TRANSFORMING MISSION

Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission

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Chapter 12

Elements of an Emerging Ecumenical Missionary Paradigm

With the qualifications mentioned in the previous chapter, I now turn to the elements which the emerging missionary paradigm comprises. Yet another warning is still in order. The elements discussed below should by no means be seen as so many distinct and isolated components of a new model; they are all intimately interrelated. This means that in discussing a specific element each other element is always somewhere in the background. The emphasis throughout should therefore be on the wholeness and indivisibility of the paradigm, rather than on its separated ingredients. As we focus our torchlight on one element at a time, all the other elements will also be present and visible just outside the center of the beam of light.

I begin with some reflections on the role of the *church* in mission. This section will be longer than the others, mainly because all the issues that will emerge in subsequent sections are, in one sense or another, already present here. Once we have discussed the place of the church in mission, we can be briefer on the other elements of the emerging paradigm.

MISSION AS THE CHURCH-WITH-OTHERS

Church and Mission

In a perceptive study Avery Dulles (1976) has identified five major ecclesial types. The church, he suggests, can be viewed as *institution*, as *mystical Body of Christ*, as *sacrament*, as *herald*, or as *servant*. Each of these implies a different interpretation of the relationship between church and mission.

Catholics have always had a high view of the church. This explains why the first two of Dulles's models have tended to predominate in Catholic ecclesiology. Highlighting the first of these, Neill (1968:74; cf Hastings 1968:28-31) says that, from the Counter-Reformation until the second half of the nineteenth century, the prevailing emphasis was on the external, the legal, and the institutional. In the course of the twentieth century the tenor of statements about the church gradually began to change. The church was now seen as the Body

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of Christ rather than, primarily, as a divine institution. This development culminated in the promulgation of the encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* in 1943. It did not, however, break with the ecclesiology that preceded it; the encyclical betrayed an unconditional identification of Christ's mystical body with the empirical Roman Catholic Church. It further strengthened the tendency to absolutize and divinize the church and hold it up as a *societas perfecta* (cf Haight 1976:623; Michiels 1989:90). The encyclical served as the main expression, indeed *the* definition of the church, until Vatican II (Michiels 1989:90). Other models of the church were rejected (:91). This did not mean, however, that the church was understood to be missionary by nature (cf Neill 1968:71-74). As van Winsen (1973:3-12; cf also Gómez 1986:46) has shown, and as was spelt out in the old Code of Canon Law, "the universal care of missions to non-Catholics (was) reserved exclusively to the Apostolic See". The pope's agents in this task were the missionary orders and congregations.

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The situation was not essentially different in Eastern Orthodoxy. Protestants, on the other hand (except "High Church" Anglicans and some Lutherans), tended toward a low view of the church. Often one distinguished between the "true church" — the *ecclesiola* or little church — within the *ecclesia*, the large and nominal church; this *ecclesiola*, not the official church, tended to be viewed as the true bearer of mission. Here there was even less appreciation for the idea of the church as the bearer of mission. The "voluntary principle" (discussed in chapter 9 above) was widely followed. Groups of individuals — sometimes members of one denomination, sometimes devout believers from a variety of denominations — banded together in missionary societies which they regarded as the bearers of mission.

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Gradually, however, a fundamental shift emerged in the perception of the relationship between church and mission, in both Catholicism and Protestantism, so much so that Moltmann (1977:7) can say, "Today one of the strongest impulses towards the renewal of the theological concept of the church comes from the theology of mission".

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Shifts in Missionary Thinking

For an understanding of the shifts in Protestant thinking regarding the relationship between church and mission, the contributions of the world missionary conferences are of primary importance (cf, for instance, Günther 1970, who surveys the "ecclesiological reflections" of the missionary conferences from Edinburgh 1910 to Mexico City 1963). In Edinburgh, a major concern was the absence of missionary enthusiasm in the churches of the West; the theological question of the relationship between church and mission was hardly touched (cf Günther 1970:24-26). At the Jerusalem Conference of the IMC (1928), however, the relationship between "older" and "younger" churches received a considerable amount of attention and became a prominent issue, even if the subdivision of the world into two large geographical areas — the one Christian, the other "non-Christian" — remained unchallenged (:35-42).

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Tambaram (1938) discussed the relationships between church and mission as well as between "older" and "younger" churches in a more theological man-

ner. The distinction between Christian and non-Christian countries was in principle abandoned. This meant that Europe and North America, too, had to be regarded as mission fields. The dividing lines no longer ran between "Christianity" and "paganism", between the church and the world, but through the church as well. We are all, at best, "Christopagans". In a Europe traumatized by the First World War and challenged by the rise of totalitarian ideologies like National Socialism, Fascism and Marxism, the anthropocentric theology of liberal Protestantism, epitomized in the views of Adolf Harnack and Ernst Troeltsch, was found wanting. Words like sin, alienation, and judgment, like conversion, forgiveness, regeneration, and righteousness, again surfaced prominently in missionary and other discussions (cf Scherer 1968:34-37; van 't Hof 1972:108f).

This could not but have a profound impact on the perception of church and mission. For the first time the recognition that church and mission belong together indissolubly began to dawn in a way that could no longer be overlooked. And even if the famous E. Stanley Jones said that Tambaram had missed the way because it had used the church instead of the kingdom of God as its starting point (reference in Anderson 1988:107; cf also Günther 1970:64-66), it cannot be denied that Tambaram registered a significant advance over earlier positions.

The Willingen meeting of 1952, convened in the aftermath of World War II and the missionary "debacle" in China (cf Paton 1953:50), took up the same theme. In the preceding years there has been an almost imperceptible shift from an emphasis on a church-centered mission (Tambaram) to a mission-centered church. In 1948 the World Council of Churches was formed, and soon the incongruence of a council of churches and a missionary council existing side by side was making itself felt. Willingen began to flesh out a new model. It recognized that the church could be neither the starting point nor the goal of mission. God's salvific work precedes both church and mission. We should not subordinate mission to the church nor the church to mission; both should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*, which now became the overarching concept. The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*. The church changes from being the sender to being the one sent (cf Günther 1970:105-114). The new mood found expression in the opening words of the Statement received by the next assembly of the IMC, which met in Achimota, Ghana, in 1958: "The Christian world mission is Christ's, not ours". In a pamphlet published soon after the Ghana Assembly, Newbigin summarized the consensus that had by now been reached: (1) "the church is the mission", which means that it is illegitimate to talk about the one without at the same time talking about the other; (2) "the home base is everywhere", which means that every Christian community is in a missionary situation; and (3) "mission in partnership", which means the end of every form of guardianship of one church over another (1958:25-38).

By this time the decision to integrate the WCC and the IMC had already been taken. It took place at the New Delhi meeting of the WCC (1961). The Assembly's Commission and Division of World Mission and Evangelism used

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the following words to express its views on the integration of the missionary concern into the Structures of the WCC:

> This spiritual heritage must not be dissipated; it must remain, ever renewed in the hidden life of prayer and adoration, at the heart of the World Council of Churches. Without it the ecumenical movement would petrify. Integration must mean that the World Council of Churches takes the missionary task to the very heart of its life (WCC 1961:249f; cf Neill 1968:108f).

This entire evolution indeed meant a momentous shift in the understanding of church and mission. But before we review its elements in some detail, let us have a brief look at developments in Catholicism.

The missionary encyclicals of the twentieth century prior to the Second Vatican Council—especially *Maximum Illud* (1919), *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926), *Evangelii Praecones* (1951), and *Fidei Donum* (1957)—registered the first hesitant steps toward a missionary understanding of the church (cf also Auf der Maur 1970:82-84). On the eve of the Council the situation was, however, rather confused; salvationist (School of Münster), ecclesiocentric (School of Louvain), sacramentalist (M.-J. le Guillou), and eschatological (Y. Congar) interpretations of mission remained unintegrated (cf Dapper 1979:63-66). Contributions of French theologians—such as Yves Congar, who was building on Godin and Daniel 1943—became catalytic in opening the way toward a fundamentally new understanding of church and mission. Of primary importance in this regard was a new interest in the New Testament and, more particularly, the Pauline view of the church (cf Power 1970:17-27; Dapper 1979:66-70).

The event of the Council itself was crucial. For the first time a truly *global* council, not only a Western one, had convened. The affirmation that the "Church of Christ is really present in all legitimately organized local groups of the faithful" (LG 26) and that "it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists" (LG 23), suggested an important break with the exclusively papal-centered understanding of the church of Vatican I (1870). This was to lead to a rediscovery of a missionary ecclesiology of the local church and to the institution of episcopal conferences (LG 37f) as well as bishops' synods (cf Fries 1986:755; Gómez 1986:38). It did not come about without a struggle. The early drafts of the Decree on Mission were prepared by representatives of the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* and revealed a very traditional posture. To this the African and Asian bishops objected; they would rather go without a decree on mission than subscribe to one that refused to break new ground (cf Hastings 1968:204-209; Glazik 1984b:50-56). Consequently the decree was completely rewritten.

Even so, the real breakthrough in respect to mission occurred not in the missionary decree but in *Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)*. Right at the outset, LG dissociates itself from traditional ecclesiology. The church is no longer described as a societal entity on a par with other societal structures like the state, but as the mystery of God's presence in the world, "in

the nature of" a sacrament, sign, and instrument of community with God and unity among people. The whole tenor of the argument is new. The church is not presenting itself imperiously and proudly but humbly; it does not define itself in legal categories or as an elite of exalted souls, but as a servant community. LG's ecclesiology is missionary through and through (cf Power 1970:15f; Auf der Maur 1970:88f; Glazik 1979:153-155).

Vatican II also reflects a convergence in Catholic and Protestant views on the missionary nature of the church, even if one has to add immediately that the Catholic documents show far greater consistency and lucidity than those produced by Protestant conferences. Michiels (1989:89) suggests that modern ecclesiologies (Catholic and Protestant) employ seven main metaphorical expressions for the church, each of them implying a peculiar perspective on the understanding of mission. These are: the church as "sacrament of salvation", "assembly of God", "people of God", "kingdom of God", "Body of Christ", "temple of the Holy Spirit", and "community of the faithful" (cf also Dulles 1976). I would like to examine some aspects of these in an attempt to trace the characteristics of an emerging missionary ecclesiology.

"Missionary by Its Very Nature"

In the emerging ecclesiology, *the church is seen as essentially missionary*. The biblical model behind this conviction, which finds its classical expression in AG 9 ("The pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature"), is the one we find in 1 Peter 2:9. Here the church is not the sender but the one sent. Its mission (its "being sent") is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission (Barth 1956:725 – I am here following the German original rather than the English translation). Ecclesiology therefore does not precede missiology (cf Hoedemaker 1988:169f, 178f). Mission is not "a fringe activity of a strongly established Church, a pious cause that [may] be attended to when the home fires [are] first brightly burning... Missionary activity is not so much the work of the church as simply the Church at work" (Power 1970:41,42; cf van Engelen 1975:298; Stransky 1982:345; Glazik 1984b:51f; Köster 1984:166-170). It is a duty "which pertains to the *whole* Church" (AG 23). Since God is a missionary God (as will be argued in the section on the *missio Dei*), God's people are a missionary people. The question, "Why still mission?" evokes a further question, "Why still church?" (Glazik 1979:158). It has become impossible to talk about the church without at the same time talking about mission. One can no longer talk about church *and* mission, only about the mission *of* the church (Glazik 1984b:52). One could even say, with Schumacher (1970:183), "The inverse of the thesis 'the church is essentially missionary' is 'Mission is essentially ecclesial'" (my translation). Because church and mission belong together from the beginning, "a church without mission or a mission without the church are both contradictions. Such things do exist, but only as pseudostructures" (Braaten 1977:55). These perspectives have implications for our understanding of the church's catholicity. Without mission, the church cannot be called catholic (cf Glazik 1979:154; Berkouwer 1979:105-109).

All this does not suggest that the church is always and everywhere overtly involved in missionary projects. Newbigin (1958:21, 43) has introduced the helpful distinction between the church's missionary *dimension* and its missionary *intention*: the church is both "missionary" and "missionizing" (cf also Gensichen 1971:80-95, 168-186; Mitterhöfer 1974:93, 97). The missionary dimension of a local church's life manifests itself, among other ways, when it is truly a worshipping community; it is able to welcome outsiders and make them feel at home; it is a church in which the pastor does not have the monopoly and the members are not merely objects of pastoral care; its members are equipped for their calling in society; it is structurally pliable and innovative; and it does not defend the privileges of a select group (cf Gensichen 1971:170-172). However, the church's missionary dimension evokes *intentional*, that is *direct* involvement in society; it actually moves beyond the walls of the church and engages in missionary "points of concentration" (Newbigin) such as evangelism and work for justice and peace.

At least one theologian has developed his entire ecclesiology in terms of the observations above: Karl Barth. Johannes Aagaard (1965:238) calls him "the decisive Protestant missiologist in this generation". In light of Barth's magnificent and consistent missionary ecclesiology there may indeed be some justification for such a claim. Under the overarching rubric of soteriology, Barth develops his ecclesiology in three phases. His reflections on soteriology as *justification* (1956:514-642) are followed by a section on "The Holy Spirit and the *Gathering* of the Christian Community" (:643-749). His exposition on soteriology as *sanctification* (1958:499-613) leads to a discourse on "The Holy Spirit and the *Upbuilding* of the Christian Community" (:614-726). And his discussion of soteriology as *vocation* (1962:481-680) is followed by a treatise on "The Holy Spirit and the *Sending* of the Christian Community" (:681-901). From three perspectives, then, the entire field of ecclesiology is surveyed; each of these perspectives evokes, presupposes, and illuminates the other two (cf Blei 1980:19f).

God's Pilgrim People

The church is viewed as the *people of God* and, by implication then, as a *pilgrim* church. In contemporary Protestantism, this idea first surfaced clearly in the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (cf Lochman 1986:58f) and at the 1952 Willingen Conference of the IMC (cf van 't Hof 1972:167). In the case of Catholicism, the notion has been promoted by Yves Congar since 1937 (cf Power 1970:17) but found little favor with the hierarchy in the preconciliar period. The classical *conciliar* references are LG 48-51 and AG 9; in fact, the church as the people of God may be viewed as *the* conciliar church model (cf Michiels 1989:90-92).

The biblical archetype here is that of the wandering people of God, which is so prominent in the letter to the Hebrews. The church is a pilgrim not simply for the practical reason that in the modern age it no longer calls the tune and is everywhere finding itself in a diaspora situation; rather, to be a pilgrim in the world belongs intrinsically to the church's ex-centric position. It is *ek-klesia*,

"called out" of the world, and sent back into the world. Foreignness is an element of its constitution (Braaten 1977:56).

God's pilgrim people need only two things: support for the road, and a destination at the end of it (Power 1970:28). It has no fixed abode here; it is a *paroikia*, a temporary residence. It is permanently underway, toward the ends of the world and the end of time (cf Hoekendijk 1967b:30-38). Even if there is an unbridgeable difference between the church and its destination — the reign of God — it is called to flesh out, already in the here and now, something of the conditions which are to prevail in God's reign. Proclaiming its own transience the church pilgrimages toward God's future (cf Kohler 1974:475; Collet 1984:264-266).

Sacrament, Sign, and Instrument

In contemporary ecclesiology the church is increasingly perceived as sacrament, sign, and instrument (cf Dulles 1976:58-70). In chapter 4 of this study it has been shown that Paul saw his own mission as "priestly service of the gospel" (Rom 15:16) and challenged the Christian community to offer itself as a "living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). The New Testament books list many gifts conferred on individuals for the benefit of all: teaching, healing, apostleship, etc. The gift of priesthood is never mentioned, however; instead (cf 1 Pet 2:9), God entrusted this gift to the community as a whole (cf Piet 1970:64). Other New Testament images of the church which represent the same idea are salt, light, yeast, servant, and prophet. In subsequent centuries, however, these notions disappeared almost without a trace. Only in our own time did they surface again and give birth to the idea of the church as sacrament, sign, and instrument.

The new terminology is, perhaps understandably, used more extensively in Catholicism than in Protestantism. Once again Vatican II was the catalyst. In its first paragraph, LG calls the church "a kind of sacrament — a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and unity among all people". Elsewhere the church is called "the visible sacrament of . . . saving unity" (LG 9) and even "the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48). Subsequent Catholic documents continued along the same lines. The 1975 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, asserts, "While the church is proclaiming the kingdom of God and building it up, it is establishing itself in the midst of the world as the *sign and instrument* of this kingdom" (EN 59, emphasis added). At a consultation held in Rome in 1982, "the concrete Christian community *(koinonia)* in its everyday life" was identified as sign and instrument of salvation (Memorandum 1982:462).

Gassmann (1986) has shown that the same terminology is increasingly being used in Protestant circles as well, particularly in the Commission for Faith and Order (FO). This has been happening notably since the Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968), although rudimentary references can already be found in the 1927 FO meeting in Lausanne and the 1937 meeting in Oxford (:3). The key formulation, often quoted, is the one drafted at Uppsala: "The Church is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of mankind". Subsequent

FO conferences and documents attempted to clarify what was meant by this terminology (:4-7). Two of the section reports of the Melbourne CWME Conference (1980) also referred to the church in these terms: as sacrament, sign, or instrument of the kingdom (:10f). Gassmann concludes:

> The remarkably wide reception of the ecclesiological use of the terms sacrament, sign and instrument in ecumenical debate suggests that this terminology is found to be helpful in describing the place and vocation of the church and its unity in God's plan of salvation (:13).

These images gave articulation to the idea, so well formulated by Archbishop William Temple (cf Neill 1968:76), that the church is the only society in the world which exists for the sake of those who are not members of it. The classical expression of this perception of the church was the phrase "the church for others". Its architect was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote the following sentences from a Nazi prison in 1944 (1971:382f), "The church is the church only when it exists for others. . . The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving".

"The church for others" was a powerful and extremely attractive phrase and was embraced widely and enthusiastically (cf Sundermeier 1986:62), not least since it so clearly echoed the New Testament picture of Jesus, particularly as the one who washed the feet of his disciples (cf also Kohler 1974:473). West (1971:262) and Sundermeier (1986:62-65) have, however, alerted us to the fact that such enthusiasm for the Bonhoeffer formula may hide from us the reality that its background is the typical liberal-humanist bourgeois climate in which Bonhoeffer had grown up, particularly the idea that Western Christians know what is best for others and, hence, that they tend to proclaim themselves the guardians of others. This helper syndrome of "pro-existence", says Sundermeier, jeopardizes the possibility of true coexistence. Instead of talking about "the church *for* others", we should rather speak of "the church *with* others".

Sundermeier's observations show that the language of "the church for others", "the church as sacrament", etc, is indeed not free from hazard. At an FO conference held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1973, Ernst Käsemann (1974) criticized the terminology. In light of the absence of intercommunion among Christians, he finds it "almost frivolous" to call the church a sacrament (:125f). This "dangerous expression" does not advance dialogue and should be avoided (:126). Käsemann fears, in addition, that this kind of terminology may blur the abiding difference between Christ and the church (:127). To call the church a sign is also problematic since there can be no doubt that the only legitimate sign of the church is the cross of Christ (:130).

Käsemann's objections have to be taken seriously. Thus, if we continue to employ this terminology, some important qualifications are in order. As the FO meeting at Louvain (1971) put it: "The church . . . *is* a sign. But it is also no more than a sign. The mystery of the love of God is not exhausted through this sign, but, at best, just hinted at from afar"; and it added, "This sign of oneness is broken by the tensions and divisions in which the churches are living" (quoted

in Gassmann 1986:4). A study paper for the 1973 Salamanca meeting stated that the church dares make the claim to be a sign "or even sacrament" of the coming unity of humankind "only by virtue of its relationship with Christ", who is the *real* sign of unity. Words like "sacrament" are, moreover, not attributes the church arrogates to itself: "God himself has chosen (the church) to be in Christ the sign or sacrament of the unity in his kingdom" (:5). Furthermore, in some sense these terms in fact help to *avoid* total identification of the church with Christ (:13): all three expressions clearly point *beyond* themselves. Likewise, they forcefully evoke the question of what correspondence there is between Christ and those who declare themselves his followers. Christianity purports to be a religion of grace, but then it should be remembered that a religion of grace is more vulnerable than a religion of law. In the words of John Baker:

> The more we emphasize, in our description of the essential nature of the church, the divine sacramental and sanctifying life within the community, the more legitimate it becomes for the world to demand discernible results. . . It is no use composing in-house descriptions of the church, however faithful they may be to scripture and tradition, if within the church they have the fatal effect of giving believers a warm illusion that all is well, and when read by humankind outside the church they seem to have parted company with reality (1986:155,158).

When the church, in its mission, risks referring to itself as sacrament, sign, or instrument of salvation, it is therefore not holding up itself as model to be emulated. Its members are not proclaiming, "Come to us!" but "Let us follow him!"

Church and World

The understanding of the church as sacrament, sign, and instrument led to a new perception of the relationship between the church and the world. Mission is viewed as "God's turning to the world" (cf the title of Schmitz 1971). This represents a fundamentally new approach in theology (W. Kasper—reference in Kramm 1979:226; cf Hoedemaker 1988:168).

For centuries a static conception of the church had prevailed; the world outside the church was perceived as a hostile power (Berkhof 1979:411). Reading theological treatises from earlier centuries, one gets the impression that there was only church, no world. Put differently, the church was a world on its own. Outside the church there was only the "false church". Christian ministry and life was defined exclusively in terms of preaching, public worship, the pastorate, and charity. "Practicing" Christians were (and often still are!) defined as regular church-goers (Schmitz 1971:52f). The church filled the whole horizon. Those outside were, at most, "prospects" to be won (Snyder 1983:132). Mission was a process of reproducing churches, and once these had been reproduced, all energy was spent on maintenance. Barth asks, "Has not the work of this divine messenger and ambassador (Christ) actually ceased in the blind alley of

the Church as an institution of salvation for those who belong to it?" (1962:767).

Slowly, however, a change began to take effect. Karl Barth (1961:18) sees this as a restoration of the doctrine of the prophetic office of Christ and the church. He traces six phases of this shift in the history of Protestantism (:18-38). It was, however, only after the Second World War that the essential orientation of the church toward the world was being embraced more widely in Protestantism. The church as conqueror of the world (Edinburgh 1910) became the church in solidarity with the world (Whitby 1947; cf van 't Hof 1972:140f). The Dutch "theology of the apostolate", which developed in the late forties and early fifties, also began to perceive the church primarily in terms of its relationship to the world (cf Berkhof 1979:411-413). Just as one could not speak of the church without speaking of its *mission*, it was impossible to think of the church without thinking, in the same breath, of the *world* to which it is sent (cf Glazik 1984b:53). It was rediscovered that *ekklesia* was, from the very beginning, a "theo-political category" (Hoekendijk 1967a:349).

In Catholicism the real breakthrough in respect of the relationship between the church and the world came with Vatican II. The theological foundations were laid in LG. However, the full extent of the shift in Catholic thinking on this relationship only becomes apparent once one peruses *Gaudium et Spes,* the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. In its opening sentence it recognizes an intimate link—which goes far beyond evangelism and church planting—between the church and the world of humanity: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well".

Subsequent developments reveal a convergence of Catholic and conciliar Protestant views on the inescapable connection between the church and the world as well as a recognition of God's activities in the world outside the church (cf, for instance, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [1975] and *Mission and Evangelism* [1982]).

How is the new view to be understood?

First, it suggests that, if the church cannot be viewed as the *ground* of mission, it cannot be considered the *goal* of mission either—certainly not the *only* goal. The church should continually be aware of its *provisional* character. "The church's final word is not 'church' but the glory of the Father and the Son in the Spirit of liberty" (Moltmann 1977:19).

Second, the church is not the kingdom of God. The church "is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom" (LG 5), "the sign and instrument of the reign of God that is to come" (EN 59). The church can be a credible sacrament of salvation for the world only when it displays to humanity a glimmer of God's imminent reign—a kingdom of reconciliation, peace, and new life (cf Schmitz 1971:58). In the here and now, that reign comes wherever Christ overcomes the power of evil. This happens (or should happen!) most visibly in the church. But it also happens in society, since Christ is Lord of the world as well.

Third, the church's missionary involvement suggests more than calling individuals into the church as a waiting room for the hereafter. Those to be evangelized are, with other human beings, subject to social, economic, and political

conditions in this world. There is, therefore, a "convergence" between liberating individuals and peoples in history and proclaiming the final coming of God's reign (Geffré 1982:491). In this perspective, the church is "the people of God in world-occurrence" (Barth 1962:681-762) and the "community for the world" (:762-795).

A)   Fourth, the church is to be viewed pneumatologically, as "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:22), as movement of the Spirit toward the world en route to the future (Memorandum 1982:461f). When we view the church as "community of the Holy Spirit" we identify it preeminently as *missionary* community, since the Spirit is the "go-between God" (Taylor 1972; cf Boer 1961).

Fifth, if the church attempts to sever itself from involvement in the world and if its structures are such that they thwart any possibility of rendering a relevant service to the world, such structures have to be recognized as heretical. The church's offices, orders, and institutions should be organized in such a manner that they serve society and do not separate the believer from the historical (Hoekendijk 1967a:349; Rütti 1972:311-315). Its life and work are intimately bound up with God's cosmic-historical plan for the salvation of the world. We are called, therefore, to be "kingdom people", not "church people", says Snyder (1983:11). He continues:

> Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.

Last, because of its integral relatedness to the world, the church may never function as a fearful border guard, but always as one who brings good tidings (Berkouwer 1979:162). Its life-in-mission vis-à-vis the world is a privilege (cf Rom 1:5).

Rediscovering the Local Church

The church-in-mission is, primarily, the *local* church everywhere in the world. This perspective, as well as the supposition that no local church should stand in a position of authority over against another local church, both fundamental to the New Testament (cf Acts 13:1-3 and the Pauline letters), was for all practical purposes ignored during much of Christian history. In Catholicism, church as well as mission became ever more clearly pope-centered. On the surface, at least, the Protestant "Three-Selfs" formula (self-government, self-support, and self-propagation) appeared to be more sound; soon "younger" churches would in all respects be the equals of "older" churches. Reality turned out to be different, however. The younger churches continued to be looked down upon and to be regarded as immature and utterly dependent upon the wisdom, experience, and help of the older churches or mission societies. The process toward independence was a pedagogical one; in the end, the self-

appointed guardian would decide whether or not the moment for "home rule" had come. Churches and mission agencies in the West understood themselves as churches *for* others.

The first person to have attacked this entire edifice head-on was Roland Allen ([1912] 1956). He alerted his readers to the glaring differences between Paul's missionary methods and those of contemporary mission agencies. Perhaps, Allen suggested (:107), the basic difference was that Paul had founded "churches" whilst we founded "missions" in the sense of *dependent* organizations. Paul wrote the first of his letters to the church in Thessalonica—where he had spent a mere five months or so—only about a year after he had left there, and he wrote it not to a mission but to a *church* (:90; cf also chapter 4 of this study). At no point did the sending church, Antioch, have any authority over the fledgling faith communities in Ephesus, Corinth, and elsewhere. From the very first moment these were *complete* churches, with the Word and the sacraments—which were all they needed in order truly to be the church of Christ. Paul's success, Allen suggested, was due to the fact that he trusted both the Lord and the people to whom he had gone. In both these respects, modern missionaries were blatantly different from Paul (:183-190).

Gradually a shift began to take place in Protestant missions. The Jerusalem and Tambaram conferences of the IMC (1928 and 1938) began to recognize the younger churches as equals. The Whitby Conference (1947) coined the phrase "Partnership in Obedience" in an attempt to give expression to the conviction that it was theologically preposterous to distinguish between "autonomous" and "dependent" churches. The Ghana Conference of the IMC (1958) appropriately concluded "that the distinction between 'older' and 'younger' churches, whatever may have been its usefulness in earlier years, is no longer valid or helpful" (in Orchard 1958:12). And even if, in all this, practice still fell far short of theory, there could be no doubt that the die had been cast and that a change of momentous importance had begun to take place. The church-*for*-others was slowly turning into the church-*with*-others; pro-existence was changing into coexistence (cf Sundermeier 1986:65). Mission could no longer be viewed as one-way traffic, from the West to the Third World; every church, everywhere, was understood to be in a state of mission.

In *Catholicism* developments have been even more marked and dramatic. For many centuries "local churches" did not exist, neither in Europe nor on the "mission fields". What one had, at best, were affiliates of the universal church. The "mission churches", in particular, had to resemble the church in Rome in almost every detail; they "were 'missions', Churches of the second class, daughter churches, immature children, apostolic vicariates, and not yet autonomous dioceses" (Bühlmann 1977:45).

In the wake of World War I, however, the local church was discovered. *Maximum Illud* (1919) and *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) paved the way for a new understanding, but it was only *Fidei Donum* (1957) that constituted a true turning point (van Winsen 1973:77, 81-83) on which Vatican II was able to build. Even this council was, however, still very much run on the presuppositions of the traditional Western church. It was, in fact, only at the series of Synods of

Bishops—an ecclesial structure that originated after the Council—that the bish-
ops of local churches[1] in the Third World really began to influence Catholic
thinking in a profound way.

The fundamentally innovative feature of the new development was the dis-
covery that the universal church actually finds its true existence in the local
churches; that these, and not the universal church, are the pristine expression
of church (cf LG 26); that this was the primary understanding of church in the
New Testament and also the way in which, during the early centuries of our
era, the church was perceived; that the pope, too, was in the first place the
pastor of the local church in Rome; that a universal church viewed as *preceding*
local churches was a pure abstraction since the universal church exists only
where there are local churches; that the church is the church because of what
happens in the local church's *martyria*, *leitourgia*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*; that
the church is an event among people rather than an authority addressing them
or an institution possessed of the elements of salvation, of doctrines, and offices
(cf van Engelen 1975:298f; Glazik 1979:155f; Köster 1984:169, 176-184; Fries
1986:755f; Michiels 1989:100f).

At the same time it has to be said that Catholics tend to appreciate, more
clearly than Protestants do, the essential interrelatedness between the universal
church and local churches. The church is, really, a *family* of local churches in
which each should be open to the needs of the others and to sharing its spiritual
and material goods with them. It is through the mutual ministry of *mission* that
the church is realized, in communion with and as local concretization of the
church universal (Stransky 1982:349; Fries 1986:756).

The rediscovery of the local church as the primary agent of mission has led
to a fundamentally new interpretation of the purpose and role of missionaries
and mission agencies. In 1969 Pope Paul VI told Christians in Kampala,
Uganda, "You are missionaries to yourselves!" And in 1985 John Paul II said
to believers in places as far apart and as different as Cameroon and Sardinia,
"Like the entire Church, you are in a state of mission" (cf Gómez 1986:47f).
It is in light of this new reality and realization that the Catholic Church has
abolished the *ius commissionis*; no longer may foreign missionary orders and
societies dictate the pattern of evangelism in the Third World. The whole world
is a mission field, and the distinction between sending and receiving churches
is becoming pointless. Every church is either still in a diaspora situation or has
returned to it (AG 37). And churches everywhere need each other (cf Bühl-
mann 1977:383-394).

In the midst of these new circumstances and relationships there is still room
for and need of individual missionaries, but only insofar as all recognize that
their task is one that pertains to the *whole* church (cf AG 26) and insofar as
missionaries appreciate that they are sent as ambassadors of one local church
to another local church (where such a local church already exists), as witnesses
of solidarity and partnership, and as expressions of mutual encounter, exchange,
and enrichment.[2]

Much of what has been outlined above is undoubtedly still ideal rather than
reality. In both confessions a donor syndrome is still very much in evidence in

the affluent churches of the West and a dependency syndrome in the churches of the Third World. The Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (the new name for the restructured *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*) still exercises authority over churches in Africa and elsewhere (cf Rosenkranz 1977:431-434). A quarter of a century after Vatican II, the Catholic Church in Africa has not yet held an Episcopal Conference (on this, cf Shorter 1989:349-352). It is not very different in the Protestant world. In spite of all the fine and friendly ecumenical language, it seems the final decisions are still taken in the churches and cities of the West, not least since this is where many of the subsidies needed for "running" Third World churches come from. Even so, the fundamental change in favor of the local church, everywhere, as the agent of mission both in its own environment and further afield, cannot be gainsaid and constitutes a decisive advance over positions that had been in vogue for many centuries.

Creative Tension

The new paradigm has led to an abiding tension between two views of the church which appear to be fundamentally irreconcilable. At one end of the spectrum, the church perceives itself to be the sole bearer of a message of salvation on which it has a monopoly; at the other end, the church views itself, at most, as an illustration—in word and deed—of God's involvement with the world. Where one chooses the first model, the church is seen as a partial realization of God's reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life. Where one opts for the alternative perception, the church is, at best, only a pointer to the way God acts in respect of the world, and mission is viewed as a contribution toward the humanization of society—a process in which the church may perhaps be involved in the role of consciousness-raiser (cf Dunn 1980:83-103; Hoedemaker 1988:170f).

The question is whether these two images of the church have to be mutually exclusive. A few reflections on this subject may be in order. The problem, so it would seem, occurs where one is unable to integrate the two visions in such a way that the tension between them becomes creative rather than destructive. Such an integration is seldom achieved. Catholic scholars have, in this respect, referred to the inability of *Ad Gentes* to keep alive the constructive tension that was so evident in *Lumen Gentium* (cf van Engelen 1975:299-309; Weber 1978:87; Kramm 1979:36f; Dunn 1980:58-64; Glazik 1984b:54-56). Having started with a dynamic and fresh view of the church, AG made a somersault in Article 6 and proceeded to espouse a pre-Vatican II perception of church and mission: mission was again one-way traffic from West to East, and the overriding aim of mission remained *plantatio ecclesiae*.

In much of contemporary Catholicism and Protestantism, then, many of the old images live on, almost unchallenged. Traditional sending agencies—whether societies or denominational structures—are being absolutized and seduced into serving as agents or legitimizers of the status quo. This is further exacerbated by the preoccupation with numerical church growth in some circles. Donald McGavran, for instance, wishes to lift up church growth as a "chief and irre-

placeable goal of mission" (1980:24). He believes that "the numerical approach is essential to understanding church growth", since the church "is made up of countable people" (:93). He defines church growth as "the sum of many baptized believers" (:147) and declares that "the student of church growth . . . cares little whether a Church is credible; he asks how much it has grown" (:159).

In this model, "achievement" in the area of mission or evangelism is frequently measured exclusively in terms of "religious" or otherworldly activities or of conduct at the micro-ethical level, such as abstinence from tobacco or profane speech. Often this also signifies a departure from engagement with the dominant social issues in a given community. Where this happens, an explosion in the numbers of converts may, in fact, be a veiled form of escapism and thus make a mockery of the true claims of the Christian faith. However, the content of a gospel without demands in respect of justice, peace, and equity suggests

> a conscience-soothing Jesus, with an unscandalous cross, an otherworldly kingdom, a private, inwardly limited spirit, a pocket God, a spiritualized Bible, and an escapist church. Its goal is a happy, comfortable, and successful life, obtainable through the forgiveness of an abstract sinfulness by faith in an unhistorical Christ (Costas 1982:80).

The first pattern, then, robs the gospel of its ethical thrust; the second, however, robs it of its soteriological depth (Costas 1982:80). This second pattern manifests itself in one of two ways: an almost complete identification of the church with the world and its agenda, or, in extreme cases, a virtually complete writing off of the church. Both these patterns—which were also mutually dependent—were in vogue particularly during the 1960s and early 1970s and reflect an extremely optimistic evaluation of the world and of humankind. Let us look briefly at these two strategies.

The idea of the world providing the agenda for the church and of the church having to identify completely with this agenda first surfaced clearly at the 1960 Strasbourg Conference of the WSCF. Speakers like D. T. Niles, Newbigin, Barth, and Visser 't Hooft appeared unable to speak to and for the students; only Hoekendijk, with his emphasis on the secular calling and role of Christianity, elicited applause (cf Bassham 1979:47f). Three years later, at the Mexico City Conference of CWME, it was said that Christians must "discover a shape of Christian obedience being written for them by what God is already actively doing in the structures of the city's life outside the Church" (quoted in Bassham 1979:65; this sentence was not, however, as Bassham seems to imply, part of the conference Message).

In 1961 the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC authorized a study project on "the Missionary Structure of the Congregation". Wieser edited an interim report on the project in 1966. A year later, and in time for the Uppsala Assembly, the final two-part report, prepared respectively by the Western European Working Group and the North American Working Group, was published (WCC 1967). Both reports (which, in the end, had precious little to say about the "missionary structure of the congregation") profoundly influenced the Uppsala

meeting. The goal of mission was identified as *shalom* by the European team and as *humanization* by the North Americans. Hoekendijk called shalom a secularized concept, a social happening, an event in inter-human relations (in Wieser 1966:43). "What else can the churches do than recognize and proclaim what God is doing in the world?" asked the European group (WCC 1967:15), since "it is the world that must be allowed to provide the agenda for the churches" (:20). Conversion was something that happened on the corporate level in the form of social change, rather than on the individual-personal level. All this culminates in the following statement in the North American report:

> We have lifted up humanization as the goal of mission because we believe that more than others it communicates in our period of history the meaning of the messianic goal. In another time the goal of God's redemptive work might best have been described in terms of man turning towards God ... The fundamental question was that of the true God, and the church responded to that question by pointing to him. It was assuming that the purpose of mission was Christianization, bringing man to God through Christ and his church. Today the fundamental question is much more that of *true* man, and the dominant concern of the missionary congregation must therefore be to point to the humanity in Christ as the goal of mission (WCC 1967:78).

By and large, the Uppsala assembly endorsed this theology. The Hoekendijk approach had become the "received view" in WCC circles. Mission became an umbrella term for health and welfare services, youth projects, activities of political interest groups, projects for economic and social development, the constructive application of violence, etc. Mission was "the comprehensive term for all conceivable ways in which people may cooperate with God in respect of this world" (Rütti 1972:307—my translation). The distinction between church and world has, for all intents and purposes, been dropped completely. In the words of J.B. Metz, "The abstract differentiation between church and world is, in the final analysis, meaningless" (quoted in Rütti 1972:274).

One can appreciate this preoccupation with the world during the 1960s and the optimism about what might be achieved soon by way of completely restructuring socio-political realities and attempts at identifying the "signs of the times". Former colonies of the West were becoming independent at a truly astonishing rate (in the year 1960 alone, eighteen African countries gained their independence). Imaginative development programs were being launched, and it was believed that, soon, these would permanently change the fate of the developing countries (although some, like Richard Shaull at the 1966 Church and Society Conference in Geneva, suggested that not the technologists, but the revolutionaries would introduce the desired restructuring of the socio-political and economic reality; cf Shaull 1967 and Dunn 1980:183-193). In church and mission circles the integration of the IMC into the WCC at New Delhi (1961) seemed to promise a completely new deal for relationships between older and younger churches. And, as far as Catholics were concerned, these were the

years following Vatican II (1962-1965); many hailed "the new Pentecost, the downpouring of hope, the open windows and rejuvenation of the Church" (Gómez 1986:26).

Fact of the matter was, however, that mission—in its new definition—was overtaxed, that too much was expected of the church and its influence, that much of the euphoria sprang from human optimism rather than faith. The church was a kind of spiritual gas station from which all and sundry could draw the energy for a great variety of worthwhile projects. Sometimes the church had to supply the incentive behind grandiose development projects; sometimes it had to become a source of dissatisfaction and disruption.

It was perhaps only to be expected that the almost complete identification of the church and its calling with the world and its agenda would eventually lead to such embarrassment and frustration with the inability of the church to carry out the world's agenda that many people despaired of the church and regarded it as expendable. This view—in varying degrees—has been advocated by Hoekendijk, Aring, and Rütti (although Rütti, contrary to much of the over-all thrust of his argument, admits that a "Christianity completely devoid of an institutionary nature cannot offer any true alternative"[1972:343 – my translation]). For Hoekendijk, in particular, the church has little more than the character of an "intermezzo" between God and the world. Others echoed him. The church is "a reality of secondary importance", says Rütti (1972:280), and to call people to become church members is "a form of proselytism" (WCC 1967:75). The *world* rather than the church is "the locus of the continuing encounter between God and humanity" (Aring 1971:83). And God is being made present in the world through people who do not know him and cannot be regarded as members of the "church" (Rütti 1971:281).

The embarrassment with the church, and particularly with the local congregation, reached crisis proportions at the Uppsala and Bangkok conferences (1968 and 1973). Hoekendijk called the parish system immobile, self-centered, and introverted, "an invention of the Middle Ages" (quoted in Hutchison 1987:185). The classical Catholic adage, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("outside the church no salvation") seemed to have been turned into its opposite—*inside* the church there was no salvation. Reflecting on the theme of the Bangkok CWME meeting, "Salvation Today", a Canadian study group asked, "Is the Church not arrogant in thinking it can offer man salvation?" (quoted in Wieser 1973:176). At both meetings the church came in for unsparing criticism. Scherer (1974:139) summarizes the mood that prevailed at Bangkok: "The church must justify itself through participation in the messianic salvation scheme, or it becomes irrelevant". The church itself needed to be saved, said Bangkok, else it cannot become a saving community: "Without the salvation of the churches from their captivity in the interests of dominating classes, races and nations there can be no saving church" (WCC 1973:89). Churches were in need of "conversion from parochial self-absorption to an awareness of what God is doing for the salvation of men *in the life of the world*" (:100).

At both conferences there were delegates who supported the Hoekendijkian position, not because they subscribed to its more extreme nuances, but because

they wished to give expression to their frustration with the bourgeois nature of the church as well as to their conviction that a new understanding and praxis of mission would lead to the renewal of the church itself. In light of the terrible conditions under which millions of starving, oppressed, and exploited people were living, Uppsala and Bangkok revealed a holy impatience with any complacency on the part of the church. For the first time a world Christian body squarely faced structural evil and made no attempt at spiritualizing away its responsibilities by seeking refuge in a sacrosanct institution.

There could be no doubt—it had become fashionable to disparage the churches-as-they-exist-in-history. People lost confidence in the church. After Vatican II the Catholic Church experienced defections of priests, a drying up of vocations, and a frenzy of demolishing venerable institutions. The missionary enterprise, in particular, was attacked, often with masochistic delight (Gómez 1986:28). Visser 't Hooft (1980:393) remarks, however, that such ridicule is a form of ingratitude. Paul, who knew so much about the weaknesses of the churches to which he wrote his letters, began nearly every time by thanking God for their existence, their faith, their loyalty.

Thus one has to say that the attacks on the institutional church, launched by Hoekendijk and others, are pertinent only insofar as they express a theological ideal raised to the level of prophetic judgment (Haight 1976:633). On closer inspection, however, they represent a view that leads to absurdity. It is impossible to talk about the church's involvement in the world if its very right to exist is disputed a priori (cf Gensichen 1971:168). A "purely apostolary approach to the church is untenable" (Berkhof 1979:413).

By the mid-1970s the euphoria that had characterized the 1960s had evaporated completely. There has been something of a turning of the tide. Many of the same theologians who criticize the empirical church now hold firmly to the view that it is impossible to talk about mission as responsibility toward and solidarity with the world unless such mission is understood also in ecclesial categories (cf Schumacher 1970:183; Mitterhöfer 1974:81f; van Engelen 1975: 309). The Christian mission is always christological and pneumatological, but the New Testament knows of no christology or pneumatology which is not ecclesial (cf Kramm 1979:212, 218; Memorandum 1982:461). Mission is moored to the church's worship, to its gathering around the Word and the sacraments. "'The visible coming together of visible people in a special place to do something particular' (Otto Weber) stands at the centre of the church. Without the actual, visible procedure of meeting together there is no church" (Moltmann 1977:334).

One may, therefore, perceive the church as an ellipse with two foci (Crum 1973:288f). In and around the first it acknowledges and enjoys the source of its life; this is where worship and prayer are emphasized. From and through the second focus the church engages and challenges the world. This is a forth-going and self-spending focus, where service, mission and evangelism are stressed (cf also Gensichen 1971:210; Bria 1975; Stransky 1982:349). Neither focus should ever be at the expense of the other; rather, they stand in each other's service. The church's *identity* sustains its *relevance* and *involvement* (Moltmann 1975:1-

4). The 1952 Lund FO meeting put it well: "The church is always and at the same time called out of the world and sent into the world". Preaching and the celebration of the sacraments call people to repentance, to baptism, to membership of the church, and to participation in God's activity in and with the world (Mitterhöfer 1974:88). The church *gathers* to praise God, to enjoy fellowship and receive spiritual sustenance, and *disperses* to serve God wherever its members are. It is called to hold in "redemptive tension" (Snyder 1983:29) its dual orientation. The report of the Vancouver Assembly Issue Group on "Taking Steps Towards Unity" expressed the conviction that

> the Church is called to be a prophetic "sign", a prophetic community through which and by which the transformation of the world can take place. It is only a church which goes out from its eucharistic centre, strengthened by word and sacrament and thus strengthened in its own identity, that can take the world on to its agenda. There will never be a time when the world, with all its political, social and economic issues, ceases to be the agenda of the Church. At the same time, the Church can go out to the edges of society, not fearful of being distorted or confused by the world's agenda, but confident and capable of recognizing that God is already there (WCC 1983:50).

It follows that the church can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time, a being-different-from-the-world (Berkhof 1979:415 — I am following the Dutch original here, rather than the English translation). Precisely for the sake of the world the church has to be unique, *in* the world without being *of* the world (cf van 't Hof 1972:206f). Christ's body, his own "earthly-historical form of existence", is "the one holy catholic and apostolic church" and as such "the provisional representation of the whole world of humanity justified in Him" (Barth 1956:643), "the experimental garden of the new humanity" (Berkhof 1979:415). There is, thus, a legitimate concern for the inalienable identity of the church and there should not be any premature amalgamation and confusion between it and the world. A witnessing and serving church "can only exist when she is intensely driven by the Spirit. She can give only in the measure that she herself receives" (:413f). It is therefore striking that even Hoekendijk, who throughout his entire life relentlessly castigated the church and argued that there was no room for an "ecclesiology", found it impossible to turn his back on it. He chastised the church, but for its own sake. He could, for instance, say that "the church is (nothing more, *but also nothing less!*) a means in God's hands to establish shalom in this world" (1967b:22 — emphasis added; cf also Blei 1980:5-7).

This does not mean that we simply accept the concrete community of faith positivistically and resign ourselves to its actual mode of life (cf also Lochman 1986:71). We know today—what many of our spiritual forebears would have found difficult to accept—that the empirical church will always be imperfect. Every church member who loves the church will also be deeply pained by it. This does not, however, call for discarding the church, but for reforming and

renewing it. The church is itself an object of the *missio Dei*, in constant need of repentance and conversion; indeed, all traditions today subscribe to the adage *ecclesia semper reformanda est* (cf Rickenbach 1970:70; Memorandum 1982:462). The cross which the church proclaims also judges the church and censures every manifestation of complacency about its "achievements". A church that pats itself on the shoulder frustrates the power of the cross in its life and ministry.

Still, the cross conveys a message not only of judgment but of forgiveness and hope as well, also for the church. It is therefore incorrect for the church to allow itself constantly to be goaded into action, as though it has to prove itself, has to earn its credibility through its own imposing schemes and in this way secure its own salvation. To flagellate itself and relentlessly prod itself to accomplish more and more simply intensifies guilt, frustration, and despair. If the injunction to repent does not go hand in hand with the free offer of forgiveness and new life, we have law without gospel, judgment without mercy, and works without grace. There is an abiding tension between the Christian community for which we long and the Christian community as it actually is. However, the dream or ideal and the factual community belong together. In the words of Bonhoeffer, "He who loves the dream of a Christian community more than the community itself, often does great damage to that community, no matter how well-intentioned he might be" (quoted in Michiels 1989:84).

There is another side to this. Sometimes, when Christians announce what they think they should accomplish by way of transforming the world, they run the risk of exceeding the competence of the church, of talking and acting pretentiously on matters about which Christians have no more expertise than the world outside the church has (cf Rickenbach 1970:78). There is therefore something both captivating and problematic in Christians endeavoring to distinguish the "signs of the times" and thereby verifying where precisely God is at work in history.[3] We should be constantly aware of the risks we are taking and refrain from glibly stating, "Thus sayeth the Lord!" Even if secular history and the history of salvation are inseparable they are not identical, and the building of the world does not directly lead to the reign of God; as M. D. Chenu says, "Grace is grace, and history is not the source of salvation" (quoted in Geffré 1982:490).

Another way of saying this is to affirm that the church, since it is an *eschatological* community, may not commit itself without reservation to any social, political, or economic project. As first fruits of the reign of God it anticipates that reign in the here and now. It is the knowledge of this that gives it confidence to work for the advance of God's reign in the world, even if it does so with modesty and without claiming to have all the answers. Even if oppressive and sinful circumstances are not wiped away as if by magic, Christians confess that these circumstances have already been brought into the force field of God's reign, relativized, and robbed of their ultimate validity (Lochman 1986:67). It is this knowledge that grants us the certainty that we are no longer prisoners of an omnipotent fate. The "church in the power of the Spirit" is not yet the reign of God; it is blundering and often unfaithful, and yet it is the anticipation

ecclesial humility

of that reign in history. Christianity is not yet the new creation, but it is the working of the Spirit of the new creation; it is not yet the new humankind, but it is its vanguard (cf Moltmann 1977:196; Collet 1984:262f).

The perception of the church as an entity completely separate from the human community—which, for instance, still dominated the deliberations of the 1952 Willingen Conference of the IMC—has been shown to be false and untenable. The church exists only as an organic and integral part of the human community. As soon as it tries to view its own life as meaningful in independence from the total human community it betrays the major purpose of its existence (Baker 1986:159). Similarly, the tendency either to debunk the church as completely irrelevant, or to erase every difference between the church and its agenda on the one hand and the world and its agenda on the other, appears to be on the decline; the church has to remain identifiably different from the world, else it will cease to be able to minister to it.

For mainline Protestantism it was the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC (1975) which first clearly registered a mood about the church different from that of previous meetings. Many were now prepared to admit that reality was more complex and nuanced than delegates to previous conferences had imagined. The tone of the meeting was more subdued and the discussions more sober than those which characterized Strasbourg (1960), Geneva (1966), Uppsala (1968), and Bangkok (1973). Perhaps this is why Nairobi's message took the form of a prayer for the churches rather than a summons to the world (Vischer 1976:10,61,63). The church was again criticized, but not as haughtily as in Bangkok. The prevailing notion was rather the biblical idea that the time had come "for judgment to begin with the household of God" (1 Pet 4:17). The church had to be cleansed so as to serve the world in a more relevant way. Indeed, the cataclysmic changes taking place in the world demanded the conversion of the church (Vischer 1976:27; cf also the title of his book). So the abiding validity of the church was reaffirmed at Nairobi; the assembly's agenda was supplied by the *church* rather than by the *world* (as had happened in Uppsala).

Also at the Melbourne meeting of CWME (1980) the church was taken more seriously than had been the case previously. It appeared to have been rehabilitated in WCC circles as an instrument of mission (Scherer 1987:44). This did not, however, suggest a return to the earlier position (roughly from Tambaram 1938 to Willingen 1952), when the integration of church and mission, in effect, had bolstered the institutional nature of mission rather than impregnated the church with a missionary character. Instead, Melbourne (in spite of Orthodox protests) distinguished carefully between the church and the kingdom of God. Section III's theme for instance, was "The Church *Witnesses to* the Kingdom". The section report (III.1) states, "The whole church of God, in every place and time, is *a sacrament of the kingdom* which came in the person of Jesus Christ and will come in its fulness when he returns in glory" (WCC 1980:193—emphasis added). Again, Section II.13 refers to the church as "a *sign* of the kingdom of God" and as being called "to be an *instrument* of the kingdom by continuing Christ's mission to the world" (:193f—emphasis added). Uppsala and Bangkok had tended to regard the churches as belonging to the court of Pharaoh; at

least Sections III and IV at Melbourne viewed them, despite many defects, as essentially belonging to the camp of Moses. The church, by the grace of God capable of repenting, of being renewed and equipped for missionary service, attained its rightful place not as final expression of God's reign, but as its servant and herald (Scherer 1987:144).

The same tone is echoed in the 1982 WCC document, *Mission and Evangelism*. It unequivocally affirms the centrality of the church in God's divine economy; the unity of the church is deemed indispensable (ME 20-27), not only, but certainly also for the sake of "mission in six continents" (ME 37-40). A year later the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC endorsed the new ecumenical consensus on the crucial importance of the church in mission. This emerges, among other ways, in the subtle differences between its language and that of Uppsala 1968 (cf WCC 1983:50). The deliberations at the San Antonio Meeting of CWME (1989) followed a similar pattern, particularly in Section I.

We now recognize that the church is both a theological and a sociological entity, an inseparable union of the divine and the dusty. Looking at itself through the eyes of the world, the church realizes that it is disreputable and shabby, susceptible to all human frailties; looking at itself through the eyes of the believers, it perceives itself as a mystery, as the incorruptible Body of Christ on earth. We can be utterly disgusted, at times, with the earthliness of the church, yet we can also be transformed, at times, with the awareness of the divine in the church (Smith 1968:61). It is *this* church, ambiguous in the extreme, which is "missionary by its very nature", the pilgrim people of God, "in the nature of" a sacrament, sign, and instrument (LG 1), and "a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race" (LG 9).

MISSION AS *MISSIO DEI*

During the past half a century or so there has been a subtle but nevertheless decisive shift toward understanding mission as *God's mission*. During preceding centuries mission was understood in a variety of ways. Sometimes it was interpreted primarily in soteriological terms: as saving individuals from eternal damnation. Or it was understood in cultural terms: as introducing people from the East and the South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West. Often it was perceived in ecclesiastical categories: as the expansion of the church (or of a specific denomination). Sometimes it was defined salvation-historically: as the process by which the world—evolutionary or by means of a cataclysmic event—would be transformed into the kingdom of God. In all these instances, and in various, frequently conflicting ways, the intrinsic interrelationship between christology, soteriology, and the doctrine of the Trinity, so important for the early church, was gradually displaced by one of several versions of the doctrine of grace (cf Beinert 1983:208).

After the First World War, however, missiologists began to take note of recent developments in biblical and systematic theology. In a paper read at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference in 1932, Karl Barth ([1932] 1957) became one of the first theologians to articulate mission as an activity of God himself.

In *Die Mission als theologisches Problem* (1933), Karl Hartenstein gave expression to a similar conviction. A few years later, at the Tambaram meeting of the IMC (1938), a statement by the German delegation became another catalyst in the development of a new understanding of mission. The delegation confessed that only "through a creative act of God His Kingdom will be consummated in the final establishment of a New Heaven and a New Earth", and "We are convinced that only this eschatological attitude can prevent the Church from becoming secularised".[4]

Throughout, the Barthian influence was crucial. Indeed, Barth may be called the first clear exponent of a new theological paradigm which broke radically with an Enlightenment approach to theology (cf Küng 1987:229). His influence on missionary thinking reached a peak at the Willingen Conference of the IMC (1952). It was here that the idea (not the exact term) *missio Dei* first surfaced clearly. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. As far as missionary thinking was concerned, this linking with the doctrine of the Trinity constituted an important innovation (Aagaard 1974:420). Willingen's image of mission was mission as participating in the sending of God. Our mission has no life of its own: only in the hands of the sending God can it truly be called mission, not least since the missionary initiative comes from God alone (cf van 't Hof 1972:158f). Mission was not seen in triumphalist categories, though. Willingen recognized a close relationship between the *missio Dei* and mission as solidarity with the incarnate and crucified Christ. Whereas the Willingen meeting was convened under the theme "The Missionary Obligation of the Church", the addresses delivered at the meeting were published under the title *Missions Under the Cross* (1953). Thus, next to the affirmation that the mission was God's, the emphasis on the cross prevented every possibility of missionary complacency (van 't Hof 1972:160f; cf Dapper 1979:27).

In attempting to flesh out the *missio Dei* concept, the following could be said: In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God (cf Aagaard 1973:11-15; Aagaard 1974:421). "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church" (Moltmann 1977:64). Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission (Aagaard 1973:13). There is church because there is mission, not vice versa (Aagaard 1974:423). To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.

Since Willingen, the understanding of mission as *missio Dei* has been embraced by virtually all Christian persuasions—first by conciliar Protestantism (cf Bosch 1980:179f, 239-248; LWF 1988:5-10), but subsequently also by other

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ecclesial groupings, such as the Eastern Orthodox (cf Anastasios 1989:79-81, 89) and many evangelicals (cf Costas 1989:71-87). It was also endorsed in Catholic mission theology, notably in some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) (cf Aagaard 1974). After having stated that the church is missionary by its very nature, since "it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit", the Council's *Decree on Mission* defines missionary activity as "nothing else, and nothing less, than the manifestation of God's plan, its epiphany and realization in the world and in history" (AG 2, 9). Mission is here defined in trinitarian, christological, pneumatological, and ecclesiological terms (Schumacher 1970:182f; cf Snijders 1977:171f; Fries 1986:761; Gómez 1986:31).

For the *missiones ecclesiae* (the missionary activities of the church) the *missio Dei* has important consequences. "Mission", singular, remains primary; "missions", in the plural, constitutes a derivative. With reference to the post-Willingen period, Neill (1966a:572) boldly proclaims, "The age of missions is at an end; the age of mission has begun". It follows that we have to distinguish between mission and missions. We cannot without ado claim that what we do is identical to the *missio Dei*; our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God. "The church stands in the service of God's turning to the world" (Schmitz 1971:25 — my translation). The primary purpose of the *missiones ecclesiae* can therefore not simply be the planting of churches or the saving of souls; rather, it has to be service to the *missio Dei*, representing God in and over against the world, pointing to God, holding up the God-child before the eyes of the world in a ceaseless celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany. In its mission, the church witnesses to the fullness of the promise of God's reign and participates in the ongoing struggle between that reign and the powers of darkness and evil (Scherer 1987:84).

After Willingen (and, already at Willingen, in the American report) the *missio Dei* concept gradually underwent a modification — a process traced in great detail by Rosin (1972). Since God's concern is for the entire world, this should also be the scope of the *missio Dei*. It affects all people in all aspects of their existence. Mission is God's turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption and consummation (Kramm 1979:210). It takes place in ordinary human history, not exclusively in and through the church. "God's own mission is larger than the mission of the church" (LWF 1988:8). The *missio Dei* is God's activity, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church may be privileged to participate.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", this wider understanding of mission is expounded *pneumatologically* rather than christologically (cf Aagaard 1973:17f; Aagaard 1974:429-433). The history of the world is not only a history of evil but also of love, a history in which the reign of God is being advanced through the work of the Spirit. Thus, in its missionary activity, the church encounters a humanity and a world in which God's salvation has already been operative secretly, through the Spirit. This may, by the grace of God, issue in a more humane world which, however, may never be seen as a purely human product — the real author of this humanized history is the Holy Spirit. So *Gaudium et Spes* 26 can

say, with reference to the social order and its development toward service to the common good, "The Spirit of God, who, with wondrous providence, directs the course of time and renews the faith of the earth, assists at this development". And even if paragraph 39 sounds a warning that "we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of God", it adds that "such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, in so far as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society".

There can be little doubt that this wider understanding of the scope of the *missio Dei* meant a development contrary to the intentions of Barth and also of Hartenstein, who first used the term. By introducing the phrase, Hartenstein had hoped to protect mission against secularization and horizontalization, and to reserve it exclusively for God. This did not happen. Others, following in the footsteps of Barth and Hartenstein, were equally upset by subsequent developments. Rosin (1972:26) calls *missio Dei* a "Trojan horse through which the (unassimilated) 'American' vision was fetched into the well-guarded walls of the ecumenical theology of mission".[5]

Those who supported the wider understanding of the concept tended to radicalize the view that the *missio Dei* was larger than the mission of the church, even to the point of suggesting that it *excluded* the church's involvement – as we have seen in the previous section. In the volume prepared by a WCC study committee on "The Missionary Structure of the Congregation" (Wieser 1966), it could, for instance, be said, "The church serves the missio Dei in the world . . . (when) it points to God at work in world history and name him there" (:52). It appeared that God was primarily "working out his purpose in the midst of the world and its historical processes" (:53). The influence of Hoekendijk is clearly discernible in formulations like these. Hoekendijkian sentiments also characterize the theological position of Aring (1971). It seems the church has become unnecessary for the *missio Dei*: "*We* have no business in 'articulating' God. In the final analysis, 'missio Dei' means that God articulates himself, without any need of assisting him through our missionary efforts in this respect" (:88 – my translation). In fact, it is unnecessary for the world "to *become* what it already *is* since Easter: the reconciled world of God" (:28). It therefore does not stand in any need of the missionary contribution of Christians. After all, God is not imaginable without the reconciled world, neither the world without God's dynamic presence (:24).

Developments like these have prompted Hoedemaker (1988:171-173) to challenge the usefulness of the *missio Dei* concept. It can, he argues, be used by people who subscribe to mutually exclusive theological positions. Hoedemaker may be right – to some extent at least. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the *missio Dei* notion has helped to articulate the conviction that neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission. Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate (cf LWF 1988:6-10). Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. It is impossible to penetrate deeper still; there is mission because God loves people.

The recognition that mission is God's mission represents a crucial breakthrough in respect of the preceding centuries (van 't Hof 1972:177). It is inconceivable that we could again revert to a narrow, ecclesiocentric view of mission.

MISSION AS MEDIATING SALVATION[6]

Traditional Interpretations of Salvation

Some years ago, the Catholic journal *Studia Missionalia* devoted two consecutive volumes (vol 29, 1980, and vol 30, 1981) to the theme "salvation in world religions". Salvation is indeed a fundamental concern of every religion. For Christians, the conviction that God has decisively wrought salvation for all in and through Jesus Christ stands at the very center of their lives. After all, the very name Jesus means "Savior" (cf Wiederkehr 1976:9f; 1982:329f; Beinert 1983:217f; Greshake 1983:15).

It follows from this conviction that the Christian missionary movement has been motivated, throughout its history, by the desire to mediate salvation to all. The "soteriological motif" may indeed be termed the "throbbing heart of missiology" since it concerns the "deepest and most fundamental question of humanity" (Gort 1988:203 — my translation). It therefore makes sense that international missionary conferences would be devoted in their entirety to this theme. One may think, for instance, of the 1973 Bangkok Conference of CWME, the theme of which was "Salvation Today." More recently, in October 1988, the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, meeting at the Urban University in Rome, devoted a week-long consultation to the same subject.[7] That these were *missionary* consultations makes eminent sense, since one's theology of mission is always closely dependent on one's theology of salvation; it would therefore be correct to say that the scope of salvation — however we define salvation — determines the scope of the missionary enterprise.

Just as there have been paradigm shifts in respect of the understanding of the relationship between church and mission, there have also been shifts in the understanding of the nature of the salvation the church had to mediate in its mission. Our reflections on mission in the early church has revealed that salvation was interpreted in comprehensive terms. This is not to suggest that all New Testament authors have exactly the same understanding in this respect. Luke, for instance, uses "salvation language" in respect of a very wide spectrum of human circumstances — the termination of poverty, discrimination, illness, demon possession, sin, and so forth — or as Scheffler (1988) puts it, in respect of economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering. Moreover, for Luke salvation is, above all, something that realizes itself in *this* life, *today* (see, in particular, Jesus' sayings recorded in 4:21; 19:9; 23:43). For Luke, salvation is *present* salvation (cf Stanley 1980:74f).

In *Paul* the accent appears to be elsewhere; he puts a greater emphasis on the *inchoative* nature of salvation — it only *begins* in this life (cf Stanley 1980:63-69). Salvation is a *process*, initiated by one's encounter with the living Christ, but complete salvation is still outstanding. The Holy Spirit is only God's *first*

gift to us (Rom 8:23). We are saved *in hope* (8:24). *Reconciliation* (a key concept in Paul) indeed occurs here and now, but Paul normally refers to salvation in the future tense: "For if while we were enemies we *were reconciled* to God ... much more, now that we *are reconciled, shall* we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:10). These delicate nuances certainly have to do with the fact that Paul thinks in *apocalyptic* categories and wishes to emphasize that comprehensive salvation is reserved for the coming triumph of God (Beker 1984). For the moment, Paul still *awaits* Jesus Christ as Savior (Phil 3:20). This does not, however, detract from the reality of radical renewal—both personal and social—which the believer may already experience in the here and now (cf Rom 8:14f and 2 Cor 5:17). Neither does this only hold good for the believer's "religious" life. The experience of reconciliation with God and the new birth has far-reaching *social* (cf Paul's letter to Philemon) and *political* consequences (Christ is called *Kyrios* and *Soter* in the face of the public confession that *Caesar* is lord and savior). But all of this remains within the framework of a fervent eschatological expectation.

In the Greek Patristic period, however, the eschatological expectation waned. Salvation now took the form of *paideia*, of a gradual "uplift" of believers to a divine status (the *theosis*). The emphasis was on the "origin" of Christ. The incarnation stood at the center, as instrument of the divine *paideia* (cf Lowe 1982:200; Beinert 1983:204).

Whereas salvation was understood as a "pedagogical" progression in the Byzantine church, the West (Catholic and Protestant) stressed the devastating effect of sin as well as the restoration of the fallen individual by means of a crisis experience mediated by the church. Not Christ's preexistence and incarnation, but his substitutionary death on the cross (a doctrine perfected in Anselm's theory of the *satisfactio vicaria*) now stood at the center (cf Beinert 1983:203-205). Salvation was the redemption of individual souls in the hereafter, which would take effect at the occasion of the miniature apocalypse of the death of the individual believer.

In this design, the "person" and "work" of Christ were increasingly separated from each other. Eventually christology was made subservient to soteriology (Lowe 1982:219; Greshake 1983:72f; Beinert 1983:202, 205, 208). By the same process, God's "salvific" activities were distinguished more and more from his "providential" activities in respect of the well-being of individuals and society. Thus even if—throughout all the centuries of Christian missionary history—remarkable service has always been rendered in respect of the care of the sick, the poor, orphans, and other victims of society, as well as in respect of education, agricultural instruction, and the like, these ministries were almost always viewed as "auxiliary services" and not as missionary in their own right. Their purpose was to dispose people favorably toward the gospel, "soften them up", and thereby prepare the way for the work of the *real* missionary, namely, the one who proclaimed God's word about eternal salvation. In most cases, then, a strict distinction was maintained between "horizontal" and "external" emphases (charity, education, medical help) on the one hand and the "vertical" or "spiritual" elements of the missionary agenda (such as preaching, the sacra-

ments, church attendance) on the other. Only the latter had a bearing on the appropriation of salvation.

This attenuated definition of salvation inevitably led to a preoccupation with narrowly defined ecclesiastical activities, which, for their part, severely complicated the believers' involvement in society since such involvement had nothing to do with salvation except to draw people toward the church where they might get access to salvation proper.

Salvation in the Modern Paradigm

The theological constellation just outlined could only survive unscathed as long as people continued to live in the context of *Christendom* and felt themselves to be completely dependent on the comprehensive, transcendent activity of God as the sole explanation for everything that happened in the world. With the advent of the Enlightenment this entire interpretation of salvation came under severe pressure, with the result that traditional soteriology was increasingly challenged. The idea of salvation coming from outside, from God, totally out of reach of human power and capability, became extremely problematic (cf Wiederkehr 1976:77-122; 1982:331-336; Beinert 1983:209; Greshake 1983:26,74; see also chapter 9 of this study).

The modern critique of religion took its point of departure here. Religion as expression of total dependence upon God and as eternal salvation in the hereafter was an anachronism and remnant of humankind's period of childhood. Salvation now meant liberation from religious superstition, attention to human welfare, and the moral improvement of humanity. An alternative soteriology emerged, an understanding of salvation in which humans were active and responsible agents who utilized science and technology in order to effect material improvements and induce socio-political change in the present. In this respect, the critique of religion became, in essence, the critique of soteriology (Wiederkehr 1982:331-333). Salvation remained the motivating force in the life of modern people, but it was redefined radically.

The reaction of church and mission to the challenge of modernism was—very generally put—twofold. The first reaction—in both Catholic and Protestant circles—was for people to continue to define salvation in traditional terms, ignoring, as it were, the challenges of the Enlightenment, and proceeding as if nothing had changed.

The second reaction was to attempt to take the challenges of modernism seriously, also with respect to its understanding of salvation. One way in which Christianity was "salvaged" was by rejecting the view according to which Jesus died a substitutionary death for humankind and thereby propitiated God. Jesus was, rather, the ideal human being, an example to emulate, a moral teacher. Here not the *person* of Jesus was at the center but the *cause* of Jesus; the *ideal*, not the One who embodied the ideal; the *teaching* (particularly the Sermon on the Mount), not the Teacher; the *kingdom* of God, but without the King (cf Greshake 1983:76).

In this paradigm, then, guilt and salvation no longer primarily divide and unite God and humans, but humans among themselves. Luther's cry, "Where

do I find a merciful God?" is changed to "How can we be merciful neighbors to each other?" God's "vertical" coming into this world manifests itself in changed, felicitous, "horizontal" relationships: the saving relationship of the human with God is made concrete in a person's conversion to his or her brother and sister. Sin is—in categories borrowed from Marx—alienation between humans. Salvation does not come through change in individuals but through the termination of perverted and unjust structures (cf Greshake 1983:26-29; Gründel 1983:113-115, 122). The apocalyptic pessimism of fundamentalism is refuted with the aid of evolutionary optimism. It is believed that people will soon be freed from *every* form of servitude to ignorance, hunger, misery, and oppression. The "paradise of the future" is being painted in vivid utopian colors, particularly in the American "Social Gospel". Salvation, defined in the American way, had to be exported to the "mission fields" (cf Dennis 1897, 1899, 1906). In this paradigm, sin is defined preeminently as *ignorance*. People only had to be *informed* about what was in their own interest. The Western mission was the great educator, which would mediate salvation to the unenlightened.

After the "Barthian interlude" (the 1920s to the 1950s) caused an interruption in this general trend, a new era of optimism dawned in the 1960s. For Johannes Hoekendijk, *shalom* was a more comprehensive notion than salvation, and if one *had* to choose, it was by no means self-evident that one would choose salvation. After all, we impose an antiquated anthropology upon our contemporaries if we continue to act as if they have to be on the lookout for a merciful God who could forgive their sins (Hoekendijk 1967a:348).

At the Geneva Conference on Church and Society (1966), both Emmanuel Mesthene and Richard Shaull utilized Hoekendijkian categories of salvation, even though they did so in very different ways. Both agreed that *this* world was the main arena of God's activity and the (only?) place where salvation could be effected. Where Mesthene's frame of reference was the modern industrialized and secularized West, and where he saw the solutions to the world's problems in technological progress, Shaull's frame of reference was the Third World, more particularly its experience of injustice, exploitation, and poverty. Mesthene's theology attempted to respond to the challenges of the Enlightenment, Shaull's to the challenges of Karl Marx and colonial exploitation. For Mesthene, salvation meant the large-scale expansion of technological development so that all may get a share in the wealth of the West; for Shaull, salvation meant liberation, which could be achieved only by overthrowing the existing order.

The Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) attempted, in a sense, to reconcile these two positions, as the two reports on the "Structures for Missionary Congregations" demonstrated (WCC 1967). It was, however, left to the next conference of CWME (Bangkok, 1973, with the theme "Salvation Today") to attempt to determine, once and for all, what salvation was. The "spirit" of the conference, it seems, emerges where salvation is defined exclusively in this-worldly terms. Section II depicts salvation in four dimensions. It manifests itself in the struggle for (1) economic justice against exploitation; (2) for human dignity against oppression; (3) for solidarity against alienation; and (4) for hope

against despair in personal life (WCC 1973:98). In the "process of salvation", we must relate (only?) these four dimensions to each other (:90).

Catholic missionary thinking on salvation parallelled that of Protestantism, particularly after Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council in 1959. As in Protestantism, it was believed that salvation could not be defined only in "religious" (or "ecclesial") terms but also in terms of what happened elsewhere. *Gaudium et Spes* devoted particular attention to this (e.g. in paragraph 4). It was, furthermore, especially in Roman Catholic *liberation theology* that a wider interpretation of salvation emerged.

There can be no doubt that the interpretation of salvation that has emerged in recent missionary thinking and practice has introduced elements into the definition of salvation without which it would be dangerously narrow and anemic. In a world in which people are dependent on each other and every individual exists within a web of inter-human relationships, it is totally untenable to limit salvation to the individual and his or her personal relationship with God. Hatred, injustice, oppression, war, and other forms of violence are manifestations of *evil*; concern for humaneness, for the conquering of famine, illness, and meaninglessness is part of the *salvation* for which we hope and labor. Christians pray that the reign of God should come and God's will be done *on earth* as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10); it follows from this that the *earth* is the locus of the Christian's calling and sanctification.

Crisis in the Modern Understanding of Salvation

In the course of the 1970s, however, the "secularist" as well as the "liberationist" definitions of salvation came under pressure. I have already referred to the more sober atmosphere that has characterized WCC meetings since the Nairobi Assembly (1975). Much the same has been true of Catholicism since the 1974 Bishops' Synod and the publication of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975). It has gradually become clear that the "horizontalist" model was riddled with inconsistencies, both theological and practical. It was self-deception to begin to think and act as if salvation lay in our grasp, was at our disposal, or was something *we* could bring about. We began to realize once again that, in spite of the deeply rooted heretic conviction that we can bring about salvation through our own good works, even Christians have no ready-made answers to the needs of society. Christians promised themselves too much, for instance at Uppsala and Medellín (both in 1968), when statements were made to the effect that within the foreseeable future *all* injustice, *all* poverty, and *every* form of servitude would be something of the past and that salvation was just around the corner. Thomas Wieser, the WCC staff member responsible for coordinating the "Salvation Today" project, sounds the following sobering warning:

> The task of identifying God's saving purpose in the midst of historical events requires solid theological criteria on the basis of which critical judgments can be made. Here an important task remains to be undertaken in order to ensure that the Church's credibility will not again be lost in a dash for short-lived "relevance" (1973:177).

Indeed, the euphoric sense of a breakthrough which the delegates to the Bangkok Assembly had experienced at the time was deceptive. The ringing statements about the meaning of salvation actually raised more questions than they answered. This was further underscored when, during the past two decades, we have become conscious of the "limits of growth". Unchecked technological development has become nonsensical, since earth's nonrenewable resources are being exhausted, while the rich become richer and the poor poorer. Even if humans could live by bread alone, there is simply no longer enough bread for all because of structures which appear to be unalterable. We have, in addition, become conscious of the real possibility that our technological and scientific know-how may lead to our irreversibly ruining the ecosystem. We are, reluctantly, arriving at the conclusion that not everything that is technologically possible *should* be manufactured. The modern story of success tends toward becoming a story of catastrophe, and some people even try to withdraw into an illusory pre-technological world. Meanwhile the dreams about the "paradise of the future" are disappearing in the smoke of interminable wars and, much worse, in the radioactive winds of nuclear explosions which threaten to destroy all life on earth. The optimism and euphoria of the sixties are no longer part of our experience.

Christians are, in addition, forced to ask whether the tendency to allow theology and mission to be submerged in social ethics must not unavoidably lead to a relativizing of the person of Jesus Christ. Beinert rightly remarks, "The indispensable christological element of soteriology is not (always) made sufficiently clear" (1983:215 — my translation). The inescapable result of much of the modern paradigm is that the world's needs and solutions are being portrayed in terms which, to an extent, are independent of Jesus Christ (Lowe 1982:220). The church, however, is called in its mission to give witness to what God has "once for all, absolutely new, unrepeatably and finally done in Jesus Christ for the sake of the salvation of the world" (Glazik 1979:160 — my translation). It is Jesus Christ who "accomplishes all salvation. No one can complete his work if he does not achieve it himself" (Memorandum 1982:459).

To summarize, salvation and well-being, even if they are closely interlocked, do not coincide completely. The Christian faith is a critical factor, the reign of God a critical category, and the Christian gospel not identical with the agenda of modern emancipation and liberation movements (cf Beinert 1983:214f; Gort 1988:213f).

We cannot, however, simply return to the classical interpretation of salvation, even if that position upholds and defends elements which remain indispensable for a Christian understanding of salvation. Its problem lies, first, in the fact that it dangerously narrows the meaning of salvation, as if it comprises only escape from the wrath of God and the redemption of the individual soul in the hereafter and, second, in that it tends to make an absolute distinction between creation and new creation, between well-being and salvation. This is, for instance, what Donald McGavran does when he writes

Salvation is a vertical relationship . . . which issues in horizontal relationships. . . The vertical must not be displaced by the horizontal. Desirable

as social ameliorations are, working for them must not be substituted for the biblical requirements of/for "salvation" (1973:31).

Over against this kind of approach we have to affirm that redemption is never salvation *out of* this world (*salus e mundo*) but always salvation *of* this world (*salus mundi*) (Aagaard 1974:429-431). Salvation in Christ is salvation in the context of human society en route to a whole and healed world.

Toward Comprehensive Salvation

The challenges of the modern world to the mission of the church in respect of the interpretation of salvation cannot simply be ignored. New challenges call for new responses. We are forced by circumstances to reflect anew on this entire matter. Perhaps a rereading of the biblical notions of salvation, done from the perspective of the realization that both the traditional and modern interpretations of salvation have proved inadequate, will help us here.

For its understanding of salvation the first model—that of the Greek Patristic mission—was oriented to the *origin* and *beginning* of Jesus' life—his preexistence and incarnation. The orientation of Western mission was toward the *end* of Jesus' life—his death on the cross (formulated classically in the Anselmian satisfaction theory). In both instances salvation was located on the edges of the life of Jesus (Wiederkehr 1976:34; Beinert 1983:211). The third model, that is, the ethical interpretation of salvation, was oriented to Jesus' *earthly life and ministry*. It admittedly introduced a more dynamic element into our understanding of salvation, but in such a way that, in the final analysis, it made Christ himself redundant.

We stand in need of an interpretation of salvation which operates within a *comprehensive* christological framework, which makes the *totus Christus*—his incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, and parousia—indispensable for church and theology. All these christological elements taken together constitute the praxis of Jesus, the One who both inaugurated salvation and provided us with a model to emulate (cf Wiederkehr 1976:39-43).

It therefore makes sense that in missionary circles today, but elsewhere as well, the mediating of "comprehensive", "integral", "total", or "universal" salvation is increasingly identified as the purpose of mission, in this way overcoming the inherent dualism in the traditional and more recent models (cf, for instance, the titles of Waldenfels 1977; Müller 1978; and Weber 1978).[8] Missionary literature, but also missionary practice, emphasize that we should find a way *beyond* every schizophrenic position and minister to people in their *total* need, that we should involve individual as well as society, soul *and* body, present *and* future in our ministry of salvation.

Never before in history has people's social distress been as extensive as it is in the twentieth century. But never before have Christians been in a better position than they are today to do something about this need. Poverty, misery, sickness, criminality, and social chaos have assumed unheard-of proportions. On an unprecedented scale people have become the victims of other people; *homo homini lupus* ("The human being is a wolf to other human beings").

Marginalized groups in many countries of the world lack every form of active and even passive participation in society; inter-human relationships are disintegrating; people are in the grip of a pattern of life from which they cannot possibly wrench themselves free; marginality characterizes every aspect of their existence (cf Müller 1978:90). To introduce change, as Christians, into all of this, is to mediate salvation; after all—to quote GS 1 again—"the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well". Precisely because our concern is salvation, we may no longer regard ourselves or others as prisoners of an omnipotent fate; in its mission the church constitutes a resistance movement against every manifestation of fatalism and quietism.

On the other hand, since we may never overrate our own or others' capabilities, we have to ask critical questions in respect to all current theories of human self-redemption. Final salvation will not be wrought by human hands, not even by *Christian* hands. The Christian's eschatological vision of salvation will not be realized in history. For this reason Christians should never identify any specific project with the fullness of the reign of God. We are, at best, erecting bridgeheads for the reign of God (cf Geffré 1982:490; Beinert 1983:215, 218; Beker 1984:86f; Gort 1988:213). We therefore hold on to the transcendent character of salvation also, and to the need of calling people to faith in God through Christ. Salvation does not come but along the route of repentance and personal faith commitment (cf Wiederkehr 1982:334).

The integral character of salvation demands that the scope of the church's mission be more comprehensive than has traditionally been the case. Salvation is as coherent, broad, and deep as the needs and exigencies of human existence. Mission therefore means being involved in the ongoing dialogue between God, who offers his salvation, and the world, which—enmeshed in all kinds of evil—craves that salvation (Gort 1988:209). "Mission means being sent to proclaim in deed and word that Christ died and rose for the life of the world, that he lives to transform human lives (Rom 8:2) and to overcome death" (Memorandum 1982:459). From the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the reign of God, from the tension between the salvation *indicative* (salvation is already a reality!) and the salvation *subjunctive* (comprehensive salvation is yet to come!) there emerges the salvation *imperative*—Get involved in the ministry of salvation! (Gort 1988:214). Those who know that God will one day wipe away all tears will not accept with resignation the tears of those who suffer and are oppressed *now*. Anyone who knows that one day there will be no more disease can and must actively anticipate the conquest of disease in individuals and society *now*. And anyone who believes that the enemy of God and humans will be vanquished will already oppose him *now* in his machinations in family and society. For all of this has to do with *salvation*.

MISSION AS THE QUEST FOR JUSTICE

The Legacy of History

In our next section (on evangelism) it will be argued that although evangelism may never simply be equated with labor for justice, it may also never be

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divorced from it. The relationship between the evangelistic and the societal dimensions of the Christian mission constitutes one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of mission. In subsequent sections we shall return to it again and again.

There can be no doubt that social justice was at the very heart of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. Since most of Israel's kings at least professed to believe in Yahweh, prophets like Amos and Jeremiah could, in the name of God, challenge them insofar as they had tolerated or perpetrated injustice in their kingdoms. The socio-political context in which the early church began to engage in mission was, however, fundamentally different. Christianity was a *religio illicita* in the Roman Empire. It was, at best, tolerated; at worst, it was persecuted. No Christian could address the authorities on the basis of a shared faith. This circumstance has led many Christians of later generations to the erroneous view that the New Testament is more "spiritual" than the Old and is, because of this, superior to it. At the same time the innate justice dimension of the Christian faith has often been overlooked, mainly because it was—in the prevailing circumstances—couched in terms which differed substantially from those we encounter in the Old Testament (cf also chapters 2 to 4 of this study).

During the reign of Constantine Christianity not only became a *religio licita*, it actually soon was the *only* legitimate religion in the empire. The situation was similar to that which prevailed in certain periods of the history of Israel as an independent nation. As had happened then, so also now the new situation led to compromises. And frequently the compromise was in the area of social justice, the "court prophets" finding it either impossible or imprudent to criticize the authorities when the latter had connived and even colluded in injustice. Still, since the membership of church and state for all practical purposes overlapped during the entire period from Constantine to the dawn of the modern era, and since the rulers explicitly acknowledged that they were as much responsible for the religious and moral life of their subjects as they were for politics, the realms of religion and politics were, somehow, held together.

As early as Augustine, however, there was a trend to divide reality starkly into two irreconcilable opposites, spelled out forcefully in *The City of God*, Book 4 Chapter 28 (cf also chapter 6 of this study). In spite of counter-currents (in late medieval Catholicism the name of Thomas Aquinas may be mentioned) there has always, since Augustine, been a tendency to construe a contrast "between the . . . radiance of divine holiness and the darkness of the world" (Niebuhr 1960:69). This legacy was passed on from Catholicism to Protestantism in all its forms (though it manifested itself more clearly in the Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions than in Calvinism). The world was evil and unredeemable, and changing its structures did not really fall within the sphere of the church's responsibilities.

With the advent of the Enlightenment and its thoroughgoing differentiation between the public world of facts and the private world of ideas, politics and the state were assigned to the former, religion and morals to the latter. The organic link between church and state had been severed and the church could

no longer appeal to the state on the basis of a shared faith commitment. The church's ministry — outside its walls — was by and large limited to charity and development. To challenge unjust societal structures fell outside of its purview and would also have been totally unacceptable to the political rulers. When, in 1926, a group of ten bishops (one of whom was William Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury) attempted to mediate in a dispute between coal miners, coal-owners, and the British government, an irate Stanley Baldwin, then prime minister, asked how the bishops would like it if he were to refer to the Iron and Steel Federation the revision of the Athanasian Creed! (cf Temple 1976:30).

The "interference" of the bishops with politics was one of the earliest manifestations of an "established" church breaking out of the mold of harmony and neat division of labor between church and state.[9] Much of the convolution in church-state relationships in the twentieth century flowed from attempts at redefining this relationship.

The Tension between Justice and Love

In order to appreciate the issues involved, it may help to highlight an observation made by Reinhold Niebuhr (1960). A *rational* ethic, Niebuhr suggests, aims at *justice*, whereas a *religious* ethic makes *love* the ideal (:57). The latter ideal is supported by viewing the soul of one's fellow human being "from the absolute and transcendent perspective" (:58). This leads to the presence — in every vital religion — of a millennial hope for a society in which the ideal of love and equity will be fully realized (:60f). However, this is complicated by the fact that, *within* the religious ideal, a "mystical" emphasis exists side by side with a "prophetic" emphasis (:64). The mystical dimension tends to make an individual or a group withdraw from the world, devalue history, claim that one's true home is not here but in heaven, and seek communion with God without attending to one's neighbor (cf Haight 1976:623). The prophetic dimension prompts the believer to get involved in society for the sake of the neighbor.

Attempts to deal with this unresolved tension in the Christian ethic have, by and large, taken two different forms.

In the Protestant *ecumenical* movement, and to a lesser extent in contemporary Catholicism, it seems it is the *prophetic* motif that predominates. In some manifestations of ecumenicalism, however, it seems that the rational ethic, which aims at justice, is more powerful than the religious ethic of love. The Social Gospel, for instance — particularly after the year 1900 — "emphasized social concern in an exclusivistic way which seemed to undercut the relevance of the message of eternal salvation" (Marsden 1980:92), thereby, seemingly, jettisoning completely any idea of transcendence in Christianity. The same appeared to be true, by and large, of much of what was said and done in "mainline" Christianity during the "secular sixties". The Geneva Church and Society Conference (1966), the WCC Uppsala Assembly (1968), and the CWME meeting in Bangkok (1973) again come to mind as manifestations of the trend to give "a blanket endorsement of any political movement" (Wieser 1973:177) without adequately identifying criteria for judging whether it truly

belonged to the mission of God (cf Bassham 1979:94). The religious ethic of love, says Niebuhr (1960:80f), will always aim at leavening the idea of justice with the ideal of love; it will prevent it from becoming purely political, with the ethical element washed out. Love demands more than justice (:75). The "ultra-rational hopes" in religion provide courage and keep love alive.

This is what EN 27 has in mind when it warns against reducing the mission of the church "to the dimensions of a simple temporal project". In similar vein Bonhoeffer ([1932] 1977) refers to the "secularist temptation" of identifying the reign of God, consciously or unconsciously, with some earthly goal, of trying to be the architects not only of our own future but also of God's. Here the "eschatological reservation" has almost completely disappeared. However, Bonhoeffer also refers to the other extreme where — in the pious radiance of otherworldly realities — earth pales into insignificance and ultimately becomes meaningless. This is the danger in the *evangelical* position on the church's calling in respect to justice in society. The problem, says Niebuhr (1960:74) is that the religious ideal tends to be more interested in the perfect *motive* of the believer than in fleshing out the consequences of love. Such a preoccupation with motive — which has its own virtues — is perilous to society. As the institution of slavery has shown, sincere Christians, motivated by love, might not move vigorously against the social injustices in the larger society, which they know to be in conflict with their religious and moral ideals (:77f). The consistent God-world, spirit-body dualism, inherited from Augustine and the Greeks and reinforced by the Enlightenment mind-set, defeats the ideal of love.

The Two Mandates

One attempt to solve the enigma of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility is to distinguish between two different *mandates*, the one spiritual, the other social. The first refers to the commission to announce the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ; the second calls Christians to responsible participation in human society, including working for human well-being and justice (cf Bassham 1979:343). Perhaps this distinction — as far as North American Protestantism is concerned — goes back to Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). According to Edwards, God's work of redemption has two facets. One consists in the converting, sanctifying, and glorifying of individuals; the other pertains to God's grand design in creation, history, and providence (cf Chaney 1976:217). Still, for Edwards these two "mandates" were inseparable. The same was true of those who had been touched by the Evangelical Awakenings. The evangelical commitment to social reform was a corollary of the enthusiasm for revival (Marsden 1980:12).

Gradually, however, a subtle shift toward the primacy of the "evangelistic mandate" was discernible. This coincided with the rise of premillennialism in what later became known as fundamentalism and the latter's growing protest against the this-worldliness of the Social Gospel. Between 1865 and 1900 interest in social and political action diminished, though it was not completely discontinued, among revivalist evangelicals. Between 1900 and 1930, however, all progressive social concern became suspect among them and disappeared dra-

matically (Marsden 1980:86-90). The broad sweep of the involvement and interest of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Awakenings had shrivelled to narrow and intolerant sectarianism. The "Great Reversal" (Timothy Smith — cf Marsden 1980:85) had set in. The Awakening, says Lovelace (1981), had never been completed.

Much of this mentality still prevails in fundamentalist circles around the world. In the main body of evangelicalism, however, a change began to set in. Catalytic in this respect was Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947). He wrote (quoted in Bassham 1979:176):

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

Henry concludes, "There is no room ... for a gospel that is indifferent to the needs of the total man nor of the global man". It took some time for this perspective to begin to filter through, not least because much evangelical energy at the time was dissipated in attempts to attack the young and energetic WCC. The "Wheaton Declaration" (produced by an evangelical conference which convened in Wheaton, Illinois, in 1966) conceded that evangelicals in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had led in social concern and stressed the importance of ministering to physical and social needs, but stated that this should happen "without minimizing the priority of preaching the gospel of individual salvation" (Lindsell 1966:234). Henceforth, whenever the "social mandate" was emphasized in evangelicalism, it would always be accompanied by a statement about the primacy of evangelism. The Berlin Congress, also held in 1966, a few months after the Wheaton Congress, reaffirmed the participants' "unswerving determination to carry out the supreme mission of the Church" (Henry and Mooneyham 1967a:5). In his address, Billy Graham spoke for many evangelicals when he included a social dimension within evangelism but then added that improved social conditions were a *result* of successful evangelism (:28),

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

By this definition evangelism relates to social responsibility as seed relates to fruit; evangelism remains primary (the church's "main task") but it generates social involvement and improved social conditions among those who have been evangelized (cf McGavran 1973:31).

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All these and similar interpretations of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility could not but increasingly come under tremendous pressure. Several evangelical scholars began to reflect anew on the issues, building on nineteenth-century social ethics and taking up some of the challenges articulated by Henry in his 1947 book.[10] So-called radical evangelicals—Mennonites and others—began to move out of their centuries-old self-imposed isolation from mainstream Christianity and made vital contributions to social thinking and practice among evangelicals (cf Yoder 1972). So by 1974, when the International Congress on World Evangelization met in Lausanne, many evangelicals, particularly those from the Third World, were ready for a new advance. John Stott, in a book published soon after the Lausanne conference, candidly confessed that he had changed his mind on the interpretation of the "Great Commission": at Berlin 1966 he had interpreted it exclusively in terms of evangelism (in Henry and Mooneyham 1967a:37-56). Now he would prefer to express himself differently:

> I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus (Stott 1975:23).

It was in line with this new understanding that the LC 5 affirmed that

> (evangelism and socio-political) involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ.

However, both the Congress and the Covenant continued to operate in terms of the two-mandate approach and to uphold the priority of evangelism. It affirmed that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary". It was also explicitly stated that "reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation".

In spite of the advantages of this approach over the one-mandate strategy ("evangelism only") that dominated evangelicalism for so long, Stott's understanding of mission as "evangelism *plus* social responsibility" was under pressure from the very beginning. The moment one regards mission as consisting of two separate components one has, in principle, conceded that each of the two has a life of its own. One is then by implication saying that it is possible to have evangelism without a social dimension and Christian social involvement without an evangelistic dimension. What is more, if one suggests that one component is primary and the other secondary, one implies that the one is essential, the other optional. This is precisely what happened. The *Thailand Statement*, released by the Pattaya conference of LCWE (1980), affirmed the movement's commitment to LC's emphasis on both evangelism and social action but went on to say that "nothing contained in the Lausanne Covenant is beyond our

concern, *so long as it is clearly related to world evangelization*" (emphasis added). The significance of this sentence lies in what it does *not* say—that nothing in LC is beyond our concern, *so long as it clearly fosters Christian involvement in society*.

In 1982, two years after the Pattaya conference, some forty scholars met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at a "Consultation on the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility" (CRESR), sponsored by LCWE and the WEF. The consultation's report conceded that some participants "felt uncomfortable" about LC's stand on the primacy of evangelism and attempted to explain that its priority may not always be *chronologically* prior to social engagement. It continued,

> Seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls, since an authentic love for our neighbor will lead us to serve him or her as a whole person. *Nevertheless, if we must choose, then we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all humankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ*, and that therefore a person's eternal, spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal and material well-being (CRESR 1982:25, emphasis added).

The dichotomy was thus upheld at CRESR. The official evangelical position remained: evangelism is primary, and where it has been successful, it has led to "fruits" in the form of social justice. In fact, this cause-effect thinking (a legacy of the Enlightenment?) still remains powerful within evangelicalism. The greatest single step the church can take toward creating a new world order, says McGavran (1983:21), is to multiply in society, "cells of the redeemed". Once this has happened, God "inevitably . . . causes them to seek a better social order" (:28).

The question is whether this cause-effect thinking can really be maintained. Apart from the fact that it could be argued, on empirical grounds, that converted individuals do not "inevitably" (McGavran's word) get involved in restructuring society, one has to ask whether this approach is *theologically* tenable. It is of interest to note that this question is increasingly asked by evangelicals themselves. Already at the Lausanne Congress several hundred delegates sided with a statement called *A Response to Lausanne*, in which LC was criticized on this point. The response states, among other things, that

> there is no biblical dichotomy between the word spoken and the word made visible in the lives of God's people. Men will look as they listen and what they see must be at one with what they hear . . . There are times when our communication may be by attitude and action only, and times when the spoken word will stand alone: but we must repudiate as demonic the attempt to drive a wedge between evangelism and social concern.

This powerful response found an echo at the Pattaya 1980 meeting of LCWE when some two hundred participants signed a "Statement of Concern on the

Future of the LCWE", in which the conference leadership was criticized in no uncertain terms for the way in which it had emphasized the evangelistic mandate to the almost total exclusion of the church's calling in the area of justice and peace. In the same year, and shortly before the Pattaya Conference, the WEF unit on Ethics and Society held two meetings at High Leigh near London, one on development, one on lifestyle.[11] Both consultations moved beyond the themes and scope which characterized evangelical meetings in the 1960s and 1970s, not least because of the strong Third-World representation. Scherer comments on the second of the two consultations,

> The actual content of the London consultation went far beyond simple living, stewardship, or benevolence, and touched precisely on God's preferential option for the poor, divine judgment on oppressors, the pattern of Christ's own identification with the poor, the risk of suffering for Christ's sake, and Christian support for changes in the political structures — themes seldom articulated with such passion in evangelical mission circles (1987:180).

In 1983 another significant step forward was taken at a WEF consultation in Wheaton devoted to "The Church in Response to Human Need".[12] For the first time in an official statement emanating from an international evangelical conference the perennial dichotomy was overcome. Without ascribing priority to either evangelism or social involvement, the *Wheaton '83 Statement,* paragraph 26, declared,

> Evil is not only in the human heart but also in social structures. . . . The mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. We must therefore evangelize, respond to immediate human needs, and press for social transformation.

By the early 1980s, then, it seemed that a new spirit was establishing itself in mainstream evangelicalism. Regional evangelical groupings followed suit. One of the most remarkable documents in this respect was the *Evangelical Witness in South Africa,* produced by a group of "Concerned Evangelicals" in 1986.[13] In the context of the apartheid system and the experience of repression and police brutality during a state of emergency, evangelicals felt forced to respond and articulate their views on evangelism, mission, structural evil, and the church's responsibility with respect to justice in society. They had no doubt that they were called to a ministry of proclaiming Christ as Savior and of inviting people to put their trust in him, but they were equally convinced that sin was both personal and structural, that life was of a piece, that dualism was contrary to the gospel, and that their ministry had to be broadened as well as deepened. This represents an important shift in evangelicalism and not simply a return to a nineteenth-century position. At that time, and due to the prevalent optimistic mood, Christians tended to believe in a "natural" and evolutionary improvement of societal conditions. Today both evangelicals and ecumenicals grasp in

a more profound manner than ever before something of the depth of evil in the world, the inability of human beings to usher in God's reign, and the need for both personal renewal by God's Spirit *and* resolute commitment to challenging and transforming the structures of society.[14]

A Convergence of Convictions

In many respects, then, an important segment of evangelicalism appears poised to reverse the "Great Reversal" and embody anew a full-orbed gospel of the irrupting reign of God not only in individual lives but also in society. A similar turning of the tide, but in the opposite direction, has been in evidence in ecumenical circles since the middle of the 1970s, more particularly since the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC (1975). This is particularly in evidence in the 1982 *Mission and Evanqelism* document. It states, among other things:

> There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice (para 34).

A similar convergence of ideas is witnessed in Catholicism. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in particular, underscores the important advance in Catholic thinking that took place since Vatican II. Refusing to limit the church's ministry to the dimensions of economics, politics, or cultural life, the pope nevertheless does not allow a return to a preconciliar position, maintaining that salvation most certainly begins in this life to find its fulfillment in eternity (EN 27; cf also Snijders 1977:172f)

Many ambiguities remain and much still has to be done in sorting out the nature of the church's involvement in society, not least because of "the general failure of theologians to deal adequately with this problem" (Snijders 1977:173). And yet, churches—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—are learning afresh "to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. The 'spiritual Gospel' and 'material Gospel' were in Jesus one Gospel" (ME 33). The alternative "between evangelization and humanization, between interior conversion and improvement of conditions, or between the vertical dimension of faith and the horizontal dimension of love" is untenable (Moltmann 1975:4). Speaking to the Uppsala Assembly, Visser 't Hooft lamented the "rather primitive oscillating movement of going from one extreme to the other", and added,

> A Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt and is not only insipid in itself, but useless to the world. But a Christianity which would use the vertical preoccupation as a means to escape from its responsibility for and in the common life of man is a denial of the incarnation (WCC 1968:318).

MISSION AS EVANGELISM[15]

Evangelism: A Plethora of Definitions

Our discussion on the meaning and scope of salvation and on the church's mission in respect to social justice leads us, almost as a matter of course, to reflections on the nature of evangelism. The concept "to evangelize" and its derivatives have actually been around much longer than the word "mission" and, of course, also occur fairly frequently in the New Testament (*euangelizein* [or *euangelizesthai*] and *euangelion*). However, these terms fell into almost complete disuse during the Middle Ages (Barrett 1987:21f). Even today they are hardly ever used in English Bible translations; *euangelion* is usually translated "gospel" and *euangelizesthai/euangelizein* "preach the gospel". Since the early nineteenth century the verb "evangelize" and its derivatives "evangelism" and "evangelization" were, however, rehabilitated in church and mission circles. They became particularly prominent around the turn of the century because of the slogan "The evangelization of the world in this generation" (:30).

After a temporary lull in usage, from the 1920s to the 1960s, the terms again became very prominent and have been widely used since 1970 in Protestant (ecumenical and evangelical) as well as Catholic circles (Barrett 1987:60-66). An "epochal watershed" (:66) in this respect was the publication, in 1975, of Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*; equally significant were the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in the same month that EN was released and the publication, in 1982, of *Mission and Evangelism—An Ecumenical Affirmation* (ME). In fact, these meetings and documents mark a significant revival in Catholic and Protestant interest in evangelism (cf Gómez 1986:35).

As far as the noun is concerned, it is worth noting that the Protestant evangelical movement as well as Roman Catholics appear to prefer "evangelization", whereas Protestant ecumenicals favor "evangelism". I shall use "evangelism" to refer to (a) the activities involved in spreading the gospel (however we may wish to define these; see below), or (b) theological reflection on these activities. "Evangelization" will be used to refer to (a) the process of spreading the gospel, or (b) the extent to which it has been spread (for instance in the expression "the evangelization of the world has not yet been completed") (cf also Barrett 1982:826; 1987:25f; Watson 1983b:7).

It remains difficult, however, to determine precisely what authors mean by evangelism or evangelization. Barrett (1987:42-45) lists seventy-nine definitions, to which many more could be added. Broadly speaking, controversy prevails in two areas: the differences (if any) between "evangelism" and "mission", and the scope or range of evangelism. These issues are, moreover, intimately interrelated.

First, some suggest that "mission" has to do with ministry to people (particularly those in the Third World) who are *not yet* Christians and "evangelism" with ministry to those (particularly in the West) who are *no longer* Christians. The existence of such "no longer" Christians reflects a new situation. Prior to the Enlightenment and the Age of Discovery all people outside the West were

"pagans", whereas everybody in the West was considered Christian. Now there are "non-believers" in the West also. It is argued, however, that a difference in terminology is needed when referring to the church's work among these two groups. Mission, it is suggested, is concerned with first conversion, with Christianization, with *vocare*, with a first beginning, with the stranger far away; evangelism has to do with re-conversion, re-Christianization, *revocare*, a new beginning, the estranged neighbor (cf Barth 1957). Within (Western) Christendom, then, evangelism is in order, not mission. "Home Missions" (evangelism) is judged to be *theologically* distinct from (foreign) mission. The differentiation is, at the same time, *geographical*. In the words of Margull, "The distinctive feature of foreign mission is to proclaim the gospel where no church as yet exists, where the Lordship of God has never yet—historically—been proclaimed, where *pagans* are the object of concern" (1962:275). Mission, then, takes place in a *pre*-Christian milieu. Over against this, Margull defines evangelism, which he also distinguishes sharply from the church's "regular" preaching to its members, as the proclamation of the gospel among those who have left the church or those living in a *post*-Christian milieu, such as Eastern Europe (1962:277f).

Margull reflects a wide consensus in Roman Catholic and Protestant circles (cf Barth 1962:872-874; Ohm 1962:53-58; *Ad Gentes;* Verkuyl 1978b:passim). At the same time, he argues (:275-277) that "evangelism" should never have a life of its own, since it is derived from the reality of the foreign mission and must always be seen in close relationship to it. "Mission" remains primary, "evangelism" secondary. One reason for such a "synchronizing" of mission and evangelism (Margull 1962:274) lies in the fact that the distinction between work among "not yet Christians" ("mission") and "no longer Christians" ("evangelism") is increasingly breaking down; there are now also "not yet Christians" (people who are not only alienated from the church but who have never had any link whatsoever with it) in the West, just as there are "no longer Christians" (people who were once Christians but have become alienated from the church) in the traditional "mission" territories (cf also Gensichen 1971:237-240; Verkuyl 1978b:72-74).

Second, and in addition to the distinction just identified, there has often been a tendency to define "evangelism" more narrowly than "mission". And as Roman Catholics and ecumenical Protestants increasingly tended to use the word "mission" for an ever-widening range of ecclesial activities (this happened particularly at the Uppsala Meeting of the WCC), evangelicals began to avoid the term "mission" and to use only "evangelism", also for the "foreign" enterprise. This polemic use of "evangelism" by evangelicals suggested that, in their view, the WCC had wrongfully broadened the scope of the original enterprise to what it is today. Johnston (1978:18), for instance, claims, "Historically the mission of the church is evangelism alone" (cf McGavran 1983:17—"Theologically mission was evangelism by every means possible"). The more "inclusive" understanding of the enterprise, Johnston says (:36) actually began with the Edinburgh Conference of 1910.

Third, there has been, over the last four decades or so, a trend to understand

"mission" and "evangelism" as synonyms. The church's task—whether in the West or the Third World—is *one,* and it is immaterial whether we call it "mission" or "evangelism". As far as evangelicals are concerned this already emerges in the definitions of Johnston and McGavran just quoted.[16] In WCC and Roman Catholic circles there is a similar tendency. The formation of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism after the WCC New Delhi Assembly (1961) attests to this; Philip Potter was therefore correct when he said that, in ecumenical literature, "mission", "evangelism", and "witness" are, as a rule, interchangeable concepts. And a Roman Catholic memorandum claims, "*Mission, evangelization and witness* are nowadays often used by Catholics as synonymous" (Memorandum 1982:460).

Further confusion was added when, fourth, the term "evangelism" or "evangelization" began to *replace* "mission" in recent years, not only in conservative evangelical circles but also among Roman Catholics and ecumenical Protestants. In the case of the latter grouping, "evangelism" or "evangelization", understood to be identical with "mission", was deemed more acceptable than "mission" because of the colonialist overtones still associated with the latter term (cf Geffré 1982:479; Gómez 1986:36). The most thoroughgoing example of "evangelization" supplanting mission is to be found in EN. The document shuns the word "mission" and, in its English translation, uses "evangelization" and its cognates no less than 214 times (Barrett 1987:66). "Evangelization" is understood as an umbrella concept embracing the whole activity of the church sent into the world: "One single term—evangelization—defines the whole of Christ's office and mandate" (EN 6; cf Snijders 1977:172; Geffré 1982:489; Scherer 1987:205). In like manner, Geijbels (1978:73-82) understands evangelization to include proclamation, translation, dialogue, service, and presence. And Walsh (1982:92) states that "human development, liberation, justice, and peace are *integral* parts of the ministry of evangelization".

In the case of evangelicals, "evangelism" (or, more commonly, "evangelization") is often preferred to "mission" because of what evangelicals believe ecumenicals to understand by "mission" (or because of the way "mission" had been "reconceptualized" at Uppsala 1968 and "implemented" as "new mission" at Bangkok 1973 [Hoekstra 1979:63-109]). Thus, if Johnston (1978) writes about "the battle for world evangelism" and Hoekstra (1979) of "the demise of evangelism" in the WCC, they reveal a preference for the term "evangelism" as opposed to the term "mission".

Toward a Constructive Understanding of Evangelism

Convolutions in meaning such as the ones identified above are symptomatic of the prevailing state of flux in missionary thinking and of the period of transition in which we find ourselves. In what follows I shall attempt to outline an understanding of evangelism which will, hopefully, contribute to the kind of mission that will be relevant to the present hour. Basic to my considerations is the conviction that mission and evangelism are not synonyms but, nevertheless, indissolubly linked together and inextricably interwoven in theology and praxis.

1. *I perceive mission to be wider than evangelism.* "Evangelization is mission,

but mission is not merely evangelization" (Moltmann 1977:10; cf Geffré 1982:478f). Mission denotes the total task God has set the church for the salvation of the world, but always related to a specific context of evil, despair, and lostness (as Jesus defined his "mission" according to Luke 4:18f—cf also Chapter 3 of this study). It "embraces all activities that serve to liberate man from his slavery in the presence of the coming God, slavery which extends from economic necessity to Godforsakenness" (Moltmann 1977:10). Mission is the church sent into the world, to love, to serve, to preach, to teach, to heal, to liberate.

2. *Evangelism should therefore not be equated with mission.* Where this happens, the need arises to supplement "evangelism" with neologisms like "pre-evangelization" and "re-evangelization" (cf Rahner 1966:52f; Gómez 1986:36), in an attempt to introduce elements which may otherwise be lost. It is therefore better to uphold the distinctiveness of evangelism within the wider mission of the church. It is, however, impossible to dissociate it from the church's wider mission (Geffré 1982:480). Evangelism is integral to mission, "sufficiently distinct and yet not separate from mission" (Löffler 1977a:341). One may never isolate it and treat it as a completely separate activity of the church. "If it is not related to everything the church does, then the church is suspect" (Spong 1982:15). Authentic evangelism is imbedded in the total mission of the church, "our opening up of the mystery of God's love to all people inside that mission" (Castro 1977:10). ME's holding together both mission (ME 1-5) and evangelism (ME 6-8) rightly makes it impossible to choose between mission and evangelism.

3. *Evangelism may be viewed as an essential "dimension of the total activity of the Church"* (1954 Evanston Assembly of the WCC, quoted in Löffler 1977b:8), the heart or core of the church's mission (Löffler 1977a:341). If we accept this, we would have to rule out the idea, propounded by Stott (1975) and the *Lausanne Covenant*, that evangelism is one of two segments or components of mission (the other one being social action). Evangelism may never be given a life of its own, in isolation from the rest of the life and ministry of the church (cf Castro 1978:88). In light of this, and of the apparent absence of conspicuous programs of evangelism in WCC member churches, it is perhaps rash to talk about the "demise" of evangelism in the WCC (Hoekstra 1979).

4. *Evangelism involves witnessing to what God has done, is doing, and will do.* This is the way Jesus began his evangelistic ministry according to the synoptic gospels: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). Evangelism is announcing that God, Creator and Lord of the universe, has personally intervened in human history and has done so supremely through the person and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth who is the Lord of history, Savior and Liberator. In this Jesus, incarnate, crucified and risen, the reign of God has been inaugurated (cf ME 6, 8). Evangelism thus includes the "gospel events" (Stott 1975:44f). It is, essentially, not a call to put something into effect, as if God's reign would be inaugurated by our response or thwarted by the absence of such a response (cf Kramm 1979:220). It is a response to what God has already put into effect. In light of this, evangelism cannot be defined in terms of its results or effectiveness, as though evangelism has only occurred where

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there are "converts". Rather, evangelism should be perceived in terms of its nature, as mediating the good news of God's love in Christ that transforms life, proclaiming, by word and action, that Christ has set us free (cf Gutiérrez 1988:xxxvii, xli).

5. *Even so, evangelism does aim at a response.* On the basis of the reality of the fullness of time and the irruption of God's reign, Jesus summons his listeners, "Repent, and believe the gospel". "The calling is to specific changes, to renounce evidences of the domination of sin in our lives and to accept responsibilities in terms of God's love for our neighbour" (ME 11); after all, *metanoia* involves the "total transformation of our attitudes and styles of life" (ME 12; cf Costas 1989:112-130). To dispense with the centrality of repentance and faith is to divest the gospel of its significance. Conversion "involves a turning *from* and a turning *to*"—"*from* a life characterized by sin, separation from God, submission to evil and the unfulfilled potential of God's image, *to* a new life characterized by the forgiveness of sins, obedience . . . renewed fellowship with God in Trinity" (ME 12). Conversion is, moreover, an ongoing, lifelong process (cf Löffler 1977b:8).

6. *Evangelism is always invitation* (Löffler 1977a:341; Sundermeier 1986:72, 92). To evangelize is to communicate joy (Gutiérrez 1988:xxxvii). It conveys a positive message; it is hope we are holding out to the world (Margull 1962:280). Evangelism should never deteriorate into coaxing, much less into threat. It is not the same as (1) offering a psychological panacea for people's frustrations and disappointments, (2) inculcating guilt feelings so that people (in despair, as it were) may turn to Christ, or (3) scaring people into repentance and conversion with stories about the horrors of hell. People should turn to God because they are drawn by God's love, not because they are pushed to God for fear of hell. It is only in the light of our experience of the grace of God in Christ "that we know the terrible abyss of darkness into which we must fall if we put our trust anywhere but in that grace" (cf Newbigin 1982:151). As was explained in Chapter 4, it is the "solution" in Christ that reveals to us the "plight" from which we have been saved.

7. *The one who evangelizes is a witness not a judge.* This has important consequences for the way we evaluate our own evangelistic ministry and often facilely divide people into the "saved" and the "lost". As Newbigin formulates it,

> I can never be so confident of the purity and authenticity of my witness that I can know that the person who rejects my witness has rejected Jesus. I am witness to him who is both utterly holy and utterly gracious. His holiness and his grace are as far above my comprehension as they are above that of my hearer (1982:151).

8. *Even though we ought to be modest about the character and effectiveness of our witness, evangelism remains an indispensable ministry.* It is not an optional extra but a sacred duty, "incumbent on (the church) . . . This message is indeed necessary. It is unique. It cannot be replaced" (EN 5). It cannot be assumed

that the evangelistic dimension of the church's mission is included in all that the church says and does; it has to be made explicit (Watson 1983a:68f). "Each person is entitled to hear the Good News" (ME 10).

9. *Evangelism is only possible when the community that evangelizes — the church — is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and exhibits an attractive lifestyle.* "The medium is the message" (Marshall McLuhan). In the words of the (British) *Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism*: "What we are and do is no less important in this respect than what we say" (NIE 1980:3). If the church is to impart to the world a message of hope and love, of faith, justice and peace, something of this should become visible, audible, and tangible in the church itself (cf Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). The witness of life of the believing community prepares the way for the gospel (cf EN 59-61; see also, once again, the criteria for a missionary church identified by Gensichen 1971:170-172). Where this is absent the credibility of our evangelism is dangerously impaired. "How many of the millions of people in the world who are not confessing Jesus Christ have rejected him because of what they saw in the lives of Christians! *Thus the call to conversion should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation*" (ME 13 — emphasis in the original). These words are particularly pertinent where a Christian community fails to demonstrate the fact that in Christ God has shattered all the barriers that divide the human family. In this respect, in particular, the *very being* of the church has an evangelistic significance, either positively or negatively (cf Barth 1956:676f, 706f).

10. *Evangelism offers people salvation as a present gift and with it assurance of eternal bliss.* People are, even without realizing it, desperately searching for a meaning to life and history; this impels them to look for a sign of hope amid the widespread fear of global catastrophe and meaninglessness. We may, through our evangelism, mediate to them "a transcendent and eschatological salvation, which indeed has its beginning in this life but which is fulfilled in eternity" (EN 27; cf Memorandum 1982:463).

However, if the offer of all this gets center-stage attention in our evangelism, the gospel is degraded to a consumer product. It has to be emphasized, therefore, that the personal enjoyment of salvation never becomes the central theme in biblical conversion stories (cf Barth 1962:561-614). Where Christians perceive themselves as those enjoying an indescribably magnificent private good fortune (:567f), Christ is easily reduced to little more than the "Disposer and Distributor" of special blessings (:595f) and evangelism to an enterprise that fosters the pursuit of pious self-centredness (:572). Not that the enjoyment of salvation is wrong, unimportant, or unbiblical; even so, it is almost incidental and secondary (:572, 593). It is not simply to *receive* life that people are called to become Christians, but rather to *give* life.

11. *Evangelism is not proselytism* (cf Löffler 1977a:340). At the founding of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei* (1622) it was explicitly stated that the interest of the new organization would be focused, not on "non-Christians", but on "non-Catholics"; indeed, until around 1830 its spotlight was on Protestant Europe (Glazik 1984a:29f). Only too often, then, evangelism has been used as means of reconquering lost ecclesiastical influence, in Catholicism *and*

Protestantism. Particularly in contexts where the church (or "denomination") is viewed as made up of individuals who have made a free choice to join it, there is an implicit (and sometimes explicit) suggestion that competition is necessary. Thus people in the surrounding community, whether they belong to other churches or not, are perceived as "prospects" to be won. Much of this reflects the tendency toward empire-building—the church "cannot resist the temptation to open yet another branch office in an area that looks promising" (Spong 1982:13). Whether intended or not, this mentality suggests that it is not by grace, but by becoming adherents of our denomination, that people will be saved.

12. *Evangelism is not the same as church extension.* During the period that the adage "no salvation outside the (Catholic) Church" was in vogue, this was the quintessence of evangelism. It is the view that lies behind the encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pope Pius XI (1926). Evangelism meant "adding to the Catholic Church the greatest number of newly-baptized"; this happened in stages, via the catechumenate, the probation period, and the introduction to the liturgical life of the church. Evangelism became the expansion of the church through increased membership. Conversion was a numerical affair. Success in evangelism was measured by counting the numbers of baptisms, of confessions, and of communions (Shorter 1972:2).

Also in Protestantism evangelism was, by and large, understood as church extension. In recent years this has been true especially of the Church Growth Movement. McGavran pleads for "gospel-proclaiming, sinner-converting, church-multiplying evangelism" (1983:71; cf 21). Moreover, the purpose of church growth is further church growth. Those who have become church members should win others for church membership; this is a main thrust, perhaps *the* main thrust of the New Testament (McGavran 1980:426). A "theology of harvest" has to take priority over a "theology of seed-sowing" (:26-30). Numerical or quantitative growth should have first priority in a world where three billion people are not Christian. "Resistant" populations constitute a problem for this approach, of course. Still, McGavran does not plead for complete withdrawal from fields of low receptivity; he adds, however, that these fields should be occupied lightly and that evangelists should concentrate on "winnable" populations (:262).

This kind of thinking distorts evangelism, however, not least since reasons why people join the church may vary greatly and may often have little to do with commitment to what the church is supposed to stand for. A talk-alike, think-alike, look-alike congregation (Armstrong 1981:26) may reflect the prevailing culture and be a club for religious folklore rather than an alternative community in a hostile or compromised environment. This emerges particularly in situations where church membership is declining and the church, reluctantly, decides that, if it is to stay in business, it had better resign itself to an evangelistic campaign. The focus in evangelism should, however, not be on the *church* but on the irrupting *reign of God* (cf Snyder 1983:11, 29).

13. *To distinguish between evangelism and membership recruitment is not to suggest, though, that they are disconnected* (Watson 1983a:71). After all, "it is at

the heart of the Christian mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human situation" (ME 25). We cannot be indifferent to numbers, for God is "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). AG 6 therefore rightly includes church planting and growth in its definition of the goal of mission. The monomaniac rejection of the empirical church in Hoekendijkian and similar theologies is totally inappropriate. Without the church there can be no evangelism or mission.

Still, as a measure of how effectively and how responsibly a church has evangelized, membership statistics are less helpful (Watson 1983a:73). As a matter of fact, authentic and costly evangelism may cause a church's membership to decline rather than increase. Numerical growth is, therefore, in a sense nothing more than a byproduct when the church is true to its deepest calling. Of greater importance is organic and incarnational growth.

14. *In evangelism, "only people can be addressed and only people can respond",* as WCC moderator M. M. Thomas said in Nairobi (in WCC 1976:233). Authentic evangelism thus doubtless has a personal dimension. The gospel is "the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship" (ME 10). It is inaccurate to argue—as often happens—that individualism is simply an "invention" of the West. Rather, the Christian gospel of necessity emphasizes personal responsibility and personal decision; therefore individualism in Western culture is primarily a fruit of the Christian mission. Rosenkranz (1977:407, drawing on E.E. Hölscher and H. Gollwitzer) argues that this constitutes the only *real* revolution in the structure of human nature, since it introduced the doctrine of the individual worth of every human being; thus, if people today think and act as free and responsible individuals— a way of thinking that diametrically opposes ancient thought and practice—it is because of the influence of the gospel.

Since only persons—individuals—can respond to the gospel, it is confusing the issue to talk of "prophetic evangelism" as the calling of "societies and nations to repentance and conversion" (Watson 1983b:7) or to say that the "call to conversion, as a call to repentance and obedience, should also be addressed to nations, groups and families" (ME 12). Principalities and powers, governments and nations cannot come to faith—only individuals can. So, even if this ministry is necessary and is an integral part of mission, it is not, strictly speaking, evangelism.

Even so, the gospel is not individualistic. Modern individualism is, to a large extent, a perversion of the Christian faith's understanding of the centrality and responsibility of the individual. In the wake of the Enlightenment, and because of its teachings, individuals have become isolated from the community which gave them birth. In evangelism, this trend has been prominent particularly since the ministry of D. L. Moody (1837-1899). For him, sin was exclusively an individual affair, with the sinner standing alone before God—a sinner who, in the democratic United States of Moody's time, was perfectly able to make up his or her mind and gain victory over sin (cf Marsden 1980:37). Since the individual was understood to be the basic unit in the work of salvation, the emphasis,

increasingly, was on the saving of individual *souls*. And biblical sayings such as Matthew 16:26, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (King James Version) were interpreted as pointing in this direction. People are, however, never isolated individuals. They are social beings, who can never be severed from the network of relationships in which they exist. And the individual's conversion touches all these relationships. Christian Keysser (1980) recognized this when, during his years in Papua New Guinea, he always emphasized the need for the social group to be involved in the conversion of every individual.

15. *Authentic evangelism is always contextual* (Costas 1989:passim). An evangelism which separates people from their context views the world not as a challenge but as a hindrance, devalues history, and has eyes only for the "spiritual" or "nonmaterial aspects of life" (H. Lindsell, quoted in Scott 1980:94), is spurious. The same is true of an evangelism which couches conversion only in micro-ethical terms, such as regular church attendance, abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, and daily bible reading and prayer (cf Wagner 1979:3; for a critique of this view, cf Scott 1980:156f; 220-222), or limits the evangelistic message to an offer of release from loneliness, peace of mind, and success in what we undertake (cf Scott 1980:208f). In fact, much so-called evangelism, it appears, aims at satisfying rather than transforming people. In the West (at least in the past) Christianity used to be identified with social respectability. Churches had public prestige going for them. In this, evangelism came to their aid: "Dominant community pressure made church membership not only a necessity but also the mark of civilization, good manners and decent living" (Spong 1982:12). Much of this mentality had been exported to Africa and other parts of the Third World. The church was for the upwardly mobile; to become a Christian meant to identify with the ethos and value system of the aspiring middle class.

All of this is a far cry from authentic evangelism. It led to a conversion to the predominant *culture*, not to the Christ of the gospels. In much of the "electronic church" materialism is baptized. The Jesus of revivalism appears to have more in common with the Chamber of Commerce and the entertainment world than with a simple cave in Bethlehem or a rugged cross on a barren hill (Armstrong 1981:22, 41, 49). Preachers steer clear of controversial social issues and concentrate on those personal sins of which most of their enthusiastic listeners are not guilty. However, what criterion decides that racism and structural injustice are social issues but pornography and abortion personal? Why is politics shunned and declared to fall outside of the competence of the evangelist, except when it favors the position of the privileged in society? How is it that preachers who appear to have an interest only in the otherworldly destiny of their listeners can be so thoroughly worldly in their ethos and methods?

Of course, to those who are experiencing personal tragedy, emptiness, loneliness, estrangement, and meaninglessness the gospel *does* come as peace, comfort, fullness, and joy. But the gospel offers this only within the context of it being a word about the lordship of Christ in all realms of life, an authoritative word of hope that the world as we know it will not always be the way it is.

16. *Because of this, evangelism cannot be divorced from the preaching and practicing of justice*. This is the flaw in the view according to which evangelism is given absolute priority over social involvement, or where evangelism is separated from justice, even if it is maintained that, together with social justice, it constitutes "mission". If we understand evangelism not just as recruiting church members, not just as offering individual souls eternal salvation, and not as seeking to hasten the return of Christ, it cannot be divorced from the larger mission of the church. And even if we include recruiting of new members and offering eternal salvation in the aim of mission, the question remains: What are people becoming church members *for*? What are individuals being saved *for*?

In our reflections on Matthew's use of the term "disciple" (chapter 2), it has been suggested that to become a disciple of Jesus includes a whole range of commitments. Primarily, it means accepting a commitment to Jesus and to God's reign. At its heart, Jesus' invitation to people to follow him and become his disciples is asking people whom they want to serve. Evangelism is, therefore, a call to *service*. This is not to be contrasted with the blessings—including eternal blessings—which the new convert will receive; as a matter of fact, it is pointless to play the one perspective out against the other. Still, since it is the perspective on eternal bliss that has usually been emphasized, it is high time that the perspective of service to the kingdom be stressed as forcefully. An evangelistic invitation oriented toward discipleship, says Scott,

> will include a call to join the living Lord in the work of his kingdom. It will direct attention to the aspirations of ordinary men and women in society, their dreams of justice, security, full stomachs, human dignity, and opportunities for their children. It will forthrightly name the "principalities and powers" opposed to the Kingdom (1980:212).

Evangelism, then, means enlisting people for the reign of God, liberating them from themselves, their sins, and their entanglements, so that they will be free for God and neighbor. It calls individuals to a life of openness, vulnerability, wholeness, and love (cf Spong 1982:15; Snyder 1983:146). To win people to Jesus is to win their allegiance to God's priorities. God wills not only that we be rescued from hell and redeemed for heaven, but also that within us—and through our ministry also in society around us—the "fullness of Christ" be re-created, the image of God be restored in our lives and relationships. LC 4 puts it well:

> In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community.

Evangelism, then, is calling people to mission.

17. *Evangelism is not a mechanism to hasten the return of Christ, as some suggest* (for example Johnston 1978:52). The ushering in of the *eschaton* has been an important missionary motif since the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Agencies like the China Inland Mission (Hudson Taylor) and the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (Grattan Guinness) were formed because their founders believed—on the basis of a biblicist interpretation of Matthew 24:14—that the return of Christ was dependent on the completion of the proclamation of the gospel to all people worldwide (cf Beaver 1961). Johnson (1988) traces the waxing enthusiasm, particularly between 1887 and 1893, for the idea of the evangelization of the entire world before the year 1900 (:24-44), but also the decline after 1893, when it had become clear that the goal was unattainable (:45-50). Most of the leading figures in the movement, such as A. T. Pierson, A. B. Simpson, and H. Grattan Guinness, defined evangelism strictly in individualistic and verbalistic categories and shunned any idea of missionaries getting involved in other projects or in the structures of society (:53-55). The mere preaching of the word, it was believed, would bring the world's millions into the fold of the redeemed and hasten Christ's second coming.

Barrett and Reapsome (1988) calculate that there have, in fact, been 788 "global plans" to evangelize the world since the beginning of the Christian era, and that most of these were intimately linked to eschatological expectations. The slogan, "the evangelization of the world in this generation", popularized by John R. Mott around the beginning of the twentieth century, did not specifically interpret evangelism as ushering in the parousia, but certainly had apocalyptic overtones. Of the almost 800 plans identified by Barrett and Reapsome, only some 250 were still alive as of 1988. But as the third millennium draws nearer, more and more new plans are being launched, and virtually all of them link evangelism with the parousia. Frequently expectations are expressed in premillennialist terms. Contemporary evangelical literature vibrates with contributions on "world evangelization before the year 2000". Modern technologies, notably computers, are utilized not only to assess the gigantic dimensions of the task, but also to devise effective strategies. One such plan, DAWN (Discipling A Whole Nation), proceeds from the premise that we need a church for every thousand people in order to evangelize the world effectively; since there will be about seven billion people by the year 2000, the DAWN strategy is to facilitate the planting of churches so as to reach a total of seven million by the end of the century (Montgomery 1989). Various conferences devote their attention to a similar goal. In 1980 a "World Consultation on Frontier Missions" was held in Edinburgh; it formulated its goal as "A Church for Every People by the Year 2000". A similar conference was held in Sao Paulo in 1987, with a focus largely, but not exclusively, on Latin America. In January 1989 a "Global Consultation on World Evangelization by AD 2000 and Beyond" convened in Singapore. And the program of Lausanne II, the conference of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization held in Manila in July 1989, included an "AD 2000 Track".[17]

As Glasser (1989) has argued, however, this entire project, and its fascination with the year 2000, is highly questionable. It proceeds from the doubtful assumptions that the world economy will become ever more buoyant, that parachurch income will skyrocket, and that the main bearers of mission in the coming decades will still be Western-type mission agencies (:6). More impor-

tant, however, are the theological flaws in this philosophy, particularly that this kind of evangelism appears deliberately to ignore the growing poverty and injustice in the world.

18. *Evangelism is not only verbal proclamation* (as Watson 1983b:6f suggests; cf McGavran 1983:190). Even so, evangelism does have an inescapable verbal dimension. In a society marked by relativism and agnosticism it is necessary to name the Name of the One in whom we believe. Christians are challenged to give an account of the hope that is in them (cf 1 Pet 3:15); their lives are not sufficiently transparent for others to be able to recognize whence that hope comes.

There is no single way to witness to Christ, however. The word may therefore never be divorced from the deed, the example, the "Christian presence", the witness of life. It is the "Word made flesh" that is the gospel. The deed without the word is dumb; the word without the deed is empty. Words interpret deeds and deeds validate words, which does not mean that every deed must have a word attached to it, nor every word a deed (Newbigin 1982:146-149; Jongeneel 1986:8).

If we now, finally, attempt a definition of evangelism, it is important that we should not delineate the content of our evangelism too sharply, too precisely, and too self-confidently (R. Jones, in NIE 1980:28). We cannot capture the evangel and package it in four or five "principles". There is no universally applicable master plan for evangelism, no definitive list of truths people only have to embrace in order to be saved. We may never limit the gospel to our understanding of God and of salvation. We can only witness in humble boldness and bold humility to our understanding of that gospel. Still, "as we humbly but joyfully reflect God's reconciling love for all humanity, in friendship and mutual respect, the Holy Spirit uses our witness and service to make God known" (NIE 1980:3).

In awareness of the essentially preliminary nature of our evangelistic ministry, yet at the same time conscious of the inescapable necessity to be involved in this ministry, we may, then, summarize evangelism as that dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Savior and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God's purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.

MISSION AS CONTEXTUALIZATION

The Genesis of Contextual Theology

The word "contextualization" was first coined in the early 1970s, in the circles of the Theological Education Fund, with a view particularly to the task of the education and formation of people for the church's ministry (cf Ukpong

1987:163). It soon caught on and became a blanket term for a variety of theological models. Ukpong (1987:163-168; cf Schreiter 1985:6-16; Waldenfels 1987) identifies two major types of contextual theology, namely, the indigenization model and the socio-economic model. Each of these can again be divided into two subtypes: the indigenization motif presents itself either as a translation or as an inculturation model; the socio-economic pattern of contextualization can be evolutionary (political theology and the theology of development) or revolutionary (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc). In what follows, this broad definition of contextual theology will be used and its nature and qualities as manifestation of a new paradigm highlighted. I shall, however, qualify Ukpong's categorization somewhat. In my view, only the inculturation model in the first type and only the revolutionary model in the second qualify as contextual theologies proper. In two subsequent sections liberation theology and inculturation will be reviewed.

A basic argument of this book has been that, from the very beginning, the missionary message of the Christian church incarnated itself in the life and world of those who had embraced it. It is, however, only fairly recently that this essentially contextual nature of the faith has been recognized. For many centuries every deviation from what any group declared to be the orthodox faith was viewed in terms of heterodoxy, even heresy. This was the case particularly after the Christian church became established in the Roman Empire. Arianism, Donatism, Pelagianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and numerous similar movements were all regarded as doctrinally heterodox and their adherents excommunicated, persecuted, or banned. The role of cultural, political, and social factors in the genesis of such movements was not recognized. The same happened at the occasion of the Great Schism in the year 1054; henceforth, the Eastern and Western churches would declare each other to be theologically unorthodox. History repeated itself in the sixteenth century when, after the Reformation, Protestants and Catholics denied each other the epithet "Christian". In subsequent centuries the formulations of the Council of Trent and the various Protestant confessions were employed as shibboleths to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable creedal formulations.

Under the influence of the Greek spirit ideas and principles were considered to be prior to and more important than their "application". Such an application was both a second and a secondary step and served to confirm and legitimize the idea or principle, which was understood to be both suprahistorical and supracultural. Churches arrogated to themselves the right to determine what the "objective" truth of the Bible was and to direct the application of this timeless truth to the everyday life of believers. With the advent of the Enlightenment this approach received a new lease of life. In the Kantian paradigm, for instance, "pure" or "theoretical" reason was superior to "practical reason".

The Baconian view gave birth to a complementary approach. Here, the earlier deductive thinking made way for an inductive or empirical method in science. Instead of starting from classically derived principles and theories one now started with observation. In ecclesial and theological circles where this method was adopted (and which, in the course of time, was termed liberal)

creeds and dogmas were no longer judged on the basis of their conformity to eternal truth but in terms of their usefulness (cf Stackhouse 1988:92f). "Churches", in the sense of bodies which claim an ultimate and uncontestable correspondence between their own teachings and the divine revelation, became "denominations", bodies of like-minded individuals, each of which magnani- mously conceded to others the right to exist and practice its faith in the way it chooses. Denominations coexisted peacefully with one another. Debates no longer centered around what was *true*, but around what were *practically* (more specifically, *pragmatically*) the right things to do. The Christian faith was pre- ferred not because it was the only true religion, but because it was manifestly the best (cf Dennis 1897, 1899, 1906).

Both these approaches were, each in its own way, attempts at salvaging theology as "science". For both, theology remained rational knowledge. Both were responses to the challenge of the Enlightenment and, more particularly, to the growing awareness of the "ugly ditch" (G.E. Lessing) that had opened between the time and culture of the Bible and the fundamentally different modern world. Each experienced ongoing history as a threat, since the distance between the then and the now was increasingly becoming unbridgeable. At the same time, no effort was spared to bridge the "ugly ditch". Indefatigably biblical scholars researched the ancient texts in an attempt to uncover the mind of the author and, in this way, put the modern reader in the immediate company of the original author, as it were, so that he or she may hear the author unham- pered by the events of the intervening history. In true Enlightenment fashion, science was understood to be cumulative; if scholars could only persist hard enough and amass more and more data, they would reach the point where the original text and the intention of the original author would be established beyond any reasonable doubt.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was one of the first theologians to realize that something was fundamentally wrong with this entire modus oper- andi. He interpreted the Protestant Reformation not as an attempt at restoring the primitive or apostolic church. What has once been cannot simply be brought back in a later period. The Christian church is always in the process of *becoming*; the church of the present is both the product of the past and the seed of the future. For this reason, theology must not be pursued as an attempt at recon- structing the pristine past and its truths; rather, theology is a reflection on the church's own life and experience (for references, cf Gerrish 1984:194-196, 201).

Thus Schleiermacher pioneered the view that all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it had evolved. There never was a "pure" message, supracultural and suprahistorical. It was impossible to pene- trate to a residue of Christian faith that was not already, in a sense, interpre- tation. Every text, it was now recognized, had a peculiar *Sitz im Leben*, which the scholar had to determine, particularly with the aid of form criticism. During the nineteenth century and, more particularly, in the twentieth, the recognition of the way in which theology was conditioned by its environment became the received view in critical theological circles. Chapters 1 to 4 of this study have shown that this was true even of the earliest New Testament writings them- selves.

Neither Schleiermacher nor the form critics, such as Bultmann, were able to execute the next step, however. They did not realize that their own interpretations were as parochial and as conditioned by their context as those they were criticizing. Their explications of the biblical texts thus, unconsciously, served to legitimize predetermined views and positions. Martin (1987:379f) explains the problem in respect to professional theologians such as those who are members of the Society for New Testament Studies. In conducting its "business", the SNTS preserves a fair degree of equilibrium, with only minor fluctuations, and is happy with the academic standards it is maintaining. This is so mainly because of its composition: its membership is predominantly male and white. If, however, the SNTS would admit to its ranks a large membership of feminist interpreters, of Jewish scholars, or of liberation theology exponents, this would gradually introduce a major flux in the system.

Where this state of affairs is recognized, scholars may succeed in moving beyond the important accomplishments of the historical-critical method and of the form and redaction critics of the middle twentieth century. Paul Ricoeur and other recent literary critics have, in a great variety of ways, advanced the view that every text is an interpreted text and that, in a sense, the reader "creates" the text when she or he reads it. The text is not only "out there", waiting to be interpreted; the text "becomes" as we engage with it. And yet, even this new hermeneutic approach is not going far enough. Interpreting a text is not only a literary exercise; it is also a social, economic, and political exercise. Our entire context comes into play when we interpret a biblical text. One therefore has to concede that *all* theology (or sociology, political theory, etc) is, by its very nature, contextual.

The real breakthrough in this respect came with the birth of Third-World theologies in their various forms. This was perceived to be so pivotal an event that Segundo (1976) referred to it as "the liberation of theology". Contextual theology truly represents a paradigm shift in theological thinking (cf Frostin 1988:1-26).

The Epistemological Break

Contextual theologies claim that they constitute an epistemological break when compared with traditional theologies. Whereas, at least since the time of Constantine, theology was conducted *from above* as an elitist enterprise (except in the case of minority Christian communities, commonly referred to as sects), its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) was *philosophy*, and its main interlocutor the *educated non-believer*, contextual theology is theology *"from below"*, "from the underside of history", its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) is the *social sciences*, and its main interlocutor the *poor* or the *culturally marginalized* (cf also Frostin 1988:6f).

Equally important in the new epistemology is the emphasis on the priority of praxis. Theology, says Gutiérrez, is "critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word of God" (1988:xxix) or "critical reflection on the word of God received in the church" (:xxxiii). Sergio Torres explains the difference between the traditional Western epistemology and the emerging epistemology in the following way:

The traditional way of knowing considers the truth as the conformity of the mind to a given object, a part of Greek influence in the western philosophical tradition. Such a concept of truth only conforms to and legitimizes the world as it now exists. But there is another way of knowing the truth—a dialectical one. In this case, the world is not a static object that the human mind confronts and attempts to understand; rather, the world is an unfinished project being built. Knowledge is not the conformity of the mind to the given, but an immersion in this process of transformation and construction of a new world (in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:5).

The following features of the new epistemology emerge from the above programmatic statement:

First, there is a profound suspicion that not only Western science and Western philosophy, but also Western theology, whether conservative or liberal, in spite of (or because of?) their claim that knowledge was neutral, were actually designed to serve the interests of the West, more particularly to legitimize "the world as it now exists". Nietzsche's "hermeneutics of suspicion" is here radicalized and applied particularly to Western scholarship in all its forms since it has developed into a rationale for imperialistic domination (cf Segundo 1976). Even where this has happened unintentionally, or "innocently", it is time to say farewell to this kind of innocence (cf the title of Boesak 1977), since it is nothing but pseudo-innocence (see also Frostin 1988:151-169).

Second, the new epistemology refuses to endorse the idea of the world as a static object which only has to be *explained*. Like Marx, it says, "The philosophers have only tried to interpret the world; the point, however, is to change it". It is history and the *human and physical* world that have to be taken seriously, not metahistory or metaphysics.

Implicit in Torres's statement, and worked out in great detail by many contextual theologians is, third, an emphasis on *commitment* as "the first act of theology" (Torres and Fabella 1978:269)—more specifically, commitment to the poor and marginalized. The point of departure is therefore orthopraxis, not orthodoxy. Orthopraxis, says Lamb,

> aims at transforming human history, redeeming it through a knowledge born of subject-empowering, life-giving love, which heals the biases needlessly victimizing millions of our brothers and sisters. *Vox victimarum vox Dei*. The cries of the victims are the voice of God. To the extent that those cries are not heard above the din of our political, cultural, economic, social, and ecclesial celebrations or bickerings, we have already begun a descent into hell (1982:22f).

Fourth, in this paradigm the theologian can no longer be "a lonely bird on the rooftop" (Barth 1933:40), who surveys and evaluates this world and its agony; he or she can only theologize credibly if it is done *with* those who suffer.

Fifth, then, the emphasis is on *doing* theology. The universal claim of the

hermeneutic of language has to be challenged by a hermeneutic of the deed, since doing is more important than knowing or speaking. In the Scriptures it is the doers who are blessed (cf Míguez Bonino 1975:27-41). There is, in fact, "no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of transforming the world through participation in history" (:88).

Last, these priorities are worked out in contextual theology by means of a hermeneutical circle (or, better, circulation) (cf Segundo 1976:7-38). The circulation begins with experience, with praxis, which, in the case of most people in the Third World or those on the periphery of power in the First World and the Second World, is an experience of marginalization. Allan Boesak says, "The black experience provides the framework within which blacks understand the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. No more, no less" (1977:16). The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) concurs: "The experience of the Third World as a source of theology must be taken seriously" (Fabella and Torres 1983:200).

From praxis or experience the hermeneutic circulation proceeds to reflection as a second (not a secondary—cf Gutiérrez 1988:xxxiii) act of theology. The traditional sequence, in which *theoria* is elevated over praxis, is here turned upside down. This does not, of course, imply a rejection of *theoria*. Ideally, there should be a dialectic relationship between theory and praxis. "Faith and the concrete, historical mission of the church are mutually dependent" (Rütti 1972:240 — my translation). The relationship between theory and praxis is not one of subject to object, but one of intersubjectivity (cf Nel 1988:184). Where this occurs, contextual theology is a clear example of the paradigm that is emerging in all disciplines. Traditionally, thought and reason were firmly placed on the one side and being and action on the other. But, as Kuhn (1970) has argued, in the new paradigm thought is no longer conceived to be prior to being or reason to action; rather, they stand and fall together (cf Lugg 1987:179-181). In the best of contextual theologies it is therefore no longer possible to juxtapose theory and praxis, orthodoxy and orthopraxis: "Orthopraxis and orthodoxy need one another, and each is adversely affected when sight is lost of the other" (Gutiérrez 1988:xxxiv). Or as Samuel Rayan puts it: "In our methodology, practice and theory, action and reflection, discussion and prayer, movement and silence, social analysis and religious hermeneutics, involvement and contemplation, constitute a single process" (quoted in Fabella and Torres 1983:xvii).

The Ambiguities of Contextualization

There can be no doubt that the contextualization project is essentially legitimate, given the situation in which many contextual theologians find themselves. "The theologians of liberation", says Dapper (1979:92 — my translation), "live in an emergency situation; they are involved in mission, speak, preach, and act in an emergency situation. They no longer have any need of deliberating what should happen in case of an emergency". In light of this, "there is no socially and politically neutral theology; in the struggle for life and against death, theology must take sides" (Míguez Bonino 1980:1155).

Still, some ambiguities remain, particularly insofar as there is a tendency in

contextual theology to overreact in one of the two manners identified in chapter 11 of this study—in this case, to make a clean break with the past and deny continuity with one's theological and ecclesial ancestry. Let me try to explain.

1. *Mission as contextualization is an affirmation that God has turned toward the world* (cf the title of Schmitz 1971). As soon as we talk about God, the world as theater of his activity is already included in the discussion (Hoekendijk 1967a:344). The historical world situation is not merely an exterior condition for the church's mission; rather, it ought to be incorporated as a constitutive element into our understanding of mission, its aim and its organization (Rütti 1972:231). Such a posture is in full accord with Jesus' understanding of his mission, as reflected in our gospels; he did not soar off into heavenly heights but immersed himself into the altogether real circumstances of the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed (cf Lk 4:18f). Today, too, Christ is where the hungry and the sick are, the exploited and the marginalized. The power of his resurrection propels human history toward the end, under the banner "Behold, I make all things new!" (Rev 21:5). Like its Lord, the church-in-mission must take sides, *for* life and against death, *for* justice and against oppression.

We therefore have to adopt a firm stand against every attempt at a non- or under-contextualized approach in mission. As Manfred Linz (1964) has illustrated in his investigation into German sermons on four so-called "missionary texts", many sermons ignore the world completely, even where the biblical text clearly centers on the world. The sermons only serve to strengthen the faith of the listeners and create in them some interest for a mission understood as calling people out of the world. Sin and evil in the world render the situation so hopeless that all we can do is build dikes against them and their destructive effects. But this kind of thinking spawns pious self-sufficiency, hypocrisy, a retreat from responsibility toward other people and toward society, and a condescending offer of the salvation we already possess to the "poor, benighted heathen" (cf Günther 1967:21f).

To see an antithesis between the glorification of God and the search for a truly human life on earth is, however, contrary to the gospel. Much talk about "leaving everything to God" is nothing but an escape from our responsibilities in the world. Here, a docetic Christology reigns supreme. Christ's incarnation is not taken seriously. The humanity of Christ is a cloak behind which the hidden God alone deals with us (Wiedenmann 1965:199).

This does not mean that God is to be identified with the historical process. Where this happens, God's will and power too easily become identified with the will and power of Christians and with the social processes they initiate. It is difficult, however, if not impossible, says Niebuhr (1959:9f) to fit Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, and others into a system determined by social factors; there is in Christianity a revolutionary and creative strain which does not allow it to be reduced to a human, albeit Christian, project. The "new creation" Paul talks about irrupts not so much because of Christian involvement in history; it comes about through Christ's work of reconciliation (cf 2 Cor 5:17), that is, primarily through God's intervention (see also Günther 1967:20). Some duality between God and the world remains. Precisely this creates the "identity-involve-

ment dilemma" to which Moltmann (1975:1; cf also Küng 1984:70-75) refers; it is of the essence of the Christian faith that, from its birth, it again and again had to seek, on the one hand, how to be relevant to and involved in the world and, on the other, how to maintain its identity in Christ. These two are never unrelated; neither are they the same. Christians find their *identity* in the cross of Christ, which separates them from superstition and unbelief but also from every other religion and ideology; they find their *relevance* in the hope for the reign of the Crucified One by taking their stand resolutely with those who suffer and are oppressed and by mediating hope for liberation and salvation to them (Moltmann 1975:4).

2. *Mission as contextualization involves the construction of a variety of "local theologies"* (cf Schreiter 1985). Hiebert (1987:104-106) refers to the period from 1800 to 1950 as the "era of noncontextualization" as far as Protestant missions are concerned. It was hardly any different in Catholic missions. In each case theology (singular) had been defined once and for all and now simply had to be "indigenized" in Third World cultures, without, however, surrendering any of its essence. Western theology had *universal* validity, not least since it was the *dominant* theology (cf Frostin 1985:141; 1988:23; Nolan 1988:15). The Christian faith was based on eternal, unalterable truth, which had already been stated in its final form, for instance in ecclesiastical confessions and policies. Ostensibly, of course, Protestants did not ascribe the same status to their traditions and creeds as they did to Scripture. Even so, the sixteenth-century Protestant confessions were soon treated as universals, valid in all times and settings and, through the missionary enterprise, exported in their unaltered — and unaltera-ble — forms to the younger churches in the Third World (cf Conn 1983:17).

Contextualization, on the other hand, suggests the experimental and contin-gent nature of all theology. Contextual theologians therefore, rightly, refrain from writing "systematic theologies" where everything fits into an all-encom-passing and eternally valid system (cf Míguez Bonino 1980:1154). We need an experimental theology in which an ongoing dialogue is taking place between text and context, a theology which, in the nature of the case, remains provisional and hypothetical (Rütti 1972:244-249).

This should not, however, lead to an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies. This danger — the danger of *relativism* — is present not only in the Third World but also, for instance, in Western historical-critical biblical scholarship, where one some-times gets the impression that each scriptural text is viewed as being so deeply shaped by its context that it actually constitutes an isolated theological world in itself. Such historicism and unbridled relativism, however, is inadmissible. There *are* faith traditions which all Christians share and which should be respected and preserved. We therefore — along with affirming the essentially contextual nature of all theology — also have to affirm the universal and context-transcending dimensions of theology. The purely contingent perspectives in theology need to be counterbalanced by an emphasis on the metatheological perspectives (for a discussion of the difference between and interrelatedness of these perspectives in theology and culture, cf Kraft 1981:291-300).

The best contextual theologies indeed hold on to this dialectic relationship. In the new introduction to *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez not only stresses his union with and allegiance to the Catholic Church worldwide, but also emphasizes that particularity does not mean isolation and that any theology is a discourse about a universal message (1988:xxxvi). Every *theologia localis* should therefore challenge and fecundate the *theologia oecumenica*, and the latter, similarly, enrich and broaden the perspective of the former. Naturally, this does not only mean that Third-World Christians should study Western theology, but also that First-World Christians should study Third-World theologies. The former has always been taken for granted; the latter, however, not. Still, this is changing (even if it is happening too slowly—cf Frostin 1988:24). A generation or so ago, no theological institution in the West would have deemed it necessary to offer courses on theological developments in the Third World; today more and more of them have integrated such courses into their curricula—not as interesting oddities but as an essential dimension of theological education.

3. *There is not only the danger of relativism, where each context forges its own theology, tailor-made for that specific context, but also the danger of absolutism of contextualism.* This is, in fact, what has happened in Western missionary outreach where theology, contextualized in the West, was in essence elevated to gospel status and exported to other continents as a package deal. Contextualism thus means universalizing one's own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it. If Western theology has not been immune to this tendency, neither are Third-World contextual theologies. A new imperialism in theology then simply replaces the old. During the Melbourne Conference of CWME (1980), for instance, Latin American spokespersons were inclined to promulgate their peculiar brand of contextual theology as having universal validity. Delegates from other Third-World situations did not always take kindly to this. The Christian Conference of Asia, for instance, argued that it would be inappropriate if Latin American liberation theology were simply to

> take the place of western theology in Asia. Not because we do not stand in need of liberation. Simply because the liberation we must have is from our captivities, and for such liberation we need other perspectives and other sensitivities.[18]

4. *We have to look at this entire issue from yet another angle, that of "reading the signs of the times", an expression that has invaded contemporary ecclesiastical language* (cf Gómez 1989:365). There can be no doubt that such an enterprise has profound validity. Like the other Semitic religions, it is innate to Christianity to take history seriously as the arena of God's activity—as has also been argued above. Such an affirmation then begs the question *how* we are to interpret God's action in history and so learn to commit ourselves to participation in this. Which are the *signs* in human history that reveal God's will and God's presence? How do we identify God's *vestigia*, God's footprints in the world? This is an

enterprise fraught with danger on all sides, but one of which we cannot absolve ourselves (cf Berkhof 1966:197-205; Gómez 1989:passim).

The first and perhaps most vexing problem is that, with the benefit of hindsight, we can now establish that the signs of the times have often been misread in the past. There was a time when the "benevolent colonialism" of the West was widely viewed—to some extent even by the colonized—as a sign of God's providential intervention in history. For many decades the policy of separate development—apartheid—was hailed by serious Christians in South Africa as a just and God-willed solution to that country's problems. The same was true of Nationalism Socialism in Germany, where the *Deutsche Wende* ("German turning point") of 1933 was applauded unreservedly by many Christians as proof of divine intervention and favor. In the 1960s secularism was similarly embraced by Mesthene, Harvey Cox, van Leeuwen, and many others. Again, many Christians saw political events and developments in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and other socialist countries as divine signs of the times (one may, for instance, refer to the fascination with Cuba among members of a Nicaraguan community of *campesinos*, as it emerges from Cardenal 1976:49, 64). Today, all of these signs of the times have been discredited, to the point of being an acute embarrassment to those who hailed them so enthusiastically. Compassion and commitment, apparently, are no guarantee that one will not produce bad sociology, practice poor politics, and pursue debatable historical analysis (cf Stackhouse 1988:95).

The problem seems to be that Christians tend to sacralize "the sociological forces of history that are dominant at any particular time, regarding them as inexorable works of providence and even of redemption" (Knapp 1977:161). Examples abound. Speaking at the CWME Conference in Melbourne (1980), Julia Esquivel saw in the victory of the people of Nicaragua a "glorious experience of the resurrection of Christ"; Israel *en route* from Egyptian slavery "may for us today mean Zimbabwe, El Salvador, Nicaragua or Guatemala". Again, at the San Antonio Meeting of CWME (1989), it was stated without qualification in Section II.6: "The rising up of the people against injustice is the creative power of God for the people and for the whole world . . . The acts of the people become God's mission for justice through creative power" (WCC 1990:40). Albert Nolan (1988:166) writes in similar vein about the struggle of the South African people against an oppressive system: "The power of the people that is manifested in the struggle is indeed the power of God . . . What the system is up against now is not 'flesh and blood' but the almighty power of God".[19]

The situation is further compounded when exponents of contextualization claim a special or privileged knowledge about God's will and declare those who do not agree with them as suffering from "false consciousness". Their own clairvoyance, on the other hand, equips them with the ability to know exactly not only what God's will is, but also what will happen in the future. With reference to South Africa, for instance, Nolan (1988:144; cf 184) avers "that we can be quite sure that our future will not be oppressive and alienating". The one thing South Africans need not fear "is the kind of take-over whereby

another group of people simply replaces the present rulers and maintains the same type of system. . . That possibility is gone forever".

Contextual theology is right in stressing the need for a "hermeneutic of suspicion", particularly as concerns the religion of the ruling classes. The danger in this is, however, "that suspecting tends to become an end in itself" (Martin 1987:381). Where this happens, theological conversation becomes "less and less a dialogue about the most important questions and more and more a power struggle about who is to be allowed to speak" (Stackhouse 1988:22f). Only those who have access to "privileged knowledge" may interpret the context and are able to say what the gospel for the context is. In this paradigm, anything "non-victims" think is irremediably tainted; if they do not immediately endorse a particular orthopraxis, they are unofficially excommunicated (because of their "false consciousness") and judged to be beyond the pale of God's justice (:102f, 186).

This approach ends up having a low view of the importance of *text*, as coming from outside the context (Stackhouse 1988:38). The very idea that texts can judge contexts is, in fact, methodically doubted (:27). The message of the gospel is not viewed as something that we bring *to* contexts but as something that we derive *from* contexts (:81). "You do not incarnate good news into a situation, good news arises out of the situation", writes Nolan (1988:27); after all, "the prophets did not 'apply' their prophetic message to their times, they had it revealed to them through the signs of the times".

The problem, however, is that "facts" always remain ambiguous. It isn't the facts of history that reveal where God is at work, but the facts illuminated by the gospel. According to GS 4, the church, in reading the signs of the times, is to interpret them *in the light of the gospel* (cf Waldenfels 1987:227). In all major ecclesial traditions—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—people look not only at where they are at the present moment, but also at where they come from. They look for a real, reliable, and universal guide to the truth and justice of God, to apply as criterion in evaluating the context. This means that it is the *gospel* which is the *norma normans*, the "norming norm". Our reading of the context is also a norm, but in a derived sense; it is the *norma normata*, the "normed norm" (Küng 1987:151). Of course, the gospel can only be read from and make sense in our present context, and yet to posit it as criterion means that it may, and often does, critique the context and our reading of it.

There is no doubt, then. We *have* to interpret the "signs of the times". Our interpretations of the signs only have relative validity, however, and they involve tremendous risks. Matthew's parables of the reign of God emphasize the need for watching (Mt 25). Watching flows from not knowing; at the same time, however, watching is a form of interpreting signs (Berkhof 1966:187f), at the risk of interpreting them incorrectly. Our initial assumptions may be erroneous; we could have asked completely inappropriate questions and looked for the wrong clues. And yet, we are not without a compass. We are given some crucial guidelines, some lodestars which indicate God's will and presence in the context. Where people are experiencing and working for justice, freedom, community, reconciliation, unity, and truth, in a spirit of love and selflessness, we

may dare to see God at work. Wherever people are being enslaved, enmity between humans is fanned, and mutual accountability is denied in a spirit of individual or communal self-centrism, we may identify the counter-forces of God's reign at work (cf Rütti 1972:231, 241; Lochman 1986:71). This enables us to take courage and make decisions, even if they remain relative in nature (Berkhof 1966:204), since our judgments do not coincide with God's final judgment (:199f). Even if we are not equipped to decide between absolute right and absolute wrong, we should be able to distinguish between shades of grey and to choose "*for* the light grey and *against* the dark grey" (:200).

5. *In spite of the undeniably crucial nature and role of the context, then, it is not to be taken as the sole and basic authority for theological reflection* (cf also Stackhouse 1988:26). Praxis can mean too many things (:91). So, even if it may be very bad form in some circles today to raise any questions about the absolute priority of praxis (:96), the fact of the matter is that there is no praxis without theory, even where the theory is not spelled out.

For this reason, praxis needs the critical control of theory—in our case, a critical theology of mission, which is dependent upon the context without, however, elevating operational effectiveness to the highest norm. The dynamics of particular contexts always involve "abstract" issues of truth and justice, "abstract" metaphysical-moral visions, and "theoretical" questions of epistemology (Stackhouse 1988:11). All praxis is dependent on "a quite specific, highly schematized and synthetic, social and historical dogma" and demands "a previous, and a rather elaborate, *theoria* about what is true and just" (:96; cf 103). The issue, therefore, is less one of the primacy of praxis over theory than it is one of "which *theoria* is sufficiently true and just that *praxis* ought to be carried out in its service" (:98). There is a legitimate suspicion today of the positing of a doctrinally "orthodox" position and an immutable *depositum fidei*; still, where some such agreed-upon faith tradition is completely absent, contextualization just spawns new sects of fideist politics (:103) and renders theological discourse utterly useless (:102f).

6. *Stackhouse has argued that we are distorting the entire contextualization debate if we interpret it only as a problem of the relationship between praxis and theory.* We also need the dimension of *poiesis*, which he defines as the "imaginative creation or representation of evocative images" (1988:85; cf 104). People do not only need truth (theory) and justice (praxis); they also need beauty, the rich resources of symbol, piety, worship, love, awe, and mystery. Only too often, in the tug-of-war between the priority of truth and the priority of justice, this dimension gets lost. In a profound sense, Niebuhr (1960:75) is correct: "Love demands more than justice"; indeed, it signifies more than truth. Of faith, hope, and love, love is the greatest—but, of course, it may never be divorced from the other two.

7. *The best models of contextual theology succeed in holding together in creative tension theoria, praxis and poiesis*—or, if one wishes, faith, hope, and love. This is another way of defining the missionary nature of the Christian faith, which seeks to combine the three dimensions. Like the other great missionary religions of the world, says Stackhouse, Christianity holds

to some great "unveiling" of ultimate truth believed to be of universal import. This "unveiling" induces a passion for transcendent justice; it frees adherents from localistic practices, from the absolute claims of contextual loyalties, and from conventional social conditions. It induces a certain "homelessness", a divine alienation—a willingness to adopt practices that are more just than what may be found at home, an eagerness to bring all other individuals into contact with this new truth, a desire to carry the universal message to peoples and nations who do not yet know of it and to transform personal identity and whole societies on the basis of its justice (1988:189).

It goes without saying that not every manifestation of contextual theology is guilty of any or all of the overreactions discussed above. Still, they all remain a constant danger to every (legitimate!) attempt at allowing the context to determine the nature and content of theology for that context. With this in mind, we now turn, consecutively, to liberation theology and to inculturation.

MISSION AS LIBERATION

From Development to Liberation

In this section I will continue my reflections on mission as contextualization, sharpening the focus to explore the nature of liberation theology as one of the most dramatic illustrations of the fundamental paradigm shift that is currently taking place in mission thinking and practice.

The theology of liberation is a multifaceted phenomenon, manifesting itself as black, Hispanic and Amerindian theologies in the United States, as Latin American theology, and as feminist theology, South African black theology, and various analogous theological movements in other parts of Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific. One could certainly also categorize the various theologies of *inculturation* as liberation theologies; at the same time, the movements we are discussing here are sufficiently different from the theologies of inculturation, which will be surveyed in the following section, to warrant separate treatment.

For all intents and purposes, all theologies of liberation and of inculturation, except some feminist theologies, are Third-World theologies or theologies of the Third World within the First World. They have their primary focus in EATWOT (the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians), which was founded in Dar es Salaam in 1976. The label Third World was consciously chosen; it expresses the experience of those who feel that they are being treated as third-class people and exploited by the powers of the First and Second Worlds. Most EATWOT members would therefore reject the term "Two-Thirds World", increasingly common in evangelical circles, since it only reflects the geographical size and population of the Third World, not its political and socio-economic position at the "underside of history" (cf Fabella and Torres 1983:xii).

To a significant extent, theologies of liberation, particularly the classical Latin American variety, evolved in protest against the inability in Western church and missionary circles, both Catholic and Protestant, to grapple with

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the problems of systemic injustice. Not that there was no concern for liberation in missionary circles prior to the 1960s! One could, for instance, refer to some individuals and mission agencies mentioned in the earlier parts of this study: Bartolomé de Las Casas; the early Pietist, Basel, and CMS missionaries; and William Wilberforce. By and large, however, churches tended to claim a sort of "extra-territoriality", a position *above* the flux and conflicts of history, merely spelling out gospel principles (cf Míguez Bonino 1981:369). It was agreed that social ills had to remedied, but without challenging societal and political macrostructures. The 1937 conference on "Church, Community, and State", held at Oxford, could still claim that the church's task was supranational, supra-class and supraracial.

Confronted by Nazism in the 1930s, the church in Germany slowly began to realize that it had deluded itself in thinking that the principalities and powers were just "in the heavens"; they were incarnate on earth, as demonic forces within societal structures. As far as the Protestant mission was concerned, it was not until the Tambaram meeting of the IMC (1938), however, that there was a clear focus on the wider structures and a conviction that improvement was not enough; what was called for, was radical renewal (cf van 't Hof 1972:119-123). Since Tambaram, the church's prophetic voice would be heard ever more clearly.

Even so, Tambaram did not usher in an era of intense confrontation with unjust societal and political structure in the Third World. For thirty years or so after the first Church and Society Conference (Stockholm 1925) the focus of the ecumenical movement remained on the social problems of the *West* and the (Marxist) *East*, particularly those caused by the tension between Socialism and free enterprise. In 1955, however, the study project on Christian responsibility toward areas of rapid social change was introduced. The axis had begun to tilt: henceforth North-South relationships would grow in importance (cf Nürnberger 1987a:passim).

In missionary circles it was recognized that neither the traditional charity model nor the model of the "comprehensive approach" (which was initiated in the 1920s and concentrated, in particular, on education, health ministries, and agricultural training) was adequate. A more fundamental strategy was needed. The concept which gave expression to the contemporary challenge was *development*. Governments of the First and the Second Worlds were going to contribute to the solution of the problem of Third-World poverty by pouring their resources into ambitious development projects. Hurriedly, Western churches and mission agencies got onto the bandwagon as well.

For the West, development meant modernization (cf Bragg 1987:22-28). The entire project was, however, based on several flawed assumptions: it supposed that what was good for the West would be good for the Third World also (in this respect, then, it was culturally insensitive); it operated on the Enlightenment presupposition of the absolute distinction between the human subject and the material object and believed that all the Third World stood in need of was technological expertise; it assumed one-way traffic without any reciprocity— development aid and skills moved from Western "donors" to Third-World

"recipients" who had often not even been consulted; and it operated on the assumption that nothing in the rich North needed to change (cf also Nürnberger 1982:233-391; Sundermeier 1986:63f, 72-80; Bragg 1987:23-25). By and large, the project miscarried disastrously. A small elite benefited; the majority of the population found themselves in an even more desperate plight. The rich got richer, the poor poorer. Smith (1968:44) mentions that, before World War II, a Brazilian could buy a Ford car for five sacks of coffee; now (1968) two hundred and six sacks were needed. In spite of (because of?) billions of dollars of development aid, the socio-economic situation in many Third-World countries was getting more desperate by the day. It was not recognized that poverty was not just the result of ignorance, lack of skills, or moral and cultural factors, but rather that it had to do with global structural relationships.

In the 1960s, however—because of the infatuation with secularization and technology—it was virtually impossible to convince Western churches and their leadership that the development model was riddled with inconsistencies. At the Geneva Church and Society Conference (1966) Mesthene and other "technological humanists" could not believe that the salvation of the poor could lie anywhere but in helping them to catch up with the West through modern technology. As late as 1968, the Uppsala WCC Assembly—in spite of its radical political stance on many issues—could devote an entire section (III) to "World Economic and Social Development" and produce a report (cf WCC 1968:45-55) which appears to be almost oblivious of the fact that the entire development philosophy had been challenged fundamentally.

Even in 1973 the German Protestant churches would still produce a memorandum which spoke in glowing terms of the exciting prospects in store for humankind and of the technological possibilities which may help to make the dreams of the whole world come true (reference in Sundermeier 1986:72f). Utopian language was characteristic of the development philosophy. "Development", said Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* 76 (1967), was "the new name for peace". The underdeveloped nations were just late in the race toward welfare; if only they could be helped to run faster and learn quicker the techniques of the advanced countries, the end to their misery was just around the next corner (cf Gómez 1986:37).

Since the 1950s, however, the mood had been changing in Third-World countries themselves, particularly in Latin America. Socio-politically, development was replaced by revolution; ecclesiastically and theologically by *liberation theology*. By the time the term "liberation theology" was coined (in 1968, just before Medellín—cf Gutiérrez 1988:xviii), its main themes had already been around for almost a decade (:xxix, cf Segundo 1986:222, note 243). Soon "liberation" was cropping up everywhere in the ecclesiastical landscape. The opposites we were dealing with were not development and underdevelopment, but domination and dependence, rich and poor, Capitalism and Socialism, oppressors and oppressed (cf Waldenfels 1987:226f; Frostin 1988:7f). Poverty would not be uprooted by pouring technological know-how into the poor countries but by removing the root causes of injustice; and since the West was reluctant to endorse such a project, Third World peoples had to take their destiny into

their own hands and liberate themselves through a revolution. Development implied evolutionary continuity with the past; liberation implied a clean break, a new beginning.

"God's Preferential Option for the Poor"

Modern capitalism, building on the philosophy of Adam Smith, has created a world totally different from anything known before. Two hundred years after the Enlightenment, says Newbigin (1986:110), "we live in a world in which millions of people enjoy a standard of material wealth that few kings and queens could match then". As their wealth accumulated, rich Christians increasingly tended to interpret the biblical sayings on poverty metaphorically. The poor were the "poor in spirit", the ones who recognized their utter dependence upon God. In this sense, then, the rich could also be poor—they could arrogate all biblical promises to themselves.

Gradually, however, the faces of the poor forced themselves on to the attention of the rich Christians of the West in a way that could no longer be ignored or allegorized. The Mexico City meeting of CWME began to notice these faces, but was still to preoccupied with secularization to draw theological consequences from this (cf Dapper 1979:39). After the Geneva Conference of 1966 the climate changed. In its "Message", the Uppsala Assembly stated:

> We heard the cry of those who long for peace; of the hungry and exploited who demand bread and justice; of the victims of discrimination who claim human justice; and of the increasing millions who seek for the meaning of life (WCC 1968:5).

Dapper writes, "Nobody can doubt that these are new tones in the World Council; there is no longer any attempt to evade the cry by resorting to metaphorical speech" (1979:45—my translation). Bangkok (1973) confirmed the new emphasis: terms like "salvation" were now translated as "liberation", "fellowship" as "solidarity" (cf Dapper 1979:53). At Melbourne (1980) the poor were put in the very center of missiological reflection; indeed, the conference made "an unalloyed affirmation that solidarity with these is today a central and crucial priority of Christian mission" (Gort 1980a:11f). In a sense, the poor became the dominant hermeneutical category at Melbourne. In at least three of the four sections (I, II, and IV) the poor were prominent. Reflecting after the conference, Emilio Castro (1985:151) suggested that, at Melbourne, the affirmation of the poor was the "missiological principle par excellence" and the church's relation to the poor "the missionary yardstick".

Even more dramatic was the "discovery of the poor" in Roman Catholic circles, particularly as this was demonstrated at the Second and Third General Conferences of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Colombia (CELAM II, 1968) and at Puebla, Mexico (CELAM III, 1979). It was at Puebla that the phrase "preferential option for the poor" was coined. And as Gutiérrez has explained (1988:xxvf), the very word "preference" denies all exclusiveness, as though God would be interested *only* in the poor, whilst the word "option"

should not be understood to mean "optional". The point is rather that the poor are the first, though not the only ones, on which God's attention focuses and that, therefore, the church has no choice but to demonstrate solidarity with the poor. The poor have an "epistemological privilege" (Hugo Assmann, quoted in Frostin 1988:6); they are the new interlocutors of theology (Frostin 1988:6f), its new hermeneutical locus.

The danger in all of this, of course, is that one may again easily fall into the trap of "the church *for* others" instead of "the church *with* others", "the church *for* the poor" rather than "the church *of* the poor". Melbourne helped to move away from the traditional condescending attitude of the (rich) church toward the poor; it was not so much a case of the poor needing the church, but of the church needing the poor—if it wished to stay close to its poor Lord. The poor were beginning to discover and affirm themselves. Just as, in their reaction to the development model, the poor "refused to dream by order" (Ivan Illich, quoted in Dapper 1979:91—my translation), they now refused to be defined by the West, the rich, or the whites. The poor were no longer merely the *objects* of mission; they had become its *agents* and bearers (cf Section IV.21 of Melbourne—WCC 1980:219). And this mission is, above all, one of liberation. Gutiérrez even defines liberation theology as "an expression of the right of the poor to think out their own faith" (1988:xxi). Once the church was the "voice of the voiceless"; now the voiceless are making their own voices heard (Castro 1985:32).

During the past two decades or so numerous studies have appeared on who the poor are and on how they have traditionally been viewed and treated by the church. There can be no doubt that both in the Old Testament and in the ministry of Jesus there was a significant focus on the poor and their plight (cf chapter 3 of this study, and De Santa Ana 1977:1-35). "The entire Bible, beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God's predilection for the weak and abused of human history" (Gutiérrez 1988:xxvii). Much of this ethos was preserved during the first centuries of the Christian church (De Santa Ana 1977:36-64). After Constantine, and as the church got richer and more privileged, the poor were increasingly neglected or treated condescendingly. Yet even then powerful voices, particularly from the circles of the monastic movement, continued to stress the Christian's inescapable responsibility in this regard. Basil the Great, in particular, was an indefatigable champion of the poor (:67-71). In a sense, then, the rediscovery of the poor in our own time is also a reaffirmation of an ancient theological tradition.

Being poor is quite incontrovertibly a material reality. We may, however, not think of the poor in modern socio-economic categories only. In my reflections on Luke (chapter 3) I have shown that, whenever Luke recorded words of Jesus about those who suffered, he either put the poor at the head or at the very end of the list. This seems to suggest that the poor were an all-embracing category for those who were the victims of society. Liberation theology interpretations of the poor follow a similar hermeneutic. The poor are the marginalized, those who lack every active or even passive participation in society; it is a marginality that comprises all spheres of life and is often so extensive that people feel that

they have no resources to do anything about it (Müller 1978:80, drawing from Hugo Kramer). It is a "subhuman condition" (Gutiérrez 1988:164), "an evil, scandalous condition" (:168), "a total system of death" (Míguez Bonino 1980:1155).

From this perspective, then, the "preferential option for the poor" does not apply to Latin America only, as is sometimes suggested. The practice of *racism* is a form of poverty inflicted on people (and, of course, those racially discrim- inated against are often also materially poor). In this respect, black theology — as the North American and South African rendition of liberation theology — is a situational application of the "preferential option for the poor" (cf Kritzinger 1988:172-236).

Traditionally, in Western theology, one's relationship with the poor has been understood only as a question of ethics, not of theology proper or of episte- mology (Frostin 1985:136; 1988:6). "Political action in our view has its place in Christian ethics, not in soteriology", says Brakemeier (1988:219). This position is today being challenged, not only from the side of liberation theology but also in Catholic, Reformed, and other circles elsewhere. Gort (1980b:52, 58) affirms that, in the Reformed position, theology and ethics belong together. Ethics is the hands and feet and face of theology, and theology the vital organs, the soul of ethics.

Such a position, of course, has tremendous consequences for our understand- ing of mission. In this model, liberation and black theologies become "a chal- lenge to mission" (cf the title of Kritzinger 1988). This was the model that predominated at Melbourne (1980); solidarity with the poor and the oppressed was a central and crucial priority in Christian mission (cf Gort 1980a:12). Once we recognize the identification of Jesus with the poor, we cannot any longer consider our own relation to the poor as a social ethics question; it is a gospel question (Castro 1985:32; cf Sider 1980:318). Or, to put it in the words of Nicholas Berdyaev: While the problem of my own bread is a material issue, the problem of my neighbor's bread is a spiritual issue.

This does not preclude God's love for the non-poor. In their case, however, a different kind of conversion is called for, which would include admitting complicity in the oppression of the poor and a turning from the idols of money, race, and self-interest (cf Kritzinger 1988:274-297). This is needed, not only because they have been acting unethically, but because they have, through their "pseudo-innocence" (Boesak) actually denied themselves access to knowledge.

It seems we have, in this respect, an increasingly unified theological per- spective. The Orthodox churches, many of which have for many centuries lived in situations where the church was persecuted or at least marginalized, have always held to this intrinsic link between theology and ethics as regards the church's attitude to the poor. Catholics and ecumenical Protestants today also subscribe to this position. And evangelicals, after the "Great Reversal" during the first decades of this century, have likewise gradually begun to see the indis- soluble connection between theology and social ethics. Today many evangeli- cals, such as Ronald J. Sider, speak in a very candid manner on the church and the poor. Sider accepts the "doctrine" that God is on the side of the oppressed

(1980:314). And if the privileged are really the people of God, they, too, would be on the side of the poor; indeed, those who neglect the needy are not really God's people at all, no matter how frequent their religious rituals are (:317f). Jesus will not be our Savior if we persistently reject him as Lord of our total life. In similar vein a consultation on simple lifestyle, co-sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship (1980), went far beyond simple living and touched precisely on God's preferential option for the poor, divine judgment on oppressors, and the pattern of Jesus' own identification with the poor (cf Scherer 1987:180).

Liberal Theology and Liberation Theology

It is often contended that the theology of liberation is merely a variant of what may broadly be termed liberal theology—the classical liberal theology of the nineteenth century, the Social Gospel, the secular theologies of the 1960s, or European political theology (cf, among others, Braaten 1977:139-148, 153; Knapp 1977:160f). And there are indeed some important similarities. Like most liberal theologies, the theology of liberation has a strong social concern and rejects both the tendency to interpret the Christian faith in otherworldly categories and excessive individualism. In spite of its critique of the West and Western theology, liberation theology is also committed to the motif of earthly prosperity via the modernization model (Sundermeier 1986:76). Both theological tributaries appear to be anthropocentric rather than theocentric; like those Western theologies, liberation theology is accused of immanentism and "an evaporation of faith" (cf Frostin 1988:12, 193).

If these assessments of liberation theology were true in their entirety, it would hardly have moved out of the shadow of the Enlightenment into a new paradigm. There are, however, two general areas in which the two projects differ rather fundamentally.

1. All the Western theologies alluded to grapple primarily with the reality of modernity, of secularism, that is, with the question whether it still makes sense to talk about God in a secular age. Their response is to affirm the basic tenets of secularism whilst trying to salvage something of their religious heritage in the process. They often do this by jettisoning evangelism as a call to personal faith and by replacing mission with "humanization". They claim that the discovery of the political, societal, and economic dimensions of life have rendered the subjectivist, individualist, and existentialist reduction of theology obsolete (cf Daecke 1988:631). They assert that the entire world is moving toward one global culture, which is irreversible, which will be shaped in the image of the West, and where religious faith in its traditional form will lose its "sacralizing relevance" (cf Fierro 1977:265-267). A "restoration of the sacred" is futile (:339-348); we should embrace the secular (:348-341). In true Enlightenment fashion, these "technological humanists" assume a separation between fact and value and believe that the human being, as detached rational subject, is capable of delivering reliable information and of making the necessary adaptations (also on the socio-political level) intelligible (and therefore acceptable) to fellow rational human beings (cf West 1971:26f). Westerners, including Western the-

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ologians, says West (:51), are by instinct technological humanists; the history they study and the assumptions of each science they absorb generate in them an instinctive faith in reason (:52), which is only to be enlightened by revelation (:63).

Liberation theologians, in contrast, tend to be almost naively religious, sometimes even biblicist (cf the critique of Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak by fellow-liberationist Mosala 1989:26-42). The cross of Jesus, an embarrassment to the Social Gospel, is at the very center of liberation theology. The "practice of Jesus" (Echegaray 1984) includes the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. There is an avowal that "theology must remain theology through and through" and refuse "to dissolve its fundamental epistemological principle" (Míguez Bonino 1980:1156). In his study of Paul, Segundo refers again and again to the "transcendent data" (1986:152, 157, and elsewhere), which may in no circumstances be relinquished. Liberation theology's question is not knowing whether God exists, but knowing on which side God is (Fabella and Torres 1983:190). And this is a *post*modern question.

2. Western progressive theologies tend to be evolutionary in their philosophy and are therefore all, in the final analysis, oriented toward an upholding of the status quo, even if in an adapted form (cf Lamb 1984:138). Even where they are committed to a form of socialism this tends to be a Fabian socialism (cf Hopkins 1940:323). Their view of society is often romantic, utopian, naive, and sentimental (:323, 325). Even the radical statements of Uppsala 1968 revealed little more than, "on the whole, a chastened technological rationalism and a sober liberal optimism laced with moral urging" (West 1971:33, note 10). As such, progressive theologies reflect the language of the privileged. It is theology "from above".

Liberation theology, however, is theology "from below". It is counter-hegemonic (Frostin 1988:192). It believes that the law of history is not development, but revolution—"an inexorable law that molds but is not subject to the human will" (West 1971:113). The enemy of humanity is not nature (as is the case in technological humanism), but one structure of human power which exploits and destroys the powerless (:32).

In light of the above, and in spite of the undeniable similarities between these two genres of theology, it would therefore be facile to regard them as mirror images of one another. Liberation theology is not just the radical, political wing of European progressive theology (Gutiérrez 1988:xxix). There is a difference here so basic that each side must misinterpret the other in order to make sense (cf West 1971:32). Both may indeed be termed "signs of the times" theologies but, as I have argued above, we have no alternative but to try and interpret the signs of the times, even if this remains an extremely hazardous venture. We cannot escape this responsibility; after all, what is worth doing is also worth doing badly. Rather than being a simple logical extension of the Social Gospel and the secularist theologies of the 1960s, various forms of liberation theology stand in the tradition of the evangelical awakenings, of Reformed theology (cf the centrality of the Reformed tradition in Boesak 1977) and of the theological breakthrough associated with the name of Karl Barth

(note the way in which James Cone and Míguez Bonino extrapolate their theologies from their Barthian roots; cf also Lamb 1984:129).

The Marxist Connection

Contextual and liberation theologies are often accused of having surrendered the Christian gospel to Marxist ideology. In itself, this is to be expected, given the fact that both Marxism and liberation theology reject the capitalist model (cf, for instance, Míguez Bonino 1976). It is also understandable in light of the bourgeois nature of most Western churches and their complicity with colonialism and capitalism. The status quo orientation of much of Christianity and the conventional interpretation of Christian social involvement as not going beyond charity and relief has been eloquently expressed in Dom Hélder Câmara's oft-quoted words: "When I build houses for the poor, they call me a saint. But when I try to help the poor by calling by name the injustices which have made them poor, they call me subversive, a Marxist". There are, thus, sound reasons for Third-World theologians to resort to a Marxist critique of traditional Christianity. Marx himself was consumed by the desire to bring an end to the exploitation and oppression of the poor, and this can hardly be faulted.

It is, however, not always recognized that liberation theology's use of Marxism and Marxist categories is selective and critical. Liberation theologians tend to use Marxist analysis as an instrument of critique rather than in a prescriptive way. Even somebody as outspokenly Marxist as José P. Miranda (whose book *Communism in the Bible* opens with a chapter entitled "Christianity Is Communism") criticizes many revolutionaries who call themselves Marxists and makes critical use of Marxist categories.

Moreover, it would seem that, as far as Latin American liberation theology is concerned, there has in recent years been a move away from Marxist analysis. This is particularly true in respect to the Marxist critique of religion. Segundo, for instance, criticizes Marxism's inability to take into account the reality of "Christian *transcendent data*". His problem, he says, is with Marxism's "simplistic, mistaken eschatology, which raises false hopes and hence in the long run will only intensify people's desperation and despair" (1986:179), and with the "paralyzing utopia" which has crept into liberation theology because of this alliance. Also Míguez Bonino (1976:118-132) is careful to point to crucial flaws in Marxism, such as its abuse of power, its arbitrariness, its personality cults, and its bureaucratic cliques. The alliance with Marxism thus has both "promise" and "limits".

At the same time, whereas Marxist analysis appears to be on the decline in Latin America, it has been introduced more vigorously into South African Black Theology since about 1981 — again for very obvious reasons, given the situation of repression and disenfranchisement of Blacks in South Africa. In a sense, then, a reverse development has taken place in South Africa, compared to Latin America. The "first phase" of Black Theology (1970-1980) was almost completely free of Marxist influences; theologians of the "second phase", however, after 1980, are using Marxist categories much more consciously and consistently (for the two "phases", cf Kritzinger 1988:58-84).

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There can hardly be any problem with using Marxist *theory* as a tool in social analysis. As such, it certainly can be of tremendous value. The question is, however, whether some proponents of liberation theology have not adopted Marxist *ideology* as well, and whether this can be deemed compatible with the Christian faith. In attempting to respond to this question, one may point out, first, that Marxism shares, with Capitalism, the presuppositions of the Enlightenment paradigm, particularly in respect to its subject-object thinking, its utopianism, and its belief in modernization and in human beings as autonomous and innately good. Newbigin, with some justification, calls it "Capitalism's rebellious twin sister"; the two are "the twin products of the apostasy of the European intellectuals of the eighteenth century" (1986:8). The difference may perhaps only be that the one pursues freedom at the cost of equality and the other equality at the cost of freedom (:118).

Second, Christianity, as a religion, proceeds from the premise that there is another reality behind and above the visible and tangible reality around us; its reference is not only to this world. Marxism, by contrast, is an ideology, which means that it lacks any reference to a trans-empirical reality (which does not preclude it from having founders, sacred scriptures, martyrs, official creeds, an eschatology, heretics, and soon; for a superb summary of the "religious elements in Marxism," cf Nürnberger 1987b:105-109). In the classical Marxist model, religion is an illusion and the opiate of the people. It is important to note that this thoroughgoing atheistic dimension of Marxism is increasingly rejected by liberation theologians. In this respect, secularist theologians are actually closer to the classical Marxist premise than liberation theologians are. By and large, the latter refuse to jettison what Segundo calls the "transcendent data". For Gutiérrez, salvation "embraces every aspect of humanity: body and spirit, individual and society, person and cosmos, time and eternity" (1988:85) — a statement no Marxist can assent to. Leonardo Boff likewise distinguishes between "partial liberation" and "integral liberation" (1984:14-66; cf Boff 1983). Only the latter deserves to be called salvation and has to do with "the eschatological condition of the human being" (1984:56-58). Salvation and liberation may never be divorced from each other (as so often happens in conventional theology); neither, however, should they be confused (:58-60).

Third, there is the matter of violence. Support for violence is intrinsic to Marxism. Without condoning the violence of the status quo and Christians' blessing of it (which is actually the bigger problem), one has to express concern about the support for revolutionary violence (which is actually the lesser problem, since it is really a response to the violence of the system) in some branches of liberation theology. It becomes especially problematic when the Marxist idea of a continual revolution is adopted by theologians, in the sense of Albert Camus' philosophy, "I rebel, therefore we are", or Ché Guevara's slogan, "The duty of a revolutionary is to make a revolution". In this kind of approach revolutionary action is raised almost to the level of a sacred liturgy, conflict becomes an all-embracing hermeneutical key, and the mobilization of hatred and demagogy an inescapable duty. At the same time, it perpetuates the fixation on the "opponent" as the implacable enemy and imputes the blame for every

misery on others (cf Sundermeier 1986:67, 76), while condoning everything the oppressed may choose to do in trying to rid themselves of the shackles of oppression.

In spite of the fact that some liberationists unequivocally support violence (such as Shaull 1967) whilst others appear to be equivocal on the issue (for instance, the *Kairos Document*), the majority are committed to nonviolence (for instance, Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak). In this vein, the Melbourne CWME Conference asserts that "Jesus of Nazareth rejected coercive power as a way of changing the world" (Section IV.3; WCC 1980:209) whilst EN 37 declares, "Violence is not in accord with the gospel". The "spiral of violence" (Câmara) is an all too well-known specter in many parts of the world. This alone makes nonviolent strategies such as those of Ghandi and Martin Luther King worthy of serious consideration. Human power has its limits; it can coerce, but it can hardly heal (West 1971:230). Christians should always remain open to the "possible impossibility" that the "enemy" may change into a friend and that the oppressor may be persuaded to pursue another course (de Gruchy 1987:242). To the chagrin of many, the gospels tell us that Jesus ate with sinners and righteous ones, with exploiters and the exploited, and that both Levi the collaborator and Simon the Zealot were among his disciples (unless, of course, our hermeneutics of suspicion prompts us radically to doubt the entire gospel tradition on these and similar points, as Mosala 1989 seems to suggest). And since Christians believe that the decisive battle has already been won by Christ, they may believe in the possibility of forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation. In view of the harsh realities of oppression and exploitation such reconciliation will be costly. It is "utterly destructive of human continuities, of theories of progress, of the old self and the old society, because it leads also to the affirmation of the adversary" (West 1971:47; cf de Gruchy 1987:241f). In this sense, then, the element of conflictual analysis in liberation theology should not be an alternative to reconciliation but an intrinsic dimension of restoring community between those who are now the privileged and the underprivileged (Frostin 1988:180).

Integral Liberation

Liberation theology has helped the church to rediscover its ancient faith in Yahweh, whose outstanding qualification—which made him the Wholly Other—was founded on his involvement in history as the God of righteousness and justice who championed the cause of the weak and the oppressed (cf Deut 4:32, 34f; Ps 82). It has helped us to understand the Holy Spirit afresh, in particular his ability to change inert things into living things, to bring people back from death to life, to empower the weak, and to recognize the Spirit's presence not only in people's hearts but also in the workaday world of history and culture (cf Krass 1977:11). It has rekindled faith in the great renewal of history that had been inaugurated in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ and reawakened the confidence that nothing need to remain the way it is: Christians may assume a critical stance vis-à-vis the authorities, traditions, and institutions of this world and match the age-old adage, *ecclesia semper*

reformanda, with its corollary, *societas semper reformanda* (cf Gort 1980b:54). This applies especially to the conditions of the poor and the lowly. They deserve preference not because they are morally or religiously better than others, but because God is God, in whose eyes "the last are first"; or, in the words of Las Casas, "God has the freshest and keenest memory of the least and most forgotten" (quoted in Gutiérrez 1988:xxvii).

Since faith and life are inseparable (Gutiérrez 1988:xix), this is a liberation that is to be effected at three different levels: from social situations of oppression and marginalization, from every kind of personal servitude, and from sin, which is the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings (:xxxviii; 24f; cf Brakemeier 1988:216). Orthodoxy and orthopraxy need each other, and each is adversely affected if sight is lost of the other; we mutilate the message of Jesus if we choose where no choice is possible (:xxxiv). And we are liberated by our participation in the new life bestowed upon us through the gratuitousness of God (:xxxviiif).

The three levels are intimately interconnected but they are not the same. The tendency in some quarters to elevate the political to a position of indisputable primacy is therefore to be challenged. In his study on the humanist christology of Paul, Segundo has some important reflections on this theme. The Yahwist faith of Israel, he says, had political liberation as one, but only one, of its dimensions (1986:169f). Liberation theologians, however, have tended either to read the whole Bible — even the seemingly most apolitical parts — with the aid of the political key, or to slight those parts which could not be read in this way (:169-171). This happened because they were trying to glean ready-made answers from Scripture, looking for an immediate pragmatic connection between the problems arising on their own horizon and the message of the Bible (:172f). He then proposes a rereading of Paul, understanding him within his own context where socio-political freedom is not everything and extrapolating from there to today. Paul shows us that there are indeed aspects of being human that are not reducible to the socio-political.

Segundo then addresses the question of who the real bearers of the idea of the theology of liberation are. There is a tendency in liberation theology, he says, to blur the distinction between the church and "the people" or "the poor", and to sacrifice the church as a distinct community. This tendency is found also outside the strict confines of liberation theology. At the Melbourne CWME Conference, for instance, a messianic quality was often conferred on the poor, as though the poor and the church were completely synonymous. A suggestion to say that the poor are blessed *insofar as* they are longing for justice was defeated in Section I. The report now asserts (emphasis added), "The poor are 'blessed' *because* of their longing for justice and their hope of liberation. They *accept* the promise that God has come to their rescue" (I.2; WCC 1980:172). Segundo warns against this kind of discourse and says that there is much empty rhetoric in superficially dazzling formulas, for instance that people should put themselves "under the discipleship of the poor", for (according to Gutiérrez), it is only to the poor that the grace of receiving and understanding the kingdom has been granted, so that there can be no authentic theology of liberation until

it is created by "the People" (in Segundo 1986:182, 224, note 257; cf 226, note 262).

Segundo, however, pleads that our overarching theological category should be the *church* rather than "the People". The praxis of liberation theology presupposes justification by grace through faith. "The People", however, is a sociological category and may not be turned into a theological term and treated as a synonym for church. All liberation must pass by way of the judgment of the cross of Christ (cf Brakemeier 1988:217-221). In the *Kairos Document*, too, the line between the church and the political movements gets blurred (cf de Gruchy 1987:241). Lamb's conviction, quoted earlier, that "the voice of the victims is the voice of God" (1982:23), is an immensely powerful and moving statement, but it suffers from the same blurring of categories. To say that God hears and responds to the cries of the oppressed is one thing; to say that these cries *are* the voice of God is another. Bishop Alpheus Zulu once said, "The statement, 'God is on the side of the oppressed' cannot simply be turned round: 'The oppressed are on the side of God'". Segundo's admonitions in this respect need to be heeded. And it seems Gutiérrez is indeed beginning to heed him. In the new introduction to *A Theology of Liberation* he warns against "the facile enthusiasms that have interpreted [the theology of liberation] in a simplistic and erroneous way by ignoring the integral demands of the Christian faith as lived in the communion of the church" (1988:xviii; cf xlii).

There is yet another side to this: humankind's innate optimism. In this respect liberation theology—at least in its early manifestation—shared the optimism of the secularist theologians, the "technological humanists". Both located sin in the structures of society rather than in the human heart. Both were inherently optimistic about the future and about humankind and were, for this, indebted to the Enlightenment worldview. The difference was perhaps only that, whereas the technological humanists considered *all* people to be essentially good, liberation theology tended to believe that only the poor and the oppressed were innately good—the rich and the oppressors, however, were evil.

The optimism of the 1960s and of the early stage of liberation theology was almost tangible. Gutiérrez (1988:xvii) quotes a paragraph from the CELAM II document (Medellín 1968, where Latin American liberation theology was first officially sanctioned) which epitomizes this:

> Latin America is obviously under the sign of transformation . . . It appears to be a time of zeal for full emancipation, of liberation from every form of servitude, of personal maturity and collective integration . . . We cannot fail to see in this gigantic effort toward a rapid transformation and development an obvious sign of the Spirit who leads the history of humankind and of the peoples toward their vocation. We cannot but discover in this force, daily more insistent and impatient for transformation, vestiges of the image of God in human nature as a powerful incentive.

At the time, Gutiérrez himself shared this excitement and endorsed the optimism. What really makes utopian thought viable and highlights its wealth

of possibilities is the revolutionary experience of our times (1988:135) — indeed, authentic utopian thought postulates, enriches, and supplies new goals for political action (:136).

This sort of language was indicative of the euphoria of the mid-1960s. Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt was the undisputed theological paradigm for liberation theology (Segundo 1986:169). Medellín fanned the enthusiasm and inspired the church and the people of Latin America. And there were indeed many promising events. The capitalist system, so it appeared, was under severe pressure, in Chile and elsewhere. The socialist golden age was just around the corner. By the mid-1970s, however, much of this had disappeared. Hopes for a social and political transformation were dashed to pieces in Chile, in Uruguay, in Argentina, and in Bolivia. Brutal regimes inspired by "national security" ideology had imposed their police repression and economic policies on much of the continent (cf Míguez Bonino 1980:1154). Also where socialist regimes were introduced, the situation hardly changed. Repression just took on new forms. And it became even more difficult to attack the morality of it all, since the socialist rulers claimed to have the backing of the people for what they were doing. Often, then, people were liberated without becoming free. . .

In this climate, the triumphalist elements began to disappear from the liberation theology discourse. Segundo (1986:224, note 254) criticizes Gutiérrez's *The Power of the Poor in History*, and asks, "What 'power' is he talking about? Where has this 'power' been hiding for the past four centuries, since the days of European colonialism?" Elsewhere he reflects on the darkening of the horizon:

> It seems that everything has been tried, every possible approach used, yet the result is the same. By some inflexible law, more keenly felt as time passes, we find it impossible to be even partially free, to choose the kind of societal life we want, to even discuss it much less fight for it. Every day we see a road closing to us that seemed open the day before (:175).

In the new introduction to his book, Gutiérrez also takes cognizance of these changed circumstances. Often, he says, the theology of liberation has "stirred facile enthusiasms" (1988:xviii). The second phase of Latin American liberation theology thus appears to be more modest, more sober, than the first. For Segundo (1986:157-180) this means, among other things, a "deutero-reading" of Paul, particularly his sayings about slaves. Paul calculates the energy costs entailed in various social situations (:222, note 240). With respect to the institution of slavery — a form of being dominated by Sin — Paul realizes that he, and the Christian slaves, are faced with a limited option, a problem of efficacy, an energy calculus; if the preoccupation of the slave is to win civil liberation, and the slave invests all his or her energy in doing that, Paul thinks that the cost is too high. So Paul makes a choice, a choice which, of course, has its limitations; that is, Paul opts to humanize the slave from within (:164). In the circumstances that he faces, he postpones commitment to the concrete socio-political cause of liberating the slaves (:165). But this does not paralyze him, for faith sees

what we ourselves cannot see; faith represents a change in our (and the slave's) epistemological premises (:159). We now have a new way of interpreting events, so that Paul can even say (Rom 8:28), "Everything works together for the good of those who love God" (:221, note 237).

We cannot simply apply Paul to our present situation. Still, we have to allow ourselves to be informed by Paul's spirituality and ask what his "energy calculus" might mean in a given context. And what is true of Paul is also true of Jesus. It is hard to imagine Jesus being silent in the face of the reality we must live through today, says Segundo (1986:173), but it is equally difficult to picture him challenging the established power over us in a totally unrealistic way and merely for the sake of principle. Paul, and Jesus, were not escaping to the "private" sector; they were simply stressing that the dehumanizing *status* of slaves need not prevent them from attaining human maturity. This they could do by adhering to faith in Christ and to the "transcendent data" brought by him (:180). In the circumstances, this was the only way in which Jesus or Paul could humanize the slave. It is the way in which the Christian can triumph qualitatively even if he or she does not escape the quantitative victory of Sin (:160).

Segundo is pioneering a new course within liberation theology. The Christian can triumph, even where circumstances do not change, even where liberation does not come. Liberation and salvation overlap with each other to a significant degree, but they do not overlap totally. We should not deceive ourselves into believing that everything lies in our grasp and that we can bring it about, now; we would then, also, diminish "the importance and decisive character of the next generation" (Segundo 1986:160). Paul's (and Segundo's) is a "spirituality for the long haul" (Robert Bilheimer, reference in Henry 1987:279f), not that of a Pelagius, who believed that "we have the power of accomplishing every good thing by action, speech, and thought" (Pelagius, quoted in Henry 1987:272). For the Pelagian, true justice and true unity can coalesce fully in this world if we just try hard enough (:274; cf Gründel 1983:122). But the hope that human beings can shoulder the burdens of the world is an illusion that leads them through anxiety to despair (cf Duff 1956:146, summarizing a report of the Advisory Committee on the theme of the WCC Evanston Assembly). It simply heightens our guilt feelings and leads to increasing self-flagellation because of our inability to achieve what we convinced ourselves we ought to accomplish. We are then trapped into the belief that justice must be our justice, that we can and must cancel our guilt by restitution, overcome our frustration by more action, and relentlessly drive ourselves from one "involvement" to the other. In addition, it is easy for those whose cause is just to blur the line between what they are working for and their own reputation and glory. Work for justice can easily slip into a kind of ideological dogmatism, with the result that we may be perpetrating injustice while fighting for justice (Henry 1987:279).

Segundo wishes to break this vicious circle of frustration, from which liberation theology is by no means exempt. We should recognize, however, that Segundo's position does not reflect a compromise or a pragmatic adjustment to and reconciliation with "realities". That would be contrary to the heart of

liberation theology. And Segundo remains firmly committed to the agenda of liberation. If Christianity would lose its counter-cultural and world-transforming role, other forces would take its place. We need a vision to direct our action within history. Indifference to this vision is a denial of the God who links his presence to the elimination of all exploitation, pain, and poverty. As soon as our hope is compromised, as soon as we stop expecting the wholesale trans-formations *within* history that the Scriptures talk about, we kill that vision (cf Krass 1977:21). We have to turn our backs resolutely on our traditional dualistic thinking, of setting up alternatives between the body and the soul, society and the church, the *eschaton* and the present, and rekindle an all-embracing faith, hope, and love in the ultimate triumph of God casting its rays into the present.

The theology of liberation is often misunderstood, attacked, and vilified. I believe that one such case of misunderstanding, one that had far-reaching con-sequences, was the *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"*, released by the Vatican in 1984 and aimed rather particularly at Leonardo Boff. I have not intended to whitewash liberation theology in these paragraphs, nor to "put the record straight". I have simply attempted to point out that this movement, in spite of its flaws (and there are several) represents "a *new stage*, closely connected with earlier ones, in the theological reflection that began with the apostolic tradition" (John Paul II, in an April 1986 letter to Brazilian bish-ops, quoted in Gutiérrez 1988:xliv; emphasis added). The pope put it well. It is not a "new theology" but a new stage in theologizing, and as such both continuous and discontinuous with the theologizing of earlier epochs. It is not a fad but a serious attempt to let the faith make sense to the postmodern age. Precisely for this reason it will never be a finished product. At every stage, says Gutiérrez, "we must refine, improve, and possibly correct earlier formulations if we want to use language that is understandable and faithful both to the integral Christian message and to the reality we experience" (:xviii).

MISSION AS INCULTURATION

The Vicissitudes of Accommodation and Indigenization

Inculturation represents a *second* important model of contextualizing the-ology (cf Ukpong 1987) and is, like liberation theology, of recent origin — even though it is not without precedent in Christian history. Inculturation is one of the patterns in which the pluriform character of contemporary Christianity manifests itself. Even the term is new. Pierre Charles introduced the concept "*en*culturation", at home in cultural anthropology circles, into missiology, but it was J. Masson who first coined the phrase *Catholicisme inculturé* ("incultur-ated Catholicism") in 1962. It soon gained currency among Jesuits, in the form of "*in*culturation". In 1977 the Jesuit superior-general, P. Arrupe, introduced the term to the Synod of Bishops; the Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Traden-dae* (CT), which flowed from this synod, took it up and gave it universal currency (cf Müller 1986:134; 1987:178). It was soon also accepted in Protestant circles and is today one of the most widely used concepts in missiological circles.

The Christian faith never exists except as "translated" into a culture. This

circumstance, which was an integral feature of Christianity from the very begin-
ning, has hopefully been made abundantly clear in the course of this study.
Lamin Sanneh rightly says (cf Stackhouse 1988:58) that the early church, "in
straddling the Jewish-Gentile worlds, was born in a cross-cultural milieu with
translation as its birthmark".[20] It should therefore come as no surprise that in
the Pauline churches Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Thracians, Egyptians, and
Romans were able to feel at home (cf Köster 1984:172). The same was true of
the post-apostolic church. The faith was inculturated in a great variety of lit-
urgies and contexts—Syriac, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian,
Maronite, and so forth. Moreover, during this early period the emphasis was
on the local church rather than the church universal in its monarchical form.

After Constantine, when the erstwhile *religio illicita* became the religion of
the establishment, the church became *the* bearer of culture. Its missionary out-
reach thus meant a movement from the civilized to "savages" and from a "supe-
rior" culture to "inferior" cultures—a process in which the latter had to be
subdued, if not eradicated. Thus Christian mission, as a matter of course, pre-
supposed the disintegration of the cultures into which it penetrated. Where
such disintegration did not take place, mission had only limited success (as in
the case of some Asian cultures—cf Gensichen 1985:122; Pieris 1986).

In chapter 9 of this study, and elsewhere as well, I have stressed the decisive
influence Western colonialism, cultural superiority feelings, and "manifest des-
tiny" exercised on the Western missionary enterprise and the extent to which
this compromised the gospel. Without repeating what has been said there, let
me just mention some ways in which these circumstances have affected the
subject under discussion here.

By the time the large-scale Western colonial expansion began, Western
Christians were unconscious of the fact that their theology was culturally con-
ditioned; they simply assumed that it was supracultural and universally valid.
And since Western culture was implicitly regarded as Christian, it was equally
self-evident that this culture had to be exported together with the Christian
faith. Still, it was soon acknowledged that, in order to expedite the conversion
process, some adjustments were necessary. The strategy by which these were
to be put into effect was variously called adaptation or accommodation (in
Catholicism) or indigenization (in Protestantism). It was often, however, limited
to accidental matters, such as liturgical vestments, non-sacramental rites, art,
literature, architecture, and music (cf Thauren 1927:37-46).

The ramifications were manifold. First, accommodation never included mod-
ifying the "prefabricated" Western theology. Second, it was actually understood
as a *concession* that Third-World Christians would now be allowed to use some
elements of their culture in order to give expression to their new faith. Third,
only those cultural elements which were manifestly "neutral" and naturally
good, that is, not "contaminated" by pagan religious values, could be employed
(cf Thauren 1927:25-33; Luzbetak 1988:67). Fourth, the word "elements" fur-
ther implied that cultures were not regarded as indivisible wholes but, in
Enlightenment fashion, as separate components that could be put together or
disassembled at will; it would thus be perfectly in order if one were to isolate

some components and employ them in the service of the Christian church. Fifth, it went without saying that indigenization or accommodation was a problem only for the "young" churches. In the Western church indigenization had for many centuries been a *fait accompli*; the gospel was perfectly at home in the *West* but still foreign elsewhere (cf Song 1977:2). Sixth, a term like "adaptation" could not help but convey the idea of an activity that was peripheral and therefore nonessential, even superficial, as far as the essence of the Christian mission was concerned; it was something optional and, in any case, only a matter of *method*, of *form* rather than *content* (cf Shorter 1977:150). The philosophy behind all of this was that of a division between "kernel" and "husk". The faith, as understood and canonized in the Western church — in other words, the *depositum fidei* — was the unalloyed kernel, the cultural accoutrements of the people to whom the missionaries went were the expendable husk. In the accommodation process, the kernel had to remain intact but adapted to the forms of the new culture; at the same time, these cultures had to be adapted to the "kernel" (cf Fries 1986:760). Seventh, this entire project suggested, implicitly and often also explicitly, that the younger churches needed the older churches, but that the latter were in no respect dependent on what they might receive from the former; the traffic was decidedly one-way. Last, often the initiative in respect of indigenization did not come from the newly converted but from missionaries with a sentimental interest in exotic cultures, who insisted on the "otherness" of the young churches and treated them as something that had to be preserved in their pristine form.

Still, Catholic missionaries, in particular early Jesuits like de Nobili and Ricci, tried to move beyond the kernel-husk model in their accommodation of the faith to the peoples of India and China. So, in fact, did *Propaganda Fide* (founded 1622). In an extraordinary policy statement in 1659 it advised its missionaries not to force people to change their customs, as long as these were not opposed to religion or morality. The statement went on to say:

> What could be more absurd than to carry France, Spain, or Italy, or any part of Europe into China? It is not this sort of things you are to bring but rather the Faith, which does not reject or damage any people's rites and customs, provided these are not depraved.

In spite of this instruction (which was remarkably similar to a directive of Pope Gregory the Great more than a thousand years earlier — cf Markus 1970), the Jesuits soon ran into difficulties, particularly because of what became known as the "Rites Controversy", in both China and India. In 1704 the papal envoy, T. M. de Tournon, released a decree in which he condemned the Jesuit praxis in sixteen points. The pope sided with de Tournon — two papal decrees (1707 and 1715) sanctioned de Tournon's ruling. The controversy continued until 1742, when another decree, *Ex quo singulari*, endorsed the earlier rulings. A papal bull of 1744, *Omnium sollicitudinum*, forbade all but the most trivial concessions to local custom and ordered an oath of submission, which was to be taken by all missioners; also forbidden was any further discussion of the

issue (cf Thauren 1927:131-145; Shorter 1988:157-160). In 1773 the Society of Jesus was suppressed. Soon after, all Jesuit missionaries were recalled. Not until 1814 were they restored by papal decree. The oath introduced in 1744 was not repealed until 1938.

Protestant missions only *appeared* to be different; instead of subordinating the expression of the faith to magisterial authority as in Catholicism, Protestants unwittingly subordinated it to the presuppositions of Euro-American culture. Protestants were, on the whole, even more suspicious of "non-Christian" cultures than Catholics, not least because of their emphasis on humankind's total depravity (Müller 1987:177). They allowed some freedom but in the main worked for an exact reproduction of European models. This could even be seen in cases where they deliberately set out to encourage indigenization, as in the celebrated case of the "three-selfs" as the aim of mission (self-government, self-support, and self-propagation), formulated classically by Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn almost a century and a half ago. These *notae ecclesiae* were derived from the Western idea of a living community, which was one which could support, extend, and manage itself; these, then, were the criteria according to which the younger churches were judged. The Western churches, which had long ago achieved these aims, represented the "higher" form, the others, struggling to rise up to these expectation, the "lower". In both Catholicism and Protestantism, then, the prevailing image was a *pedagogical* one—over an extended period of time and along a laborious route the younger churches were to be educated and trained in order to reach selfhood or "maturity", measured in terms of the "three-selfs". In practice, however, the younger churches, like Peter Pan, never "grew up", at least not in the eyes of the older ones. Most of them could only survive, and thereby also please their founders, if they resolutely segregated themselves from the surrounding culture and existed as foreign bodies.

Twentieth-Century Developments

The "rigid system" of accommodation (Thauren 1927:130) could not last interminably. Forces that contributed to the breakdown of the model included the emergence, already in the nineteenth century, of nationalism in the Third World; the rise of anthropological thought, which gradually revealed the relativity and contextuality of all cultures (including those of the West); and—of particular importance for our purpose—the maturation of the younger churches, which frequently went hand in hand with the founding of independent churches free from any missionary control. In spite of the flaws inherent in the "three-selfs" model, it did help to inspire subjugated peoples to seek independence also in areas other than the strictly ecclesiastical. Even somebody as fiercely critical of the entire Western missionary enterprise as Hoekendijk had to admit that, in this respect, the church really was ahead of the world (1967a:321). Around 1860 the autonomy of the young churches could be seen in large print on every sensible missionary program, long before anybody in the West even dreamt about other kinds of autonomy for colonized countries. There certainly were more sensitivities in this respect in Western missionary circles than there were in the various colonial offices.

Pope Benedict XV, particularly in his encyclical *Maximum Illud* (1919), was one of the first to promote the right of the "mission churches" to cease being ecclesiastical colonies under foreign control and to have their own clergy and bishops. *Rerum Ecclesiae* (Pius XI, 1926) and *Evangelii Praecones* (Pius XII, 1951) elaborated further along similar lines (cf Shorter 1988:179-186). Since then, local hierarchies have been introduced everywhere. Bühlmann (1977) describes the new development as "the coming of the third church", a reality which he elsewhere calls "*the* epoch-making event of current church history" (quoted in Anderson 1988:114). The new reality also finds expression in the fact that there are today (according to the calculations of Barrett 1990:27) many more Christians outside than inside the traditional missionary-sending countries—914 million compared to 597 million—and that many of these younger churches have themselves begun to send out missionaries.

In the period immediately after World War II a host of adjustments had to be made in both Catholic and Protestant circles. For our purpose, two are of special importance. First, there were the events in China, culminating in the victory of the Communists in 1949—an event which symbolized, in a special way, the breakup of the entire old missionary order. Then there was the circumstance that—in spite of the war during which they had been "orphaned"—many fledgling Third World churches had not only survived, but some had actually grown spectacularly during the years of the missionaries' absence. Whitby's slogan (1947) "Partnership in Obedience" and the formation of the WCC as a council of autonomous churches from all corners of the globe, were two ways of giving recognition to the new reality and to the need for a new relationship. This found expression in the idea of "mission as reciprocal assistance" and in such ecumenical projects as "Interchurch Aid", "Ecumenical Sharing of Personnel", and "Joint Action for Mission" (cf Jansen Schoonhoven 1977; for the Catholic scene, cf van Winsen 1973).

Mission as interchurch assistance was, however, a transitional phenomenon (cf van Engelen 1975:294). By the late 1960s it became evident that a decisive shift had taken place, even in the mind of Westerners, from a Europe-centered world to a humankind-centered world. Henceforth the churches of the West would increasingly take cognizance of the views of and developments in the younger churches. Yet even at the Second Vatican Council the voices of Third World church leaders were still muffled, as they were in Protestant ecumenical gatherings of the time. Only since the Catholic Synods of Bishops and, in Protestantism, since the Bangkok CWME meeting (1973), has it become clear that global ecclesiastical leadership is inexorably passing toward Third World Christians. The "rediscovery" of the local church, during and after Vatican II, contributed tremendously to the new sense of maturing of relationships. The birth of basic Christian communities, first in Latin America and then elsewhere, meant much to the self-image of local Christian communities in the Third World, so much so that Leonardo Boff (1986) refers to it as "ecclesiogenesis", or as "reinventing" the church.

It was now also high time that a "fourth self" be added to the classical "three-selfs"—*self-theologizing*, an aspect about which the missionary theorists

of the nineteenth century never thought (cf Hiebert 1985b:16). Of course a lot
of self-theologizing had already been taking place, often unnoticed or clandes-
tine, more frequently outside of the "mission churches" and thus of the purview
of missionaries—to whom much of this was at any rate unacceptable since it
was deemed to be syncretistic.[21] Since the 1930s, however, Asian (especially
Indian) theologians from "mission churches" had begun consciously and pub-
licly to chart new ways theologically. In Africa, such developments only rose
above the surface after World War II. In 1956 a group of African priests from
Francophone countries published *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, a book that was
to have wide influence in Catholic circles. Shortly afterward, Tharcisse Tshi-
bangu, a student at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Kinshasa, began to
challenge his Belgian mentors' ideas about a universally valid theology. In 1965
he published his *Théologie positive et théologie speculative*. These and other devel-
opments were the first steps toward remedying a situation which John Mbiti
once described as follows: "[The church in Africa] is a church without a the-
ology, without theologians, and without a theological concern" (1972:51). The
stage was set for the vigorous development of autochthonous African theology.

Toward Inculturation

The developments outlined above paved the way for what was later to be
known as "inculturation". It was finally recognized that a plurality of cultures
presupposes a plurality of theologies and therefore, for Third-World churches,
a farewell to a Eurocentric approach (cf Fries 1986:760; Waldenfels 1987:227f).
The Christian faith must be rethought, reformulated and lived anew in each
human culture (Memorandum 1982:465), and this must be done in a *vital* way,
in depth and right to the cultures' roots (EN 20). Such a project is even more
needed in light of the way in which the West has raped the cultures of the
Third World, inflicting on them what has been termed "anthropological pov-
erty" (cf Frostin 1988:15).

At first, the Western church leadership embraced the new development only
reluctantly. Snijders (1977:173f) has shown how Paul VI, for instance, wavered
between embracing and rejecting the inculturation idea—much the way an ear-
lier pope, Gregory the Great, wavered with respect to missionary accommo-
dation in the sixth century (cf Markus 1970). In the end, however, Paul VI
resolutely chose in favor of inculturation, as did John Paul II, particularly in
CT. The latter's commitment to the project was further underscored when he
founded the Pontifical Council for Culture in 1982 (cf Shorter 1988:230f). A
similar evolution can be observed in Protestantism. Here, evangelicals were
often in the forefront (perhaps because ecumenical Protestants revealed a
greater interest in mission as liberation rather than in mission as incultura-
tion?). A landmark event was the Consultation on Gospel and Culture, spon-
sored by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization and held in 1978
in Willowbank, Bermuda (cf Stott and Coote 1980). The Willowbank Report
(:311-339) was widely acclaimed (cf Gensichen 1985:112-129). By and large,
Willowbank opted for the "dynamic equivalence" model of inculturation (Stott
and Coote 1980:330f), thus following in the steps of the pioneering work done

by Eugene Nida and, more recently, Charles Kraft. "Dynamic equivalence", a variation of the "translation model", is, however, only one of several current inculturation patterns. Others include the anthropological, praxis, synthetic, and semiotic models. An excellent example of the last is Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985). It is clear, then, that inculturation does not necessarily mean the same to everybody. Still, there are some basic traits all these models share and which set them off against the earlier accommodation, indigenization, and similar approaches.

In which respects does inculturation differ from its predecessors?

1) First, it differs in respect of the *agents*. In all earlier models it was the Western missionary who either induced or benevolently supervised the way in which the encounter between the Christian faith and the local cultures was to unfold. The very terms "accommodation", "adaptation", etc, suggested this. The process was one-sided, in that the local faith community was not the primary agent. In inculturation, however, the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity (cf Luzbetak 1988:66). Neither the missionary, nor the hierarchy, nor the magisterium controls the process. This does not mean that the missionary and the theologian are excluded. Schreiter even regards their participation as indispensable; to ignore the resources of the professional theologian "is to prefer ignorance to knowledge" (1985:18). Missionaries no longer go with a kind of Peace Corps mentality for the purpose of "doing good", however. They no longer participate as the ones who have all the answers but are learners like everybody else. The *padre* becomes a *compadre*. Inculturation only becomes possible if all practice *convivência*, "life together" (Sundermeier 1986).

2) Second, the emphasis is truly on the *local* situation. "The universal word only speaks dialect" (P. Casaldáliga, quoted in Sundermeier 1986:93). Vatican II's new emphasis on the local church already pointed in this direction. The one, universal church finds its true existence in the particular churches (LG 23, 26)—something Third World churches take much more seriously than the church in the West (cf Glazik 1984b:64). At this local level, inculturation comprises much more than culture in the traditional or anthropological sense of the term. It involves the entire context: social, economic, political, religious, educational, etc.

3) Inculturation is, however, not only a local event. It also has a *regional* or macrocontextual and macrocultural manifestation. To a significant extent the various paradigms I have traced in the earlier part of this study evolved because each time the Christian faith entered another macrocultural context—the Greek, Slavic, Latin, or Germanic worlds. The theological disputes which arose in this process should be attributed at least as much to cultural as to genuine doctrinal differences. Looked at from this perspective, it could be argued that the Protestant Reformation was a case of the (overdue?) inculturation of the faith among Germanic and related peoples. The same is true of many regional differences today. The decisive consideration may, then, not be whether a church is Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, or Lutheran, but whether it has its home in Africa, Asia, or Europe. Regional differences tend to become

more decisive than confessional ones. It is noteworthy, for instance, that black Americans, after having been assaulted by an alien culture for several centuries, still retain a unique religio-cultural identity. In part, then, these differences on the macro-level explain why, in Latin America, inculturation takes the form of solidarity with and among the poor; in Africa it may be solidarity and communion within and across autonomous cultures; and in Asia the search for identity amid the density of religious pluralism. In various regions of the world we thus observe the burgeoning of autochthonous ecclesiologies, christologies, and the like.

incm 4) Fourth, inculturation consciously follows the model of the *incarnation* (cf John Paul II, quoted in ITC 1989:143). The Willowbank Report refers specifically to John 17:18, 20:21, and Philippians 2 (cf Stott and Coote 1980:323). In fact, the kenotic and incarnational dimension of authentic inculturation is mentioned again and again in all theological traditions (cf Bühlmann 1977:287; Scott and Coote 1980:323f; Geffré 1982:480-482; Gensichen 1985:123-126; Müller 1986:134; 1987:177; cf also CT 53 and ME 26, 28). This incarnational dimension, of the gospel being "en-fleshed", "em-bodied" in a people and its culture, of a "kind of *ongoing* incarnation" (P. Divarkar, quoted in Müller 1986:134 — my translation) is very different from any model that had been in vogue for over a thousand years. In this paradigm, it is not so much a case of the church being *expanded*, but of the church being *born anew* in each new context and culture.

5) In the fifth place, and following directly from the previous point, the earlier models did indeed suggest an interaction between gospel and culture, but one in which the theological content of the interaction remained obscure. The coordination of gospel and culture should, however, be structured *christologically* (Gensichen 1985:124). Still, the missionaries do not just set out to "take Christ" to other people and cultures, but also to allow the faith the chance to start a history of its own in each people and its experience of Christ. Inculturation suggests a *double movement*: there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture. The gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon (Geffré 1982:482), while it takes into account the meaning systems already present in the context (cf Schreiter 1985:12f). On the one hand, it offers the cultures "the knowledge of the divine mystery", while on the other it helps them "to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought" (CT 53). This approach breaks radically with the idea of the faith as "kernel" and the culture as "husk"—which in any case is, to a large extent, an illustration of the Western scientific tradition's distinction between "content" and "form". In many non-Western cultures such distinctions do not operate at all (cf Hiebert 1987:108, who refers to Mary Douglas). A more appropriate metaphor may therefore be that of the flowering of a seed implanted into the soil of a particular culture. This is also the metaphor AG 22 employs (without, of course, explicitly using the term "inculturation").

6) Sixth, since culture is an all-embracing reality, inculturation is also all-embracing. EN 20 could still state that the reign of God makes use only of "certain elements of human culture and cultures". It is now, however, recog-

nized that it is impossible to isolate elements and customs and "christianize" these. Where this is being done the encounter between gospel and culture does not take place at a meaningful level (cf Gensichen 1985:124f). Only where the encounter is inclusive will this experience be a force animating and renewing the culture from within (cf Müller 1987:178).

The Limits of Inculturation

Inculturation also has a *critical* dimension. The faith and its cultural expression—even if it is neither possible nor prudent to dislodge the one from the other—are never completely coterminous. Inculturation does not mean that culture is to be destroyed and something new built up on its ruins; neither, however, does it suggest that a particular culture is merely to be endorsed in its present form (cf Gensichen 1985:125f). The philosophy that "anything goes" as long as it seems to make sense to people can be catastrophic.

Of course, the churches of the West have to say this first to themselves, before they dare say it to and of others. Often in the West the inculturation process has been so "successful" that Christianity has become nothing but the religious dimension of the culture—listening to the church, society hears only the sound of its own music. The West has often domesticated the gospel in its own culture while making it unnecessarily foreign to other cultures. In a very real sense, however, the gospel is foreign to every culture. It will always be a sign of contradiction. But when it is in conflict with a particular culture, for instance of the Third World, it is important to establish whether the tension stems from the gospel itself or from the circumstance that the gospel has been too closely associated with the culture through which the missionary message was mediated at this point in time (cf Geffré 1982:482).

There are two principles at work here, says Walls (1982b), and they operate simultaneously. On the one hand there is the "indigenizing" principle, which affirms that the gospel is at home in every culture and every culture is at home with the gospel. But then there is the "pilgrim" principle, which warns us that the gospel will put us out of step with society—"for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system" (:99). Authentic inculturation may indeed view the gospel as the liberator of culture; the gospel can, however, also become culture's prisoner (cf Walls 1982b).

Inculturation's concern, says Pedro Arrupe, is to become "a principle that animates, directs, and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'" (quoted in Shorter 1988:11; cf ITC 1989:143, 155). The focus, then, is on the "new creation", on the transformation of the old, on the plant which, having flowered from its seed, is at the same time something fundamentally new when compared with that seed.

Interculturation

In the nature of the case inculturation can never be a *fait accompli*. One may never use the term "inculturated". Inculturation remains a tentative and continuing process (cf Memorandum 1982:466), not only because cultures are

not static but also because the church may be led to discover previously unknown mysteries of the faith. The relationship between the Christian message and culture is a creative and dynamic one, and full of surprises. There is no eternal theology, no *theologia perennis* which may play the referee over "local theologies". In the past, Western theology arrogated to itself the right to be such an arbitrator in respect to Third-World theologies. It implicitly viewed itself as fully indigenized, inculturated, a finished product. We are beginning to realize that this was inappropriate, that Western theologies (plural!)—just as much as all the others—were theologies in the making, theologies in the *process* of being contextualized and indigenized.

This insight has important consequences. We are beginning to realize that all theologies, including those in the West, need one another; they influence, challenge, enrich, and invigorate each other—not least so that Western theologies may be liberated from the "Babylonian captivity" of many centuries. In a very real sense, then, what we are involved in is not just inculturation, but "in*ter*culturation" (Joseph Blomjous—cf Shorter 1988:13-16). We need an "exchange of theologies" (Beinert 1983:219), in which Third-World students continue (as they have been doing for a long time) to study in the West but in which Western students also go to study in Third-World contexts, in which one-way traffic, from the West to the East and the South, is superseded, first by bilateral and then by multilateral relationships.[22] Where this happens, the old dichotomies are transcended and the churches of the West discover, to their amazement, that they are not simply benefactors and those of the South and the East not merely beneficiaries, but that all are, at the same time, giving and receiving, that a kind of osmosis is taking place (cf Jansen Schoonhoven 1977:172-194; Bühlmann 1977:383-394). This calls for a new disposition, particularly on the part of the West and Western missionaries (and perhaps increasingly also on the part of missionaries from the South to the West!), who have to rethink the necessity and blessedness of receiving, of being genuinely teachable. The missionary, Daniel Fleming said almost seventy years ago, must realize that he or she is "temporary, secondary and advisory" (quoted in Hutchison 1987:151). This does not make missionaries redundant or unimportant. They will remain, also in the future, living symbols of the universality of the church as a body that transcends all boundaries, cultures, and languages. But they will, far more than has been the case in the past, be ambassadors sent from one church to the other, a living embodiment of mutual solidarity and partnership.

Interculturation assumes, furthermore, that local incarnations of the faith should not be *too* local. On the one hand, a "homogeneous unit" church can become so ingrown that it finds it impossible to communicate with other churches and believes that its perspective on the gospel is the only legitimate one. The church must be a place to feel at home; but if only *we* feel at home in our particular church, and all others are either excluded or made unwelcome or feel themselves completely alienated, something has gone wrong (cf Walls 1982b). On the other hand, we may be tempted to over-celebrate an infinite number of differences in the emergence of pluralistic local theologies and claim

local - universal tension
(why WYD matter).

that not just each local worshiping community but even each pastor and church member may develop her or his own "local theology" (cf Stackhouse 1988:23, 115f). Over against these positions it has to be said that our churches and worshiping communities also have to be de-provincialized (:116). This can only happen if vital contact with the wider church is nurtured. While acting locally we have to think globally, in terms of the *una sancta*, combining a micro- with a macro-perspective. It is true that the church exists primarily in *particular* churches (LG 23), but it is also true that it is *in virtue of the church's catholicity* (cf LG 13) that the particular churches exist — and this holds true not only for the Roman Catholic Church as an international ecclesiastical structure, but for all those communities that call themselves "Christian". If the church is the Body of Christ it can only be one. In this sense, then — and not as an idealistic supra-cultural entity — the church is a kind of "universal hermeneutical community, in which Christians and theologians from different lands check one another's cultural biases" (Hiebert 1985b:16). Particularity does not mean isolation; so, even if we may celebrate our various local theologies, let us remember that it is equally true that "any theology is a discourse about a universal message" (Gutiérrez 1988:xxxvi). This discourse certainly leads to tension, but it can be a creative tension if we pursue the model of "unity within reconciled diversity" (H. Meyer, reference in Sundermeier 1986:98). If we follow this road, our understanding of mission and church will indeed be qualitatively different from all earlier models, while we will at the same time experience vital communion with those former epochs.

MISSION AS COMMON WITNESS

The (Re)birth of the Ecumenical Idea in Mission

I have called the emerging theological paradigm "ecumenical" (see the title of this chapter). This leitmotif has been *implicit* throughout this entire chapter. It is now necessary to make it more *explicit*.

As far as Protestantism is concerned, the ecumenical idea was a direct result of the various awakenings and the subsequent involvement of churches from the West in the worldwide missionary enterprise. The first clear example of this was the emergence of the Pietist movement at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans in Germany, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Britain experienced a newfound unity of Christians, which transcended denominational differences, and felt urged to involve themselves in a new, trans-denominational missionary movement (cf Rosenkranz 1977:168). The ecumenical spirit manifested itself, for example, in the bible societies and, at the end of the nineteenth century, in youth movements such as the YMCA, YWCA, and WSCF. But it was especially in the foreign missionary movement that the ecumenical idea thrived. Several of the earliest mission societies were non- or transdenominational. One may, for instance, think of the LMS, the American Board, the Basel and the Barmen Missionary Societies. Others, such as the Berlin Missionary Society, were only mildly confessional (cf Rosenkranz 1977:198).