address, and many others considered that their freedom in the faith was at stake. George maintained that faith and freedom should be held in creative tension, and urged that it was reasonable to demonstrate unity in Christ by making a positive statement of what Baptists do, and do not, believe. George was convinced that a most serious theological issue was in question and that it was necessary for the denomination to state its basic beliefs. The resolution was accepted by Council and passed by an overwhelming majority at the subsequent Assembly.

George served the Baptist Union Council in a variety of ways. For ten years he was chairman of the Advisory Committee on Church Relations which dealt with ecumenical concerns, and it was he who prepared and presented to the Council in 1967 the document *Baptists and Unity*. This was discussed at local church level and responses were noted in *Baptists and Unity Reviewed* (1969). At the 1969 Assembly George moved a resolution which urged Baptists to continue sharing and exploring ecumenical relationships. The resolution recognised the differences of conviction among Baptists regarding inter-church relationships and the right of member churches to engage in, or refrain from, such ecumenical encounter. It asked the churches of the Union to maintain, in their differences, a mutual trust and love which accorded with fellowship in Christ. The tone and content of George's presentation on this delicate issue was a factor in the Assembly's acceptance of the Report.

George's representative presence on various groups within both the British and World Council of Churches was welcomed by the denomination since his scholarship and evangelical convictions were well-known and respected. His final chapter in *Baptism in the New Testament* recognises the pain of ecumenical discussion but he is not prevented from drawing conclusions, albeit with candour and courtesy, contrary to many of his paedobaptist colleagues, 'for the sake of the truth after which we all strive and which we but partially see.'

In addition to extensive work on inter-church relations, George also served on various Union committees, including the Ministerial Recognition Committee, the General Purposes and Finance Executive, the Assembly Programme Committee, and the Joint Consultative Committee which brings together the executive officers of the United Kingdom Baptist Unions and the Baptist Missionary Society. George's musical gifts were used as a member of the editorial committee which produced the *Baptist Hymn Book* in 1962. Serving as the BMS General Committee in his capacity as College Principal, he was a constant advocate of the Baptist Missionary Society, and first his daughter Elizabeth and then his son Paul served as short-term missionaries with the Society.

The denomination honoured George with its highest distinction when he became President in 1968. It was a recognition of loyal service and at the same time a call to leadership. He challenged the churches, through his Presidential theme, to be 'Renewed for Mission'. He deliberately chose the second half of the slogan adopted by the 1964 Faith and Order Conference held at Nottingham. He made the point that the denomination had given much attention to the meaning of 'One Church' and he believed that the time had come to give equally intensive consideration to renewal by the Holy Spirit and the mission of Christ. The nature of mission he described as proclamation of the Gospel and action commensurate with it. The instrument of

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mission is the Church committed to Christ. The mode of mission is the proclamation of the Gospel by the whole Church whose members are missionaries, in a way which is intelligible to contemporary pagans. The condition for carrying on the mission is dependence upon the Holy Spirit. This powerful utterance included a very practical proposal. George challenged the churches to study during the autumn and winter of his Presidential year the meaning of mission and at the next Easter to make a clear-cut witness to Christ's resurrection. It was a clarion call to all the churches to engage in joint action by which the Easter message would be communicated effectively to the nation.

A Retired Minister?

The question mark belongs to the adjective, since George's ministry continues unabated. He retired a year early, welcoming this eagerly as an opportunity to engage in yet more writing and lecturing! He returned to London from Louisville in 1980 and brought to completion two significant volumes, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* and his commentary on *The Gospel of John*, published in 1986 and 1987 respectively. He is Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, and returns to lecture there regularly, and he enjoys preaching in local churches and contributing to conferences in Britain. The Beckenham Baptist Church (Elm Road) benefited from his Moderatorship when their pastor, the late Michael Walker, became a tutor at the South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff; George preached and taught regularly until the vacancy was filled. When George and Ruth moved to Hove, they joined the Holland Road Baptist Church, where George serves as a deacon. At a personal level, George continues to be counsellor and advisor to many who seek him out. A somewhat belated honour came to him when he was elected President of Spurgeon's College Conference, an accolade which his service and devotion to the College and the respect in which he is held by 'Spurgeon's men and women' made inevitable. George chose as his Presidential theme: 'Christians and Jews, yesterday and today'. His own address dealt with the relationship between synagogue and church in the New Testament. A guest speaker was Dr Pinchas Lapide, an orthodox Jewish Rabbi from Frankfurt, who spoke on 'The Creed of a Jewish New Testament Scholar'. Here is another instance of the breadth of George's interests and of his eager desire to build bridges of understanding firmly based on truth and love. This has characterised his life and ministry from the time when he first grasped the wonder of God's love, the marvel of Christ's victory and the hope of his return in glory and 'felt that everybody ought to know about them. 'More explicitly', he later wrote in *My Call to Ministry*, 'it seemed to me that since God had made them known to me, I ought to make them known to others. I believed therefore that God had called me to know Christ and to make Christ known. He had brought me to Himself that I might be a preacher!' Despite the hard choices he has had to make, he has never wavered from the conviction that Jesus Christ entrusted him with a Gospel of reconciliation. He has used his gifts of communication to urge listeners and readers to be at one with God and with each other. This, after all, is the purpose of Christian mission, and mission is the force which fills George Beasley-Murray's life. His preaching and caring, teaching and writing, befriending and counselling have a single-minded aim: to make Christ known as the way, the truth and the life.

J. J. BROWN

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CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON 1834 - 1892

Church Planter

In 1854 a nineteen year old preacher from Cambridgeshire took London by storm. A dwindling and disheartened congregation in Park Street Chapel, south of London Bridge, sprang to life. Hundreds of people flocked to hear the country lad with the extraordinary voice and a fluency to match it. It was Charles Haddon Spurgeon, often called the 'Prince of Preachers',¹ who in addition to his pulpit ministry and prolific writing began over twenty-five philanthropic organizations and instituted a College for the training of ministers.

Spurgeon's preaching has been evaluated, his writings analysed, his philanthropy considered, and his political involvement summarized. However, it was the role of Pastor/Evangelist which dominated his ministry. Evangelism was at the heart of all that he sought to do. Whether preaching from the pulpit or speaking with individuals, Spurgeon was always an evangelist. The many avenues of evangelical ministry all arose from his consuming 'passion for souls'.

A precocious child, with a fine and bright spirit, Charles Haddon Spurgeon grew up in a godly rural Essex family. Surrounded by a large Puritan library and spiritually-minded adults, his home life impressed upon him a deep sense both of God's providence and man's sinfulness. A loving, prayerful mother ensured a secure place for the sensitive child within a large family.

He was born on 19 June 1834 in the village of Kelvedon, Essex. Educated at Dame Schools and at the Maidstone Agricultural College, he was destined for a teaching career. In the summer of 1849 he became a junior tutor at Swindell's School in Newmarket, became skilled in Greek and Latin and well-read in Philosophy. In addition he assisted in teaching the younger children. Although still unconverted, the Christian influence of his family had made an indelible impression upon him.² One evening in January 1850 he found assurance of salvation at Eld Lane Baptist Church, Colchester. The text of Isaiah 45:22 drew him to trust in Christ alone for salvation. Four months later he was baptised in the River Lark and when he left Newmarket for Cambridge he joined St Andrew's Street Baptist Church.

Spurgeon became active in Christian service, by distributing tracts every Saturday afternoon, visiting some seventy people on a regular basis, endeavouring as he said 'to draw their attention to spiritual realities.'³ He described his compulsion to serve: 'I could scarcely content myself even for five minutes without trying to do something for Christ.'⁴

He had an unusual gift for public speaking. Deeply influenced by the theology of John Calvin, the devotion of the English Puritans, the imagination of Hudson Taylor, the faith of George Müller and the preaching of George Whitefield, the multi-faceted career of the finest Baptist preacher of the nineteenth century was about to begin. Compelling and captivating preaching made him a fruitful lay pastor at Waterbeach Baptist Chapel. Spurgeon's whole ministry was characterized by a deep evangelistic commitment. He counted the conversion of a person more precious than anything else, declaring 'I would rather be the means of saving a soul from death than be the greatest orator on earth'.⁵

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The historic church at Park Street, London, was run down and discouraged when he arrived, but within weeks it was crowded to capacity. Respectable middle-class and needy working-class people filled the Chapel each Sunday. During his life he preached to millions and added nearly twelve thousand converts to his London congregation. Industrious, direct, sensitive and with great personal charm, Spurgeon disciplined his converts and cared for his needy flock, forging deep personal friendships. When the new Metropolitan Tabernacle opened it housed the largest congregation in the world. About five thousand people worshipped at each service and enjoyed psalm singing as well as the praying, exposition and proclamation of Spurgeon. Fellowship life was administered by Spurgeon's brother James and a devoted company of elders and deacons. All members were baptized by immersion as a public testimony to faith in Christ, the communion table was open to all believers, and a proliferating network of agencies surrounded an increasingly busy Pastor,

A naturally gifted orator, Spurgeon continually improved his skills through voracious reading and regular practice. Rarely preaching on a series of passages, he chose his weekly texts with great care. Most messages were dictated to his secretaries in the week beforehand, but he actually preached from brief notes written on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon. An arresting direct introduction would be followed by a structured message rich in doctrinal affirmation, laced with anecdotal illustrations and proverbs, and concluding with relevant application and earnest appeal. Possessed of an extraordinary voice, the imaginative mind of a poet and the sincerity of a dedicated man, he preached to a sympathetic and prayerful congregation.

His compassionate care and generosity within his own church typified his balanced commitment to evangelism and social care. He supported liberal politics, was active in promoting voluntary educational enterprise, and his interest extended to the unemployed of northern England and the destitute of the cities. His church supported homes for the elderly and free evening classes for under-educated adults. Colporteurs were sent out to offer good Christian literature around the nation.

Next to evangelism, Spurgeon's greatest passion was the planting of new churches. From 1866-1876 one of the main features of the monthly *The Sword and the Trowel* was a report on various churches that had been planted by students and graduates from the Pastor's College. These reports diminished in the mid 1870s, giving way to reports on the growing and proliferating agencies of the Tabernacle, i.e. the orphanage work, the almshouses, colportage and evangelistic associations. By the 1880s most of the reports concerned students who were venturing overseas to engage in a church planting ministry.

A leading figure

There is no doubt that Spurgeon sits astride the whole enterprise of church growth in London. Twenty-seven new churches were founded by students from the Pastor's College between 1853 and 1867. In the second half of the nineteenth century the number of Baptist churches in London doubled and nearly all of these were founded under Spurgeonic influence of one kind or another. Students were sent out to new areas or existing churches, normally at the command of "the gov'nor". Spurgeon was keen not just to plant missions but also to found churches. It was his enterprising, imaginative, powerful and generous vigour which inspired many to venture out in Christ's name at a propitious time of revival activity.

Spurgeon joined with two other London ministers, Landels of Regent's Park and Brock of Bloomsbury, to found the London Baptist Association, with the clear

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intention that one new chapel should be erected each year. Both Brock and Landels had planted their churches and commenced local missions, but Spurgeon's vision was London-wide. Every major church planting venture in a particular geographical area requires one person as a catalyst. Spurgeon fulfilled that role.

A needy city

Although Spurgeon said 'our design . . . knows no geographical limits', he had a particular concern for London. By 1863, of the thirty-eight men sent from the College, eleven settled in London.⁶ Spurgeon saw the strategic significance of London. 'Every Christian denomination should be on the alert for London, for it is in some respects the very heart of the world.' (1875, p.147). It was also the city in which he laboured. His frequent home visits during the cholera epidemic early in his ministry had a profound effect on him. He saw at first-hand the depravity and depression of people's condition. In Spurgeon's view church planting needed to keep pace with London's development. He urged that 'growing villages' (like Cheam) 'near London, early be supplied with the gospel of Christ. Being on the spot the friends will be ready for greater things as the population increases.' (1871, p.190)

Between 1851 and 1865 the number of chapel seats provided by Baptists in London had increased by sixty-one per cent; a pattern of growth more rapid than that of the Independents (30%) or the Wesleyans (19%). However, there was a general decline in accommodation space relative to the population despite a total of 219 places of worship (1867, p.535). He criticised Dissenters for lacking initiative in church planting, unlike the Anglicans who were usually first on the scene in a new suburb. Spurgeon continued to stress the need to 'commence more churches in and around London' and to see them suitably accommodated (1875, p.147).

Convincing theology

Spurgeon was an evangelical Calvinist who accepted the principles of Calvin's theology, derived mainly from Puritan literature of the seventeenth century. He was inspired by the revival preaching of George Whitefield and the insights of Jonathan Edwards. Spurgeon himself preached as if the destiny of his congregation depended upon that word. He sent out men similarly inspired, believing that they were to go out to find God's elect and to bring them in to their eternal destiny by means of prayer and preaching.

From the outset Spurgeon valued a discourse 'not by the approbation of men, nor by the ability of it, but by the effect produced in comforting the saint and awakening the sinner'.⁷ This twin aim was the product of his theological understanding, holding in tension the doctrines of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, believing that they could never be 'welded into one upon any earthly anvil but they certainly shall be one in eternity'.⁸ He stated unequivocally that 'Calvinism is the gospel and nothing else',⁹ and in didactic manner argued that Calvin received his view from Augustine, the spiritual successor to the Apostle Paul. Throughout his ministry he was intolerant of the Arminian scheme of free will, but he also steered clear of hyper-Calvinism which he found 'too hot-spiced for my palate'.¹⁰ He often attacked Roman Catholic and Church of England ideas, criticising their rituals and dogma.

Preaching, for Spurgeon, was 'the burden of the Lord'.¹¹ He sought constantly for signs of regeneration and sanctification, believing the Word had great power in its effect, constantly reminding the non-Christian of human wretchedness and the remedy to be found only in the cross of Christ. On Spurgeon's memorial stone some lines from a Cowper hymn express the desire of Spurgeon's evangelistic heart:

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E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply
Redeeming love has been my theme
And shall be till I die.¹²

The Christian was assured of the constant grace of God, yet was still responsible for his own behaviour. Spurgeon, outspoken on 'the crying sins of the Time', singled out certain sins so that his hearers would 'perceive he speaks of them'.¹³ Instantaneous conversions made him glad, but he sought to make devoted disciples, people who could demonstrate a 'thorough work of grace, a deep sense of sin and an effectual wounding of this law'.¹⁴ This emphasis on conversion, discipleship and holiness helped create a people prepared to serve God sacrificially.

Calvinistic theology was dogmatically taught at the Pastor's College. The College was founded in 1856 in response to a need for local men who were already engaged in evangelistic preaching to be trained to do it more effectively. Within the College a general education was given to those who needed it, followed by specific ministerial education in biblical and theological studies. The students were required to do little outside the classroom except be available for practical enterprises. They took no university examinations. Living in local communities, they trained both in the classroom and on the job.

The nature of training was vitally important. They were trained in a practical atmosphere long enough for them to gain knowledge but not to lose their evangelistic zeal nor the cutting edge of their proclamation. Spurgeon trained men from all sorts of backgrounds and enabled them to plant churches in needy areas.

Corporate endeavour

Spurgeon did not only wish to send out local evangelists or those who would use mission stations as agencies of social concern, he sought to establish independent churches at the earliest possible juncture.

London was affected by the spiritual awakening in England, particularly in 1859-1860 when about a million were added to the Church in England.¹⁵ In terms of churches planted in London, Spurgeon made his greatest impact in the 1860s and 1870s. The number of new London Baptist churches averaged over eight a year between 1856 and 1860, and over eleven a year between 1861 and 1863.¹⁶ By 1878 forty-eight new churches had been planted under his guidance in and around London (1878, pp.240-63).

There was a definite strategy. First, evangelistic activity in 'ad hoc' places, a major factor in these early enterprises being the prayers and presence of a handful of Christians who sought to establish a church in their locality. With hindsight Spurgeon stated that the work should generally begin in 'a hall or other hired building to get together a few people, to gather converts and to struggle on till a small church is formed; then commence the labour collecting money to build a school room or part of a building, or to erect an iron chapel, and when this is accomplished, the chapel is undertaken . . .' (1878, p.238) Many Baptist writers have supposed that most of the churches planted in the period 1860-1870 were 'isolated at first'.¹⁷ This assertion lacks evidence. Inter-church life was fostered by the *esprit de corps* which existed between Spurgeon's men. Although the College was too large for all to know one other and the students were actively pursuing their own styles of evangelism, they attended each other's fund-raising teas and induction services, underlining links of fellowship. This was enhanced by the formation of a Student Association. The College Conference and the Ministers' Orphan Fund were indicative of a strong sense

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of kindred spirit (1875, p.253). The corporate nature of church planting was stressed from the outset. Students were first assigned to be with an older preacher so that they could catch his spirit and learn from his experience. Over this period the important role of evangelist was kept to the fore and the closest co-operation between minister and evangelist was emphasized, challenging the traditional assumption of one-man ministry. When a man was sent to work in new areas, others were always involved as a pioneer group. For instance, by 1878 J. Cox celebrated the first anniversary of the Baptist cause in Penge, commenting: 'zealous workers have been found to co-operate in the undertaking' (1867, p.45). This concept of church planting by 'microcosmic churches' led to the formation of many ancillary evangelistic agencies at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. They were an important source of manpower, pumping life through the arteries into the whole movement.

There was a distinct note of militancy in church planting operations. For many of the College students missions were a Holy War. In a similar vein to William Booth, Spurgeon declared, 'when you bewail the world's iniquity . . . weeping will do nothing without action.'¹⁸ He exhorted everyone to get involved in the fight. The East London Tabernacle was commended in *The Sword and the Trowel* as an 'aggressive Church, and is daily reaping the reward of its holy enterprise' (1876, p.365). In East London's Providence Chapel there was a mission body one hundred strong who were 'emphatically an aggressive corps who do the real sapper and miner work of the Church in a common sense, effective way' (1876, p.175). The earnest evangelist is ' . . . persistent. He knows no discouragement. He recognizes no hindrances' (1867, p.271).

Much of the human responsibility for the success of the work rested on the shoulders of the students themselves, for Spurgeon organized and developed evangelists who did the groundwork and took the initiative. These pioneers became 'jacks-of-all-trades' until a church had grown sufficiently. To facilitate their churches' growth they mobilized members. In 1867 the Metropolitan Tabernacle could boast at least two hundred and fifty members who were evangelists, loan tract distributors, missionaries or Bible women, and others supported a host of other agencies. Other churches followed suit (1867, p.175). Patterns of church planting were being established and lessons applied quickly in new pioneer situations. Leadership was provided as more became willing to assume responsibility in church life. In July 1867, for example, the members of Romney Street Chapel gave their first annual report of the mission connected with that place of worship. Every Sunday morning people took regular informal services at six lodging houses, rising to twelve by the end of the year. Forty-six open air services were conducted each summer Sunday afternoon. Sixty thousand tracts were distributed to every house in the neighbourhood and to hospitals, including the Westminster, which was visited by female members who distributed books to patients (1867, p.334).

Endless initiative was employed in evangelism (1867, p.535). By the end of the 1870s Spurgeon's pragmatic church planting operations were vindicated: within twenty-five years he had made a unique and lasting contribution to London Baptist life (1875, p.167).

Varied methods

Necessity justified every method of Christian service in Spurgeon's view. He had no time for respectability which shirks 'what faith and works perform' (1867, p.391). In *The Sword and the Trowel* two men were commended when they had paid for two pews and went out inviting people in, thus adding twenty-four to the congregation that morning (1870, p.129). Holy boldness was an essential part of faith.

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Specialist outreach was developed, for instance, among Chelsea pensioners and others with particular needs. In the fine weather, open air preaching was firmly advocated because confining the Gospel within buildings had no 'apostolic precedent'.¹⁹ Open air preaching was linked to church services so that hearers could respond appropriately. Such work heightened public awareness and produced converts. Mr Linnecar of Peckham formed a church of forty-one members in 1870 through this method, and Peniel Tabernacle, Chalk Farm Road, also grew in this way (1878, pp.261, 245).

In the winter months theatre preaching was particularly popular. People who felt culturally estranged from traditional places of worship, even 'the most sinful and vile that the east of London could produce', would come to listen to the gospel in such places as the Pavilion Theatre. The preaching was brief, simple and well-illustrated (1869, p.405).

Literature evangelism was another popular means of disseminating the gospel, but it is hard to assess its effectiveness. Colportage was the means of selling Bibles and appropriate literature from door to door. In London this was mainly done by Bible women and city missionaries. Loan tract societies were also established. This work permeated localities with Christian knowledge and values, as well as providing people with a constant reminder of the Christian gospel.(1878, p.265)

Sunday Schools were a strong focal point for evangelism. The children learnt the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic and the elements of the Christian faith. Classes, soon over-subscribed, proved an invaluable local point of contact. Chapels outgrown by the church were frequently used for the Sunday School.

Evangelism by College men included social care. Spurgeon was a genuine friend of the poor and they were prepared to listen to him. His men commended themselves by example. Many churches set up Benevolent Societies. At Providence Chapel thirty-two tract visitors started subscribing to a fund to help the most distressing cases they met. In one year the young single-sex Bible classes raised £100 for it (1876, p.174). The minister's wife, Mrs Cuff, took Bible studies for 'street idlers' and prostitutes. Churches provided occasional feasts for those living in lodging houses. Many churches used free teas followed by simple earnest preaching. Other societies sprang up within church life like the Band of Hope, promoting abstinence from alcohol among the young and making a stand against the drunkenness of the day.

Many churches revived older struggling causes but, since people form a church, many revived churches became in reality new. In such causes the pioneers, in addition to the pressures of creating a new work, had to harmonize existing members' views with their own vision and methods. Spurgeon observed that the revival of a church was 'often a more difficult task than to commence a new one' (1878, p.264). The most successful revived churches were listed in the 1873 *The Sword and the Trowel*. Others in strife or difficulty were sensitively omitted. Their development differed little from that of new foundations. For instance, Barking Baptist Church was helped by student preachers between 1871 and 1874 until Mr Tomkins became pastor. By 1877 membership had risen from 27 to 102, the congregation had trebled and the building had been enlarged.(1878, p.266)

In the first decade of the College's life men trained there had baptized 20,676 people and the gross increase of members in their churches was 30,677.²⁰ One reason for the success lay in Spurgeon's concept of the Church. He believed churches ought to be self-supporting and self-governing, with active fellowship links with other churches. No administrative hierarchy of a huge church planting organization emerged. Both the College and the Metropolitan Tabernacle wanted to remain sponsors of mission rather than head a defined, internally-organized association of

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churches. Flexibility and speed in decision making was possible, without constant reference back to a higher body. Pioneers were free to develop each church in a manner appropriate to the locality. No condition was laid on the new church by the College, although churches usually felt 'a grateful tie binding them to the fostering mother' (1878, p.239). Churches were at liberty to appoint a minister from another college if so desired. Spurgeon repudiated the idea of isolated independency, believing in a mixture of Baptist and Presbyterian ecclesiology.²¹ Few administrative bottle-necks existed in church planting operations. The disadvantage was uncoordinated planning and sometimes a lack of immediate support for causes in difficulty.

Adequate buildings

Spurgeon was convinced that, once a handful of converts had been gathered, the essential need was to raise money for a building. He maintained that 'experience proves that without a home of their own churches do not rise into a vigorous condition' (1878, p.257). Initially this could be a functional structure and something better might be erected later. He believed that the establishment of a building not only gave opportunity for new enterprises on behalf of the church but also gave the local Christians a sense of belonging together in a particular place in the cause of Christ. He believed in building churches *and* church buildings. Some began in rented rooms in public houses, as did the Baptist churches in Wandsworth, Enfield and Ealing. Fashionable lecture halls might be used for Sunday services, such as the large hall of the Angel Town Institute or the Royal Hill Lecture Hall in Greenwich. Other churches began in a rented, dilapidated wooden building (Streatham), under a railway arch (Peckham), in a carpenter's shop (Kennington) and in private rooms (Penge). Wesleyans and Congregationalists allowed Spurgeon's men to use their empty or under-utilized buildings. One student, Frank Smith, boldly hired Duncombe Road Chapel and within four years had a thriving church in Hornsey Rise. By contrast, Barnes Baptist Church was constructed at the instigation of a wealthy gentleman and then W.H.Pritter, a College student, was asked to gather a congregation there (1878, pp.240-70). Many churches were housed temporarily in iron chapels rapidly constructed and requiring little land, with the longer-term aim of moving into a permanent building. By the 1870s Baptists had begun to etch themselves on London's skyline. Sir Samuel Morton Peto, a leading Baptist and a liberal donor, shared Spurgeon's preference for strategic, high-profile siting for these new buildings. Large 'dissenting cathedrals' and commodious chapels reflected the growing confident optimism of the denomination (1878, p.241).

Financial fellowship

Various financial schemes were promoted by Spurgeon to facilitate the construction of churches. In 1864 the Metropolitan Tabernacle established a loan building reserve fund administered by the deacons to aid debt reduction, make possible necessary repair work and finance new building projects. By 1877 the fund amounted to around £5,000 (1878, p.272). Spurgeon was also instrumental in establishing a building fund within the London Baptist Association. Personally generous, he appealed publicly for large sums of money, embarrassed only when it was not forthcoming. Lists of contributors, large and small, were published, although anonymity could be preserved. Much was owed to Mr W. Higgs, a deacon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, who owned a building company and built many large and small chapels at cost price.

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In poor districts it proved burdensome to plant churches and erect chapels simultaneously, taxing even the most committed of men. Spurgeon argued that practical and financial help to erect a chapel was 'the safest and best mode of aiding a working-class Church' (1878, p.244). Limited funds were made available on a discretionary basis, taking into account the efforts made by the Church to raise funds itself. Stepney Green received £500 for a building costing £3,500, but this debt was speedily discharged. Mr Beecliff formed a church in Deptford Library Institute and raised £100 for a chapel; a further £100 was made available from the Fund. Spurgeon spurred on Mr Spanswick who led a work in the Camberwell Claremont Rooms, telling him 'it is high time to begin providing a permanent home'. (1866, pp.228-9) At Shooters Hill, Blackheath, Spurgeon counselled caution, for they were too few in number to afford the venture.

Chapel-begging was an acceptable means of raising support from business or wealthy people. Through such means Archibald Brown of the East London Tabernacle raised £2,000 within a month. The remaining £10,000 was collected after thousands of leaflets appealing for aid were distributed worldwide, with the stamp bill alone amounting £500 (1876, p.363).

In 1875 *The Freeman* pressed for a comprehensive report of chapel debts. An earlier partial return from London had shown that 'every church member was having to pay an average of two shillings per annum in interest alone.'²² It is hard to assess whether Spurgeon was partly responsible for 'loading our denomination with buildings disproportionate both to our needs and our resources', for he stressed both the need for church buildings and for prudence. Financial advice was available from Spurgeon who stated 'when our men run before us they usually run into debt . . .' (1878, p.245). Nevertheless, the building of permanent places of worship ensured a regular meeting place, gave scope for diverse activities and firmly established Baptist church life in a community. Such churches provided some social stability in areas where there was considerable flux in the population.

Persevering spirit

Spurgeon remarked that 'the difficulty of founding churches, and especially of building chapels, can only be known by those who have experienced it' (1878, p.238). A large amount of evangelistic work sometimes produced no church organization, only a handful of converts. In fact Spurgeon expected such cases, given his theological and practical perspective, saying that they had sought 'to do little where we could not do much' (1866, p.227, 229). This pragmatic attitude, not to be bound to 'uncongenial spots', was only a guideline. In practice the assessment of the tension between perseverance and accepted failure was difficult. Consequently there were some churches like Shooters Hill Chapel where 'after much anxious toil and many discouragements a Church numbering ten members was at last formed' (1878, p.251). Nearby South Street, Greenwich, took twenty years of 'patient and unwearied toil' before a building could be erected and the members moved out of Royal Hill Lecture Hall (1878, p.242).

Spurgeon did not fear the multiplicity of churches in close proximity to one another. When he helped to develop a church in Norwood New Town in 1879, Chatsworth Baptist Church, formed a year earlier a mile away, sent a letter of protest.²³ A more clearly defined geographical strategy may have been needed but he viewed the task of mission, rather than church conciliation, as the greater good. True to conviction, Spurgeon supplied preachers to Upton Chapel and a Mr W. Williams preached there and 'attracted a considerable congregation almost under the shadow of the Metropolitan Tabernacle'.²⁴

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Did Spurgeon's success depend primarily on transfer growth rather than conversions, thereby reducing manpower and morale in smaller churches? Whenever there is a new work of God some Christians, bored or frustrated with their own church situations, seek to be involved in what appears to be marked by success. So London Christians, individually or in small groups, sought either membership at the Metropolitan Tabernacle or Spurgeon's advice. If attempted reconciliation of seceding groups to their former churches failed, Spurgeon did not allow them to drift but endeavoured to use them 'for the increase of the Church' (1878, p.246). However, Spurgeon believed it a 'burning disgrace' in a pastor if his 'pastoral care is composed of members whom he has stolen from other Christian churches'.²⁵ On examination of his own long pastorate, 14,691 were received into fellowship often after baptism at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and of these 5,211 were in membership in 1892, indicating the massive flux of this church population.²⁶

In this period many other agencies sought to address the spiritual needs of the people, including such cults as the Mormons and the Spiritualists. In April 1863 Bishop Tait sought to raise £1,000,000 in ten years to provide more Anglican ministers for the increased population, particularly in the poorer London areas (1870, p.223). *The Times* pointedly remarked that 'the spiritual conquest of the populations is not to be made by advancing a succession of ecclesiastical fortresses', but these churches often served a useful purpose in reaching people with the gospel. In contrast W. J. Orsman created a remarkably diverse mission in Golden Lane, arguing that 'there is no good substitute for voluntary organized evangelical labour'. Many groups harnessed some of the vast potential in Christian churches. In the East End many missions date from this time. In Bow, Grattan Guinness aimed at providing workers for the East End. In 1872 he founded the East London Institute which within sixteen years had trained eight hundred men, many of whom remained in London, founding or strengthening Baptist churches.²⁷ The London City Mission did tremendous work and many of its converts joined Baptist churches, which Spurgeon duly acknowledged.

William Booth began the Salvation Army in 1865 and, amidst much opposition, was successful both in preaching the gospel and recruiting men and women for sacrificial service. Prolific works were rapidly initiated as the Army mobilized the strength of its movement, contrasting with the way the independence of Baptist churches limited their organization of resources and men. The Roman Catholic Church, with its large bases in and around the city, also served London's needy.

Spurgeon fitted into the wider contemporary Christian concern for mission: his distinct contribution lay in his style of church planting. The establishment of a ministerial training college to plant churches, linked organically to an extremely large and powerful church, proved a successful combination with Baptists at grass roots level. In 1877 the annual return revealed that 208 Baptist churches had grown by an average of eleven members per church; but this included the work of the Metropolitan churches which had grown on average by twenty members per year, indicating the relative effectiveness of Spurgeon's men (1878, p.271). He sought neither to establish a new denomination nor a para-church movement, but perceived that potential was best developed through the founding of independent Baptist churches which, given time, could reproduce themselves. Some have argued that Spurgeon possessed the organizing ability of a John Wesley and the burning eloquence of a George Whitefield. Whether this is true or not, Spurgeon always operated in a corporate context: much attributed to Spurgeon should rightly be associated with the leaders of the Tabernacle and the College and with the pioneers' own resourcefulness.

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NOTES

1. James Douglas, **The Prince of Preachers**, n.d. This is a biography of Spurgeon utilising this popular motif.
2. Charles Ray, **The Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon**, Worthing 1903, p.43.
3. W. Y. Fullerton, **C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography**, 1920, p.41.
4. C. H. Spurgeon, **Autobiography**, 4 vols., 1890, I p.156.
5. **The Sword and the Trowel**, 1866, p.28. Subsequent references to this major source are given in brackets in the text.
6. M. K. Nicholls, **Some Aspects of Protestant Pastoral Training in London**, London M.Th. thesis, 1979, p.65.
7. **Autobiography**, I p.531.
8. *ibid.*, p.174.
9. *ibid.*, p.168.
9. J. C. Carlile, **C. H. Spurgeon: an Interpretive Biography**, 1933, p.102.
10. **Autobiography**, I p.403.
11. *Ibid.*, II photograph opposite p.307.
12. *Ibid.*, I p.537.
13. Iain H. Murray, **The Forgotten Spurgeon**, 1966, p.112.
14. E. W. Hayden, **Spurgeon on Revival**, Grand Rapids 1962, p.40.
15. W. T. Whitley, **The Baptists of London**, 1928, p.79.
16. *Ibid.*, p.79.
17. **Autobiography**, I, p.154.
18. *Ibid.*, I, p.222.
19. Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.174.
20. *Ibid.*, p.216.
21. E. A. Payne, **The Baptist Union**, 1959, pp.103, 109.
22. Nicholls, *op.cit.* p.68.
23. Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.183.
24. **Autobiography**, I p.39.
25. Carlile, *op.cit.*, p.267.
26. Whitley, *op.cit.*, p.79.

MICHAEL K. NICHOLLS

URBAN MISSION

Urban Mission is now firmly on the Christian agenda. Black-led churches, unemployment, church planting, political involvement, Asian congregations, new networks, other faiths . . . all come together in an exciting (and sometimes exhausting!) kaleidoscope of colour and activity.

The Anglican *Faith in the City* initiative and Methodism's *Mission Alongside the Poor* are the evidence for this within the historic denominations. Both have been energetic and urgent responses to the urban realities, within and around the churches, which have led to a multiplicity of projects.

Alongside them, and often preceding them, has sprung up a rich variety of networks and agencies. The radical 'Christians organised for social, political and economic change' (COSPEC), the 'Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission', and the Anglo-Catholic Jubilee movement have found themselves drawn into umbrella groups, like the Urban Mission Training Association or the Urban Forum, alongside emerging forces like the West Indian Evangelical Federation.

Denominational response, para-church initiation and new forms of Christianity are the UK evidence of a world-wide concern. Books from the USA like Harvey Cox's *Secular City* and Ray Bakke's *The Urban Christian* are matched from Australia by Peter Kaldor's *Green Shoots in the Concrete* and Ron Brown's *Down and Under*. The realism of urban life in Third World cities like Calcutta, San Paulo and Mexico City has given an urgency and dynamism to mission which has been reflected in the tracks of recent major international conferences, whether they be held under the auspices of Lausanne or the WCC. The urban poor are the majority of the world's population and the urban areas are now the key mission fields of the world.

The United Kingdom is classified as the most urbanised country in the world and we certainly have the longest record of industrial and urban development. But alongside this stands the indisputable fact that Christian presence (however it is measured) is at its weakest in our urban areas.

In the past forty years Urban Mission here has passed through a series of phases as the attention and action of Christians has been focused on key issues. Each emphasis has led to a response and the current United Kingdom urban mission scene is a complex interweaving of all the factors.

It began with the inner city. We centred down on the place, the geographical area from which Christians and churches withdrew. Sociologically, we learnt about 'religious lift' and 'white flight'. Historically, we grappled with social engineering and the ghetto. Ecclesiastically, we saw the breakdown of the parish system and the commuting, non-local style of the 'gathered communities'.

Within this framework emerged the programmes of urban mission. What is the appropriate and authentic approach to the left-behind and the powerless? Evangelism and social action fused together, the mandate of Matthew 28 tied in with the manifesto of Luke 4. Church buildings were opened up to community activities, industrial mission went to the workers, church life went through a revolution or died. Analysis, research and survey preceded response and an incredible wave of projects covering housing, unemployment, evangelism, family ministry and poverty spread across the churches in the urban areas.

Next came discovery of cultural gaps and the recognition of the urban poor. This centring on people had an international dimension but a national presence. It is still hard for Christians to hear that a Government report in 1990 documents the fact that 1 in 5 of our population lives on or under the poverty line. Groups like 'Christian Action on Poverty' provide a focus for response but many of our congregations live within a world peopled by the left-behind indigenous, the job-seeking incomer and the visibly obvious immigrant. Living alongside the dispossessed and facing the biblical stress on 'bias to the poor' has been the uncomfortable and continuing

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experience for those brought up in 'the suburban captivity of the churches'.

It was the emergence of urban priorities which sharply accelerated the United Kingdom awareness of the urban issues. Government plans for urban priority areas led to a political confrontation between the Church of England and Conservative ministers over the *Faith in the City* report. Accusations of marxist clergy and manipulated statistics came as a counterblast to the prophetic stress on social justice - 'A call for action by the church and nation'. Christians in the urban struggle already knew the polarisation between 'the loony left' and the National Front face of fascism, but now they were caught up in far-reaching debates about an unjust system and the politics of power.

Since then we have known urban regeneration at a double level. Physically, massive sums of money have poured into schemes like London Docklands or the Manpower Resources Commission. People-wise, the twin prongs of immigration and gentrification have changed the human face of many urban areas. Although these tides have reached the heart of major conurbations the persisting bleakness of outlying council estates like Kirby, Liverpool, and Dagenham still colours the urban landscape.

Within all this, urban prophecy has sought to 'make the word flesh' as committed individuals, renewed congregations and fresh patterns of ministry have led to church planting and social witness. Inner London alone can point out more than five hundred new black-led, Asian, cultural, community churches in the past twenty-five years. Many of these are 'Baptistic' in belief and style and they are matched through the country. The community movement, charismatic worship and lifestyle stress have coloured and shaped these indications of spiritual life. Hundreds of young people have chosen to stay or decided to come to urban areas and scores of churches have taken off in a resurrection of life and witness.

Yet an uneasy feeling persists that urban mission is perched on top of the Christian churches - a gadfly riding on the carhorse! People are still genuinely surprised at the scale and agendas of the urban areas. They have failed to recognise both the signs of spiritual renaissance and the continuing battle with 'principalities and powers'. David Sheppard maintains that the urban agenda has not entered the bloodstream of the whole church. There is only a token response, and there is a refusal to see that vast areas of this country are, by any indices, major mission fields. There has been a physical withdrawal from, and a misunderstanding of, the urban process.

This can be illustrated in many ways. Spurgeon's College began life at the Elephant and Castle, right at the heart of London. But, like all London theological colleges, it has moved out and away, from the inner city to the suburban. The Baptist Missionary Society, even when we are faced by the presence of nationals from many Asian and African countries living in a cosmopolitan city life, finds itself constitutionally struggling with the restriction of its work to overseas only. Recent correspondence in the *Baptist Times* raised the question of the difficulty of finding ministers ready and willing to take on urban pastorates.

Beneath all this are a cluster of profoundly theological questions. They have to do with the motivation, means and message of mission in the contemporary urban world. Urban Mission begins with incarnation - 'making the word flesh' in a specific situation and style. Identification and servanthood springing out of compassion and love provide the motivation. Commuting congregations and parachute evangelists must be questioned since being, living there, becoming part of these are the life thrusts of mission.

The message carried must be holistic. Bible words like 'kingdom' and 'shalom' point to the wholeness and integration that is God's purpose for both the individual and the community. Conversion is fundamental and continuing as conversion to

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Christ, the Church and the world are experienced by each individual believer. Churches are to be alive to the Spirit and to the district. Personal evangelism and social action go hand in hand.

Ministry here is wider and deeper. All members are called into a participating, gift-sharing congregation where the dominance of the ordained is seen as de-skilling and unbiblical. Training for this ministry has to do with orientation and context.

Those who come to serve and work in the urban require an understanding of themselves and the situation to which they have come. For some years professional church workers in East London from every denomination have come together in an orientation course which was born in the casualties and confusion of incomers thinking they had the answer and understood the questions! Those who are born and belong in the inner cities require training in the context. The gathering together of men and women who have the gifts of leadership in various spheres of ministry has become an enriching and strengthening process.

Baptists are often found in the vanguard of United Kingdom urban mission. Their missionary emphasis, biblical foundation and flexibility of structure motivate and make possible a response to the cry of the city. In literature Roger Dowley's *Lost Bequest*, Roy Joslin's *Urban Harvest* and Michael Eastman's *Ten Inner City Churches* all point to scriptural underpinning, the signs of hope and the widespread earthing of mission. In projects, three very different Home Mission Fund investments in the Salford Urban Mission (an ecumenical team), the Birmingham Baptist Inner City Project (gathering together twelve churches), and the London Evangelical Coalition of Urban Mission (providing a resources network for multi-level ministry) illustrate the possibilities and diversity. Pressure groups like the Baptist Urban Group and Joppa (concerned with the other faiths) provide other focal points of Baptist thought and action.

Urban Christians have journeyed a long way in a short time, deeply aware of the many allies who join hands with us in the work. There are many surprises that go alongside the disappointments. We know that the world is with us and that God is stirring up that world. We still face unanswered questions - but there are pointers towards an emerging pattern which is true to the Gospel and relevant to urban hungers and hopes. The unanswered questions form themselves around four issues.

- (1) The sociological question centres around change and conflict. We are living through the breakdown of traditional urban communities under the combined impact of industrial rephasing, population movement and social forces. The arrival of the other faiths in force has moved us into pluralism in the realms of religion, the impact of immigration has led to a multi-racial society, and the backlash of racism and economic factors have created an underclass of deprived and bitter people. The churches, too, have 'new wine' pressures within them and are drawn into the wider social shifts. What now holds together such disparity and where is the glue for the mosaic of pieces?
- (2) The political question focuses on justice and 'shalom'. The manifest inequalities in British society and the perpetuation of these are now clear to all. Issues like the poll tax and other aspects of social legislation which militate against the interests of people who are already disadvantaged sharpen the point for Christians. Where do we stand politically? No-one can work in the inner city without facing the question of power and politics. No Christian can operate without re-reading the Bible to see what God wills for society.
- (3) The ecclesiastical question has to do with the historical denominations and the

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ecumenical movement. Traditional structures have broken down in the urban areas - they no longer fit. The main-line churches now find themselves outnumbered in many areas by the new churches. Pastoral maintenance is giving way to mission strategy. In this world, can church planting function within the Inter Church Process? Who carries authority and where are the parameters?

- (4) The theological question concerns the nature of the Gospel. The whole church must carry the whole Gospel to the whole world. It is therefore comprehensive in scope or marginalised. It is taking Jesus seriously and taking Him seriously into all of life.

There is an emerging pattern for urban mission which holds together all the elements and is a realistic and powerful agency for the whole Gospel. Within this overall thrust are the tools of mission which are already available and will become more visible.

At the heart of urban mission is the base community. This is the neighbourhood cell that holds together the two-legged approach of Bible and current issues. Believers come together in small groups for prayer, Bible obedience, sharing and being. These street-level communities of belief are the building blocks of the congregation and the direct, face-to-face bridge for the Gospel. In an atomised society they provide a sense of belonging, in the focusing on real issues they offer relevance, and in the discipline of prayer and scripture they build on faith and grow into mission.

Local congregations draw together in neighbourhood cells as they come together for a full service of worship and teaching. Many participate in a lively, loving fellowship of proclamation and praise. Music is vital, preaching is simple, prayer is corporate and fellowship is real. Much of the baggage of the past has gone as uniformed groups, single-sex groups and committees have disappeared. Often there is one, much longer worship service for all with options for contracting out that are dependent upon the stage of commitment or pilgrimage.

The celebration grouping brings together a cluster of congregations and enables larger area groupings to strengthen faith, allow the formation of issue-centred groups, and take the Gospel to the area through public demonstration. In all this black and white congregations will mingle, denominational lines be broken and new forms of leadership-sharing will be seen.

From the cells, congregations and clusters will come the task forces set aside for mission. Those engaged in church planting will learn from each other, politicians will support and face each other, sector ministries in education or care will encourage or teach. Here experience and gifts will complement and skills and opportunities will be matched. Coalitions and consortiums of faith will cross over old lines and create fresh patterns.

Communication and collaboration will take place through regional and national networks. Some, like the 'Zebra' project, will draw Christians across race divides. Others, like the Frontier Youth Trust, will service those working with young people on the frontiers of our society. Some, like Church Action on Poverty will become a national rallying point. Others, like the Urban Forum, will be a hidden force for change. Already these networks have moved across the local, city-wide, regional, national and international lines. They are the resource and communication carriers for the urban armies intent on sharing faith.

Clarity of message and comprehension of life are both required in a complex and confusing urban society. The historic strength of urban mission is that it has drawn from, and struggles to hold together, all the biblical and theological strands carried

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by the denominational and new churches. Nowhere is this more clear than in the shifts seen in the ecumenical and evangelical worlds.

In 1968 George Beasley-Murray quoted, in his Baptist Union Presidential address, from the World Council of Churches Evanston statement:

Jesus Christ is the Gospel we proclaim . . . To evangelise is to participate in his life and in his ministry to the world . . . Evangelism is the bringing of persons to Christ as Saviour and Lord that they may share in his eternal life. Here is the heart of the matter. There must be personal encounter with Christ. For on this relationship to God in Christ depends the eternal destiny of man.

In 1989 the newsletter of World Vision International can support the Lausanne Movement in its stress on the marriage of personal evangelism and social concern with the comment:

The vast majority of the unreached people of the world are poor. If the world is to be evangelised the poor must see the Gospel as good news. From a purely evangelistic strategy, with no other desire but to see these people become Christians, any plan to communicate that good news must deal with poverty. From a biblical point of view to preach about the saving grace of Jesus' life, death and resurrection without demonstrating that grace is a contradiction. The road to Jericho does set its own agenda.

Urban mission, like Jesus, must start where people are and share with them the wholeness of the Gospel, making the word flesh, offering shalom to all. The real hope of urban mission in this country is that it now carries, in all its failure and frustration, many signs of hope and renewal. Mission has been and is being made real in the urban places of the United Kingdom.

COLIN MARCHANT

MISSION

SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

Marcan Mission Perspectives for Today's Church

I came to London in 1964 to complete *my* BD in Old Testament and left eighteen months later to spend the rest of my life studying and teaching New Testament - such was the impact of George Beasley-Murray. It was not just his voluminous knowledge of the subject, it was his enthusiasm, encouragement, and determination to relate the text to the twentieth century. This essay is offered as a symbol of my appreciation for his inspiration and encouragement over many years.

I

Space will not allow even a cursory analysis of all of the Marcan mission themes and I will restrict myself primarily to a consideration of Mark 6.6 - 8.21, the section of the Gospel where Mark addresses himself specifically to the question of mission. But first let us place the text within the wider context of Mark's narrative structure.

Theological Structure. Mark divides the first major section of his Gospel (1.14 - 8.26) into three smaller sections (1.14 - 3.6; 3.7 - 6.6a; 6.6b - 8.21), each commencing with a summary statement outlining an aspect of the ministry of Jesus (1.14-15 preaching; 3.7-12 healing; 6.6b teaching) followed by a discipleship story (1.16-20 call of the first disciples; 3.13-35 community of the disciples; 6.7-31 mission of the disciples) and concludes with a group of people opposed to Jesus (3.1-6 religious and political leaders plot to kill him; 6.1-6a his own townspeople reject him; 8.14-21 his disciples harden their hearts). On each occasion the material is divided into two smaller sections (1.21-45 and 2.1 - 3.6; 4.34 and 4.35 - 6.6a; 6.32 - 7.23 and 7.24 - 8.21) with geographical settings marking out the divisions and development, and Marcan 'sandwiches' (one story placed between the two parts of another) indicating themes (1.23-26 between 1.21-22 and 1.27-28 the authority of Jesus; 3.23-30 between 3.31-35 the new family of Jesus; 6.14-29 between 6.7-13 and 30-31 the cost of involvement in the mission of Jesus). An introductory transitional summary (1.14-15) links this section of the Gospel to the preface featuring John the Baptist (1.1-13) and a concluding transitional story (8.22-26) leads on to the following section on the meaning of discipleship (8.27 - 10.52).

Theological Chronology. Mark has prepared us for his theology of mission in the opening summary 'after John had been arrested (literally: "handed over") Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of God' (1.14). According to Mark, John the Baptist (1.7), Jesus (1.14-15) and the early church (13.10) preach the gospel, and John (1.14-15), Jesus (14.21 and many places) and the early church (13.9) are 'handed over' to the authorities. The early church is to share in the preaching of the Gospel and in its fate.

Theological Geography. Mark describes six boat trips and two lengthy overland journeys. (1) Following the parable discourse delivered from a boat (4.1-34) Jesus commands the disciples to take him to the other side of the sea, which they do (4.35 - 5.1). This is a journey from the western side of the sea (which in Mark's narrative

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world is Jewish as signified by the synagogues in 1.21-18; 3.1-6; 5.21-24; 6.1-6) to the eastern side (which in Mark's narrative world is Gentile as signified by the pigs in 5.11-20). It is a stormy crossing and for a time it looks as though they may not make it; with help from Jesus, they are finally successful. (2) After healing the Gerasene demoniac they return to the Jewish side without difficulty (5.18,21). (3) In order to escape the crowds they take a short boat trip along the western side of the sea - only to find that the crowd has arrived before them (6.30-34). (4) Jesus feeds the 5,000 on the Jewish side of the lake (6.35-44) and compels his disciples to embark and cross to Bethsaida, on the Gentile side. They make heavy weather of it again and, although Jesus rescues them (6.45-52), they land at Gennesaret, still on the Jewish side. (5) Following an altercation with a group of Pharisees, and some scribes who have come down from Jerusalem (7.1-23), Jesus journeys to the territory of Tyre (where he is encountered by the Syrophoenecian woman) (7.24-30), (6) returning by a very circuitous route through Gentile territory ending up on the Gentile side of the sea (7.31), where he heals a deaf man who could not speak (7.32-37) and feeds the 4,000 (8.1-10). (7) They embark and travel to Dalmanutha (probably Magdala on the Jewish side). (8) Following another altercation with the Pharisees, Jesus embarks and makes for the other shore. On the way he exchanges strong words with the disciples about the meaning of the feeding miracles (8.14-21), but this time they finally make it to Bethsaida on the Gentile side (8.22). These are not simply descriptions of Jesus wandering aimlessly around Galilee - they are theological narratives presenting his mission, and the mission of the church, among Jews and Gentiles. Unlike the disciples who have hardened their hearts and have not understood about the loaves (6.25), the reader will have picked up Mark's cue; the journey in the direction of the Gentiles is fraught with difficulties and dangers, but must be undertaken nonetheless (4.35 - 5.1; 6.45-52; 8.14-21).

Theological Space and Culture. In the opening miracle story (1.21-28) Jesus is confronted by a man with an 'unclean spirit' who screams, 'What have we got in common, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God!' (1.24). In the light of the declaration that Jesus is 'the Holy One of God!', the answer to the first question is obviously 'nothing!', and to the second is clearly an emphatic 'yes!' Jesus is the Holy One of God but as the narrative unfolds Jesus breaks through all of the purity boundaries relating to persons, things, places and times: he touches a leper (1.41), allows a woman with a flow of blood to touch him (5.24-28), declares all food clean (7.19), heals on the sabbath (3.1-6), opposes the temple (11.15-18), and, most importantly from our point of view, moves in and out among the Gentiles exposing himself to pollution on all sides (5.1-20; 7.24 - 8.10). In the first section of the Gospel (1.14 - 3.6) Mark shows Jesus' authority as the 'Holy One of God' (1.21-39) who challenges the religious authorities to recognize his authority (1.40-45) only to be met with opposition and the first death plot, occasioned because he broke the sabbath (3.1-6). In the second section (3.6 - 6.6a) Mark is concerned about the membership of the Christian community (4.10-12, 'insiders' and 'outsiders') and Jesus travels across the sea to welcome a Gentile (5.1-20) before returning to heal two Jewish women; the healing of a poor unclean woman (5.24b-34) taking precedence over the respectable woman who had a leading male pleading her cause (5.21-24a,35-43). In the third section (6.6b - 8.21) Mark is concerned about the nature of the Christian mission and the travels of Jesus provide the clues with the watershed coming in the story about purity regulations (7.1-23) and the encounter with the Syrophoenecian woman (7.24-30).

II

From the clues or codes which we have already identified, we will not be surprised

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to find that structure, geography, space and culture carry the theological understanding of the mission of the Church in Mark's story.

The narrative has been placed with the basic structure of opening summary statement (6.6b) and discipleship story (6.7-31) and concluding opposition (8.14-21). A Marcan sandwich indicates the theme of the section, with the story of the death of John the Baptist (6.14-29) placed between the two parts of the story of the mission of the disciples (6.7-13,30-31). The section (6.6 - 8.21) is divided up into two subsections (as also in 1.21-45 and 2.1-3.6; 4.1-34 and 4.35-6.6a) through the use of geography which places the first half in Jewish territory (6.6 - 7.23) the second half in gentile territory (7.24-8.9). The concluding episodes, which bring out the significance of the section, repeat the pattern with an encounter with the Pharisees on the Jewish side (8.10-12) and a discussion with the disciples on the way back to the Gentile side of the lake (8.14-22a).

The key theological term which carries the narrative is *ἄρτος* ('bread', or 'loaf', or 'food' generally): the disciples are told to take 'no bread' (6.8), 5,000 are fed with 'bread' and fish (6.37,38,41,41,44), the disciples do not understand about 'the bread' (6.52), religious leaders dispute with Jesus about eating 'bread' with unclean hands (7.2,5), the Syrophenecian woman is told it is not right to take children's 'bread' and give it to the dogs (7.27), the 4,000 are fed with 'bread' (8.4,5,6), the disciples forget to take 'bread', except for one 'loaf' they have in the boat (8.14,14) and Jesus draws out the meaning of the breaking of 'bread' for the 5,000 and the 4,000 (8.16,17,19).

1) When Jesus began his public ministry as the Holy One of God everyone was amazed that he taught with such 'authority' that even the unclean spirits obeyed him (1.21-28). This authority is now given to the *disciples as they are sent out on mission* (6.7-13) and the terminology 'unclean spirits' (3.15) is used rather than 'demons' because their mission is going to raise the question of 'clean and unclean' as Jesus presses beyond the boundaries (7.1-23).

When Jesus called his first disciples, he promised that they would catch people (1.17 redactional) and in his first mention of the community, Mark tells us that they were called to preach and to have authority to cast out demons (3.15). Now, having been given authority over the unclean spirits (6.7), Mark tells us that they went out and preached that the people might change their way of living. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them (6.12-13). The undertaking was both urgent and costly and the followers of Jesus were being called on to trust God and to identify with the poor of Galilee among whom they were to minister. They were to stay with the first people who offered them hospitality, resisting the temptation to move to better quarters should such be offered.

2) Mark has waited six chapters to tell of *the death of John the Baptist* (6.14-29; cf. 1.14) and he inserts the story in the interlude between the disciples being sent out on mission (6.7-13) and their return from that mission (6.30-31). It evokes images of the enmity of Jezebel towards Elijah and the weakness of Ahab (1 Kings 17-21) and continues the understanding of John's role as the suffering Elijah preparing the way of the Lord and of his people (Mark 1.2-8; 9.9-13; 15.35-36). Placed between the sending out of the disciples on mission and their return (6.7-13, 30-31), it warned of the cost of involvement in the mission of God. John, the messianic forerunner, lost his head because of his mission (6.14-29), Jesus was rejected by the religious and political elite and crucified because of his mission (15.21-39), Christian missionaries will be arrested, beaten, and dragged before the authorities for proclaiming the gospel to the nations (13.9-11).

3) In the description of *the return of those who had been sent out* (6.30-31), we meet the only Marcan usage of the early church's favourite title of authority, 'the apostles',

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but it is clear that he is using it as a verbal noun, meaning 'when those who had been sent out returned'. In view of the widespread use of the title in the early church it seems Mark's usage is quite deliberate. The 'authority' given to the leaders is the authority needed to carry out their mission (6.7); they are 'apostles' only as long as they engage in apostolic mission.

4) Jesus' attempt to find solitude is unsuccessful and leads to an extension of his ministry through *the first great feeding of the people of God in the wilderness* (6.33-52). The story incorporates many Old Testament images, especially God's supply of food to Israel during their time in 'the wilderness' (Exod 16.1; Num 11.1-35). Mark has enhanced this perspective by placing the story on the Jewish side of the lake, stressing that they picked up 'twelve' baskets full of broken pieces (6.43; and especially 8.19 redactional) and relating it to the feeding of the children in the discussion with the Syrophoenecian woman (7.27 redactional). Only in the two feeding miracles (6.32-44; 8.1-9) does Jesus involve his disciples in the performance of a miracle story and it fully accords with Mark's desire to get his church involved in the mission of Jesus. The eucharistic language probably belonged to the earliest strata of church tradition before being incorporated into Mark (6.41; 8.6; cf. 14.22; 1 Cor. 11.24), but it has taken on an additional dimension through the discussion about the 'one loaf' (8.14). While the statement that there was bread left over originally served as a demonstration that a miracle had taken place, in the Marcan sequence it means the disciples should have realised that there would be plenty for everyone - Jews and Gentiles alike.

5) The account of *the unsuccessful attempt of the disciples to cross over the Gentile side of the sea* (6.45-52) has caused endless difficulties for interpreters. Jesus 'compels' the disciples to embark and cross over to Bethsaida - located on the Gentile side according to Mark's theological map. The disciples were obviously less than enthusiastic about venturing over there on their own. It was not the sea that worried them so much - four of them were fishermen and Jesus tended to go to sleep in the boat - it was the Gentiles! The journey beyond the boundary is always difficult and the explanatory statement 'for the wind was against them' (7.48b redactional) is not a simple meteorological observation. Like other such statements in Mark it is loaded with theological significance and this is clear when we observe that they have a full sail on the way home (5.21; 8.10). When things were at their worst, Jesus came to their rescue, walking on the water in scenes reminiscent of the theophanies to Elijah and Moses (Exod 33.18-23; 34.5-9; 1 Kings 19.9-18). They came safely to shore, but not to the other side as intended; for it is only much later that they arrive at their proposed destination of Bethsaida (8.22). The conclusion, stating that they were astounded 'for they had not understood about the loaves, but their hearts had been hardened' (6.52 redactional), emphasizes that a correct understanding of the feeding miracles (6.32-44; 8.1-9) is the key to this section of the Gospel.

6) There has been a strong debate as to whether *the healings at Gennesaret* (6:53-56) are portrayed as healings on the Jewish or the Gentile side of the sea. However, as Gennesaret is on the eastern shore and as the transfer to the Gentile focus happens only after Jesus has declared all foods clean (7.1-23), it seems they serve as the concluding summary of the mission to the Jews.

7) In the account of *Jesus' abrogation of the traditional boundaries of Jewish religion* (7.1-23), the evidence and intention of Mark's handiwork is clear. The Pharisees have already joined with the Herodians in a plot to do away with Jesus (3.6 redactional), and scribes 'who have come down from Jerusalem' have previously accused Jesus of collusion with Beelzebul (3.22 redactional). In Mark 'Jerusalem' is

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the place of opposition, rejection and death. The deadly intention of the scribes who 'come down from Jerusalem' (3.22; 7.1) is evident from the later notice that Jesus 'goes up to Jerusalem' to be arrested, condemned to death and killed (10.31-33 redactional). Mark's lengthy explanatory comment (7.3-4) is as important theologically as it is difficult historically. This story is not about the rejection of the strict code of a minority of legalistic extremists; it is the setting aside of boundaries which make the Jewish faith Jewish. The saying 'nothing that goes into a person can defile that person' (7.15) lifts the whole of the Old Testament law off its hinges. Mark provides it with a new setting (7.14a) and a new introductory exhortation (7.15b), adding the disciples' request for an explanation of 'the parable' which allows Mark to draw out the significance of the saying for his 'house-churches' by incorporating the comment 'declaring all food clean' (7.19c) and adding a traditional Hellenistic(-Jewish) understanding of purity regulations which prepares for the inclusion of the Gentiles (7.20-23).

8) *The healing of the daughter of a Syrophenician woman* (7.24-30) functions as the turning point in the missionary narrative. Within Mark's theological framework, Tyre is as far from Jerusalem - the centre of the Jewish faith - as it is possible to go. In a story that reflects the ethnic, cultural and socio-political hostility between Jews and Gentiles, a gentile woman, through the logic of her argument, leads Jesus to redefine the boundaries specifically to include the Gentiles. She is described as 'a woman', 'a Greek' and as 'a Syrophenician' and she breaks all cultural taboos when in an outburst of shameful behaviour she bursts through the barriers and enters the house where Jesus has been seeking solitude. Jesus' reply is sharp and direct as he defends the honour and priority of the Jews in the history of salvation (7.27). The woman, however, is not so easily silenced and she breaks through again, this time on behalf of the Gentiles (7.28). Jesus allows himself to be shamed and admits the validity of her insights, confirming them in word and action (7.29).

In interpreting the key word 'first' (7.27), most commentators ignore the location of the story in Mark's theological framework. It indicates not only the 'priority' of the Jews in salvation history, but a priority which, according to Mark, belongs in the past. They have already been fed (6.32-44). Now is the time for the Gentiles to be fed, says Mark. Their time has come (8.1-9).

9) The 'impossible' circuitous route of *Jesus' return trip* 'from Tyre through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee up into the centre of the Decapolis districts' (7.24) is probably Mark's deliberate attempt to indicate that at this stage Jesus made an even deeper penetration into Gentile territory. The healing of the deaf person who could not speak (7.24-30) has a number of parallels with the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (8.22-26), and together they reflect the fulfilment of the eschatological promises of Isaiah 35.5, but unique is the statement 'groaning he looked up into heaven and said to it (*or* to him), "Ephphatha" which means "Be opened"' (7.34). The only other reference to Jesus looking up into heaven occurs in the feeding of the 5,000 (6.42) and the ambiguous 'said to it (*or* 'him') most naturally refers back to 'heaven', in which case Jesus is calling for heaven to 'be opened' for the Gentiles. In the first part of the concluding choral response 'he has done all things well' (8.37b), the plural and the perfect indicate that it has a more programmatic dimension as an affirmation of the entire mission of Jesus (to the Jews and to the Gentiles).

10) The story of the feeding of the four thousand (8.1-9) evokes a number of Marcan theological images: the people have come 'from afar', they have been with Jesus 'three days', he does not wish to send them 'to their houses' lest they faint 'on the way' (8.2-3). These images take on additional significance within the context of Mark's presentation of the story as *the second great feeding of the people of God*, the feeding

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of the Gentiles.

Jesus has compassion on the crowd again (8.2), but this time, in Mark's structure, it is because they are Gentiles ('from afar'), not because they are Jews with poor leaders (6.43-44). Despite the previous miracle, the disciples again display their lack of understanding (8.4) and distance themselves both from the people and from Jesus. Not willing to be turned aside from his mission, and desirous of drawing his church into it, Jesus again incorporates the disciples in his actions. The allusion to the Lord's Supper tradition (1 Cor. 11.24) prepares for Jesus' explanation concerning the 'one loaf' (8.14-21).

11) When they return to Jewish side of the lake (8.10), *the Pharisees tempt Jesus*, seeking a sign from heaven. But heaven has already been opened (7.34-35) and the Gentiles have been fed (8.1-9). 'This people' (or 'generation', but here 'this people' is more appropriate and, for Mark, on this side of the sea = 'the Jews') will not be given a sign (8.11-12).

12) When Jesus healed on the sabbath the Pharisees held counsel with the Herodians in the first death plot against Jesus (3.6) and the two groups came together again in a further attempt to trap him (12.13-17) immediately after the third death plot (12.12 redactional). The combination has been changed to *the Pharisees and Herod* here, since in the storyline of this section of the Gospel Herod has killed John (6.14-29) and the Pharisees have challenged Jesus (7.1,3,5). Let the disciples beware.

The 'one loaf' in the boat (8.14) is evocative of the Eucharist in the church and for Mark's missionary emphasis it is important that there is only one loaf, not two. The altercation between Jesus and his disciples (8.17-21 redactional) recalls the harsh language of Isaiah 6.9-19. They are on the verge of irretrievable apostasy and it will take a miracle to open thier eyes (8.22-26). Jesus takes his disciples back through the miracles of feeding, i.e. Mark takes his church back through the clues that he has built into his missionary narrative. They answer correctly: 'Twelve!' 'Seven!' But do they understand? 'Israel!' 'The whole world!'

III

In the space that remains I should like to draw some of the implications of Mark's missionary theology for today's church, particularly as they relate to the working class, the unemployed and the urban poor - those who live on the other side of the sea from our predominantly middle-class churches.

1) The first and most obvious implication from Mark's presentation is that *mission begins and ends with Jesus of Nazareth*. It is Jesus who takes the initiative, provides the inspiration and determines the direction of the church's mission in the world. The three summary statements delineating the various aspects of the ministry of Jesus (1.14-15 preaching; 3.7-12 healing; 6.6 teaching) precede and prepare for the sending out of the disciples on mission (6.7-13). In each of the discipleship stories, Jesus takes the initiative (1.16-20 he calls the disciples to follow him; 3.13-19 he calls the Twelve as the nucleus of the new people of God; 6.7-13 he sends them out on mission).

2) The second implication of Mark's presentation is that *mission is the crown of discipleship*. According to Mark, the call to discipleship (1.16-20) always leads to community (3.13-31) and to involvement in the community's mission in the world (6.7-13). Mission is not an optional extra in the life of discipleship. Without involvement in mission the call to discipleship is truncated and incomplete, the community lacks direction and purpose. It is intended that all of the church should be involved in the mission and that the authority of the leadership is directly related

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to their involvement in the church's mission.

3) The mission of the church is *not to be bound by social, cultural and economics boundaries*, no matter how important they may seem to the life of the church or of the society of which it is a part. Indeed, the characteristic of Jesus' ministry in Mark's presentation is that he continually ignored the religious and cultural taboos and repeatedly crossed the boundaries that determined relationships in Palestinian society. His missionary narrative focuses on the need for the church to cross these boundaries that all may experience the liberating power of the gospel.

4) The mission of the church is *concerned for all aspects of existence* - the personal, social, economic and political aspects of life are all included. According to Mark, the mission of the disciples is to persuade people to change the way they are living, teach them how to live in relationship with God and with one another, heal the lives of individuals, and overthrow the demonic systems that hold people captive. Certainly, Jesus sent them out to preach the gospel, but we also need to remember that when he sought to draw the disciples into his mission it was to help him feed the hungry.

5) The most striking feature in the section of Mark that we have reviewed is the way that Jesus accepts the cultural shame of being upstaged by a Gentile woman! This would have been totally unacceptable within the context of first century Palestinian life. In his first answer Jesus identified with the basic tenet of his culture, the priority of the Jews (7.27), without recognising the damage that a false understanding of that priority had caused in the lives of the people who lived on the margins of their society. However, when the Gentile woman reminds him of the situation of her people, he admits his mistake and affirms the truth that she has expressed (7.29). If the church wants to move out beyond the boundaries of its own cultural captivity, it *must be willing to experience the culture shock and, where necessary, to endure the cultural shame* that is part of this movement. Those of us who are from the privileged groups in society will have to be willing to admit to the damage which the system, from which we have benefitted, has so often caused to those who have been forced to live on the other side of the sea.

6) As the church moves out in holistic mission beyond the boundaries of its own middle-class culture, identifying with and becoming servants of the hungry and the marginalised, it will find itself in *conflict with some religious and political authorities* who have a vested interest in maintaining their position as beneficiaries of the existing boundary systems. The spirit which motivated the religious and political leaders in their opposition to John the Baptist, Jesus, and the early church will be as active in the twenty-first century as in the first.

7) *As the church moves out beyond the boundaries of our culture it is assured that it has all the resources necessary* for the mission to which God is calling it. The leaders of Mark's church are not the only ones to assert that they do not have the resources for a mission across the sea, overlooking the resources at hand (8.16). One loaf in the boat (8.14) might not seem a great deal in the face of the enormity of the task, but when we recall what the loaf embodied through the presence of Jesus the equation is altered. We are again being compelled to go to the other side of the sea, to cross the boundaries of our culture (6.45). The challenge is still to take no money in our belts, to identify with the poor and to trust in God (6.7-13).

ATHOL GILL

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Barth's supposed 'universalism' in the context of his view of mission

Despite frequent denials, both by himself and by his more sympathetic critics, Karl Barth continues to be suspected of 'Universalism'. Nowhere would this suspicion be more prevalent than among Barth's 'evangelical' detractors who would rightly be concerned by the implications of a universalistic system for the mission of the Church. In what does evangelism consist if all men are ultimately saved anyway, regardless of their attitude? The proclamation of the Gospel would cease to have the urgency of a life and death issue. The mission of the Church would be reduced to the imparting of information concerning a cosmic alteration in the state of all men before God. While it would still be appropriate to proclaim this message, there would be little urgency in doing so, since the matter of each individual's eternal destiny would be settled in any case. A proper thankfulness towards God for this all-inclusive decision may continue to issue in eucharistic acts of goodness and mercy but the impetus for such acts would be at least diminished.

It is for this reason that a brief review of that which Barth actually says about the mission of the Church could provide indications concerning the validity of the charge of 'Universalism'. Is Barth's view of mission consistent with the common and critical parody of his concept of election as a universal *fait accompli*?

Barth first addresses the theme of the Church's mission within the *Church Dogmatics* under the general heading of 'The Proclamation of the Church' and as part of his exposition of 'The Doctrine of the Word of God'.¹ The Church's mission is determined by its commission by God to proclaim the Word of God. It only fulfils its mission and discharges its commission as it proclaims this Word. Yet its proclamation of the Word is not a merely human endeavour. As an outcome of the grace of God in Jesus Christ the proclamation of the Church is itself a form of the Word of God: 'Jesus Christ in the power of His resurrection is present wherever men really speak really of God'.² With this in view the task of proclamation must be undertaken both with prayer and with 'serious and honest work'.³

Previously Barth had stressed the foundational nature of the Church's proclamation. Proclamation is that which 'makes the Church the Church'. It is 'the function of the Church's life which governs all others'.⁴ The Word of God is itself God's positive command that such proclamation should occur. The Word of God is the content of that proclamation. The Word of God is also the criterion by which this proclamation is to be tested. The Word of God is finally the event which must occur if proclamation is truly to be proclamation.⁵

Barth's major treatment of the doctrine of the Church falls within the context of his 'Doctrine of Reconciliation'. In the introduction to these later volumes he speaks of the Church's mission as the ordination 'to be the community sent out as a witness in the world and to the world'.⁶ The Church is a 'missionary community'; a prophetic community in relation to the world. As such the Church 'stands vicariously for the whole world' as it 'bears witness to the truth known within it'.⁷ The Church is:

... ordained for its part to confess Him before all men, to call them to Him and thus to make known to the whole world that the covenant between God and man concluded in Him is the first and final meaning of its history, and that His future manifestation is already here and now its great, effective and living hope.⁸

The Church exists for the world because it exists for God and because God

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himself, as the electing God, exists for the world.⁹ While the Church is separated from the world by being called out of the world by the Word of God it is nonetheless, and at the same time, genuinely called into the world.¹⁰ It exists for the world as it performs its mission.¹¹ Though the world is in 'no position to know itself in its true reality',¹² it is given to the Church, in its knowledge of the covenant between God and man, to know the world as it truly is.¹³

The task of the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is the confession of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ The Church's ministry is positively defined by its call to exist actively in the world as the community of Jesus Christ,¹⁵ but it is not its ministry to do the work of Jesus Christ or to take His place (it cannot itself reconcile the world to God). Rather it is called to confess Jesus Christ to the world as 'the work of God accomplished for it'.¹⁶ The ministry of the Church must consist therefore in the proclamation, explanation and application of the Gospel as the Word of God.¹⁷ For Barth however there is no false tension between the Church's proclamation and the Church's action:

No matter how we understand speaking or proclamation on the one side and acting or healing on the other in the ministry of the community, and no matter what the community may think it is commanded to do and may actually try to fulfil along these two lines: there can be no doubt that in the light of its origin, of the Giver of its task who is also its content, its ministry and witness have always to move along these two lines: not merely along either the one or the other, but along both; and no less along the one than the other, but with equal seriousness and emphasis along both.¹⁸

While expounding the ministry of the Church, Barth draws a distinction between the Church's evangelism and the Church's mission. He defines evangelization as the task of the Church within the confusing context of the identification of Church and State: a confusion compounded by the 'even more curious custom of infant baptism'.¹⁹ Evangelization must consist in a call to those who are 'within in theory but not in practice'; a declaration of the Gospel 'on this shifting frontier between true and merely nominal Christians'.²⁰

But the mission of the Church in its narrower but also its true and original sense consists in the attesting of the Gospel amongst the nations of the world: the proclamation that Jesus Christ died and rose again also for those who have 'fallen victim' to 'false beliefs in false gods'.²¹ According to Barth, this task ought not to be restricted to some missionary society composed merely of 'friends of missionary work': the true missionary society 'can only act representatively for the whole community which is as such a missionary community'.²² The goal of the Church's mission is not to 'convert the heathen' since this is the work of God alone but it is to bear testimony to this work and to do so by serving and never by mastering or ruling.²³

The purpose of 'missions' must be to make known the Gospel. No other purpose, such as the extension of a European or American culture, must be allowed to predominate or even be admitted.²⁴ In its mission the Church must maintain a sincere respect and also an equally sincere lack of respect for other religions; that is to say, it must reject the 'crass arrogance of the white man', but must equally reject any compromise of the Gospel by attempts to locate 'points of contact and the like'.²⁵ 'Missions' must be concerned with the establishment of the whole ministry of the Church, contributing to general education and medical care, though such tasks must never become ends in themselves.²⁶

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But while all this demonstrates the crucial and irreducible place of mission in Barth's understanding of the Church, it does little to throw light on the original question. Does Barth's concept of mission tend to confirm or deny the suspicion of 'Universalism'? Is the proclamation of the Church the means through which the Holy Spirit causes a real change to occur in the lives of the hearers or is it merely the declaration that this change has already occurred in a manner that is inclusive of all men?

If we are to understand Barth correctly, we must realize that this question poses a false and artificial alternative. For Barth the response to both possibilities can only be 'Yes'. At the heart of Barth's theology there is a tension that various critics of Barth have sought to resolve in one way or the other. Barth is properly interpreted only when this tension is recognized as irresolvable. When it is recognized not as an 'either . . . or . . .' but as a 'both . . . and . . .'. When it is recognized, in fact, as being a wholly illusory and imposed tension in the first place.

For Barth the theological definition of all men is determined by the doctrine of election. Man's being is not some autonomous state determined by man's own being and actions, it is rather determined by God's gracious decision of election. This eternal decision has been made actual in Jesus Christ who Himself has borne the divine rejection on behalf of all men. All men are ontologically defined as elect in Him since He alone is the true definition of authentic humanity.²⁷

The Christian community consists of those who know this truth, both for themselves and for all men.²⁸ Therefore the content of their proclamation is that this decision concerning the being of man has been made:

In Jesus Christ thou, too, art not rejected - for He has borne thy rejection - but elected. A decision has been made, in Jesus Christ, concerning the futility of thy desire and attempt to live that life; and it has been decided that thou canst live only this other life.²⁹

Ontologically both the Christian and the non-Christian are defined as elect in Jesus Christ: their election is that which has happened 'to' rather than 'in' their human nature and history. The Christian is one who has recognized this fact while the non-Christian is one who has not yet recognized or no longer recognizes it. Thus far the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian is noetic rather than ontological.³⁰

This same noetic distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian is continued in the fourth volume of *The Dogmatics*.³¹ That which makes a man a Christian is his knowledge of his being as a reconciled man. The individual addressed by the Church in its proclamation is one who 'lacks the knowledge of the Gospel and is thus supremely needy',³² one who 'suffers by reason of ignorance'.³³ The call to faith is a call 'to acknowledge' (*anerkennen*), 'to know' (*erkennen*), and 'to confess' (*bekennen*).³⁴

As this human act it has no creative but only a cognitive character. It does not alter anything. As a human act it is simply the confirmation of a change which has already taken place, the change in the whole human situation which took place in the death of Jesus Christ and was revealed in His resurrection and attested by the Christian community.³⁵

But to dismiss Barth's view of the distinction between the Christian and the non-Christian as being 'merely' noetic would be seriously to misrepresent him. Knowledge in this context, both for Barth and for the Bible, cannot merely mean the

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'acquisition of neutral information'. It is rather the process in which that which is known comes to man and totally transforms him. The event of the knowledge of salvation is itself an event of salvation; the 'total alteration of the one who it befalls'.³⁶ More than merely an enlightenment to knowledge, man's calling creates a 'distinction and alteration' of man's being and is thus both noetic and ontic in character.³⁷ It is such because, as a true event of proclamation and hearing, it is an event of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the work of the Son is no mere addendum to the eternal decision of the Father, so also the work of the Holy Spirit is no mere addendum to the completed work of the Son. Barth expounds man's salvation as a fully Trinitarian event. As a work of the Holy Spirit, man's reconciliation is an event not only *de iure* but also *de facto*.³⁸

The human act of faith has a cognitive rather than a creative character but, since this act can only occur in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is also a creative event: the positing of a new being, a new creation, a new birth, a total change in man's whole situation.³⁹ The work of the Holy Spirit in the 'calling' of the elect is the 'objective' difference (*die objektive unterscheidung*) which 'corresponds objectively' (*entspricht objektiv*) to the distinction which is peculiar to the elect.⁴⁰ The work of the Holy Spirit in the calling of men is that by which 'their election is accomplished in their life' (*zur Vollstreckung ihrer Erwählung in ihrem Leben*).⁴¹ For Barth, the Holy Spirit is the 'divine Noetic which has all the force of a divine Ontic'.⁴²

The ontological definition of all men as elect in Christ is not therefore some 'static Platonic form invalidating the genuine history and decisions of men'.⁴³ God's eternal decision of election, which is made actual in Christ, includes man's actual participation in that event of election. The relationship between Jesus Christ and other men is not merely ontological it is also dynamic and ontic. Reconciliation is an act of God, not a state but an event.⁴⁴

That all men are ontologically defined as elect in Jesus Christ implies that, in its mission, there is no other valid way for the Church to address men or to view men than according to this definition. There is no other valid definition of the being of man. The Church's testimony must be unequivocal. Its message is good-news. It must proclaim to every man that Jesus Christ died and rose again for him also. It must never reverse the ordained relationship between election and rejection, promise and threat.⁴⁵

But the election of man in Jesus Christ is not a decision of the eternal past that is 'left behind' by human history: this would be to totally misunderstand Barth's view of the nature of eternity as God's authentic temporality. The event of election includes an eternal decision of the Father, the actualization of that decision in the death and resurrection of the Son, and the realization of that decision in the life of the Christian in the power of the Holy Spirit. For Barth there is no tension here, still less a contradiction. There is an ontological definition that applies equally to all men. There is an ontic event in which the Holy Spirit remains the free Lord.⁴⁶

The Church is commissioned by God to declare this ontological definition; to proclaim the good-news of man's election in Jesus Christ. The Church does not possess the power to make any man one of the elect nor even to make it clear to any man that he is elected. This is the prerogative of God alone.⁴⁷ But when the Church's proclamation is truly proclamation, when it is truly a form of the Word of God, then not only a noetic human event but also an ontic and creative event occurs in the power of the Spirit. It would not be possible within this brief essay to give a comprehensive account of the manner in which Barth avoids the charge of 'Universalism'. It is rather the purpose of the essay simply to question whether his account of the Church's mission is consistent or inconsistent with a 'universalistic'

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scheme. In the expectation of a genuinely creative event taking place within the Church's proclamation in the power of the Holy Spirit lies an incentive for the Church's mission that it would be hard to reconcile with any form of 'Universalism'.⁴⁸

NOTES

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (hereafter C.D.), vols. I-IV, Eng. trans. eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, 1956-75), I 2, pp.743ff.
2. C.D. I 2, p.752.
3. *ibid.*, p.755.
4. C.D. I 1, p.88.
5. *ibid.*, pp.89ff.
6. C.D. IV 1, p.152.
7. *ibid.*, pp.152f.
8. C.D. IV 3, p.681.
9. *ibid.* p.762.
10. *ibid.*, pp.763f.
11. *ibid.*, p.769.
12. *ibid.*, p.771.
13. *ibid.*, p.769.
14. *ibid.*, pp.787ff.
15. *ibid.*, pp.830f.
16. *ibid.*, pp.835f.
17. *ibid.*, p.843.
18. *ibid.*, p.863.
19. *ibid.*, p.872.
20. *ibid.*, p.873.
21. *ibid.*, p.874.
22. *ibid.*, p.875.
23. *ibid.*, p.876.
24. *ibid.*, p.875.
25. *ibid.*, p.875.
26. *ibid.*, pp.875f.
27. C.D. II 2, pp.94ff.
28. *ibid.* pp.318ff.
29. *ibid.* p.322.
30. *ibid.* p.321; cf. John E. Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp.259ff.
31. C.D. IV 1, pp.90ff.
32. C.D. IV 3, p.806.
33. *ibid.*, p.809.
34. C.D. IV 1, pp.740ff.
35. *ibid.*, p.751.
36. C.D. IV 3, p.510; cf. pp.183ff & 218ff.
37. *ibid.* pp.650ff.
38. C.D. IV 2, p.511.
39. C.D. IV 1, pp.751ff.
40. C.D. II 2, p.345; cf. *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II 2 (Zurich, 1942), p.380.
41. C.D. II 2, p.348; cf. *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II 2 p.383.
42. Philip J. Rosato, S.J., *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh, 1981), p.126; cf. John E. Colwell, *op. cit.*, pp.283ff. For this distinction between the ontological and the ontic, see John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A comparison of Heidegger and Bultman* (1955), p.30; cf. also E. Jüngel, 'Das Dilemma der natürlichen Theologie und die Wahrheit ihres Problems: Überlegungen für ein Gespräch mit Wolfhart Pannenberg' in *Denken im Schatten des Nihilismus: Festschrift für Wilhelm Weischedel zum 70 Geburtstag*, ed. A. Schwan (Darmstadt, 1975), pp.419-440 (p.429).
43. John E. Colwell, *op. cit.*, p.282.
44. C.D. IV 1, p.6.
45. C.D. II 2, pp.320ff.
46. C.D. IV 3, p.942.
47. C.D. II 2, p.320; cf. pp.410ff.
48. For a fuller defence of Barth against the charge of 'Universalism' see J. D. Bettis, 'Is Karl Barth a Universalist?', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 20 (1967), 423-436; also John E. Colwell, *op. cit.*, pp.264ff.

JOHN E. COLWELL

'EVEN SO I SEND YOU'

An Expository and Theological Reflection on John 20:21

The saying recorded in John 20:21, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you', has long been recognized as a crucial statement in the account of the ministry of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. As the Johannine form of the 'Great Commission', it represents the critical programmatic watershed for the Church's mission to the world. Addressed first to the 'ten' disciples, it has clear and continuing significance for the Christian community in all ages, certainly not least our own. It will be the purpose of this article to identify several threads in the texture of its message and to focus something of its significance for Christian mission in our time.

As far as context is concerned, these words of the Risen Lord are embedded in a resurrection appearance account on the evening of Easter day (20:19). Precise location is not given but the upper room Last Supper site in Jerusalem seems most plausible. Jesus, after appearing visibly, utters the familiar Jewish word of greeting 'Shalom' (v.19), dispelling the disciples' understandable fears. He then confirms the reality of his personal presence by reference to his physical wounds which he displays, producing an overwhelming joy in the disciples (v.20). Jesus speaks again re-affirming the gift of peace and then utters the words of commission (v.21). The appearance concludes with an exhortation of the Spirit and the pronouncement of the authority to forgive and retain sins (vv.22-23).

Turning to exposition we find ourselves addressed by the text concerning, in turn, the importance of mission, its character, and the resources made available for it. As far as the *importance* of mission is concerned, the first consideration to be explored is the autobiographical perspective of Jesus in this saying, 'As the Father has sent me'. Jesus here understands himself as the 'Sent One', the personal emissary of the Father, a self-identity which echoes through the Fourth Gospel from end to end (cf. 5:36; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 13:20; 20:21). As Jesus favoured self-designation in this gospel, it is not without parallel to the Son of Man in the Synoptics (although Son of Man is also known in John) (cf. 1:50; 3:13f; 6:27; 8:28; 12:34; 13:31). Not only does this missionary perspective define Jesus, it also correspondingly defines the Father as the 'One who sent/sends me' (cf. 3:17; 4:34; 5:23; 6:44; 7:18; 8:29; 10:42; 12:44f; 13:16; 14:24; 15:21; 17:8).

This brings us immediately to an issue of profound theological and practical significance. The pervasiveness of this language means that, for this Gospel, God defines himself in terms of mission. In the dynamic interaction of a Sender and Sent One the divine is disclosed to us. Thus, mission, whose context and form we will examine more fully below, reaches back into the internal relations of the Godhead. It is accordingly not straying beyond the boundaries of this Johannine perspective to assert that God is a missionary God, even that God is a missionary, or a missionary society. In our text, then, Jesus senses the profound claim of the mission on his life and, that being so, his whole action is set within the context and under the sign of his being sent forth by the Father, and the Father correspondingly appears as the source and the sustainer of the missionary task of the Son.

This carries massive implications for our understanding of the Godhead. For if this dynamic interaction of Sender and Sent reaches back into the interior life of the Trinity we are immediately in a fundamentally different thought-world than the Unmoved Mover of Hellenism, the impassible 'Being' itself. Instead we are confronted with a God whose very being reverberates to the ultimate depths in dynamic, interpersonal relationship in the context of a passionate and self-sacrificial involvement with the world he has brought into being. This Johannine vision has a

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significant contribution to make to modern debate concerning the nature of God and the struggle to assert a dynamic as distinct from a static concept of Godhead.

As the mission of the Son to the world is precisely and identically the mission of God to the world, this vision of God necessarily affirms the significance of the world for God, and the historical process viewed in terms of the biblical history of fallenness and redemption. The mission of the Son is explicable only in terms of his incarnated solidarity with us in our flesh and of the incredible grace and love which underlie and are expressed in it. This Johannine God of Sender and Sent is clearly a God who is for us and with us to the very core of his Godhead.

One obvious implication can be drawn at this point which is of the greatest practical and strategic relevance for the life of the local Church as well as contemporary forms of the life of discipleship - the overwhelming importance of mission! For if all this is so, mission assumes an importance which is literally incomparable. Since mission defines the Godhead to the very depths of his being, God ceaselessly reaching out from himself, sending and being sent, mission is given a primacy which is unequalled. If the ultimate destiny of the Church is conformation for the Christ (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:13f; Col. 3:10), then such conformation for the *ecclesia militans* must necessarily be a tangible and pervasive commitment to mission. Put another way - if godliness is our ultimate goal, whether as individuals, local churches, or denominations - then a fair test of our progress is the degree of our missionary and evangelistic passion. Where does mission come in our list of priorities? Putting the same question another way - how godly are we?

A directly exegetical issue brings us to our second area of concern - the *character* of mission. This concerns the respective tenses of the two verbs. The second is, as might be expected, a present indicative: 'I am [now] sending you'. The first, however, is, perhaps unexpectedly, a perfect ('..... has sent me'), with the sense of the continuation of this action in the present. Thus Jesus is seen as implicitly identifying a past action by the Father, 'sent me' (cf. 17:18), as one which has a continuing present realization. The former mission of the Father through the Son is not concluded, albeit its form may be about to change: his mission will continue in theirs.

This insight is a fundamental accord with the perspective of other New Testament witness. This is precisely Luke's viewpoint in Acts 1:1, understanding his 'second treatise', the Book of Acts, as in essence the continuation of what Jesus 'began to do and teach' in his first treatise, his gospel. Acts is to be understood as the action of the Risen Jesus through the apostles, their colleagues and successors. This is also the perspective of the Matthean form of the great commission, Matthew 28:20, where the concluding words, 'I am with you always', or 'to the end of the age', is a missiological statement - 'with you' as you carry out the commission, 'with you' *in mission*, as its Leader and Resource. Paul expresses an identical perspective in Romans 15:8, referring to his ministry as 'What [the Risen] Christ has accomplished through me'. In our text we have not two successive missions, that of the Son sent by the Father and then that of the disciples sent by the Son, but one essential action of mission proceeding from the heart of God to the world, a single, unified and indissoluble movement in mission which has two distinguishable parts. Both parts of the mission are the work of the Son, the continuing ministry in and through his body, the Church in all the world and through all the ages.

At this point the text appears to be drawing upon the Jewish notion of *Shaliah*, the principle of transferred authorization, 'one who is sent as the one who sends him' (compare 13:20; also Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16). This principle of the *Shaliah* (ambassador, emissary) relates particularly to the issue of authority (Matthew 28:18, 'all authority [*ἐξουσία*] is given to me'). Jesus as the Sent One, having acted in the unqualified authority of the Father, the Sender, an authority sealed and affirmed in

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his Easter exaltation, now confers *his* authority on the messengers who go forth in his name. All of this has considerable implications for the Church's mission today. We are not alone in the task - Jesus, risen and exalted, is himself among us. Indeed, the mission is his and not ours. He is the Lord of the mission as he was proclaimed Lord in his earthly ministry. What this can mean in terms of our resource in mission we will explore below - for the moment we can let it stand in all of its wonder and impressiveness: *He is in the midst as we go forth for him to the world!*

Another implication for the character of mission is that the mission he exercised as the 'Sent One' of the Father becomes the model for ours (cf. καθώς, as). This principle is patient of almost limitless applications. It draws us anew to the gospel records of Jesus' ministry: from every page and paragraph sound the words 'Follow me!'. Specifically we may note the pervasive quality of *dependence* in the Fourth Gospel portrait of the Son in relation to the Father (cf. 5:19; 5:30; 6:38; 6:57; 7:16; 8:28; 8:42; 8:50; 12:49). This dependence motif is the more impressive both for its pervasiveness - covering the whole range of Jesus' ministry - and also because set in juxtaposition to the most audacious claims to deity (cf. 5:24-27; 6:33-37; 6:39-40; 7:37; 8:23ff; 8:51-58; 10:28-30; 14:6-11). This element which some see as a key to our understanding of the mystery of the incarnation becomes crucial for our mission. The Sent is to live out of the Sender. Just as Jesus, the Sent One, depends wholly and at every point on the Father, the Sender, so dependence on the Sender, Jesus, is the *modus operandi* of the disciples' mission.

Two specific applications are in order. First, against the Jewish background, the issue of authority is most clearly raised. The *Shaliah* embodies the authority of the sender in his person. Thus the unimpressiveness or similar personal disqualification of the messenger in no way detracts from his authority. Here is the secret of the otherwise impossible crisis of confidence which arises for any Christian witness the moment we reflect seriously on the nature of the task committed to us. We are ourselves 'clay pots', to use Paul's metaphor (II Cor. 4:7); we are to commend a 'treasure' which is nothing less than the revelation of 'the glory of God in the face of Christ' (v.6). Who is, or can ever be, sufficient for such a task? This insoluble dilemma is resolved in terms of the *Shaliah* - we go for him, sent by him and hence in his person and with his divine authority as the exalted one. But the degree of the authority we shall exercise will be dependent finally on the degree to which we subordinate ourselves to his rule, 'the transaction could not be properly concluded without a resolute subordination of the will of the representative to that of the one who commissioned him.' At this point the paradox of ministry is confronted - we find freedom in so far as we permit his enslavement of us; we bring life to others to the degree that we lose our own; we have authority and power to the degree that we are willing to become helpless. However, positively, in that submission there lies the unimaginable possibility of the exercise of Jesus' authority through us, as verse 23 of John illustrates in terms of the 'loosing' and the 'retaining' of sins. As we subordinate our lives to the rule of the exalted Lord, so in our ministry men and women will find themselves confronted directly by the person of the Risen One and hence by the grace and judgement of his kingdom.

The other specific application is seen in verses 20-21. The Risen One who is the model of our mission is identified not by his kingly glory but by the marks of his cross and passion (v.20). To be invited to follow such a Master in the work of mission could not but have had the most profound effect on the apostles. 'As the Father' had meant costly self-sacrifice to the point of the hell of Calvary, it could not henceforth mean less in principle for them. There is no evading the element of pain and suffering in mission. The earlier statement of the principle of the *Shaliah* (13:20) is in the context of the foot washing. Lowly servanthood, the path of

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suffering love, even unto death (John 12:24; cf. 12:26 'whoever serves me must follow me'), is implicit in the text and hence in the mission which is its burden.

These considerations bring us finally to the resources for mission. Up to now, we have generally implied this to be the Risen One himself; the Sender in the midst of the Sent. It is, however, appropriate to ask: In what way is Christ present for us? Can the resource he represents be given sharper focus and fuller authentication?

We can answer that in two ways. First, we notice an earlier occurrence of the Johannine commission in chapter 17:18: 'As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world'. This earlier form, linguistically almost identical, falls within Jesus' prayer for the disciples. This context is crucial for our consideration of the resources for the Christian mission, which makes it the more surprising and regrettable that in all the wealth of commentary of the Fourth Gospel, and the Farewell discourses in particular, comparatively little attention is given to the simple fact that Jesus concludes his instruction of the disciples *with a prayer for them*. It is in that context and as a part of the prayer that the 'Great Commission' is first promulgated. The commentators concern themselves in the main with a search for literary parallels. Kasemann, in his influential study of the prayer, effectively questions whether it is a prayer at all. Others, mainly Roman Catholic commentators, explore the possibility of liturgical sources. None of this really grapples with the fundamental question, why does Jesus pray at this point? What does the fact that he prays signify?

Here the missiological setting becomes crucial. Jesus, facing the climax of his own mission, uses the upper room discourse to prepare the disciples for *their* mission beyond the crisis of his passion. Hence, 17:18 is in effect a summary text for the whole discourse. The point to be noted, however, in chapter 17 is that he not only instructs them, *he prays for them*. This can mean nothing less than that *the mission of the Church is taken up into the inner dialogue of the Trinity*. More specifically, Jesus in his God-manhood prays for his Church. Thus our mission as the sent ones of the Son takes place in the setting of his prayer, is gathered up by it, and presented in it to the Father. The immediate setting of verse 18 is crucial: self-consecration of the Son ('for their sake I consecrate myself'). The mainly British tradition of interpretation of the prayer appears to be right, as against some of the continental pre-occupations noted above, in finding the key to the prayer in verses 17-19. But the self-consecration of Jesus is not only the uniting theme of the prayer but also its essential *basis*. The prayer is the fruit of the self-consecration of Jesus and it is on the basis of his self-consecration that the power of prayer is released. This prayer embraces the historic mission of the Church, both immediately (vv. 6-19), and across all the ages until his glorification (vv.20-26). *Thus the mission of the Church in history partakes of, and is enabled by, the self-oblation of the Son of God in which he offers in our humanity a perfect response to the Father in us and for us.*

This truly is the most enormous and all-sufficient resource since it anchors our work in mission in all its particularity and brokenness firmly in the perfect and completed work of the Son. There is imparted to our mission the most profound and pervasive note of confidence. The great affirmation of 16:33 carries over into the prayer and echoes around the world and embraces all the aeons. 'I have overcome the world': that is, 'take heart, my mission, *which includes yours*, is triumphant and prevailing'. We go forth in mission within the prayer of Jesus.

If the prayers we are to offer in mission are assured of efficacy (14:13-14; 15:16; 16:24), *how much more* the prayer of Jesus! More theologically, our prayers are answered primarily on the basis of the fact that they are surrounded and enclosed within his prayer for us. This is the supreme resource of our mission, not just the presence of Jesus as the risen companion, but the fact that our work and witness in

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all its variety is already grasped, healed, sanctified, renewed and perfected within the one mission of Jesus as he takes up our mission into his perfected mission for the Father. Thus the sins of our mission, its unworthiness, unbelief, disobedience, all its sordid self-promotion, its cowardice and worldly compromise is overcome. Mission, therefore, becomes *celebration*, an act of adoration, an affirmation, a demonstration of the triumph of the victorious and exalted Lord who sends us.

This leads to the second aspect of the passage as far as the resources in mission are concerned (v.22), 'receive the Holy Spirit'. That the divine Spirit is the resource in mission is a commonplace of biblical missiology. What the text does here is to root the giving of the Spirit firmly in the Christological reality of the accomplishment of Jesus. Here we are shown the risen Jesus, the victor over the world, the perfected missionary, breathing on the apostolic community, with the words, 'receive [the] Holy Spirit'. Commentators here commonly and correctly draw attention to the parallels with Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37. However not too much should be made of these precedents. The setting is *mission*, our human mission in the world, Christ's mission through us. The Spirit's resource is here defined for us - he is the life-breath of the risen Jesus, i.e. the completed mission of the Son becomes expressed in us by the Spirit (Acts 2:33, etc.). John 20:22 is the actualizing of John 17:19 - it is the impartation by the Spirit of the missionary humanity of Jesus to his body in history.

This connection is crucial both for our interpretation of this passage and for our experience of the Spirit of the Church, for it teaches that the Spirit is always *the Spirit of Jesus*. An independent and freely operating 'Spirit - mission' is therefore excluded. The one mission is the mission of Jesus in and through his Spirit. But further, the work of the Spirit lies not in some sheerly supernatural sphere detached from historical continuum in which our mission is set, any more than the mission of Jesus was thus detached. Rather the Spirit makes available and brings to realization in the Church the reality of the perfected humanity of the Son. While works of power are certainly not excluded, as they were not excluded for Jesus, the primary evidence of the Spirit's operation remains the Christ - imaging humanity and missionary zeal of a people who look like Jesus and who share his passion for the world! (Acts 1:8; 4:22; Gal. 5:22).

If, according to John 20:21, mission partakes of the Divine Being, then we have no excuse for making it a secondary issue as far as the agenda of the church in our day is concerned. We dare not live within the church, careless of the world, but rather must go and go again in his Name. In the end, godliness as a church or as individuals lies to an important extent with the degree of our identification with the missionary heart of God. Somehow the church needs to break through its narcissistic self-absorption and rediscover itself as a community *pro mundum*, a people for the world. Further if, according to John 20:21, mission is Christ's mission continued in us, then the key to our experiencing the divine authority in our witness lies paradoxically in the degree to which we are prepared to surrender our leadership to the leadership of the Lord in our midst. Again, if identification with him inevitably implies an identification with him in his suffering love, then precisely in that identification our mission will become authentically the reflection of his and the continuation of his authority-bearing mission in the world. Finally if, according to John 20:21, our resources are none other than the triumphant and perfected humanity of Jesus in mission offered to the Father for us, there is inserted into our whole endeavour a note of hope and even triumph as the spirit of the exalted Jesus moves among us, imparting to us the power of the perfected mission of the one who still says to us, 'As the Father sent me, I am sending you'.

BRUCE MILNE

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MISSION, THE SHAPE OF THE CHURCH AND ECUMENISM

The intention of this article is to argue that the form which the church of Jesus Christ takes is directly related to its effectiveness in mission and to the impact which that mission has upon society. For this reason it behoves us not to imagine that issues of church order and renewal are distractions from the 'real task' of the church or matters of ecclesiastical introspection. Rather we should be concerned about church order precisely because the shape of the church determines the shape of the mission. Specifically, at this point several fundamental concerns should be seen to converge. Baptist identity emerges out of distinctive concern for the church to be a covenant community of believers gathered together in freedom under the headship of Christ. Believers' baptism expresses this doctrine of the church. If Baptists have any distinctive witness to give to world and church, it concerns the order and shape of the church - it is *ecclesiological*. Such Free Church¹ ecclesiology has *missiological* implications. The understanding of active and committed discipleship from which it emerges leads to the belief that the church exists under and by the word of God preached. In other words, it implies evangelism. Coincidentally the belief that the church is God's community being formed in the midst of human community provides the crucial insight which makes for the renewing of human community. These concerns converge with the *ecumenical* imperative. If the form of the church and the mission of the church are integrally related, it is of the essence of the Baptist contribution to ecumenical dialogue to urge upon the worldwide church for the sake of mission the reform and renewing of its life along the lines of a Free Church theology.

That the essence of Baptist identity concerns the nature of the church it hardly seems necessary to argue. The various Anabaptist and Baptist movements divide from the rest of the church not over catholic issues of trinitarian orthodoxy or chalcedonian christology nor over protestant emphases on authority and soteriology. In all such issues they are part of the mainstream church in its Reformation mode of existence. They do divide over the nature of the church, insisting that it comprises the truly regenerate, that it is a voluntary community, and that in matters of its faith and conscience, the writ of the state does not run. In the emergence of Free Church and Baptist believers there was a radical threat to the state which the latter was not slow to perceive. According to this new insight, the state had only a relative and enabling role to play in the maintenance of human community. To the ancient cry that faith was so important that everybody should be compelled to share the same one, it replied that faith was so important that all should be allowed freedom to discover and embrace it for themselves. There was agreement about the importance of religious faith but disagreement about how such faith might be propagated. Here also is that dynamic which leads to the rediscovery of evangelism. As faith is not imparted to

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any along with their citizenship but comes in response to the preaching of the Word, the Word must be preached with the object of gathering in those who believe. It is little appreciated that this rebirth of the church's evangelistic thrust has its roots in Free Church theology and life and emerges directly from it.

It has long since been pointed out by K. S. Latourette that the Reformers were not themselves evangelistically minded, and indeed that they expressly denied that the Great Commission was binding on any but the first apostles.² Conversely, Franklin H. Littell has shown that, although there were vocational groups such as the Franciscans which had striven to fulfil the Great Commission, the Anabaptists were among the first to make it binding upon all church members.³ According to Harold Bender, the crucial distinction between these two Reformation groupings at this point is attributable in part to their attitudes to the state: 'The Reformers were not evangelistic (in the strict sense), partly because they adopted the principle of the territorial state church, and the principle that the ruler determines the religion of his people. Thus they were immobilized by political boundaries and the state church concept, whereas the Anabaptists had full mobility'.⁴ Clearly, for as long as the church was wedded to that notion of Christendom according to which church and state reinforced each other, the evangelistic imperative was either forgotten or handed over to the state to fulfil by means of coercion. The genius of the Free Church movement was that it perceived the falsity of this link and, in breaking it, opened up the way for the recovery of a true evangelism. It can only be a source of embarrassment to those who elevate the Reformers that the missionary task only began to be taken up among their followers in the eighteenth century with the emergence of the Pietism of Halle and Herrnhut⁵ while the Anabaptists, by comparison, were 'originally and intensely evangelistic'.⁶ It is consistent with this that believers in the Free Church concept have been in the forefront of the church's missionary expansion, to such an extent that in 1967 Littell could claim: 'Today more than three-fourths of the Protestant missionary staff and resources stem from churches of Free Church parentage'.⁷ For the purpose of the present argument, the fact that historically evangelism re-emerged out of the Free Church tradition indicates that Free Church ecclesiology is conducive to the church's evangelistic mission. Theology will give rise to practice and a theology of the church which stresses the need for response of heart and will to the word of the gospel will stimulate the practice of evangelism. Traditional state churches become evangelistic to the extent that they adopt wittingly or unwittingly the characteristics of the believers' church. The fact that some individual churches in these traditions are strongly evangelistic reflects the leaven of Free Church theology. The idea of a state church, familiar to us from the post-Constantinian era and defended even today as a way of bringing lives and communities under the reign of Christ, actually functions as an obstruction to the fulfilment of the Great Commission. The shape of the church as a believing community of disciples bears directly upon its mission. Where such an understanding of the church is to be found, it will be conducive to evangelism. And where evangelism is engaged in and bears fruit, it will tend to require this shape from the church for the work of nurture and discipling to be fulfilled adequately. The believers' church concept is to be advocated because in the work of mission it is functional as well as inherently right.

Thus far the emphasis has been upon that aspect of mission which is called evangelism. While this a crucial aspect of the task of mission, it is not its sum total. Here again the shape of the church comes into focus. The complement to calling folk to personal decision is the corporate reality of a believing community in the midst of human community which reflects and embodies the life of Jesus Christ and exists as a 'new humanity' in the midst of the old. It is through this community that

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God is at work to renew fallen humanity from within and it may rightly be described as a 'political' community in that it is called to express a way of living together which contradicts and challenges the prevailing patterns of society. According to John Howard Yoder: 'The political novelty which God brings into the world is a community of those who serve instead of ruling, who suffer instead of inflicting suffering, whose fellowship crosses social lines instead of reinforcing them. This new Christian community in which the walls are broken down not by human idealism or democratic legalism but by the work of Christ, is not only a vehicle of the gospel or fruit of the gospel; it is the good news. It is not merely the agent of mission or the constituency of a mission agency. This is the mission.'⁸ Understood in this way the shape of the church, the way in which it orders its life and lives out its values, is integral to its mission because such living in conformity to Christ offers to the wider human community creative possibilities for living which are not within its power to originate. The church dissents from the majority moral culture not to retreat into a sectarian ghetto but to offer back to that culture creative and life-enhancing possibilities which make for freedom and dignity and which are forged among a community of believing people who are focused upon Christ. The dissenting option, represented by Baptists and others, is not a merely negative response to establishment religion: it is the conviction that there is a higher form of churchmanship.⁹

It would certainly be claiming too much for the Free Church tradition to say that it has consistently held a theology which articulates this aspect of its mission. The articulation of the dimensions of mission along these lines is a relatively recent phenomenon. What the tradition has had is a cluster of deeply perceived insights about what it means to be free which have left their creative mark on British and Western society. These insights have led to the development of 'a pluralist society in which men would learn to live in peace with others with whom they disagreed without resort to the scaffold or the firing squad'.¹⁰ These are positive gains for the living of human life which spring out of the Free Church tradition. We are not in a position to say that this is all that there will be. Indeed, the logic of the case would suggest that the new community in Christ is able to be a constant source of inklings of this kind in so far as it is true to itself in living out its life under Christ's rule. The potential for the transformation of human society is increased in so far as the church, from whatever tradition its various parts may come, learns to acknowledge Christ as the one whose crown rights put it in a position of radical dissent from the alienated structures of human society and equally radical conformity to the pattern of life revealed in him. That the contemporary Free Churches are largely failing to do this does not mean that their fundamental theology is wrong but that they have forgotten what it is.

That ecclesiology and missiology are related in the ways so far suggested indicates both that the church's mission cannot be carried forward by ignoring the shape of the church's life and that cooperation in mission between churches holding differing ecclesiologies must eventually lead to searching questions about what exactly the church is called to be. We cannot afford to sink our differences for the sake of mission but must rather maintain the conversation about the shape of the church because we are involved in mission together. When Baptist believers begin to perceive that Free Church identity is not a quaint oddity that can be safely relegated to the history books but is intimately related to what we are called to be and do for the sake of the world, then perhaps they will grasp that more is at stake than was first thought. In the ecumenical conversations which are an inevitable and desirable part of future Christian existence, Free Church and Baptist Christians have much to gain. What they can give is a clear understanding of the church which, if taken seriously, will increase the church's mission. The letting loose of Free Church theology is one

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of the ways forward if for no other reason than that the universal church must now come to terms with living in a pluralist, post-Constantinian era. It must adopt increasingly the identity of a believers' church and the signs are that this is beginning to happen and to bear fruit. Baptist Christians are in the position of having adopted freely and as a matter of principle that which many are now having to adopt reluctantly and of necessity. In previous generations a sense of grievance, as well as of principle, led our forbears to argue for the disestablishment of the English church. The issue of principle remains, but in addition we are now able to argue that for the sake of the mission of the church the established churches should give up their pretensions and privileges. At least one prominent churchman has begun to argue, although not yet in public or in print and therefore he will not be named, that the mission of the 'established' church would be immensely strengthened in this country if it were to adopt the status of a voluntary community of faith and cease to baptize infants as an act of witness concerning the nature of faith and the Christian life. Here is a train of thought which traces the line of the historical development already indicated: the state-church nexus hinders rather than furthers the mission. The form of the church communicates the wrong message. If the church cannot rely upon the inherent authority of its life and its message, then no amount of state privilege will fill the gap.

It is an encouraging sign that the towering presence in twentieth-century theology, Karl Barth, moved throughout his life time to distinctively Free Church convictions, even though he never carried them through to their logical conclusions. He came to see the church in congregational terms, saying: 'I have demolished the whole concept of church "authority" in both its episcopal and synodical form - and constructed everything (rather like the Pilgrim Fathers) on the congregation.'¹¹ He developed the thought of the church as a 'brotherly Christocracy' and a 'Christocratic brotherhood'.¹² From 1939 onwards he became increasingly critical of infant baptism until he conceded that 'fundamentally Baptists and Mennonites are on the right track in their baptismal practice' and recommended a 'presentation of infants' as a distinct alternative to infant baptism.¹³ He castigated adherence to the notions of the *corpus Christianum* and the *Volkskirche* and saw that the health of the church was tied up with rejection of these forms.¹⁴

Although steadfastly resisted, it is significant that a principled rejection of the older justification of notions of the state church has begun to emerge, although slowly, from within the continental Reformed tradition. Jurgen Moltmann has articulated the shift to a rediscovery of the congregation in his book *The Open Church*: 'It seems to me that the "future of the Reformation" does not lie on the right wing with its Catholic tendencies but on the so-called left wing of the Reformation . . . After the "reformation of doctrine" through the gospel they wanted the "reformation of life" through love. After the "reformation of faith" they wanted the "gathering of the congregation" . . . The future of the church of Christ lies in principle on this wing of the Reformation because the widely unknown and uninhabited land of "the congregation" is found here. The Catholic dioceses and the Protestant national churches and denominations are today on the threshold of discovering the congregation. And it is no accident that everywhere in the old territorial-church structures today grass-roots congregations are arising - Christian communities, cells and groups which are changing the church from the inside out and making it into the congregation. There is a great hope in the church; it comes from below, from the grass roots.'¹⁵ Consistent with this shift, Moltmann elsewhere calls for a new baptismal practice in which 'the religious festival of birth and name giving would be replaced by a call event which would make clear the believer's Christian identity . . . So-called voluntary baptism does not really make baptism a matter of

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choice, but is essentially baptism into the liberty of Christ . . . Baptism as the liberating event in a person's life corresponds only to a church which spreads the liberty of Christ.¹⁶

That Moltmann sees so clearly the relationship between the church's future, its form and its mission, is confirmation of the argument pursued in this article. That he is coming from a tradition, as was Barth, which historically has opposed itself to the understanding of the relationship of church and society espoused in the Free Church way of being the church, is a sign of hope. The essence of ecumenical witness is not the abandoning of the particular Baptist identity which is our stewardship, but the offering of it to the whole church with the renewal of the church in view. Voices like Moltmann's are reminders that in offering Free Church theology in this way we can be assured of the fact that it will have its echoes in the wider Christian community and will be encountered by a movement which comes to meet it from the church universal. In this way we may help towards the renewing of the church for its mission.

NOTES

1. The title 'Free Church' is being used in this article as an affirmative description of the church as a voluntary gathering of those who truly believe and who believe it is wrong to be governed in this by the state, rather than to indicate an accidental trait of legal history. The title 'Free Church' takes the form of the latter in common British usage when, for example, the Episcopalian Church in Scotland is so described. See on this J. H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame, 1984) pp.105-6.
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5. Donald F. Durnbaugh, *The Believers' Church* (Macmillan, 1968) p.230.
6. Bender, *op.cit.* p.269.
7. Cited in Durnbaugh *op.cit.* p.238.
8. Cited in Durnbaugh *op.cit.* pp.240-1.
9. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978) p2.
10. *ibid.* p4.
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12. *Church Dogmatics* IV/2 (T. and T. Clark 1958) pp.680-1.
13. *Church Dogmatics* IV/4 (T. and T. Clark 1969) pp.193-4.
14. See the citations in Leonard Verduin, *The Anatomy of a Hybrid* (Eerdmans, 1976) p.249.
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16. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (SCM, 1977) pp.241-2.

NIGEL G. WRIGHT

THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

As the oldest contributor to this symposium, I may perhaps be forgiven for starting on a nostalgically personal note. It is forty years since I joined the first-year intake at Spurgeon's - the 1949 Amies batch. Prin Evans and the staff, as was the custom, entertained us for lunch. I still remember his Edwardian-style courtesy, ushering us into a world that now seems light-years away. It is partly an emotional thing, this sense of something that happened before the flood. At the time, I was in love with a Bart's nurse, and when my course and her SRN training were completed, we married. Fifteen years later, in mountainous country between Sao Paulo and Curitiba, our VW combi casually skidded off the road and tumbled down an embankment. Four of us emerged virtually unscathed, but Beryl died. Before and after the flood.

The other main factor to account for this sense of distance is the sea-change in my understanding of mission. I applied to Spurgeon's in response to a sense of call to mission overseas. National service in Germany in the years just after the war had convinced me of the chaos humankind creates when God is left out of the reckoning. But the connection between the apocalyptic vision of German cities bombed to bits and the call to be a missionary in Brazil seems, in retrospect, more tenuous than it did at the time. If each of us can move the world by half-an-inch, it might have made more sense to hang about and apply my half-inch worth to what we have learnt to call 'The North', rather than fly off to the Third (Two-Thirds?) World. As Ed de la Torre puts it, 'You'll only add to the congestion'. But maybe without all that exploring I could never have arrived where I started and known the place for the first time.¹

My senior colleague in Brazil was another Spurgeon's man, Arthur Elder. In 1970 we both returned to the UK, Arthur to a tutor's job at Selly Oak while I lectured in Religious Studies at a College of Education. One of the B.Ed. courses I taught was called 'Christianity in the Modern World', which included a section on Christian-Marxist dialogue. One day in 1973 Arthur pressed into my hands a copy of Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation*², which I read avidly as a Latin American perspective on the dialogue. I did not realise at the time that liberation theology would give me a perspective on a good deal more besides.

At this point it may be well to deal with a question implicit in the title of an article that appeared some years ago: 'Whatever happened to liberation theology?'. The thesis was that this theology was just another passing fashion; it had had its day, and had been consigned to the dustbin of theological history. But like the death of God, the report of the death of liberation theology was greatly exaggerated. The Uruguayan theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, once remarked that in the struggle for liberation the danger is not the death of God but the death of the theologian.³ And while liberation theologians continue to die violent deaths, it follows that the theology they do is is very much alive: otherwise, who would bother? Ignacio Ellacuria and his five Jesuit colleagues at the University of Central America, were not killed as the exponents of an out-moded theological fashion. They are the latest witnesses (martyrs) both to the scale of oppression suffered by the poor - the majority of people in Latin America - and the power of the Gospel to give these people faith and hope against all the odds of destitution and powerlessness: the very essence of liberation theology.

Jon Sobrino, who would certainly have shared the fate of his six colleagues, had he not been out of El Salvador on 16th November 1989, wrote a moving tribute to his Jesuit friends. In the course of it he observed: 'Oppression is not a fashion. The cries of the oppressed continue to rise to heaven with increasing urgency. And God continues to hear these cries, continues to condemn oppression, and continues to inspire the quest for liberation. Whoever fails to see this doesn't understand a word of liberation theology. I ask myself what theology is about if it ignores this

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fundamental fact of God's creation as it exists today; I ask how theology can call itself Christian if it skates over the crucifixion of entire peoples and their need of resurrection, even if its books continue to discuss a crucifixion and resurrection that happened twenty centuries ago. So if those who do liberation theology don't do it well, then let others do it and do it better. But someone has to do it. And for the love of God, let no-one call it a fashion.⁴

It is all a far cry from those dear departed days of the London external B.D. that I sweated over for three years, or, for that matter, the New Testament section of the Cambridge Theology Tripos (Part III) that George Beasley-Murray (bless him) encouraged me to take as a sequel, where the examiners set the burning questions that they wished they knew the answers to themselves, like who really wrote the Letter to the Ephesians? Wet behind the ears, it took a long time before it dawned on me that five years of theology pursued as the acquisition and discussion of a corpus of knowledge was not the best preparation for mission either in Brazil or in Britain. Such questions as - Who does theology? What is it about? On whose behalf is it done? What is the social location of the theologian? - just did not occur. In fact, as late as 1981 a group of activists organised a conference on 'A Theology for Britain in the 80s', and chose as a venue a grassy campus in Roehampton. Ironically, that very weekend, the balloon went up in Brixton.

There is an even greater gap between the smart apartment blocks of Copacabana (complete with military-style security systems) and the *favelas* that struggle up the hillside of Rio de Janeiro; but it is these latter, like the shanties of Sao Paulo, the *barrios* of Lima, the *poblaciones* of Santiago and the villages of El Salvador, that provide the place of 'epistemological privilege' for doing theology. In such locations, Basic Christian Communities⁵ read their lives, their struggles, their terrors and their hopes in the light of the Bible; and the fruit of their discussion, prayer and worship is found in some community action for change. They discover in the prophets a God with a passion for justice; they find him in Mary's song as the one who fills the hungry with good things; and they recognise him most of all in Jesus who came to preach good news to the poor and bring liberation to the captives. But as they read the gospels they see how that good news actually changed things: it was translated into good reality. It gives them hope that good news can still become good reality. If 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof', it cannot be right that land is concentrated into fewer and fewer greedy and powerful hands, leaving landless peasants nowhere to grow crops to feed their families. So the Gospel imperative is to campaign for land reform. If Jesus is the 'Water of Life', this spiritual truth can only take on meaning among people deprived of a clean, safe water supply as they work together in their community to provide it. In these communities the voiceless at last find their voice; they begin to have a say in running their lives; and the privileged and powerful discover that they are dealing not with sheep, but men and women who, because they know they are made in the image of God, refuse any longer to put up with inhuman living conditions: the lack of basic housing, health care, schools and jobs that others take for granted. This is where theology of liberation is done, and these are the people who do it. Boff, Sobrino and the others are simply the resource people who help them articulate it and stand with them in their struggle.⁶

The reaction of this irruption of the poor into the history of Latin America is predictable. The privileged oligarchies, in situations where sensitivities to world opinion are growing, attempt to camouflage their retention of the levers of power under a cloak of democracy. Where they think they can get away with it, naked repression is still a weapon. Either way, the poor can still be defined as those who are nearer to death, whether (as is more common now in Brazil) slow death from

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malnutrition and lack of health care or (as still happens with appalling frequency in El Salvador) a more or less quick death at the hands of the death squads.

The name for this situation is sin. Sin is identified as that which brought death to the Son of God; the sin which still brings death to the daughters and sons of God⁷ - 70,000 in El Salvador alone over the past decade, the majority of them victims of the death squads, the majority of them nameless (to us) students, union leaders, peasants, community workers, members of local congregations. We happen to know the name of Oscar Romero; he was an archbishop. We happen to know the names of Elba and Celina; they were the housekeeper and her 15 year-old daughter, murdered in cold blood along with the Jesuits, too dangerous to be left alive as witnesses to the killings. These people, the famous and the nameless, are the crucified people of El Salvador. It is not surprising that for Ellacuria and Sobrino, the only Biblical figure adequate to symbolise the sufferings of their people is that of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52/53)⁸, bearing in himself the sin of the world; but it is the sin of *our* world, the North more than the South, that they bear. We shall return to this later.

Another Biblical image that comes to life in this situation of sin is that of the idols of death. We thought Moloch was a nightmare of pre-Christian history; we discover that he lives in his modern counterpart mammon, the rampant capitalism and obscene wealth defended by the doctrine of National Security and cloaked with the civic religion of 'Western Christian Civilisation'. To touch this idol, to finger him even, invites immediate retribution; the idol can only be placated by human sacrifice. The prophets waged war on the idols of death in the name of the God of life; Jesus takes up the same challenge as a task central to his ministry and message⁹ ('Is it lawful to do good or evil on the Sabbath? to save or to kill?'). His proclamation of the God of life led to continuing conflict with those who oppressed his people, distorting the image of the living God into an idol that brought death - even, in the end, his own death.

What of faith in this situation so dominated by sin that it seems the very antithesis of the Kingdom of God? Faith means following Jesus, whatever such discipleship may cost. In his *Freedom made Flesh*, Ellacuria observes - with tragic insight - 'If the Church identifies itself with the struggle of the oppressed, it will run head-on into the oppressors who hold power'.¹⁰ That must not divert the Church from witnessing to the Kingdom, and working for a society of justice, peace and love that will embody the Kingdom at least a bit more than the hell of present conditions. Liberation theologians never fool themselves that the Kingdom of God in all its fullness can ever be an earthly reality. But, as Sobrino puts it: 'As it stands now in most Latin American countries, asserting that the fullness of the Kingdom has not yet arrived here is not the problem; that is all too obvious. What we must now do is assert that our situation is the formal negation of the fullness of the Kingdom, that we must therefore work to create something that resembles it at least a little'.¹¹ And just as faith, for Jesus, did not mean possession of God and his Kingdom, but rather an on-going search for them¹², so for the disciple, faith is commitment to a quest rather than a possession; and our own contact with Jesus will come 'not primarily through cultic acclamation or adoration, but through following Jesus in the service of God's Kingdom'.¹³

What does all this imply for our mission to the world? Maybe it is a bit clearer by now what it implies for Christians in Latin America, seen from the perspective of liberation theology. But what about 'our' mission to Latin America? Can we properly speak of such a mission? Or does it make more sense to speak of their mission to us? What does their understanding of theology imply for the way we do theology, for our ministerial training programmes, for the life and work of our congregations? And if there is any sense in which we can still make a contribution

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to their work and witness, can it be in any other terms than Christian solidarity? And will this not imply being missionaries to our own people, indeed, to ourselves? In his letter of invitation to write this essay, the editor spoke about befriending 'those who know not the Saviour'. According to Matthew 25, such people may be found in unexpected places.

In April 1989, a sprinkling of Baptist Churches in Britain were privileged to have a visit from Tomas Tellez, the Secretary of the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention. He spoke movingly of his people's struggle for self-determination and a more decent way of life. He described the involvement of Baptist young people in education and health care in the areas of his country ravaged by the war against the Contras, and how some of them had been abducted and others killed by this army led by former officers in the deposed dictator Somoza's National Guard. He made no bones about the fact that this army, although fighting a war condemned by the International Court of Justice at the Hague, was sponsored and funded by the government of the USA. But that is not all. During the period in the 1980s when Congress withheld funds from the Contras, supplies were kept going nicely by private subscription of millions of dollars, much of the money channelled through the Christian Broadcasting Network. The man who masterminded this was Pat Robertson,¹⁴ a leading TV evangelist, and a presidential candidate who enjoyed massive support from Christians in the race that finally put George Bush in the White House. Robertson is one tip of a massive iceberg of a brand of right-wing Christianity waging an anti-communist crusade in the Third World, notably in Central America, Southern Africa and South-East Asia. Christians in these regions whose faith leads them to take sides with the poor find themselves the targets of this crusade and the victims of persecution. Tomas's friends were killed by the Contras; Ellacuria and his colleagues by the death squads. But behind those who pull the trigger stand those 'Christian' sponsors who give them ideological and financial backing. They are part of a movement, strongest in the USA, which is spreading to Britain and other European countries. And at last, Third World Christians have spoken out. Thousands of them (Tomas among them) have signed a document declaring that Christians who side with those who oppress and exploit people are siding with idolators who worship money, power, privilege and pleasure. They affirm that the persecution of Christians who side with the oppressed is the abandonment of the Gospel. And they share the hope that 'those who collaborate with the idols of death and those who persecute us today will be converted to the God of life'.¹⁵ Hence the title of the document (which should be required reading for every pastor and congregation in Britain): *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion*.

Well, that rang a bell with me. I still possess a dog-eared copy of a specimen sermon I sent to Spurgeon's in 1948 to support my application. The text is Acts 26, 12-19. I had a good time with the theme of opening eyes and turning 'them' from darkness to light. But what if we ourselves are still as blind as bats? If we are the ones who by the criteria of Matthew 25 'know not the Saviour'? If we are the people who (even by silent complicity or default) live by oppression while our fellow-Christians die by it?

In 1992, Baptist Missionary Society will be celebrating two hundred years since William Carey and his colleagues founded the BMS. Well, good, there is much to celebrate. But by one of those odd quirks of history, 1992 marks another momentous anniversary: five hundred years since Columbus 'discovered' America. Latin Americans date the beginning of modern history from then; but the indigenous peoples, who predated Columbus by more than a millenium, and their descendants have good cause to question the celebration. Discovery and conquest brought in their wake wholesale slaughter of innocent people, the uprooting and enslavement of

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millions, and the plunder of their land and resources. These days the Spanish soldiers and Portuguese traders have been largely replaced by American military advisers, British bankers and European transnational executives; but the effects are roughly the same. On this twin anniversary, British Baptists could do worse than dedicate our half-inch worth, even at the expense of transferring resources from Brazil and El Salvador, to a programme of political advocacy in the UK on behalf of Latin America. God knows, that is a big enough missionary task to be going on with.

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2. G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Orbis 1973, SCM 1974.
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G. DENOMINATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

1. Dr Beasley-Murray served as Chairman for the Advisory Committee for Church Relations which produced the Report *Baptists and Unity* (Baptist Union: London, 1965), 60pp.
2. Regular contributions to *Spurgeon's College Record*, especially when Tutor (1950-56) and Principal (1958-73). Of special interest is 'World Journey' in issue 51 (December 1970), pp.4-11, detailing visits to Canada, Tokyo and Russia.
3. Frequent contributions to the *Baptist Times*: two are of special interest. 'Let's stop apologising for the Church', 2 May 1968, pp.8-9, in the wake of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King. Dr Beasley-Murray, as President of the Baptist Union, argued strongly for social activity on the part of Christians. 'The Person of Christ: The New Testament Witness to Christ', 29 July 1971, p.7, appeared in the midst of the christological discussions.

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