MAKING DISCIPLES:
A FOUNDATION FOR AN INTEGRATED MISSION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

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This research project proposes to answer the question, "What is the proper relationship between evangelism and social justice in Christian mission?" The legitimacy of both activities is a given, but how the two parts should come together in the whole has remained a question in the North American context and a source of unresolved tension in the evangelical church.

Missiologists have proposed solutions to the dilemma from several different biblical paradigms, including the great commission (Mt 28:18–20), the great commandment (Mt 22:37–40), the creation mandate (Gn 1:28), and the example of Jesus (Jn 20:21.) These paradigms have produced various missional streams in evangelical circles: gospel proclamation, holistic mission, cultural mandate mission, and radical discipleship mission. Each paradigm and each "stream" leads to different emphases and priorities in church mission programs.

This author has approached the question from an orientation based in Christ's great commission as recorded in the book of Matthew, where the emphasis falls on the command to "make disciples." The great commission is the most recognized mandate for Christian mission and, as will be shown, integrates the biblical commonality of the various streams. The resulting conclusion is that evangelism and social justice must operate as integrated and

compatible components of the mission of the church. However, while social justice is never

misplaced, evangelism must never be replaced.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

During the 2008 Advent season a local evangelical church raised approximately

$96,000 for clean water in a Ugandan village, a fundraising project that fell under the

administration of the missions program of the church. The agency directing the water project

was founded in 2007 by Christian people well connected to the Canadian evangelical

community. Its purpose is to educate people in how to change their contaminated water into

pure drinking water utilizing the SODIS method (an immensely effective and practical

system for economically disadvantaged regions surrounding the equator). In embracing this

project, the local church was eager to do something to alleviate disease and misery caused by

water contamination in an overtly Christian context. But upon further scrutiny, it became

clear that the organization's primary and only stated purpose is to provide clean water to

people who do not have access to it. While it is true that partnerships are sought with

churches, this is not mandatory. The organization will partner with any willing community-

based institution located in the service area.

The discovery elicited a discussion amongst the pastoral staff, elder leadership, and

missions committee of the local church as to the appropriate destination for funds earmarked

"missions." On the one hand, several asked what providing clean water had to do with

evangelism and ultimate eternal destiny. On the other hand, it was evident that, as Ralph

Winter writes, "A large and growing proportion of mission donors are relentlessly concerned about suffering people in the here and now."[1] Other questions arose. Can we speak of missional priorities in a broken world? How would one sort out competing priorities: evangelism, church planting, education, health care, prevention and eradication of disease, famine relief, social and economic injustices, etc.? It is not easy to decide the case: that children sicken and die from filthy water is an unconscionable situation, but how does providing clean water necessarily solve the fundamental human problem of alienation from God? As John Piper said in his plenary address at the Lausanne Movement's[2] Cape Town 2010 conference, "We evangelicals care about human suffering, especially eternal human suffering."

This local situation reflects a larger reality. Mission agency leaders are sensing a broadening in the missional values of Christian people.[3] Dr. Dale Little, a delegate at Lausanne 2010, blogged in anticipation of the conference, "Ask God to give the Lausanne

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[1] Ralph D. Winter, "Are We In a 'Kingdom Era'?" *Mission Frontiers* 25, no. 1 (2008), 54–55. In his later years, Winter changed his approach to mission as primarily evangelism to a much broader approach. See also David J. Hesselgrave, "What Happens When Apostles Disagree?," *EMQonline.com,* April 2010 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.emisdirect.com/emq/issue-311/2406; accessed 13 September 2010.

[2] The Lausanne Movement began in the early 1970s as an evangelical attempt to re-frame Christian mission in a world of social, political, economic, and religious upheaval. Its founders believed the church had to apply the gospel to the contemporary world, and to work to understand the ideas and values behind rapid changes in society. See http://www.lausanne.org.

[3] Rich Peachey (Human Resources Director, Evangelical Free Church of Canada Mission), email message to author, 11 May 2010.

Congress an intentional focus on evangelization in face of competing priorities for mission."[4]

The current edition of the Evangelism and Missions Information Service (EMIS) Mission

Handbook verifies this trend: from 1998 to 2008 Canadian agencies whose primary activity

is in evangelism and discipleship dropped from 68.8% to 55.8%, while over the same period

agencies reporting primary activity in relief and development increased from 15.7% to

24.2%.[5] Further, agencies tracked for three reporting periods (1998, 2005, 2008) and whose

primary activities are in evangelism and discipleship report a decrease in proportionate share

of income, while agencies whose primary activities are relief and development report an

increase in proportionate share of income.[6] The Handbook also reports that while agencies

whose primary reported activity is evangelism and discipleship report the largest share of

Canadian full-time workers and non–Canadian citizen full-time workers, agencies whose

primary activity is in the relief and development category report the largest income for

overseas ministries and short-term workers.[7]

Statement of Purpose

The tension and dilemma surrounding what constitutes Christian mission is the result

of a genuine desire on the part of believers with limited resources to obey the teaching of

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[4] Dr. Little is one of thirty delegates selected for the Cape Town Congress from the evangelical churches of Japan. He participates as President of Japan Evangelical Missionary Association—the voice of evangelical missionaries in Japan. See his blog on Lausanne at http://tokyolittles.net/blog/.

[5] Linda J. Weber, *Mission Handbook: U.S. and Canadian Protestant Ministries Overseas,* 21st ed. (Wheaton: EMIS, 2010), 80–82.

[6] Ibid., 80–82.

[7] Ibid., 80.

scripture. The typical evangelical sees the missionary task as defined by a blend of several notable biblical mandates that apply to all believers: go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:16–20); love God and love your neighbour (Mt 22:34–40); let your light shine before men (Mt 5:16); rule and fill the earth (Gn 1:26–28); act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before your God (Mi 6:8). Many also see a pattern for missional strategy set by the Father and the Son in the words of Jesus, "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you (Jn 20:21). Christians, thus, increasingly see their responsibility—their mission, and that of the church— as multi-faceted.

This thesis proposes that there is an integral paradigm for mission found in the biblical and theological concept of making disciples, which is the goal of the great commission. Implicit in the command to make disciples is the necessary proclamation of the gospel. The explicit words of Jesus "teaching them everything I have commanded you" enfolds the great commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . and love your neighbour as yourself" (Mt 22:37–40). Making disciples affirms the incarnational continuity of Jn 20:21 from Jesus to the original twelve to the vast numbers "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rv 5:9). Making disciples affirms and enhances the cultural mandate (Gn 1:28) as this goal for all humanity can only be ultimately fulfilled through the transformative power of the gospel. "Teach everything" contains a vast array of transformative principles that begin and end in knowing Christ himself. The result will be disciples that "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly" before their God; disciples who are salt, light, and a city on a hill that cannot be hid; disciples whose good deeds bring glory to God.

As the worldview of a person is changed through the message of the gospel, they begin to understand what it means to be made in the image of God, to live in a way that serves, honours, and glorifies their Creator. A person whose worldview is transformed by the gospel will live a life of love for God and love for neighbour (the great commandment). A person whose worldview is transformed by the gospel will engage their community as Jesus did (the Johannine mandate). A person whose worldview is transformed by the gospel will influence their community and society for good (the creation mandate). A person whose worldview is first transformed by the gospel will in turn share the message of Christ with others (the great commission). This transformation can only be ultimately and perfectly effected through the gospel of Christ.

Christian mission is multi-faceted and all encompassing. However, the call to faith and belief in Christ can only happen if the gospel is heard; as Romans 10:14 insists, "how shall they hear without a preacher?" While this paper was being written, Lausanne 2010 took place. One speaker, Ajith Fernando, Director of Youth for Christ in Sri Lanka, reminded the delegates that although St. Francis of Assisi is frequently quoted as saying, "Preach the gospel—and if necessary use words," he himself constantly used words of truth to portray the gospel. Fernando exhorted the delegates to avoid using that quote from Francis of Assisi to excuse our reticence to speak the gospel.

At the same time it cannot be denied that Christian faith births a love for humanity, which in turn finds expression in ministries of compassion and social justice.[8] This is an

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[8] "Social justice" will be used throughout this paper to refer to all types of expressions and activities people engage in for the relief of misery and betterment of mankind.

integral part of living out the Christian faith that must be affirmed. The fact that evangelicals have again embraced this task wholeheartedly is right and good. Christians grasp intuitively that there must be some connection between the faith they profess and the deeds that they do—that is, helping their fellow man. James 2:17 says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Christian involvement in social justice is never misplaced.

This thesis argues that the model of making disciples taken from Matthew 28:16–20 is an adequate model for a church missions program in setting a vision, establishing purpose, and making decisions. It asserts that the model of making disciples can integrate the inseparable entities of evangelism and social justice in the mission of the church, while at the same time respecting the distinction between them. While social justice is never misplaced in Christian mission, it can never replace the proclamation of the gospel.

Chapter Two surveys current streams in evangelical mission and proposes a working definition of "mission." As well, this section examines scripture for theological and biblical insight into the great commission's command to make disciples, as a foundational model of mission that integrates evangelical concerns for both the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Chapter Three is an examination of church history focused on identifying a precedent for the church's use of the disciple model for its missionary purposes. This section covers the New Testament church using Luke's book of Acts as a primary source for the historical activities of this era. As well, the church in the early Roman Empire is considered.

Chapter Four focuses on one man, William Wilberforce (1759 – 1833), who was an historical example of a person transformed into a disciple of Christ through the gospel. It has

been said that the life of William Wilberforce "stands out as a beacon of light, which the passing of two centuries has scarcely dimmed."[9] Wilberforce demonstrates how a disciple of Christ integrates evangelism and social justice into the fabric of a life.

Chapter Five surveys the historical context of the rift between evangelism and social justice by reviewing the social gospel and the evangelical reaction against it—a primarily North American phenomena. Awareness and understanding of historical context will give perspective on lingering tensions concerning the scope of Christian mission.

<div align="center">Statement of Assumptions</div>

Every writer has assumptions and presuppositions and proceeds from a particular worldview. As such, the reader should be duly notified of mine.

i. I believe that all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is therefore authoritative for life and practice (1 Tim 3:15). Therefore, scripture will be used confidently for historical research (i.e. Luke's book of Acts), exegetical foundations, and practical application.[10]

ii. I believe that the entire canon of scripture is missional. The central message of redemption found in the Old and New Testaments validates the missionary mandate. Therefore, the church has a mission, and each Christian participates in that

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[9] William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 515.

[10] "An unprejudiced reader who surveys the New Testament's table of contents will assume that the most important source for a description of the history of the early Christian mission is the Acts of the Apostles . . . " Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:22.

mission. *Missions, mission,* and *missionary* are all concepts that have been deeply criticized in anthropological and sociological contexts as being ethnocentric, oppressive to cultures, promoting colonialism, paternalistic, and more. While it cannot be denied that regrettable mistakes have been made and sinful objects pursued, the theme of scripture—"to know Christ and make him known"—remains a comprehensive and necessary call for all people everywhere (Jn 17:3; Phil 3:10; Col 2:2–4). Carrying out the mission mandate does not have to be accompanied by the above noted negative practices.

iii. Romans 1:28–32 insists that humankind has a problem; we are sinners before a holy God. The consequences of sin are not only personal; because mankind is filled with every kind of wickedness—evil, greed, depravity—there are inevitable social consequences as well.

iv. I believe that mission is not "over there," not west to east, but is "every nation to every people—together."[11]

Statement of Delimitations

First, this study will proceed from an evangelical Protestant perspective. It is recognized that there is a vast body of literature on missiology and mission from Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox perspectives, which are beyond the scope of this paper.

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[11] Gary Corwin, "Reflections on 'Becoming Globally Friendly,'" *EMQonline.com,* January 2011 [journal online]; available from http://www.emisdirect.com/emq/issue-314/2491; accessed January 5, 2011.

Second, this research is undertaken for the eventual benefit of a particular local church congregation that is eager to respond to biblical teaching. Therefore, it will concentrate less on various missiological theories and more on historical precedent and biblical and theological paradigms. The intent of the writer is the practical application in a particular local church context.

Third, this study will not be an exhaustive review of everything that has been written on the topic of mission, but a representative review. Anyone entering into the current discussion on the theology of Christian mission will understand that the body of literature published since Latourette's comprehensive series, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, has multiplied exponentially![12]

Fourth, exegetical study will be based on English translations of the scripture, primarily the New International Version.

<center>Literature Review</center>

The following is an outline of the sources this author found most helpful and/or interesting on the subject at hand. In no particular order, they are as follows:

William Wilberforce[13] is a compelling new biography by William Hague, a British Conservative Member of Parliament. Hague has written an exhaustively researched and sympathetic account of the life of William Wilberforce that is a pleasure to read. Hague gives

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[12] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity,* 2 vols., rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). Begun in 1937, this work was published as a seven-volume set in 1945 and was later revised and published as a two-volume edition.

[13] Hague, *William Wilberforce*.

full and fair credit to Wilberforce's evangelical motivation for good works, never falling into condescension or scepticism or giving short shrift to Wilberforce's Christian faith. Hague has probably discovered in Wilberforce a political kinsman (as he also has in George W. Bush), one who shares "compassionate conservatism" ideology.

The Life of William Wilberforce,[14] the official biography, was written by Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, two of Wilberforce's sons. Published in 1838, a mere five years after Wilberforce's death, it was met with dismay by evangelicals who remembered Wilberforce. It apparently smothers Wilberforce's evangelical fervour and his sympathy with so-called "enthusiasts." This modern reader could not sense this omission at first glance. Time and distance from the nineteenth-century language has preserved Wilberforce's warm-hearted evangelicalism in spite of the high-church inclinations of his sons.

Eckhard J. Schnabel's *Early Christian Mission,*[15] written in two massive volumes, must be considered the gold standard for the history and theology of mission in the New Testament church. It is written from a warmly evangelical perspective and is utterly solid from an academic perspective, yet also eminently readable.

Ronald J. Sider's *Good News and Good Works*[16] is a representative account of the radical discipleship view of the Christian life. Every Christian needs to read this book.

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[14] Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce,* 5 vols. (London: John Murray, 1838; reprint, New York: Books for Libraries, 1972).

[15] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* vol. 1.

[16] Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

Carl Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*[17] was the turning point for evangelical engagement with social responsibility in North America. This is a good book to read to understand the evangelical reaction (up to the mid–twentieth century) to the "social gospel."

John Stott's *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary*[18] is one of the first careful attempts to lay a theological foundation for bringing social responsibility back into the evangelical fold.

The Mission of God[19] by Chris Wright is, in the writer's opinion, the best available book written laying the theological foundation for an integrated perspective on mission. Wright maintains that the gospel of Christ is the ultimate mission of the church, "ultimate" being a word he carefully distinguishes from "priority."

Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis*[20] should be read by every evangelical who is interested in the integration of social justice and gospel proclamation. It should become clear that when biblical orthodoxy slides into mere ethics (which is, interestingly, the very problem Wilberforce addressed in *Real Christianity*), the foundation

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[17] Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1947).

[18] John Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization [1978], 1975).

[19] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006).

[20] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic that Woke Up the Church,* ed. Paul B. Raushenbush (New York: HarperOne, 2007). Originally published as *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907).

for Christian social justice is gone. Nonetheless it is a thought-provoking call for Christian social justice.

In *Fundamentalism and the American Culture*[21] George Marsden delivers an historical assessment of the evangelism versus social justice dilemma from an evangelical perspective. His book was very helpful in identifying inter-connecting issues in the American church in the early twentieth century.

Wilberforce's *Real Christianity*[22] is still being re-published and re-printed in both original and abridged forms. It is hard to imagine that this work was written two hundred years ago. It is timeless! The spiritual truths it expresses are still able to edify and convict the soul.

To the best of this author's knowledge, the latest book to be written on the theology of mission is Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss's *Encountering Theology of Mission.*[23] The subtitle describes the contents: "biblical foundations, historical developments, and contemporary issues." This book is written from an evangelical perspective, clearly covering the landscape in historical and theological missiology, and fairly considers all aspects of a point. It is readable.

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[21] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[22] William Wilberforce, *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity,* 14th ed. (London: Cadell, 1797; reprint London: Kessinger, 1829).

[23] Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

David Bosch's *Transforming Mission*[24] is a respected academic treatise on mission

and is generously referenced. Bosch writes from a conservative conciliar perspective, with

the result that the text can seem ambiguous (note the title itself.)

Timothy Keller's *Generous Justice*[25] proved to be a turning point in this author's

understanding of the relationship between evangelism and social justice in Christian

missions. Keller says that they exist in "an asymmetrical inseparable relationship."[26]

Several journal articles were instrumental in this research. Hans Kvalbein's "Go

Therefore and Make Disciples . . . The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament"[27]

outlines the nature of discipleship as the goal of evangelism. Keith Fernando's "Mission: A

Problem of Definition"[28] was helpful in outlining evangelical approaches to mission, ending

in an affirmation of disciple making as the purpose and goal of mission. An alternate way of

looking at the integration of evangelism and social-justice issues in mission is presented in

Wilbert R. Shenk's "The Whole is Greater than the Sum of the Parts: Moving Beyond Word

and Deed."[29] This article proposes the model of the kingdom of God as the mediating

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[24] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

[25] Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice* (New York: Dutton, 2010).

[26] Ibid., 139.

[27] Hans Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples . . . The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," *Themelios* 13, no. 2 (1988) [journal on-line]; available at http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/13.2_Kvalbein.pdf; accessed October 2010.

[28] Keith Ferdinando, "Mission: A Problem of Definition," *Themelios* 33, no. 1 (May 2008) [journal online], available at http://thegospelcoalition.org/publications/33-1/mission-a-problem-of-definition; accessed October 28, 2010.

position that holds the two elements together. Charles Ringma's "Holistic Ministry and Mission: A Call for Reconceptualization"[30] is an excellent reminder that definition, words, and labels in the Christian world of ideas and concepts need to be chosen carefully and precisely to avoid long debates and unhealthy polarizations.

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[29] William R. Shenk, "The Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of the Parts: Moving Beyond Word and Deed," *Missiology: An International Review* 20 (1993): 65–75.

[30] Charles Ringma, "Holistic Ministry and Mission: A Call for Reconceptualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 32 (2004): 431–448.

CHAPTER 2

A MISSION MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

A mission conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 became an historical marker in

current evangelical mission development.[1] The theme of the conference was "the

evangelization of the world in this generation." This conference presented the missionary

task primarily as bringing people to Christ and gathering them into churches. As it was a time

of positive momentum in world history, social justice issues arising from the world's

problems were seemingly being solved by science and technology on many fronts: in health,

industry, economics, and education. In this climate of momentum, the church envisioned its

primary task as evangelizing the whole world.

However, the twentieth century failed to deliver on the promise of unending positive

progression. Instead, people were stunned by two world wars and a world-wide depression,

while murderous economic and political systems proliferated around the world. In the first

half of the century, the Protestant church was torn apart by a fundamentalist-modernist

controversy that arose from debate over the authority and infallibility of the scriptures, but

which spun into many other issues of contention. The result was a bitter division between

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[1] This conference was a worldwide ecumenical event organized by the Student Volunteer Movement (1886–1966), a student organization that sent thousands of missionaries overseas in the first half of the twentieth century.

conciliars[2] (older, mainline denominations) and evangelicals, many of whom exited the

existing churches to form their own denominations. Possibly the most harmful division that

developed was the dichotomization of Christian mission into evangelism (the evangelicals)

versus social justice (the conciliars.)[3]

One of the results of this controversy is that, over the course of the last century,

serious theological work has been done with regard to mission, much of it concerned with the

proper relationship between evangelism and social justice. Perhaps the fundamental idea that

has caused evangelicals to broaden their thinking with regard to the missionary task is the

concept of *missio Dei*.[4] *Missio Dei* is the Latin term for "the sending of God." As a

theological concept it was originally used in reference to the Trinity, specifically the

"sentness of God (the Son) by the Father."[5] The term's biblical foundation is derived from Jn

3:16–17, 5:30, 11:42, 17:18, and 20:21; in these passages Jesus speaks repeatedly of being

sent into the world by the Father. As *missio Dei* came to be used in missiological discussions,

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[2] "Conciliar" is a term in missiological literature that refers to older, mainline denominations that became defined by the World Council of churches established in 1948.

[3] The history and philosophy of the social gospel movement are reviewed in chapter 5.

[4] Although this idea was introduced by theologians and missiologists in the ecumenical (conciliar) movement, it has contributed to evangelical missional studies. The "face" of the ecumenical movement is the World Council of Churches and its various committees. The missiological work done in the first half of the twentieth century by the WCC is to be commended for its valuable contribution to the theology of mission. Unfortunately, much of this work was flawed by "theological ambiguity and tentativity," and even though written with "impeccable theological precision," it lacked "missionary passion." J. F. Shepherd, Education Secretary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, foreword to George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

[5] John A. McIntosh, "Missio Dei," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 631–633.

the term came to mean "the mission of God." Therefore, God's mission is directed toward this world in making himself known, bringing redemption to mankind, and establishing his Kingdom. It begins with creation and ends with the reconciliation of all things "in heaven and earth" to himself through the Lord Jesus Christ (Col 1:20). Hence, mission is rooted in the initiative and character of God.[6]

As the concept of *missio Dei* was developed in the Protestant ecumenical movement, mission became interpreted as participation in the social and political liberation of societies.[7] The *missio Dei* became everything God was doing in the world with or without the church. Mission was seen as happening wherever, however, and by whomever the will of God is done on earth. This included non-Christians to whom the concept of the will of God is completely unknown or rejected. The watchword became "Let the world set the agenda." As commitment to the role of the church in mission was loosened, eventually the commitment to gospel proclamation was severed.[8]

In contrast, evangelical Protestantism has maintained that the church remains at the centre of the mission of God. God's mission is specifically located in the church, in the

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[6] Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 62.

[7] This development occurred over consecutive conferences held by the International Missionary Council (IMC) and/or the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), the missions arm of the World Council of Churches: Willingen 1952, Ghana 1958, Mexico 1963, Upsalla 1968. For an excellent map of the ecumenical world conferences up to 1998, see David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict: 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 319–323.

[8] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms*. In recent years this position has moderated. See Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology*, 116, 131. Yet differences between evangelical and conciliar theology with regard to the uniqueness of Christ and the value of non-Christian religions continue the breach.

redeemed people of God and what they have been commissioned to do under the authority of

Jesus with the promise of his presence (Mt 28:18–20). Consequently, the church's mission

flows from the mission of God. We are privileged to participate in the great narrative of what

God is doing throughout the world in calling people to himself and establishing his kingdom.

John Stott explains the evangelical sense of *missio Dei* as follows:

> Mission is an activity of God arising out of the very nature of God. The living God of the Bible is a sending God, which is what "mission" means. He sent the prophets to Israel. He sent his Son into the world. His Son sent out the apostles and the seventy, and the Church. He also sent the Spirit to the Church and sends Him into our hearts today. So the mission of the Church arises from the mission of God and is to be modeled on it.[9]

The recognition that mission is not primarily something we do but rather something

that we participate in at the initiative and purposes of God has caused a metamorphosis in

missional thinking. As one reads through the literature it becomes evident that mission has

become a very broad concept that will accommodate differing emphases and perspectives.

Four different missional streams are detectable in evangelical thinking today.[10] Each stream

tends to overlap with another. What distinguishes them is their emphasis of various points

rather than fundamentally different claims.

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[9] J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 66.

[10] Others have counted and identified the streams differently. A. Scott Moreau, in "Mission and Missions" *(Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions)* counts three. Tokunboh Adeyemo cites nine! ("A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary Perspectives" in Bruce Nicholls, ed., *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 41–62). Keith Ferdinando ("Mission") counts four.

Mission as Gospel Proclamation

This stream is characterized by a prioritized focus on the evangelization and establishment of local churches in every people group around the world. Its starting point is the great commission of Matthew 28:18–20. Proponents of this view would carefully guard the definition of mission to ensure that gospel proclamation, with the goal of establishing churches, remains the missional priority. Proponents of this view are concerned that in the broadening definition of mission, the personal and individual redemptive message of salvation will be smothered. An example of this concern is seen in "Missiology Faces a Lion" by missiologist Donald McGavran (1897–1990).[11] In this article the author uses the metaphor of a lion to represent all the activities of a socio-political nature now competing with the proclamation of the gospel. The lion threatens to kill and eat all true missiologists, i.e. those holding to a belief that mission is primarily evangelism. In McGavran's view, the fundamental task is to first change the worldview of idol worshippers through the proclamation of the gospel:

> Before us lies a village in which all the inhabitants offer sacrifices to and worship the god represented in the stone image of a bull, or of a woman, or a man. The average income of those who reside here is very low. Half the people in the village are illiterates. The people in this village are divided into several distinct castes or tribes. One of these is, by the religion professed, held to be most superior; another is held to be most inferior. What does this village need? . . . Its crucial need is to cease worshiping the stone idols, to cease believing that all sickness is caused by acts of these gods. The crucial need is to believe on God the Father Almighty, who is made known to us in Jesus Christ, his Son. The great need is to move off the animal and human platform

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[11] Donald A. McGavran, "Missiology Faces The Lion," *Missiology: An International Review* 17 (July 1989): 335–341.

and to mount the platform of the divine life. Then and then only will . . . other advances be made quickly and permanently.[12]

Mission as gospel proclamation, with its boldly stated priorities, has rarely neglected social action. As one author has pointed out, the "logic of the gospel" draws Christian missionaries irresistibly into all type of social causes.[13] Historically, as missionaries were sent out to preach the gospel, they often found themselves fully engaged in alleviating the endemic poverty and misery of the people they lived among and grew to love. This was done by establishing schools, clinics, hospitals, and orphanages. Missionaries pioneered agricultural projects, as well as bible translation and literacy. In many places they were instrumental in ending repressive cultural practices: immolation of widows, foot binding, killing of twin babies, etc. These activities accompanied the proclamation of the gospel and the establishment of the local church as a natural consequence of Christian obedience to Jesus' command to love your neighbour.[14]

Indeed, many missionaries in evangelical faith missions of an earlier era (1920–1975) found themselves in conflict with the realities of the physical needs on the field and the expectations of supporters back home to see individual conversion results.[15] An example of

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[12] McGavran, "Missiology," 339.

[13] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 1995), 91–92.

[14] Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology,* 128. Craig Ott cites Nigerian theologian Yusufu Turaki: "Christian missions have done more to bring about social, religious, and human development and change than any other human agent in Africa south of the Sahara. . . They made substantial contributions to nation-state building and to modernizing African societies."

[15] Ralph D. Winter, "The Future of Evangelicals in Mission," *Mission Frontiers* September–October 2007 [journal online], 12–13; available at http://www.missiofrontiers.org/oldsite/2007/05/200705.htm; accessed 27 October 2010.

this can be seen in the early missionary career of Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators.[16] Townsend went to Guatemala in 1919 with Central American Mission (CAM), an agency whose stated purpose was to "carry the Gospel to every creature in Central America, not to plant Christian institutions or even churches. . . . The entire time of missionaries, and all the funds contributed, are devoted to evangelization."[17] The Townsends were not long on the field when they deemed it necessary to establish schools with boarding accommodation, orphanages, churches, a hospital/clinic, dispensary, printing press, translation work, coffee curing plant, and a bible institute, all spread over four mission stations! The Central American Mission home board was faced with the task of convincing its "evangelism only" constituency that all these efforts were legitimate mission. This story illustrates that the logic of the gospel often led to practical realities that were in tension with the rhetoric of home-based supporters.

Holistic Mission

The second stream is defined by the adjective "holistic."[18] Holistic mission takes its starting point from the Johannine form of the great commission: "Jesus said, 'As the Father

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[16] Bill Svelmoe, "Evangelism Only: Theory versus Practise in the Early Faith Missions," *Missiology: An International Review* XXXI, no. 2 (April 2003): 195–206.

[17] Svelmoe, "Evangelism Only," 195, citing C. I. Scofield, co-founder of Central American Mission.

[18] Charles Ringma, "Holistic Ministry and Mission: A Call for Reconceptualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 32, no. 4 (October 2004): 431–448. The word "holistic" as it applies to Christian mission may have reached the limit of its usefulness. Ringma maintains that had careful work been done on the philosophical and cultural meanings of the term "holistic," it would not have slipped into missional vocabulary. He calls it a "grab bag" term used in our culture to refer to holistic counselling, holistic medicine, holistic healing,

has sent me, I am sending you'" (Jn 20:21). Proponents of this stream interpret the commission as a broader task than that of gospel proclamation and see social justice as necessarily included in the mission of the church. The definitional breadth of holistic mission is exhaustive. The following concepts are included in its scope: ministry to the whole person, holistic and "wholistic" ministry, Christian social transformation, ministry to both physical and spiritual needs, and integrated development (meaning an integration of evangelism with social action).[19]

Holistic mission's most able advocate is the Lausanne movement initiated by the revered British evangelical John Stott. The Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelism held in 1974 published the Lausanne Covenant, which included the following statement:

> We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all people. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. *Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive.* Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless *we affirm 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 neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people

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holistic and sustainable agriculture, holistic environmentalism, and holistic mission! Holistic mission, says Ringma, often means far too much and is far too general.

[19] Tetsuano Yamamori, Bryant L. Myers, and David Conner, eds., *Serving with the Poor in Asia* (Monrovia, CA: MARC Publications, 1995).

receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.[20]

This statement reflects a watershed in the missiological thinking of the twentieth century evangelical church. Holistic mission has become the dominant view of evangelicalism with evangelism and social responsibility becoming more closely linked as time went on. Social responsibility became not merely the consequence of evangelism in Stott's mind; he wrote that "the actual commission itself (i.e. Mt 28:16–20) must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus."[21] At a Committee for World Evangelism conference held in Grand Rapids (1982), Stott further solidified his position on the dual responsibilities of evangelism and social action by using the illustrations of two blades of a pair of scissors, the two wings of a bird, and a marriage.[22] The entire tenor of the report coming out of this conference is that of a necessary partnership between social action and evangelism in the mission of the church. Both are seen as equally constitutive elements of a Christian's duty and of the mission of the church.

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[20] The Lausanne Movement, "The Lausanne Covenant" (1974) [online document]; available at http://www.lausanne.org/covenant; accessed 25 October 2010. See paragraph 5, "Christian Social Responsibility." Italics mine.

[21] John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World,* IVP Classics (London: Church Pastoral Aid Society, 1975), 23.

[22] The Lausanne Movement, "Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment" (Lausanne Occaional Paper No. 21), *Grand Rapids Report, A Joint Publication of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship* (The Lausanne Movement, 1982), 23.

For many years the Lausanne Movement affirmed an equal partnership between evangelism and social action, while at the same time asserting that gospel proclamation is primary.[23] At Lausanne's latest conference (held in Cape Town, July 2010), the Cape Town Commitment addressed the ongoing tension by clarifying its position on the relationship between gospel proclamation and social action. It is worth fully quoting:

> Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God….The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world. . . . We affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and humankind, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. . . . The salvation we proclaim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead.
>
> Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world, we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.
>
> We commit ourselves to the integral and dynamic exercise of all dimensions of mission to which God calls his church.
>
> God commands us to make known to all nations the truth of God's revelation and the gospel of God's saving grace through Jesus Christ, calling all people to repentance, faith, baptism and obedient discipleship.
>
> God commands us to reflect his own character though compassionate care for the needy, and to demonstrate the values and the power of the kingdom of God in striving for justice and peace and in caring for God's creation.[24]

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[23] John R. W. Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). See especially 1980 Thailand Statement (159–160), the 1982 Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility (183), 1989 Manila Manifesto (236).

[24] The Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action," Part 1.10 [online document] (The Lausanne Movement, 2011); available at http://www.lausanne.org/ctcommitment (accessed February 16, 2011). This

The sum of the Lausanne 2010 statement is a distinction between evangelism and social action accompanied by the contention that neither one acts alone; both are necessary components of "integral mission."

Cultural Mandate Mission

The third stream is another comprehensive approach that takes as its starting point the biblical doctrine of the cultural mandate (Gn 1:28).[25] Similar in scope to holistic mission, it embraces everything that God sends the church to do. An advocate of this position, J. Andrew Kirk, sees the church's mission as essentially five tasks, which he lists in no particular order of priority: [26]

- to be stewards of the earth by developing resources for the benefit of humanity with ecological care;

- to serve others in compassion "without distinction and whatever their need";

- to bear witness to the gospel of Christ. This includes verbal proclamation of the gospel as well as a visual example of the transforming power of the gospel in individual lives and the communities in which we live;

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commitment has been signed by well-known theologians and leaders of reformed persuasion such as Sinclair Ferguson, John Piper, and Chris Wright.

[25] Ralph D. Winter, "The Future of Evangelicals in Mission," 6–15. See also: Winter, "Are We In a 'Kingdom Era'?" *Mission Frontiers* 25, no. 1 (2008).

[26] J. Andrew Kirk, "Missiology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 434–436. Kirk is a British Baptist evangelical who spent many years as an educator in South America. He currently is a senior research fellow at International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation. For Kirk and other proponents of this view, attaching priority leads to choosing between alternatives. Each task is vital.

- to advocate for justice in our society by seeking to reform the institutions and customs that create the social ills of poverty, marginalization, and oppression;

- to be a community that is seen by the world as an example of reconciliation, liberty, and love for one another; in short, a community practicing a transformed life by the grace of God.

The beauty and comprehensiveness of Kirk's "mission is the Christian life" definition is to be admired. It appears to adequately describe the transformed life and task of a true disciple of Christ.

Radical Discipleship Mission

The fourth stream is called radical discipleship mission. This viewpoint has a strong socio-political emphasis, maintaining that social justice and evangelism are equally important but genuinely distinct aspects of the total mission of the church. This position also refuses to differentiate any priority between evangelism and social responsibility. The best-known evangelical representative of this position, Ron Sider, says, "The time has come for all biblical Christians to refuse to use the sentence: 'The primary task of the church is. . . . ' I do not care if you complete the sentence with evangelism or social action. Either way it is unbiblical and misleading."[27]

Radical discipleship mission has a right and left wing that are divided by the definition of salvation. Evangelicals Ron Sider, Rene Padilla, Samuel Escobar, and Jim Wallis/Sojourners are the "right-radicals." Their theology being for the most part conservative, they define salvation as applying only to:

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[27] Ronald J. Sider, *Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice* (Bramcote Notts: Grove Books, 1977), 17–18.

> . . . what happens when persons accept Christ and join the redeemed
> community and what will happen when Christ returns to bring a cosmic
> restoration of the whole created order. That means that even now salvation is
> personal and social (in the church). And it will be cosmic and total.[28]

The "left-radicals" are Orlando Costas, Richard Mouw, Vinay Samuel, and Chris Sugden, who apply the term salvation to societal structures as well. The eradication of poverty, injustice, and oppression wherever it may occur is "salvation."[29] In other words, salvation is not just an individual redemptive concept, but also applies to society as well.[30]

This position holds much appeal for earnest-minded individuals who readily see the inadequacies, even hypocrisy of the nominally Christian Western church. They are highly aware of the social and economic inequities systemically entrenched throughout the world. Often this group has no patience when they look at the politically conservative, capitalist disposition of the average North American church-goer. The appeal of social activism, of "doing something" about the injustices they feel keenly, draws them to this position.

All four of these positions have strong evangelical advocates and are represented across the spectrum in our churches. A mission program must accommodate this plurality of emphasis in the church. The people of God in every local congregation have a variety of interests and gifts that are necessary and valuable for Kingdom work (1 Cor 12). It would be short sighted for a mission program to focus exclusively on one or another view.

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[28] Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 209.

[29] That is to say, the eradication of apartheid in South Africa was "salvation" for that country.

[30] Critics of the radical discipleship position warn that the indiscriminate application of the kingdom of God and the lordship of Jesus to society at large rather than where Christ rules (his redeemed community) is a misapplication of scripture.

This paper proposes that integration of these missional streams is possible by developing a model based on the Great Commission's central command to "make disciples." The command to make disciples has an implicit transformational starting point: the proclamation of the gospel. Making disciples enfolds the Great Commandment to love God and neighbour, and the Great Commission extends the creation command to rule and fill the whole earth.

A Definition of Christian Mission

Given the divergence of views on the definition of mission, it is necessary to propose a working definition of mission. The fact that *mission* is not a word used in the New Testament forces one to proceed with some humility. However, the concept of *sending,* which lies behind the word *mission,* is certainly biblical.

An additional complication is the lexical movement from *missions* to *mission.* Prior to the 1960s these two words were commonly used as synonyms and described the process of spreading the Christian faith by sending missionaries to preach the gospel and establish churches, usually in a cross-cultural setting. The theological development of *missio Dei* has necessitated that these two words be distinguished. *Mission* is an all-encompassing term reflecting the whole redemptive purpose of God. The church's mission is derivative and has been described as that of being "sent" (as pilgrim, stranger, witness, prophet, servant, salt, light, etc.) by God into this world."[31] *Missions* is the word now commonly used for particular components that the church engages in to accomplish the redemptive purpose of God such as

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[31] Peters, *A Biblical Theology,* 209, 11.

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evangelism, church planting, and increasingly, social justice. *Missions* is considered a sub-set of the *mission* of the church.

David J. Bosch (1929–1992), a very influential missiologist of the twentieth century, doubts the very possibility of defining mission, saying that the meaning of mission has broadened over the course of time, and carries different connotations in different periods of time.[32] Further, according to Bosch, the biblical examples of Jesus, Paul, and the Apostles provide us with no single theology of mission, for each one had a different approach.[33] Bosch concludes, therefore, that mission is indefinable.[34]

This study, however, takes the position that it is not only possible to define the mission of the church but necessary. From a practical perspective, how would a church mission committee function if they are unable to define the very task they have been given to administrate? In *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* published in 1961, J. H. Bavinck asked several questions as a preface to his study on the theory of missions:

> How ought missionary work be conducted? Is it to be restricted exclusively to the preaching of the Word, or does it also include medical help, education, agricultural assistance, and the like? If it includes more than preaching, is such additional activity simply preparatory, or is it to be included in our concept of

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[32] David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* American Society of Missiology Series, no. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 8. The author traces six successive missionary paradigms from the first century to the twentieth: the apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity, the Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period, the medieval Roman Catholic paradigm, the Protestant (Reformation) paradigm, and the modern Enlightenment paradigm (which is the presently fading scene). He proposes a paradigm of the future: "the emerging ecumenical paradigm" (see 181–182).

[33] Ibid., 56–180. This is the premise of Part 1 of the book (New Testament Models for Mission).

[34] Ibid., 9. Bosch's work is said to be the primary text used in the majority of seminaries with a missiology study program.

missions? Is the missionary approach simple in nature—exclusively preaching—or is it comprehensive? Ought it to be immediately concerned with the entire life of the non-Christian?[35]

This, in essence, is still our question. Since Bavinck wrote this, the "additional activity" has multiplied.

Surely we are headed into a complex era in the mission of the church. In this context a local church must anchor its mission program in biblical and theological foundations to avoid fulfilling Stephen Neill's prophetic warning: "If everything is mission, nothing is mission. If everything the church does is to be classed as 'mission,' we shall need to find another term for the church's particular responsibility for 'the heathen,' those who have never yet heard the Name of Christ."[36] It is possible to define mission too broadly; the subsequent danger is the diminishment of the gospel. It is also possible to define mission too narrowly; the subsequent danger is a stunted form of individualistic conversion. It is necessary to find a model that will avoid both extremes.

For the purposes of this paper a definition of mission proposed by Presbyterian missionary John M. L. Young[37] will be adopted.[38]

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[35] J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: The Presyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), 4–5.

[36] Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology,* 79. Missiologist Stephen Neill made this remark at the Duff Lectures, Edinburgh, 1958. It has since been widely quoted in many articles, lectures, and books on the topic of missions. Neill meant it as a warning against losing sight of the necessary proclamation of the gospel.

[37] John M. L. Young (1912–1994) was born in Korea to Canadian Presbyterian missionary parents. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Young finished his missionary career in Japan with the Presbyterian Church in America. See complete biography at http://www.pcahistory.org/findingaids/youngjml.html

> Missions is the work of the Triune God, moving His Church in love, to send Christ's ambassadors to proclaim to the world the gospel of His covenant of life (grace) that men from all nations might be made disciples, build His Church and fulfill their covenant task, seeking to bring all things into subjection to God for the true restoration and advancement of men and the glory of God.[39]

This definition of mission is broad enough to reconcile the various missional streams that have developed, and to provide a well-grounded foundation for decision making. The four streams already discussed carry a central goal: making disciples for the glory of God. This, too, is the central goal of our adopted definition. Other important features of this definition also serve to reconcile various missiological concepts.

First, this definition recognizes the truth of the *missio Dei*: mission begins with the Trinity. God the Father sent the Son; Christ sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers and equip them for mission; the church sends ambassadors. All is the work of God. The historical narrative of the Old and New Testaments demonstrates that it is God who covenants to make himself known to his people. "I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Lv. 26:11–12),

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[38] Two other definitions of mission deserve mention: 1) "Our mission . . . means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation" (C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*), and 2) "Christian mission is . . . the activity of a community of faith that distinguishes itself from its environment in terms of both religious belief (theology) and social behaviour (ethics), that is convinced of the truth claims of its faith, and that actively works to win other people to the content of faith and to the way of life of whose truth and necessity the members of that community are convinced." Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:11.

[39] John M. L. Young, *Missions: The Biblical Motive and Aim* (Pittsburg: Crown & Covenant, 1962, 2007), vi. This definition reflects Young's later thinking. His earlier definition of missions was: "Missions is the work of the Triune God, through His Church, of sending Christ's ambassadors to all nations to proclaim His whole Word for the salvation of lost men, the establishment of indigenous churches, and the coming of God's kingdom, all for the glory of God" (see p. 3).

"Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9), and "For God so loved that world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). God is a missionary God.[40]

Second, this definition recognizes that the Church is the vehicle through which redemptive mission is delivered. The gathered church both draws in and moves outward in love.[41] Corporately and individually, the church is an ambassador—people who represent and speak on behalf of Christ. The book of Acts tells the story of how the twelve disciples and other followers of Jesus obediently waited for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit, whose mission is to fill the ambassadors with power "to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These ambassadors of Christ crossed all the cultural barriers of the first century (Samaritan, Ethiopian, Roman, Greek, and Gentile) as witnesses of the whole Word:

> Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God. . . . handed over . . . put to death . . . but God raised him from the dead. . . . [You must] repent . . . turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 2:22–24; 3:19–21).

Third, as the pivotal phrase of this definition indicates, the mission of the church is to "make disciples" of people from all nations. As we will see in chapter 3, this is a comprehensive task that Jesus characterized as "baptizing . . . and teaching everything that I

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[40] "And I . . . am about to come and gather all nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory" (Isaiah 66:18).

[41] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church,* Contours of Christian Theology, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 162.

have commanded you" (Mt 28:20). As Young's definition indicates, the task of making disciples has a necessary transformational point—the proclamation of the gospel.

Finally, this definition affirms that becoming a disciple of Christ is not an end in itself. A disciple, by virtue of being taught everything that Christ has commanded and by participating in the community of believers, will live a life of purpose directed toward his fellow man for the glory of God. As Michael Green has noted in *The Message of Matthew*, "The apostles are called not to evoke decisions but to make disciples. And that is an altogether tougher assignment."[42]

A Model for Christian Mission: Making Disciples

"Disciple" is the most frequently used term in the gospel of Matthew for those who respond to the gospel message of redemption and follow Jesus.[43] It bears repeating that the New Testament consistently portrays disciples as those who have entered the kingdom by hearing the word of God.[44] The category of disciple is not restricted to the original twelve called by Jesus, although their uniqueness is certainly recognized, but is intended to refer to all whom are called by Christ into his kingdom. Disciple, therefore, is synonymous with Christian, as Acts 11:26 makes explicit: "The disciples were called Christians first at

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[42] Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew,* The Bible Speaks Today, ed. John Stott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 322.

[43] R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1989), 261.

[44] Romans 10:14–15 is representative: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"

Antioch." A disciple is not a spiritually elite category; it denotes all who are baptized into the name of the triune God and follow Christ in a life of obedience to his teaching.

Turning now to Matthew's account of the great commission, we see that Young's definition is developed from a thoroughly biblical premise. The most commonly recognized mandate for mission is found in Matthew 28:16–20:[45]

> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Chris Wright states that "the Great Commission is the command of the new covenant."[46] It is a covenantal command in that it follows all the forms of Old Testament covenantal statements: an introductory statement claiming comprehensive authority ("all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"), imperative demands derived from this authority ("therefore, go . . . make disciples . . . baptising . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"), and the promise or blessing of everlasting presence

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[45] The Great Commission has been given in several complementary forms: Luke 24:44–49; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8; Mt 4:19; 10:16–20; 13:38; 24:14. It is recognized that building a biblical case for mission on one passage alone is inadequate. See C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 34–38). The writer agrees with Wright that the Bible is all about mission: "the whole Bible renders to us the story of God's mission through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation" (Ibid., 51). See also Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology,* 61). Yet Mt 28:16–20 is the most commonly recognized text for the basis of mission.

[46] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 354.

("surely I am with you always"). In this way, Jesus restates the Deuteronomic covenant: *I am the Lord your God; obey me, and you will live.*[47]

Consequently, the Great Commission is an extension and a restatement of the Old Testament covenantal commands for the people of God to live a life of righteousness before a holy God. This provides important continuity between Old Testament covenantal commands, for instance, the cultural mandate in Gn 1:28, and Christian mission in the New Testament era. Jesus declared that he had not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (Mt 5:17). Christian discipleship ethics are based on the call to righteousness found in the law and the prophets: "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48 and Lev 19:2).

In the Great Commission passage, the verbs "go," "baptizing," and "teaching" are participles in the original Greek writing, but "make disciples" is an imperative.[48] Hence, the grammatical emphasis of this passage falls on the command to "make disciples." The participles—go, baptize, and teach—are the means of making disciples. As well, they describe the character of a disciple; one who goes, one who baptizes, and one who teaches. The imperative—make disciples—is the goal.[49] Making disciples is therefore, the essence of

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[47] A summary of Dt. 5:6–32, Dt. 5:1–25, and several other passages in Deuteronomy.

[48] D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:595; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 951; Craig S. Keener, *Commentary of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 718; R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academie Books, 1989), 261. Most commentators agree that for various linguistic reasons the participles "go," "baptize," and "teach" also accrue imperative force.

[49] Hans Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples . . . The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," *Themelios* 13, no. 2 (1988) [journal on-line]; available

the mission of the church. From this text a model for mission can be built that properly integrates all aspects of a Christian's responsibility in mission.

As the great commission indicates, a disciple is one who is taught. The Greek words used in the New Testament for disciple and making disciples are *mathetes* and *matheteuo.*[50] They are etymologically related to *manthano*, which means "to instruct." As the word *matheteuo* etymologically implies, making disciples of Christ will always include verbal proclamation of the gospel.

Further, "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded" is a comprehensive statement. The word "commanded" (*entellomai*) in this passage has an all-inclusive sense.[51] Because Jesus himself was the object of the disciples' study, *entellomai* points to the full explication of his life and ministry. Christ's words, contained in his teachings, proverbs, blessings, parables, and prophecies, as well as his deeds, are all to be taught. Jesus said, "These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39).

However, more than conveying a set of facts, *matheteuo* denotes adopting the philosophy, practices, and lifestyle of one's teacher. The pattern set by Jesus with the first

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at http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/13.2_Kvalbein.pdf; accessed October 2010, 597.

[50] *Matheteuo/matheteusate* is the verb form: make or become disciples. It occurs at Mt 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21.

[51] Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 957. Wilkins is distinguished professor of New Testament and dean of faculty at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. (See footnote by Gottlob Schrenk, TDNT, 2:545: "In this context the word *entellomai* simply expresses the unconditional obligation to obedience which, grounded Christologically, is the obedience of faith.")

twelve disciples was that Jesus himself was the object of their study. A disciple not only talks

about Jesus, he lives like Jesus. Calvin wrote,

> For it (the gospel) is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It is not
> apprehended by the understanding and memory alone . . . but it is received
> only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the
> inmost affection of the heart. . . . Let them show themselves disciples not
> unworthy of Christ their teacher. We have given the first place to the doctrine
> in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it
> must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into
> itself that it may not be unfruitful for us.[52]

The indicative statement that introduces the great commission ("all authority in

heaven and on earth has been given to me") alerts us to the reality that Jesus is not only

Teacher, he is Lord. This reinforces the conclusion that the pattern of disciple making is not

to be a human relationship, but one that faithfully points to Christ. In other words, we do not

make disciples that follow us, but rather, with God's grace and help, we make disciples that

follow Jesus.[53] Matthew's gospel affirms that a disciple is an imitator of Jesus: as a servant

of all (20:24–28; 23:8–12), sharing in suffering and persecution (10:22–24), and in meekness

and humility (5:3–5; 11:29).

Jesus' instructions to his disciples to "teach everything I have commanded" is

foundational to the concept of making future disciples, and therefore important for

understanding how evangelism and social justice are to be integrated in mission. It is helpful

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[52] Jean Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Library of Christian
Classics, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox,
1960), Vol. XX, Book III.vi.4, 688.

[53] Samuel Larsen, "Biblical Mathetology: Implementing a Mutualistic Model of
Discipleship in a Cross Cultural and Church Planting Context" (D.Min. Dissertation,
Reformed Theological Seminary, 1989), 46–50.

to see the five discourses in the gospel of Matthew as a complete summary of Jesus'
teaching.[54]

In the first discourse (Mt 5–7), commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus
taught that his disciples would look completely different from others around them. Among
other things, the character of a disciple is demonstrated by poverty of spirit, mourning over
sin, meekness, longing for righteousness, mercy, purity, peacemaking, righteousness to the
point of persecution, keeping the intent and letter of the law, love for even enemies,
generosity to the needs of others without personal aggrandizement, prayer, fasting, trust in
God rather than worrying, and absence of judgment. A disciple is not like the world around
them (Mt 6:8.) Disciples have ever been counter-cultural.[55] A disciple who has fully
absorbed this body of teaching is salt and light in the world.

The second discourse (Mt 10) prepares disciples for mission. In this first mission,
urgency is emphasized (Mt 10:9, 10.) The tasks laid out are broad; preach, heal the sick, raise
the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, and drive out demons. Here, the mission is to the
"lost sheep of Israel" but the eventual mission to the Gentiles is assumed (10:18). The
essential realities of mission that Jesus taught are: the sense of urgency (10:6–15), the reality
of danger and opposition (10:16–23), the reality of Christ's power and protection (10:24–31),
the cost of loyalty to Christ (10:32–39), and the reward for those who remain steadfastly

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[54] Wilkins, *Matthew,* 32. "These discourses provide a wholistic presentation on the
kind of discipleship that was to be taught to disciples as the basis for full-orbed obedience to
Christ and became the basis for Christian instruction within the church. These discourses
reveal that Jesus' disciples will be characterized by what they are taught to follow in these
directives."

[55] John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-
Varsity, 1978), 18–19.

loyal (10:40–42). In the broad scope of the task, mission is urgent, dangerous, costly, yet ultimately rewarding.

In the third discourse (Mt 13), Jesus' teaching comes in a series of parables designed to sift genuine disciples from nominally interested followers (13:10–17). Here Jesus teaches that the nature of his kingdom is surprising and unexpected in human terms. His kingdom is completely governed by the sovereignty of God. Therefore, not all "seed" comes to maturity (13:1–23); the visible church on earth contains both believers and unbelievers (13:24–30, 47–52); God's rule seems insignificant, but it will permeate the world and it is worth being a part of at all cost (13:31–33, 44–46).

The teaching of the fourth discourse (Mt 18) runs parallel to that in John's gospel: "by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (Jn 13:35). Jesus teaches that his disciples are filled with child-like trust that he will protect them from those who would damage the faith of these "little ones" (Mt 18:1–14). Christ's disciples are those who submit to being accountable to one another (Mt 18:15–20). Finally, a disciple is one who is marked by mercy (Mt 18:21–35).

The fifth discourse (Mt 24–25), although notoriously difficult to interpret, nonetheless is clear enough in Jesus' essential teaching. Christ Jesus will return and his disciples will be prepared and watching for him.

These teachings describe the worldview and character of a disciple. It is a worldview that completely transforms lives, enabling the gathered church to be a demonstration of Christ's character and kingdom. When disciples share the good news of the gospel and demonstrate kingdom ethics—showing the love of God by loving one another, loving and praying for their enemies, doing good to those who hate them, refusing to pay evil for evil,

giving to the needy, identifying with the poor and oppressed as Jesus and the Prophets did,

living and watching in anticipation of Christ's return—then the world will see our good

deeds and praise our Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:16)!

The Great Commission also indicates that disciples of Jesus are baptized. The

grammatical construction of the Greek participle ("make disciples . . . baptizing them")

denotes the character of a disciple; one who is baptized.[56] Baptism is a visual and verbal sign

that one has pledged to follow Christ and committed to a new community. The notion of an

independent and unattached disciple is absent from the New Testament.[57] The twelve

apostles were selected from a larger group of disciples following Christ (Lk 6:13; Mk 3:13,

14). At Pentecost, the group instructed to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit numbered

one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15). After Peter's sermon on that same day three thousand

accepted his message, were baptized and "added to their number" (Acts 2:41). This pattern

continues throughout Acts; people believed the message, accepted baptism, and attached

themselves to the community of believers—the church.

The church today is a living sign of the promise of redemption—the present and

coming kingdom and reign of God. Disciples of Jesus have a particular obligation to lead the

way in what every human has been divinely called to do at creation.[58] Disciples who have

been taught all that Christ commanded have the unique opportunity to offer the solution to

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[56] D. A. Carson, *Matthew, The Expositor's Bible Commentary with NIV,* ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 2:597.

[57] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament,* rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, 1993), 388.

[58] Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology,* 150.

why society in general is unable to love God or their neighbour; unable to follow Jesus; unable to keep the creation mandate and therefore, suffers from the consequences of sin. Jesus demonstrated in his life and character the path of righteousness to which his disciples are called (Mt 5:20, 48). The church by its very presence is a powerful witness to the gospel:

> . . . by being the Church the people of God are automatically "spreading abroad the good news." Conversely, if the life of the Church denies the message about Jesus and the kingdom, then it is saying the gospel is not true. There is simply no neutral, uncommitted place outside of the community of faith from which a message may be proclaimed in order that the Church may come into existence as a second step, once people have accepted the verbal presentation.[59]

The essence of true religion is not simply a pattern of beliefs, but a way of life. Jesus says that those who do "the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 12:50) are his disciples. A disciple is one who hears, understands, and obeys "everything I have commanded you." Hence, the proclamation of the gospel is the verbal communication of truth which is also demonstrated by the messenger and seen by the recipient. This is a cycle that repeats itself in the life of the church. Just as Jesus—through word and deed—taught the eleven disciples, they in turn were sent to model him before others, thereby establishing a pattern for the church.[60] Disciples make disciples. Making disciples, then, is the process of bringing others to hear, understand, and obey (follow) the Lord Jesus.

Discipleship includes teaching and modeling. According to Matthew's gospel, the most important elements of discipleship are what is learned: submission and obedience to the

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[59] J. Andrew Kirk, *Good News of the Kingdom Coming: The Marriage of Evangelism and Social Responsibility* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1983), 104.

[60] The author recognizes that the initial disciples were in many ways unique. It is their role as followers of Christ and witnesses to him that is intended here.

will of God (6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 26:39, 42), absolute loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ (6:22–24, 33; 10:17ff, 37–39; 11:29; 13:21ff; 16:24ff; 19:12; 19:27ff; 24:9ff; 26:35), and complete obedience to the words of Christ (7:24–27; 28:19).[61] A disciple is one who lives a life of loyal obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and imitates his righteous character. The presence of such disciples in the church has great implications for missions.

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[61] Roger Mohrlang, *Matthew and Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 75. Mohrlang is professor of Biblical Studies, Whitworth College, Spokane, WA.

CHAPTER 3

MAKING DISCIPLES:
THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MISSION

The book of Acts shows how the "making disciples" model worked in the history of the early church. The first group of disciples attached great significance to the preaching of the gospel. They also demonstrated a new way of living, which attracted others to the community (Acts 2:46–47). This was the beginning of the churches' obedience to the teachings of Christ; of becoming the city upon a hill which cannot remain hidden.[1]

Rodney Stark, in *The Rise of Christianity*, asks the question, "How did a tiny and obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman Empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization?"[2] Stark, a sociologist, has researched reasons why people convert to another religion. Applying his research to the historical data of the early church, Stark's answer reveals the degree to which the Christians lived out their faith and profoundly impacted the culture surrounding them.

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[1] J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: The Presyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), 40.

[2] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3. Also: "What began as a Jewish sect in A.D. 30 had grown into a world religion by A.D. 60," J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982), 7.

According to Stark, numerous factors contributed to the expansion of Christianity in the first three centuries after Christ's death.[3] Christians tended to have large social networks which extended across social classes. The social marginality of the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora made a new community attractive.[4] Christians showed an ability to survive social chaos caused by epidemics and natural disasters. Christianity provided a religious foundation for a highly ethical social code. Women were valued by Christians. The surplus of women in the church had an impact on pagan culture through exogamous marriage. The high value placed on marriage and the family, coupled with prohibition of abortion, infanticide, and divorce all led to much higher birth rates in Christian families. The confidence of the martyr's was a testimony to the truth of their convictions. The overwhelming multiplicity of pagan gods contributed to the attraction of monotheism. Organizational commitment led to thriving communities who were able to care for one another as well as spread the gospel message. Finally, says Stark, Christianity succeeded because of superior theology.[5]

Stark's list can be significantly gathered into two categories: the engagement of Christians with their community; and the implicit communication of their Christian

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[3] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 21–209.

[4] Stark means the Hellenized Jews did not fit socially as either Jewish or Gentile insiders.

[5] Stark, *The Rise of Christianity,* 4, 209. All of these reasons have been critiqued by Eckhard Schnabel and have been shown to be insufficient cause in and of themselves, or even together, for the spread of Christianity. Schnabel quotes the French patristic scholar Gustave Bardy: "A satisfactory answer to this question is not possible. The mystery of the human soul belongs to itself, and we should not forget the powerful effect of divine grace, which chooses whom it wants, leading them onto those paths that lead to Him." See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:1555–1561.

worldview to those around them. Stark's overall conclusion is that Christianity ultimately

succeeded because the "central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive,

liberating, and effective social relations and organizations."[6] In other words, what Christians

believed transformed their behaviour in a way that fostered community life and strengthened

the communities in which they lived.

The New Testament documents are the primary sources on the content and spread of

Christian doctrine, and its consequent impact on society.[7] The book of Acts in particular

offers insight into the historical mission activity of the early church, specifically with regard

to the content of the central doctrines of Christianity (what Christians believed), how these

beliefs were communicated, and what consequential changes were seen in the community.

The New Testament documents demonstrate that Christian mission is a broad scope of

activities anchored in the proclamation of the gospel.

The early church was a missionary church. Ferdinand Hahn says,

The proclamation, the teaching, all activities of the early Christians had a
missionary dimension. The fact that it is not possible to find a defined concept
of 'mission' in the New Testament does not alter the fact that early
Christianity was controlled by the missionary task in their entire existence and
in all their activities.[8]

After having met the risen Jesus, the disciples were convinced that the promised kingdom of

God had come in the person of Jesus. Before Jesus left this earth he commissioned his

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[6] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity,* 211.

[7] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* 1:20–35. Schnabel outlines important arguments
for the historical reliability of Luke's account.

[8] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* 1:5. Ferdinand Hahn, *Mission in the New
Testament* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), 95.

disciples thus: ". . . you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Matthew's gospel expands the commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19–20). Clearly, the community of believers was not to remain static; the plan was to grow, to gather and multiply disciples from every nation of the world. The apostles evidently interpreted Jesus' statements—"you will be my witnesses" and "make disciples all nations"—as integral components of their apostolic ministry (Acts 1:25).

The apostolic witness centred around one person, Jesus Christ, an historical man with whom they had spent three years learning and whom they had come to believe was very God, of very God. Jesus told them just before he left, "you will be my witnesses," but that was not the first time they had heard what their life task would be. When Jesus first called them to himself, he said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."[9] Their task defined, the disciples spent the rest of their lives in joyful obedience to the fulfillment of this mission.

In his classic work, *Evangelism and the Early Church*, Michael Green describes the motivational nature of the early church's willing obedience to the fulfillment of Jesus' mission mandate. The motivation for mission in the early church was gratitude for salvation and the love that God. This is reflected in Paul's statement, "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Cor 5:14). The early Christians were driven by a sense of responsibility to live lives consistent with their profession. There was a deep sense of accountability to God for how they conducted their

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[9] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* 1:275. The phrase "fishers of people" from Mt 4:19 and Mk 1:17 is Eckhard Schnabel's translation.

lives (Eph 4:1–3, Phil 1:27). Finally, Christians were overwhelmed with a sense of concern

for the lost. The Apostle Paul said, "I am compelled to preach. . . . woe to me if I do not

preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16). They took seriously Jesus' claim that he had come to seek

and save the lost (Lk 19:10). Green reminds his readers of this emphasis in Jesus' teachings:

> Mankind is divided into those who accept him as the way to God and those
> who do not. There are two ways a man may tread—the broad way which leads
> to destruction or the narrow way which leads to life: no third option. There are
> two rulers which may hold sway in a man's life, God or Mammon. There are
> two possibilities open to a man: he may have a share in God's own life
> through relationship with Jesus, or remain spiritually dead. Men are divided in
> his parables into sheep and goats, wheat and tares, wise virgins and foolish,
> those who accept the invitation to the Wedding Feast and those who determine
> to remain outside: "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." On whether
> men declare themselves for him or against him depends their eternal destiny.
> Entry into the kingdom of God depends upon relationship him. Always we
> meet this religious dualism.[10]

The content of the gospel message is seen in the early sermons of Peter, Stephen

(Acts 7), Philip (Acts 8), and Paul. This is the gospel that became known throughout the

Roman Empire during the lives of the apostles.[11] The first gospel messages preached by

Peter in the Book of Acts were to Jewish crowds (2:14–39; 3:12–26), to authorities (4:8–12;

5:29–32), and to Gentiles (10:34–43). Peter's messages reveal that the good news is Jesus of

Nazareth himself:

- Jesus was a man who lived among them as the fulfillment of all Old Testament
  prophecy about the coming of the Messiah and the "great and glorious day of the
  Lord" (2:16–21; 25–30; 34–35; 3:18–25; 4:11).

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[10] Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 251.

[11] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* 1:4. In order to demonstrate the reach of the
Christian gospel, Schnabel recounts the negative reactions of four first-century Roman
Emperors—Claudius, Nero, Domitian, and Trajan—who all took action against Christians
during their reigns.

- Jesus proved himself to be God while on earth through miracles, wonders, and signs (2:22; 3:12–13, 16; 4:10).
- Jesus was put to death on a cross at the hands of wicked men in the sovereign purposes of God, but he rose from the grave as it was impossible that death could hold him (2:23, 24; 3:13–15; 4:10; 5:30).
- Jesus is now alive, and the apostles and many others are witnesses to that fact (2:32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:32).
- Jesus is now exalted to his former position with the Father (2:33; 3:13, 21; 5:31).
- Jesus gives gifts, i.e. the Holy Spirit (2:33; 5:32).
- Jesus is Lord and Christ (2:36).
- Jesus is the Redeemer; "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

The result of Peter's "good news" message was that the hearers were "cut to the heart." It does not sound much like they thought it was good news. Realizing that they had offended God by acquiescing to and participating in the crucifixion, the people were devastated. But the good news continued. They could repent of their sin, receive forgiveness, and be baptized (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31). They and their children would receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38, 39), enjoy "times of refreshing" (3:19–20), anticipate the time when God will restore everything through Christ (3:21), and inherit the promise of blessing made to their forefathers, which included the promise of God turning them from their wicked ways (3:25–26). This was the good news of salvation from the wrath of God as preached in Peter's first and second sermons and in his defences before the Jewish authorities.

Peter's third sermon was to a Gentile crowd (Acts 10:34–43), and in it the good news continues. By this time it had become evident to the apostles that the gospel is inclusive: it is not peculiar to any ethnic group or race. It is not a "party" religion, but is freely open to all who will believe. Peter confesses, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (10:34–35).

Immediately after his conversion, the apostle Paul began to "preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). He "baffled the Jews proving that Jesus is the Christ" (9:22) and "preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus" (9:27). In Jerusalem he "spoke boldly in the name of the Lord" (9:28). Paul gives two summary statements of the gospel: to a Jewish audience he says, "I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you . . . " (13:38–40). To a Gentile man Paul recounts the mission given to him by Jesus, "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (26:18).

In his farewell speech to the Ephesian church, Paul claimed that he had not hesitated to proclaim "the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27). This last all-encompassing phrase, "the whole will of God," conveys the panoramic vastness of what we have come to call the Gospel. It is the message of the good news of redemption and reconciliation coming from God through Jesus Christ. In these last days, says the writer of Hebrews, God has spoken!

The definitive motivating event that pushed the disciples into mission was Pentecost. John Stott says,

> Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the church without the spirit is dead.[12]

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[12] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 60.

Pentecost is a prototype, a foreshadowing of the type of witness that was to follow this event.

Pentecost was one of the greatest verbal events in the bible, and from this time on, all of

Christ's witnesses have used speech to communicate the gospel. The language in the

following passage from Acts 2:4–11 emphasizes the verbal nature of being Christ's witness:

> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to *speak* in other
> *tongues* as the Spirit [gave them *utterance*].[13] Now there were staying in
> Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they
> *heard* this *sound*, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one
> *heard* them *speaking* in his own *language.* Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are
> not all these men who are *speaking* Galileans? Then how is it that each of us
> *hears* them in his own *native languag*e? Parthians, Medes and Elamites;
> residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia
> and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome
> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we *hear* them
> *declaring* the wonders of God in our own *tongues!*

The weight of evidence in the book of Acts reveals that the gospel message is centered on

Jesus Christ and that its dissemination is ultimately by means of verbal communication.

Underscoring this reality are Paul's words in Romans 9:14–15:

> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can
> they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear
> without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are
> sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good
> news!

> Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "you will be my witnesses." A witness by definition is

someone who has seen or knows something and is therefore competent to give evidence and

testify concerning it.[14] A survey of Acts shows that spoken words were absolutely critical to

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[13] This wording comes from the ESV, NKJV, NASB translations: "was giving them utterance." The rest of the quoted passage is from the NIV. Emphasis added throughout is mine.

[14] "Witness" is also that which serves as or furnishes evidence or proof.

the disciples' mission. The following lexical survey will demonstrate the importance that the

Acts narrative assigns the spoken word:[15]

- *Verbs that denote or connote speech:* raised (his voice), addressed (the crowd), explain, spoken, prophesy, listen, say, tell, tells, hear, heard, warned, pleaded, said, speaking, teaching, proclaiming, (called to) account, warn, speak, teach, testify, replied, spoke, preached, paid close attention, testified, proclaimed, told, preach, proving, talking, telling, explained, confirm, taught, urged, reported, listening, reasoned, proclaim, persuade, testifying, refuted, arguing, declared, (word of God) spread, discoursed, praying, singing.

- *Adverbs describing the act of speaking:* boldly, (listen) carefully, fearlessly, effectively, vigorously, persuasively, publicly.

- *Nouns that denote or connote speech:* words, teaching, message, witnesses, good news, ministry of the word, word, word of God, ears, word of mouth, prophets, teachers, word of the Lord, ideas, (do not be) silent, debate, defence.

- *Adjectives describing speech:* great (boldness), full (message), increase, public (debate).

One cannot read the historical record of Acts without getting the point that in the making of

disciples the "oral proclamation of the gospel was the central activity of the apostles."[16]

Ferdinand Hahn says, "For the whole New Testament there is no missionary preaching and

activity that does not involve making known the Christ-event in the whole world and

proclaiming to all mankind the salvation that has become manifest in Christ."[17]

However, the witness of the apostles and the newly forming church was not only

spoken; it was also modeled. As Schnabel aptly points out, the oral proclamation of the

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[15] Taken from Acts 1–28 (NIV).

[16] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* 1:1548.

[17] Hahn, *Mission,* 169.

gospel is not an end in itself.[18] The Acts account also demonstrates the reality of lives transformed by the gospel—disciples of Christ, gathered as worshipers. From the outset these followers of Jesus were marked by obedience to his instructions; their allegiance was solely to him. They were to stay in Jerusalem, waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit (1:4) when it would have been smarter to leave for the comfort and safety of their own homes. Ananias was obedient to the Lord in spite of his own great fear of the murderous Saul (9:13–14). Peter was obedient to the Lord in spite of his aversion to the world of Gentile impurities (Acts 10). Their obedience to Christ was evidence of a changed perspective.

Upon accepting Peter's message calling for repentance and salvation, new believers were baptized (Acts 2:41). The record shows a church of three thousand people who immediately formed a community marked by love for one another (2:42–47; 8:2; 9:27; 11:18, 23; 12:5, 12–17; 14:20; 15:4, 19, 33). It was a community of numerical and spiritual growth (2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 8:14; 9:31; 11:1, 18, 21; 12:24; 19:20; 21:19, 20). Elders were established to shepherd the church (14:23). The churches were encouraged, strengthened, and taught by the leadership (14:22, 28; 15:31, 32, 41; 16:5, 40; 18:11, 18, 23; 19:10; 20:1, 2, 25–32). Pagan worship practices were abandoned and worship objects destroyed (19:19). When accused of causing public mischief, the apostles were sometimes exonerated by their testimony and integrity (16:35–40; 18:12–17; 19:23–41; 22:22–30; 26:31–32; 28:18). In all of these endeavours the church carrying out the task of making disciples was the sign of, and witness to the kingdom of God.

In a time of no social assistance and rigid social stratification, with its inevitable oppression and marginalization, we see the church giving to anyone who was in need so that

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[18] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* 1:1549.

there were no needy persons among them (Acts 2:45; 4:34). Relief money was collected (4:35, 37; 11:29), and personal possessions were held lightly, being used for the needs of others (2:44–45; 4:32, 35). There was a daily distribution of food (6:1) for the poor among them. When a complaint came that some needy widows were being neglected in this matter, the apostles immediately ensured that this important need was looked after (6:3). The apostles continued their miraculous healing ministry both as an act of compassion and as witness to the truth of the gospel, providing continuity with the work of Jesus while he was on earth (2:43; 3:6; 4:9, 30; 5:12, 15–16; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 9:32–43; 13:11–12; 14:3, 9–10; 15:12; 16:18, 23–34; 19:11; 20:7–12; 27:21–26; 28:1–9).[19]

The witness to the reality of their faith came not just from their proclamation of the gospel message accompanied with miracles, but also from the moral integrity of these followers of Jesus. The apostle Paul is a representative example of the moral integrity of leadership in the new churches.[20] Paul was a financial burden to no one, choosing to practice his trade for a living when necessary (Acts 20:33–35). His hard work was an effort to demonstrate the necessity of labour in order to have the resources to help the needy (20:35). He could say with confidence that he had worked hard over the course of his missionary career, not neglecting any aspect of Christian service (20:18–32).

The Jewish and Pagan societies that the first Christians lived amongst recognized a new group in their midst. Their characteristic allegiance to Jesus Christ, their changed character marked by love and fellowship, their care for their poor, and the amazing miracles

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[19] It must be noted, however, that according to the record in Acts, the signs and wonders and miracles of healing were without exception accompanied by the explicit or implied verbal proclamation of the gospel.

[20] See also 1 Thes 2:8–12, 1 Thes 4:11–12, Phil 1:27, Eph 4:1.

of healing attested to the veracity of the new religion. The moral integrity and courage of

their leadership won favour (Acts 2:47) and high regard (5:13) among the people, and even

opposing authorities were often forced to recognize that they had charged the Christians

unjustly (5:17–40; 16:35–39). Christian people were to face much opposition and persecution

in the years to come, but from the beginning Christianity has been a movement within and

amongst the people.

As the church moved from the apostolic period recorded in the New Testament to the

next generation, Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. At this point in the

history of the Christian church, the testimony of the spoken word became supplemented by

the written word, most of the New Testament documents having been written in the middle

years of the first century. At the close of the New Testament, churches had been established

and elders appointed. The next period of church history would see the church plagued by

periods of vicious persecution and false teaching. Nonetheless, the twin tasks of proclaiming

and living the gospel were continued. The church historian Eusebius records:

> [E]arnest disciples of great men built on the foundations of the churches
> everywhere laid by the apostles, spreading the message still further and
> sowing the saving seed of the Kingdom of Heaven far and wide through the
> entire world. Very many of the disciples of the time, their hearts smitten by
> the word of God with an ardent passion for true philosophy, first fulfilled the
> Saviour's command by distributing their possessions among the needy; then,
> leaving their homes behind, they carried out the work of evangelists,
> ambitious to preach to those who had never yet heard the message of the faith
> and to give them the inspired gospels in writing. Staying only to lay the
> foundations of the faith in one foreign place or another, appoint others as
> pastors, and entrust to them the tending of those newly brought in, they set off
> again for other lands and peoples with the grace and cooperation of God, for
> even at that late date many miraculous powers of the divine Spirit worked

through them, so that at the first hearing whole crowds in a body embraced with whole-hearted eagerness the worship of the universal Creator.[21]

The moral climate of the Roman world was rife with human cruelty and sexual immorality of all descriptions. Along with this came the associated problems of abortion, infanticide, exposure of infants or their sale into slavery and prostitution, a low view of marriage and family, homelessness, and impoverishment. The Christian message of hope accompanied with moral purity and active Christian love for their fellow man was revolutionary. The gospel activity that extended outward to all human relationships—that of love, mercy, chastity, and justice to all people—was something entirely new.

Living in allegiance to Jesus and his teachings in the depraved Roman culture must have been difficult, to say the least. Christian religion demanded complete separation from predominant Roman practices such as idolatry, sexual immorality, theatrical entertainments (because of their inhumanity, immorality, and bloodshed), and politics (because idolatry was integral to political life). Even some trades had to be avoided due to their economic dependency on the practice of idolatry.[22] As the church grew, the gospel preached and lived became more visible and pronounced in the surrounding society. Demonstrating steadfast faith, courage, and moral purity, Christians revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by establishing a completely different culture. The Roman world teemed with pagan gods who were demanding, vicious, and utterly removed relationally. Into this religious pluralism came the Christian message of the God who loved the world.

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[21] Eusebius, *The History of the Church,* trans. G. A. Williamson (New York: Penguin, 1965; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1995), 148.

[22] Roland H. Bainton, *Early Christianity,* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1960, 1984), 49.

Justin Martyr's (ca. AD 100–165) *First Apology* is one of the earliest extant Christian writings. Justin, apparently a Roman citizen, was converted after observing the steadfastness and courage of the Christians in the face of harsh punishment and death. He wrote his *Apology* (a defence of Christians and their faith) addressed to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, the Emperor's sons, the Senate, and all Romans. In the writing, he protested the unjust treatment of the Christians and defended their right to be treated equally. The following excerpt demonstrates the transformation of the gospel in the lives of people:

> We . . . after our conversion by the Word have separated ourselves from those demons [i.e. false gods that demand bloody sacrifices, libations and incense] and have attached ourselves to the only unbegotten God, through His Son. We who once revelled in impurities now cling to purity; we who devoted ourselves to the arts of magic now consecrate ourselves to the good and unbegotten God; we who loved above all else the ways of acquiring riches and possessions now hand over to a community fund what we possess, and share it with every needy person; we who hated and killed one another and would not share our hearth with those of another tribe because of their different customs, now, after the coming of Christ, live together with them, and pray for our enemies, and try to convince those who hate us unjustly, so that they who live according to the good commands of Christ may have a firm hope of receiving the same reward as ourselves from God who governs all.[23]

Early Christian apologist Tertullian (ca. AD 160–220), using the imagery of a trial in which he is defending Christians, writes (ca. AD 197):

> The money therefrom [i.e. a voluntary collection] is spent for the support and burial of the poor, for children who are without their parents and means of subsistence, for household servants who have become old and cannot work, likewise, for shipwrecked sailors; and if any are in the mines, on islands, or in prisons—provided they are there because they belong to God's sect—these become entitled to loving and protective care for their confession. It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!' . . . So we who have become mingled in mind and soul have no

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[23] In Thomas B. Falls, *Writings of Saint Justin Martyr,* Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1948) 6:47.

hesitation about sharing what we have. Everything is in common among us—except our wives.[24]

Dionysius (ca. AD 190–265), bishop of Alexandria, records in a festal letter the actions of

Christians in the time of a great plague:

> Most of our brother-Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves and thinking only of one another. Heedless of the danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ . . . they laid them out . . . wrapped them in grave clothes . . . The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treating unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease . . . [25]

Again, during a horrific time of famine, war, and epidemic during the reign of

Maximin (d. 313), the church historian Eusebius writes:

> [T]he fruits of the Christians' limitless enthusiasm and devotion became evident to all the heathen. Alone in the midst of this terrible calamity they proved by visible deeds their sympathy and humanity. All day long some continued without rest to tend the dying and bury them—the number was immense, and there was no one to see to them; others rounded up the huge number who had been reduced to scarecrows all over the city and distributed loaves to them all, so that their praises were sung on every side, and all men glorified the God of the Christians and owned that they alone were pious and truly religious: did not their actions speak for themselves?[26]

Not only the extant accounts of Christians give us a picture of the social ethics of Christians

living in Roman society; there are accounts from the pagans themselves witnessing the

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[24] In Robert D. Sider, ed., *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2001) 2:60–61.

[25] In Eusebius, *History,* 305–306.

[26] Eusebius, *History,* 367.

reality of gospel transformation. The Emperor Julian (331–363), who was raised as a

Christian but reverted to paganism, wrote to Arsacius, a pagan High Priest in Galatia:

> Why is it that the Greek religion does not yet flourish? It is because those who have the most to gain from its advancement are most negligent in promoting that splendid worship . . . These atheists [i.e. the Christians] excel in good works to strangers, their scrupulous attention to the graves of the dead, and the feigned piety they display in their everyday lives. For my part I wish these habits could be cultivated by all—not only you but every one of the priests in Galatia.
> More than this . . . you should arrange for hostels to be erected in every city as a sign of our benevolence to those in need, and I do not mean Greeks only but those who most need our help . . . For it is a disgrace to us that no Jew has to beg, and that every Galilean [i.e. Christian] is ready to provide support for our poor as well as their own, while men laugh that we cannot muster aid for our people.
> As charity belongs by right to us let us not permit others to outdo us in such service; for insofar as we are remiss in this way, so also we show dishonour to the gods. I shall be glad indeed to hear that you are carrying out these orders.[27]

In summary, biblical and historical records show that the ancient Christian church

communicated the message of the gospel by verbal proclamation. The records also show that

the verbal proclamation of the gospel was not on its own. Along with verbal proclamation

was living evidence of the gospel's transformative reality, seen in the changed worldview of

Christians and their deeds of compassion within their communities. The proclamation of the

gospel in word and deed resulted in new disciples of Christ who, in turn, systematically

integrated social justice into their ethos—the evidence of a community that has been

transformed by the gospel of Christ.

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[27] R. Joseph Hoffmann, ed. and trans., *Julian's Against the Galileans* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 155–156. Hoffmann writes, "This letter is preserved by the historian Sozomen (5.16), who seems to think it is particularly important for understanding Julian's attitude toward Christian benevolence and charitable work. There is no good reason on the basis of language or content to question its authenticity, since elsewhere Julian offers grudging praise of Christian social practice while ridiculing aspects of their belief."

CHAPTER 4

A DEMONSTRATION OF DISCIPLESHIP:
WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

It has been said that William Wilberforce (1759–1833) was the "leading moral and

religious citizen of the world" of his day.[1] A more recent writer, William Hague, closes his

biography of Wilberforce by saying, "In the dark historical landscape of violence, treachery

and hate, the life of William Wilberforce stands out as a beacon of light, which the passing of

two centuries has scarcely dimmed."[2] Wilberforce was a devout Christian evangelical

working in perhaps the most difficult of all vocations—political life. He was elected to the

British Parliament in 1780, and over the course of forty-five consecutive years, until his

retirement in 1825, he worked assiduously to achieve countless political, social, and spiritual

reforms. His evangelical faith was the motivation for these reforms, which had a

transformational impact on British society for a hundred years beyond his time, into the

Victorian era.[3] Wilberforce is an important historical example of one whom the power of the

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[1] Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1961), 490.

[2] William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 515.

[3] Queen Victoria reigned from 1837–1901. She was the daughter of the fourth son (Prince Edward) of George III, and the niece of George IV, the ruling monarchs during Wilberforce's life.

gospel transformed into a disciple of Christ, who subsequently used all his skills, talents, and opportunities for the Kingdom of God.

Wilberforce has been reintroduced in our day by the release of the movie, *Amazing Grace,* on the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the African slave trade.[4] Wilberforce was the British parliamentary leader in the campaign to end the horrific slave trade that was being plied between the continents of the world. What is less well known is that after a "great change," which is what Wilberforce called his conversion, he devoted his life to transforming the social and religious fabric of society in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England by undertaking a myriad of causes.[5] A journal entry dated 28 October 1787 records the following: "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners."[6] His biography goes on to say, "In this spirit he approached the strife, and let it never be forgotten that it was fear of God which armed him as the champion of the liberty of man."[7]

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[4] Bristol Bay Productions, 2007.

[5] Jonathan Bayes, "William Wilberforce: His Impact on Nineteenth Century Society," *Churchman* 108, no. 2 (1994) [journal online]; available at http://www.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_108_2_Bayes.pdf; accessed 18 November 2010). Wilberforce was initially chosen as an example of a Christian who changed the world because of his evangelically motivated social activism with regard to the slave trade. As research progressed, it became obvious that the slave trade issue was just one of his endeavours to transform the world in which he lived. Bayes' article in the Churchman underscores this research.

[6] Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London: John Murray, 1838; reprint, New York: Books for Libraries, 1972) 1:149. The "reformation of manners" was the term Wilberforce used for moral reform.

[7] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:149.

Wilberforce was born in 1759 into a privileged background. Although physically frail, he demonstrated a brilliant mind and endearing personality. In his early life, Wilberforce lived several years with his aunt and uncle, devout Christians who were converted through the preaching of George Whitfield. When Wilberforce's mother realized he was being influenced by evangelical ministers and teachings, she removed him from their home.[8] The next several years of his life were spent in the endless frivolity and self-indulgence of upper-class British society: theatre, balls, rounds of visiting, great suppers, card parties, etc. Wilberforce said of this time, ". . . no pious parent ever laboured more to impress a beloved child with sentiments of piety, than they did to give me a taste for the world and its diversion."[9] All of this effort was successful in deadening Wilberforce's nascent spiritual fervour.

At the age of 17 (1776) Wilberforce entered Cambridge University with a thoroughly worldly mindset and no serious regard for spiritual things. His natural talent enabled him to excel without effort. His fortune and amiable personality made him a social favourite. "Idle amusements" filled his time at Cambridge, although he was never a completely dissolute character. For the rest of his life, Wilberforce would regret the "neglected opportunities of moral and intellectual profit" during his Cambridge years, which could never be recovered.

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[8] Leaving his aunt and uncle's home caused Wilberforce a great deal of grief. When his aunt expressed her sorrow that William was being removed from the opportunities of a religious life, his mother, knowing the tenets of early Methodism, caustically replied, "You should not fear, if it be a work of grace, you know it cannot fail." She did not know how prophetically she spoke.

[9] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:8.

Wilberforce was elected to parliament in September 1780. By this time he and William Pitt, future prime minister, had become intimate friends. Again, in London, Wilberforce's natural social abilities endeared him to all he met; his political success opened all doors to London society. His biography records:

> He had entered in his earliest manhood upon the dissipated scenes of fashionable life, with a large fortune and most acceptable manners. His ready wit, his conversation continually sparking with polished raillery and courteous repartee, his chastened liveliness, his generous and kindly feelings; all secured him that hazardous applause with which society rewards its ornament and victims. . . . He was in equal danger from the severer temptations of ambition. With talents of the highest order, and eloquence surpassed by few, he entered upon public life possessed of the best personal connexions, in his intimate friendship with Mr. Pitt.[10]

After four years of heady political success and full immersion in the London social scene (prestigious private clubs that offered gambling, drinking, over-eating, and more), Wilberforce read Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*.[11] Doddridge's book outlined the carelessness of the sinner, the necessity of being awakened to sin, and the good news of salvation in Christ. Wilberforce recognized himself in the following lines:

> There is, perhaps, a freedom from any gross and scandalous immoralities, an external decency of behaviour, an attendance on the outward forms of worship in public . . . yet amidst all this, there is nothing which looks like the genuine actings of the spiritual and divine life. There is no appearance of love to God, no reverence of his presence, no desire of his favour as the highest good: there is no cordial belief of the gospel of salvation; no eager solicitude to escape the condemnation which we have incurred by sin; no hearty concern to secure that

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[10] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:30.

[11] Philip Doddridge, *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott: 1745, 1864). Philip Doddridge (1702–1751) was a nonconformist church leader, educator, and hymn writer. *Rise and Progress* was translated into seven languages. Not only would the Christian doctrines outlined in this book influence Wilberforce, but he would also absorb the "tone and tenor" advocating Christian unity and religious toleration.

eternal life which Christ has purchased and secured for his people, and which he freely promises to all who will receive him. Alas . . . whatever else may be amiable in this dear friend . . . religion dwells not in his breast.[12]

Weighing Doddridge's book against subsequent readings of the New Testament, Wilberforce began to experience the inner turmoil of conviction pressing on his heart and mind. Though his outward conduct gave no evidence of this, he was to say:

Often while in the full enjoyment of all that this world could bestow, my conscience told me that in the true sense of the word, I was not a Christian. I laughed, I sang, I was apparently gay and happy, but the thought would steal across me, 'What madness is all this; to continue easy in a state in which a sudden call out of the world would consign me to everlasting misery, and that, when eternal happiness is within my grasp!'[13]

Wilberforce had come to understand the great truths of the gospel. Gradually, as he continued in prayer, reading scripture, seeking spiritual counsel from godly men (e.g. John Newton,)[14] attending Sunday services conducted by converted ministers, and confessing his faith to friends and family,[15] he began to feel the beginnings of "gospel comfort." In his later years, Wilberforce wrote about this time:

By degrees the promises and offers of the gospel produced in me something of a settled peace of conscience. I devoted myself for whatever might be the term

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[12] Doddridge, *Rise and Progress,* 15.

[13] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:88.

[14] Years before, while living in the home of his aunt and uncle, Wilberforce had known and revered Newton. Wilberforce's biography records that Newton had always "entertained hopes and confidence that God would some time bring me to Him." (Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:97)

[15] Aware that his dear mother was deeply suspicious of his conversion, Wilberforce determined to conduct himself respectfully, affectionately, and kindly toward her. The result was that Mrs. Wilberforce's friend remarked, "If this is madness, I hope that he will bite us all." (Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:119)

of my future life, to the service of my God and Saviour, and with many infirmities and deficiencies, through his help, I continue until this day.[16]

A critical decision Wilberforce faced at the time of his conversion was whether to continue in public life. Although there were evangelicals in the political and social elite, they were a small minority and were treated with suspicion and derision.[17] This prejudice came in spite of the fact that they had remained in the state-sanctioned Church of England and were not dissenters.[18] It was John Newton, the former slave trader, who convinced Wilberforce to continue with his political career. Understanding that Wilberforce had access to circles of the ruling class that were closed to himself and other evangelicals, Newton advised Wilberforce to stay where he was: not hastily forming new connections, but also not cutting himself off from old friends.[19] For the next ten years, the elderly Newton would be a spiritual guide for Wilberforce, encouraging him to use his influence as a political figure to further causes consistent with Christian principals. In 1786 Newton would write to his friend, the poet William Cowper: "I hope the Lord will make him a blessing both as a Christian and a

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[16] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:112.

[17] Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1961), 2. Brown says that in 1785 the group that came to be known as "the Evangelicals" probably numbered less than one hundred people.

[18] Sydney Smith (Anglican clergyman and writer) wrote in 1808: "[whether] Arminian and Calvinistic Methodists [or] the Evangelical clergymen of the Church of England . . . we shall use the general term of Methodism to designate those three classes of fanatics, not troubling ourselves to point out the finer shades and nicer discriminations of lunacy, but treating them all as in one general conspiracy against common sense and rational orthodox Christianity" (in Hague, *William Wilberforce,* 90). Such was the opprobrium toward people of evangelical faith, including the poet William Cowper, the wealthy philanthropist John Thornton, vicar Henry Venn, writer and abolitionist Hannah More, pastor and hymn writer John Newton, members of the Clapham Sect, the early abolitionists, and William Wilberforce. All were prominent in the British evangelical revival (c. 1800).

[19] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:97.

statesman. How seldom do these characters coincide!! But they are not incompatible."[20] He

wrote Wilberforce in 1788 saying: "It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up

for the good of his Church, and for the good of the nation,"[21] and in 1796: "I believe you are

the Lord's servant, and are in the post which He has assigned you."[22] Again in 1796 Newton

would encourage Wilberforce:

> The example, and even the presence of a consistent character, may have a
> powerful, though unobserved effect upon others. You are not only a
> representative for Yorkshire, you have the far greater honour of being a
> representative for the Lord in a place where many know him not . . . It is true
> that you live in the midst of difficulties and snares, and you need a double
> guard of watchfulness and prayer. But since you know both of your need of
> help, and where to look for it, I may say to you as Darius to Daniel 'Thy God
> whom thou servest continually is able to preserve and deliver you' . . . Indeed
> the great point for our comfort in life is to have a well grounded persuasion
> that we are, where, all things considered, we ought to be.[23]
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> Thus encouraged, Wilberforce remained an independent representative for Yorkshire

in the British parliament until his retirement in 1825.[24] From the time of his conversion on,

his motives and actions would be governed by his commitment to live for God's glory and

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[20] Hague, *William Wilberforce*, 88.

[21] Hague, *William Wilberforce*, 88.

[22] Hague, *William Wilberforce*, 88.

[23] Hague, *William Wilberforce,* 263.

[24] Wilberforce was always technically an independent. However, his abiding
friendship with Prime Minister William Pitt made this distinction difficult to maintain. As
well, Wilberforce was by nature and conviction a conservative. Although his personal
humanitarian and philanthropic efforts are legendary, he was often accused by his opponents
of hypocrisy, because he would vote against bills supporting education, labour or
parliamentary reforms that he considered disruptive of social structures or devoid of
Christian principles. Wilberforce's opponents accused him unjustly; he cared deeply for the
poor and oppressed and proved this with the distribution of his own wealth, but he would not
support legislation that he thought disrupted social order.

"my fellow-creature's good."[25] He would take seriously the advice of Doddridge's book: that

the Christian life is one of service for God, and the mature Christian demonstrates a life of

usefulness. Wilberforce later wrote,

> The grand characteristic mark of the true Christian . . . is his desiring to please
> God in all his thoughts, and words, and actions; to take the revealed word to
> be the rule of his belief and practice; to "let his light shine before men" . . . No
> calling is denounced, no pursuit is forbidden, no science or art is prohibited,
> no pleasure is disallowed—provide it can be reconciled to this principle."[26]

Believing that he would glorify God in the very public role of Member of Parliament by

fulfilling his duties with conscientious diligence[27] and by applying his Christian principles to

the needs of his fellow man, Wilberforce immediately set to work on one social, political, or

religious reform after another, a pattern that would mark his entire life.

Wilberforce is, of course, best remembered for his life long campaign to end slavery

in the British colonies.[28] This long and arduous campaign is a story beyond the scope of this

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[25] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:116.

[26] William Wilberforce, *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity,* 14th ed. (London: Cadell, 1797; reprint London: Kessinger, 1829), 304.

[27] Wilberforce's capacity for work was immense. He was rarely absent from regular Parliamentary debate and sat on many parliamentary committees. His commitment to the ordinary work of a British parliamentarian earned him deep respect, and on his retirement it was said that "the moral tone of the House of Commons, as well as of the nation at large, is much higher than when you first entered upon public life; and there can be no doubt that God has made you the honoured instrument of contributing much to this great improvement." (Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 5:240)

[28] An already interested Wilberforce was persuaded to join the abolition cause in 1787. The London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed in 1787 by twelve devoutly evangelical men; ten Quakers and two Anglicans. However, much groundwork in the abolition cause already had been undertaken by such men as Quakers George Fox (1671) and Anthony Benezet (1760s), and Methodist John Wesley (1774);

paper. Suffice it to say that as a political leader, Wilberforce used every opportunity and strategy available to the abolition cause along the way, working for incremental victories out of recognition that the war against slavery would not be won at once. He remained an independent politician largely to keep friends on both sides of the House; he remained a respectable member of the Anglican Church while also cultivating social ties with influential people; he incorporated popular Enlightenment ideas such as the brotherhood of man with Christian concepts of all mankind being created in the image of God.[29]

In time the massive campaign efforts of the abolitionists brought the end of the African slave trade in Great Britain and her dominions. The Slave Trade Abolition Act was passed by the British parliament February 23, 1807. It was on his death bed that Wilberforce received news that the future passage of the Abolition of Slavery Bill was secure.[30] In 1888 Brazil freed the last slaves in the Americas. The centuries of legal trade in African people was ended everywhere in the world in one hundred years. "From any historical perspective, this was a stupendous transformation."[31]

Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson had both worked for the previous twenty years educating the public on the inhumanity of slavery. Enlightenment thinkers Montesquieu (1748), Rousseau (1762), Adam Smith (1776), William Paley (1785), and others all wrote against slavery from philosophical and economic viewpoints.

[29] The motto of the abolitionists became, "Am I not a man and a brother?"

[30] Wilberforce died July 29, 1833 at the age of seventy-three. The Abolition of Slavery Bill was passed in the British House of Commons and House of Lords in August of the same year.

[31] David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 108.

Research indicates, however, that although the abolition of slavery was a momentous moral achievement, Wilberforce did not consider it an end in itself. He was ultimately concerned with access to the gospel message for slaves and the African continent. As long as African people remained property and not human beings, they technically had no access to the gospel. Wilberforce saw that among the rights and privileges denied to slaves, the greatest failure was the denial of gospel opportunity. He wrote: "Though many of the physical evils of our colonial slavery are cruel and odious, and pernicious, the almost universal destitution of religious and moral instruction among the slaves is the most serious of all the vices of the West Indian system."[32]

The abolition of slavery was the cause of a lifetime,[33] yet before its appearance on Wilberforce's horizon, he was already engaged in the implementation of a plan for the

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[32] Hague, *William Wilberforce,* 481, quoting from "An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire, in behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies, Hatchard's, London, 1823." Wilberforce poured time, energy, and personal finances into the establishment of the freed slave colony of Sierra Leone. As well, he entered into correspondence with former slave King Henri Christophe, of Saint-Domingue (Haiti) in the hopes of "sowing the seeds of civilisation, and still more of Christian faith, in this hitherto benighted quarter of the world . . ." (Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 4:354–355, 3:546–548)

[33] "By the end of the century Wilberforce was engaged in the support of religious, moral, educational, charitable, benevolent and philanthropic societies and institutions of all 'useful' kinds in a way that was not equalled or approached by any other person of the age. He was in the Bettering and Philanthropic Societies, the Magdalen Hospital and the Foundling Hospital, the Lock Hospital and the Lock Asylum, the Small Debts Society, the Sunday School Society, Marine Society, Naval and Military Bible Society, London Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society, St. Bartholomew's Hospital and many others, a governor or life member or on the committee or among the officers." (Brown, *Fathers,* 97–98). As well, records show Wilberforce's involvement in child labour laws, education of blind and deaf, prison reform, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the National Gallery of Art, settlement of free slaves in Sierra Leone, reversal of legislation forbidding entry of missionaries to India, immolation of Hindu widows, excessive use of capital punishment, and countless other concerns.

"reformation of manners." Even before the "great change" had fully taken root in his heart, Wilberforce was concerned about the immorality and spiritual decay of the nation. He wrote to a friend shortly before his conversion of his "despair of the republic," caused by "the universal corruption and profligacy of the times, which taking its rise amongst the rich and luxurious has now extended its baneful influence and spread its destructive poison through the whole body of the people."[34] After his conversion he had the motivation, determination, and courage to do something about his nation's moral decay.

Eighteenth-century England was an age of industrial and material advancement: the spinning machine was patented in 1768, the steam engine in 1769, the spinning jenny in 1770, and the power loom in 1784; Staffordshire potteries became operational in 1762. However, this industrial progress was accompanied by forced urbanization, abject poverty, homelessness, squalid and unsanitary living conditions, and moral and spiritual decay. Hanoverian England—especially the cities—were an inferno of drunkenness, prostitution, gambling, petty thievery, debauchery, immorality, duelling, criminality, and daily multiple public hangings.

> A comprehensive analysis of crime in London in 1796 produced "a shocking
> catalogue of human depravity," along with the calculation that 115,000 (out of
> a population of little more than a million) supported themselves "in and near
> the metropolis by pursuits either criminal, illegal, or immoral."[35]

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[34] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:84.

[35] Hague, *William Wilberforce,* 107, citing P. Colquhoun, *Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* (Dilly, London: 1796).

Wilberforce came up with a reform plan inspired by his reading of Dr. Josiah Woodward's *History of the Society for the Reformation of Manners in the year 1692*.[36] This earlier effort at "the suppressing of profane swearing and cursing, drunkenness and prophanation of the Lord's Day . . . the open lewdness that was acted in many of our streets," had apparently been successful for a period of time. "God has set before me as my object the reformation of my country's manners," Wilberforce wrote in his journal after reading Woodward's account.[37]

If Wilberforce had learned anything from his parliamentary experience it was to plan well, make good friends, and proceed carefully and slowly in a society resistant to change. As he set about to reform manners, he carefully followed the advice of his friend, the Bishop of London, Beilby Porteus. On Porteus' advice Wilberforce won the approval for his plan from the prime minister, William Pitt. Porteus recruited the Archbishop of Canterbury, and through the Archbishop, King George III and Queen Charlotte were also persuaded. The government, the church, and the crown were all on side before Wilberforce mentioned his scheme to anyone outside his closest confidants. On June 1, 1787, George III issued the Royal Proclamation against vice and immorality:

> . . . [observing] with inexpressible concern, the rapid progress of impiety and licentiousness and that deluge of prophaneness, immorality, and every kind of vice . . . [commanding] Judges, Mayors, Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace and all our other subjects' to set about the prosecution of all person guilty of 'excessive drinking, Blasphemy, profane Swearing and Cursing lewdness, Profanation of the Lord's Day, or other dissolute, immoral, or disorderly Practices; and that they . . . suppress all publick Gaming Houses and other

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[36] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:130. Written in 1701, Woodward's book recounted an attempt at moral reform in 1692, during the reign of William and Mary.

[37] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:130.

loose and disorderly Houses, and also all unlicensed Publick Shews, Interludes, and Places of Entertainment.'[38]

Wilberforce traveled around the countryside soliciting support from influential people, many of whom would become founding members: four members of parliament (including the prime minister), ten peers, six dukes, and a marquis, along with seventeen bishops and the archbishops of both Canterbury and York.[39] With this critical mass of influential people, local societies for the reformation of manners soon formed with the authority required to fulfill the Proclamation Society's mandate.[40] Wilberforce's biography records:

> Before [the Proclamation Society's] dissolution it had obtained many valuable acts of parliament, and greatly checked the spread of blasphemous and indecent publication.It afforded also a centre from which many other useful schemes proceeded, and was the first example of the various associations, which soon succeeded to the apathy of former years.[41]

The Proclamation Society was said to have been successful in causing a "lull" in rioting, disorderly conduct, and brutal amusements, while improving the comportment of English society.[42] The Society would eventually also achieve practical results in improving

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[38] Hague, *William Wilberforce,* 108.

[39] Hague, *William Wilberforce*, 108–109. Wilberforce certainly met with some opposition. One nobleman, pointing to a crucifix, said to him, "So you wish, young man, to be a reformer of men's morals. Look then, and see there what is the end of such reformers." (Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:136)

[40] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:134.

[41] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:138. The work of the Proclamation Society would be taken over by the Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1802.

[42] Hague, *William Wilberforce*, 111. Hague says it is statistically impossible to prove this; however, records for criminal convictions do show a decline in violent trends that continues throughout this period. As well, it seems that the Proclamation Society may have

prison government, regulating vagrancy, closing brothels, and enforcing Sunday observance. It was the forerunner of literally thousands of societies established throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[43] These societies would become much more than mere enforcement. There were a staggering number formed to address every aspect of English life: moral, religious, educational, charitable, and benevolent. It was during this time that the great missionary societies of the nineteenth century were formed.[44] These societies largely maintained evangelical control and character. Lord Shaftesbury claimed in 1884 that "most of the great philanthropic movements of the century have sprung from the Evangelicals."[45]

> By the middle of the period, as England seems to become a network of thousands upon thousands of local branches of these societies, the few hundreds of those Evangelical men and women who constituted the chief support of the parent (London) societies, the names of many appearing in twenty or thirty or more, begin to take on the look of a moral directorate that is not figurative but literal.[46]

"set going a national movement" but if the streets of London were any index to overall reform, the Evangelicals "would have been heart-sick" (Brown, *Fathers,* 523–524). William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army in 1865, could still describe London as "a population sodden with drink, steeped in vice, eaten up by every social and physical malady, these are the denizens of Darkest England amidst whom my life has been spent" (General Booth, *In Darkest England* [London: The Salvation Army, 1890], 14–15).

[43] Brown, *Fathers,* 317–360. Brown lists these societies up to 1844. As the parent societies were formed, it was unusual to not see Wilberforce's name, or one of his close evangelical associates, on the founder's list and surviving lists of heavy subscribers.

[44] Baptist Missionary Society (1792), London Missionary Society (1795), Church Missionary Society (1799), and the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804). Wilberforce likely initiated the idea of the British and Foreign Bible Society. He also sat on the committee for the London Missionary Society, and was on the founding committee of the Church Missionary Society. (Brown, *Fathers,* 529)

[45] Kathleen Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of their Social Work in the Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 294. Heasman is quoting from Edwin Hodder, *Life of Lord Shaftesbury* (London: Cassell & Co., 1886) ii:3.

[46] Brown, *Fathers,* 318.

In spite of the societies' success in changing the face of British society, Wilberforce recognized that "by regulating the external conduct we do not at first change the hearts of men"[47] and he thus applied himself to another great work. Published in 1797, Wilberforce's book, *Real Christianity*, was first of all a confession of the essence of Wilberforce's faith, explaining the doctrinal basis and motivation for all of his efforts in social reformation. Secondly, as the title suggests, it was an evangelistic appeal to the British people to possess the faith they professed. In other words, *Real Christianity* was directed toward the spiritual apathy in the established church.

Wilberforce believed that both government and societal pressure were needed to combat moral decay; he also was convinced that true reformation was a religious concern—a reformation of the heart. In writing *Real Christianity*, Wilberforce wanted to convince his social peers that their conformity to the dead moralism of the church was not true faith but nominalism.[48] He felt a deep personal and spiritual responsibility for the spiritual improvement of others. His journal records the following: "May I be endeavouring in all things to walk in wisdom to them that are without, redeeming the time; labouring for the spiritual improvement of others."[49]

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[47] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:131.

[48] Nominalism is rote participation in and adherence to the Christian religion, but with no apparent transformative effect on one's life.

[49] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 1:250.

The established church of the eighteenth century had "fallen away from true religion" and was cold, dead, and formal. Citing the memoirs of evangelical clergyman the Rev. Basil Woodd, historian Ford Brown writes:

> The clergy of the Church of England at that period were . . . heathen moralists . . . wholly secular in their spirit . . . and utterly opposed to that spirit which determines to know nothing among men but Jesus Christ and him crucified. . . . A person eagerly in quest of spiritual truth might have entered scores of churches in succession, without hearing a discourse which clearly set forth such topics as the lapsed and guilty and helpless condition of man by nature.[50]

Wilberforce's friend, evangelical clergyman Henry Venn, would write regarding published sermons of certain prominent clergy, "I have read them; and, excepting a phrase or two, they might be preached in a synagogue or mosque without offence."[51] Doctrinal content and the essence of Christianity had been replaced by a system of moralistic ethics, and warm-hearted faith was despised as enthusiasm.

Real Christianity opens with Wilberforce expressing a warm love for his friends and peers that compels him to correct mistaken and dangerous notions about Christianity among them:

> It is the duty of every man to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures to the utmost of his power; and that he who thinks he sees many around him, whom he esteems and loves, labouring under a fatal error, must have a cold

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[50] Brown, *Fathers,* 33–34. Brown is citing from: S. C. Wilks, *Memoirs of the Rev. Basil Woodd* (1831), p. 19.

[51] Brown, *Fathers*, 34. Here Brown is citing from *The Life . . . of Henry Venn* by John Venn and the Rev. Henry Venn (New York, 1855), from the 6th London edition, p. 71 (June 1760).The Church of England was infected with Socinian (denial of the deity of Christ) and Latitudinarian views. Latitudinarianism was a religion of minimal doctrinal content, the emphasis being on unity; a loving, benevolent and wise God whose purpose ensured the dignity and safety of humans in an orderly and beautiful universe; no condemnation or wrath of God toward sin; and the elevation of human reason over the authority of scripture. (Bayes, "William Wilberforce")

heart, or a most confined notion of benevolence, if he could withhold his endeavours to set them right. . . . [R]eligion is the business of everyone. . . . [I]ts advancement or decline in any country is . . . intimately connected with the temporal interests of society . . .[52]

He continues:

The main object…is not to convince the sceptic, or to answer the arguments of persons who avowedly oppose the fundamental doctrines of our religion; but to point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians, and to contrast their defective scheme with a representation of what the author apprehends to be real Christianity….[T]he subject is of infinite importance….[T]his present scene, with all its cares and all its gaieties, will soon be rolled away, and "we must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."[53]

In these introductory statements we can clearly see Wilberforce's mind. He is convinced that as a Christian who has escaped from error, he has a duty to his fellow man to help them escape also. Thus, *Real Christianity* is Wilberforce's public attempt to explain the true character of his reform work, his evangelical faith. Wilberforce believed that what one believes ultimately affects the culture in which they live. Wilberforce may be the preeminent model of Christian social activism, yet he recognized that we live in a temporal world that will soon pass away.

Therefore, his great concern was to communicate the gospel of Christ to his friends: "a light from darkness, release from prison, deliverance from captivity, and life from death."[54] Wilberforce pointed out to professing but nominal Christians that their speech betrays little difference between them and unbelievers. This is because "the Bible lies on the

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[52] W. Wilberforce, *Practical View . . . Real Christianity,* ii–iii (Introduction).

[53] W. Wilberforce, *Practical View . . . Real Christianity,* iii (Introduction).

[54] W. Wilberforce, *Practical View . . . Real Christianity,* Chapter 1, 5ff.

shelf unopened," ensuring that their opinions are not informed by the word of God but by some other standard. To Wilberforce the scripture was a "revelation from God" that emphasizes the value of the Gospel.

Wilberforce outlined the true way of salvation. It is not, as the nominal Christian believes, obtained by unassisted natural efforts. It is purely and wholly a work of the Holy Spirit:

> He knows therefore that this holiness is not to precede his reconciliation with God and be its cause; but to follow it, and be its effect. That in short it is by faith in Christ only . . . that he is to be justified in the sight of God; to be delivered from the condition of a child of wrath, and a slave of Satan; to be adopted into the family of God; to become an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ, entitled to all the privileges which belong to this high relation; here, to the Spirit of Grace, and a partial renewal after the image of his Creator; hereafter, to the more perfect possession of the divine likeness, and an inheritance of eternal glory.[55]

The entire argument presented in *Real Christianity* centres on Christ. The compassion of God was moved to send his only Son to rescue mankind from the wretchedness and danger of their natural state. Therefore, Wilberforce calls his readers to "look to Jesus" to learn "the duty and reasonableness of an absolute and unconditional surrender of soul and body to the will and service of God." One must look to Jesus to grasp the enormity of one's sin. Only by looking at Jesus can one learn to love God, love Christ, and love others. "Looking unto Jesus" is the only way to learn humility. Wilberforce urges the reader to look to Jesus because the shortness and uncertainty of time makes it necessary to make provision for eternity.

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[55] W. Wilberforce, *Practical View . . . Real Christianity,* 255–256.

To counter the moralistic religious code of the day, Wilberforce stressed that without affection and love for the doctrines and principles of Christianity, there is no ultimate motive for its ethics. You cannot have true practice without the accompanying principle, says Wilberforce, for then Christianity is reduced to a mere creed. He points to the all-encompassing demands of the scriptures on the life of a Christian: "Whatever ye do in *word* or *deed*, do *all* in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17). A real Christian will look to Jesus for courage to live, knowing that

> [h]is chief business while on earth is not to meditate, but to act; . . . that he is to discharge with fidelity the duties of his particular station, and to conduct himself . . . after the example of his blessed Master, whose meat and drink it was to do the work of his heavenly Father: that he is diligently to cultivate the talents with which God has entrusted him, and assiduously to employ them in doing justice and shewing mercy. . . . In short, he is to demean himself, in all the common affairs of life, like an accountable creature, who is . . . waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.[56]

On April 12, 1797 Wilberforce's book was released.[57] The work was a publishing phenomenon and it had a powerful influence on Wilberforce's contemporaries. His biographers record that it gave the first "general impulse to that warmer and more earnest spring of piety which, amongst all its many evils, has happily distinguished the last half century."[58] His mentor, John Newton, wrote:

> Such a book by such a man, and at such a time! A book which must and will be read by persons in the higher circles, who are quite inaccessible to us little

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[56] W. Wilberforce, *Practical View . . . Real Christianity,* Chapter 4, 256ff, 267–268.

[57] "How careful ought I to be that I may not disgust men by an inconsistency between the picture of a Christian which I draw, and which I exhibit! How else can I expect the blessing of God on my book? May His grace quicken me." (Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 2:204)

[58] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 2:205.

folk, who will neither hear what we can say, nor read what we may write. I am filled with wonder and with hope. I accept it as a token for good; yea, as the brightest token I can discern in this dark and perilous day. Yes, I trust that the Lord, by raising up such an incontestable witness to the truth and power of the gospel, has a gracious purpose to honour him as an instrument of reviving and strengthening the sense of real religion where it already is, and of communicating it where it is not.[59]

Wilberforce considered his book to be the greatest achievement of all his life's work.

He wrote to Newton:

I cannot help saying it is a great relief to my mind to have published what I may call my manifesto; to have plainly told my worldly acquaintance what I think of their system and conduct, and where it must end. I own I shall act in my parliamentary situation with more comfort and satisfaction than hitherto. You will perceive that I have laboured to make my book as acceptable to men of the world as it could be made without a dereliction of principle; and I hope I have reason to believe not without effect. I hope also that it may be useful to young persons who with general dispositions to seriousness are very ignorant about religion, and know not where to apply for instruction. It is the grace of God, however, only that can teach, and I shall at least feel a solid satisfaction from having openly declared myself as it were on the side of Christ, and having avowed on what my hopes for the well-being of the country bottom.[60]

Wilberforce judged his social justice work and the gospel proclamation in *Real Christianity* as being the responsibility of a Christian living out the tenets of faith. He saw no tension between the two; his witness to Christ and social-justice activities combined effortlessly his heart and his mind. In *Real Christianity* he points out that the mark of the true Christian is to please God in all his thoughts, words, and actions, letting the Word of God rule in faith and practice. The true Christian would "let his light shine before men" in whatever he did; therefore no "calling is denounced, no pursuit is forbidden, no science or art

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[59] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 2:201.

[60] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 2:202–203.

is prohibited, no pleasure is disallowed—provide it can be reconciled to this principle."[61] Nevertheless, Wilberforce considered the gospel message he communicated in *Real Christianity* to be the ultimate good that God had enabled him to accomplish.[62] Although Wilberforce lived two hundred years ago in an age very different from our own, his life remains a testimony to how the dual responsibilities of evangelism and social justice are never be separated in the life of a disciple of Christ.

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[61] W. Wilberforce, *Practical View . . . Real Christianity,* 304.

[62] Wilberforce and Wilberforce, *The Life* 2:207–208.

CHAPTER 5

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL AND EVANGELICAL REACTION
IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY NORTH AMERICA

The nineteenth century saw evangelicals in England playing a major role in the social

justice issues of their time: the abolition of slavery, the establishment of volunteer societies

working among the poor to alleviate suffering, and political advocacy for improved working

conditions in the new industrial economy. As well, there was unprecedented momentum in

foreign missions. As we saw in the previous chapter this was accompanied by concern for the

preaching of the gospel, as the publication of Wilberforce's *Real Christianity* clearly

illustrated.

The pattern set by British evangelicals was followed in North America as well,

sustained by the early revivalists who recognized the "social context, the social implications,

the social causes, and the social effects of personal sin."[1] Thus when Christians entered the

slums of New York or Chicago to preach the gospel, they quickly moved to establish social

welfare programs aimed at the myriad physical needs of the people. George Marsden says

that "the evangelical commitment to social reform was a corollary of the inherited

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[1] David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1977), 28. See also George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 34. Although most of the sources accessed are written from an American perspective, the situation was mirrored in Canada.

enthusiasm for revival."[2] During this period the preaching of the gospel, considered the primary Christian task, was rarely separated from a response to social needs. The assumption that the Christian faith was the only basis for a healthy civilization was as essential to evangelicalism as the belief that every soul needed to be prepared for eternity.

The early pattern of evangelism integrated with social action was the dominant evangelical ethos in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, this evangelical ethos would soon be dramatically reversed. For example, the evangelist D. L. Moody (1837–1899), founder of Moody Bible Institute, was initially actively committed to the idea that Christian charity and evangelism naturally went together. Yet he is famously quoted as saying:

> When I was at work for the City Relief Society before the fire I used to go to a poor sinner with the Bible in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other. . . . My idea was that I could open a poor man's heart by giving him a load of wood or a ton of coal when the winter was coming on, but I soon found out that he wasn't any more interested in the Gospel on that account. Instead of thinking how he could come to Christ, he was thinking how long it would be before he got the load of wood. If I had the Bible in one hand and a loaf in the other the people always looked first at the loaf; and that was just the contrary of the order laid down in the Gospel.[3]

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[2] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 12.

[3] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 37. Moody is referring to the great Chicago fire of 1871 in which the entire city was destroyed and he lost everything. After the fire Moody would focus all his energy on preaching. This quote may reflect an attempt on Moody's part to personally come to terms with his very human inability to "do it all." It has been said that before the fire he had spread himself so thin in his many worthwhile endeavours that he was unable to keep it all together, facing burnout. When all was lost in the fire (the YMCA building, Moody's Farwell Hall, his Illinois Street church, his house, and his workers were scattered), it was a clean sweep for Moody, enabling him to restrain his activities (Timothy George, ed., *Mr. Moody and the Evangelical Tradition* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 41–46). This remark comes before the rise of the Social Gospel controversy, but opponents of the Social Gospel seized upon it for their own use. Moody's contemporaries would not have agreed with him (Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 81).

By the end of World War I, the active engagement of evangelicals with social issues of all kinds was virtually abandoned. This remarkable tragedy in North American church history has aptly been called "the Great Reversal."[4] What had happened? A careful look at the events of this time will give some insight into the lingering tension in our churches with regard to the scope of Christian mission.

George Marsden discusses a series of inter-connecting reasons for the disengagement of evangelicals in social-justice concerns in *Fundamentalism and the American Culture*.[5] After the bloodbath of the American Civil War (1865), interest in political and social issues faded; the average American was eager for stability, peace, and normalcy. The rising social problems caused by the disruption of the Civil War coupled with industrialization were not completely ignored by any means, but Christian people tended to believe that a solution should be reached "gradually and safely, by wise and conservative legislation . . . Christian moral education, and the gospel."[6] Furthermore, the prevailing economic system of free-enterprise capitalism was approved of by the vast majority of evangelicals. The diminishing interest in political affairs was gradual and did not in itself diminish concerns for social justice, but it prepared the way.[7]

In the latter decades of the nineteenth century the predominantly Christian Protestant population was transitioning from a Calvinistic tradition and world view that valued political

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[4] A term coined by Timothy L. Smith (1924–1997), noted American evangelical historian, in about 1962. Smith served also as a Nazarene pastor.

[5] Marsden, *Fundamentalism.*

[6] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 14.

[7] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 86.

engagement as a positive force to a more pietistic view, with an accompanying inclination to view politics as suspect although necessary to restrain evil.[8] Further, a change was occurring in eschatological thinking. During the years 1865–1900, there was a massive shift in Christian thought from postmillennialism to premillennialism.[9] Postmillennialists saw history as a long period of continual progress, the culmination of which would be the return of Christ. This view is usually associated with a more positive outlook on the capability of mankind to manage progress and assumes the responsibility of the Christian to reform society in preparation for the return of Christ. In contrast, the new premillennialist view held that the world cannot be improved substantially until Christ returns, and that Christians are responsible for preparing themselves and others to meet Christ.

The doctrine of the Kingdom of God became a dividing point between the two eschatological views at this time. Postmillenialists believed that the Kingdom comes through gradual cooperation with the work of God, tending to see the Christian task as introducing the Kingdom to the world through civil laws and the transformation of culture.

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[8] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 86.

[9] The premillenialism of this time was primarily the dispensationalist type. It was introduced to American evangelicals by John Nelson Darby, associated with the Plymouth Brethren in England. Darby visited America seven times between 1862 and 1877 and was an influence on D. L. Moody. Although Moody was never a dispensational hard-liner, his associates were early dispensationalist leaders to whom Moody provided a platform. American evangelicals who were influential in solidifying this eschatological position as the predominant "Christian" interpretation were prominent St. Louis, Missouri Presbyterian pastor James H. Brookes; successor to D. L. Moody and president of (now) Moody Bible College (c. 1889) Rueben A. Torrey; author of the Scofield Reference Bible (1909) C. I. Scofield; founder of Dallas Theological Seminary (1924) Lewis Sperry Chafer. This group became a powerful force in American fundamentalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On American dispensationalism, see http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/articles/full.asp?id=21||655. On John Nelson Darby, see http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/articles/full.asp?id=21|21|174.

Premillenialists primarily saw the Kingdom as a wholly future event that would come suddenly and dramatically, delivering Christians and the world itself from evil.[10]

A revivalist emphasis in the late nineteenth century along with "deeper life" conferences emphasized individual spiritual development. Evangelicals were committed to the idea that a person was individually responsible to make a personal decision to accept Christ, and then to grow in holiness. The primary focus was on the eradication of sin from one's personal life and on personal spiritual growth through prayer, bible reading, and bible study. The result of this emphasis on individualism was that Christianity became a private affair. This trend, as well, contributed to a loosening commitment in some parts of the Christian community to social causes.

No single one of these trends in and of itself stopped evangelicals from participating in social causes. Of the revivalist and premillenialist evangelicals who were the vast majority by the turn of the century, Marsden writes, "Though they were dedicated first to saving souls, greatly occupied with personal piety, and held pessimistic social views, their record of Christian social service, in an era when social reform was not popular, was as impressive as that of almost any group in the country."[11] For example, evangelicals of the late nineteenth century established organizations like the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which was formed for the purpose of taking the gospel to the urban poor. The Salvation Army, originally started in England, also established itself in the U. S. with similar ministries. These organizations, along with many other evangelicals, established rescue missions, transition

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[10] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 88.

[11] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 85.

homes for women, orphanages, relief programs, work amongst immigrants, employment bureaus for the poor, and many more worthwhile social causes. It has been said that their large numbers and "fervent commitment made them the most important force in the nation's first war on poverty."[12]

Furthermore, before the turn of the century, evangelicals sensed that the appalling indigence of the working poor was not necessarily because of personal failing, but because of systemic problems originating in the laissez-faire capitalist economic structure far beyond their control. [13] Therefore, Christian social workers at this time advocated politically for the right of labour to strike for higher wages, for laws to control child labour, and for legislation to prevent the exploitation of women.[14]

The primary reason for what has become known as the "Great Reversal"—the comprehensive evangelical rejection of involvement with political and social causes—was the close identification with liberal theology in what became known as the Social Gospel movement.[15] Emerging between the Civil War and World War I (1865–1920) within Protestant churches, the Social Gospel movement was concerned with social problems relating to the new industrial economy.

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[12] Moberg, *The Great Reversal*, 29.

[13] "Laissez-faire" is the economic principal of non-interference by the state in trade and industrial affairs, especially with regard to conditions of labour and restrictions on individual competition. This attitude of compassion for the poor unfortunately would change. Along with individualistic ideas about Christian faith came individualistic ideas about economic status. If you ended up poor, it was probably because you did not work hard enough, or drank too much, or both. (Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 85.)

[14] Moberg, *The Great Reversal,* 29.

[15] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 91.

The social problems revolved around rising inequities between the rich and the poor in urban-industrial America; conflicts between labour and capital; rapid growth of industrialized cities and towns and resulting squalid conditions for workers; starvation wages; and economic exploitation.[16] Social Gospel thinkers saw that unchecked industrial capitalism bred widespread poverty and many accompanying social ills. As a movement it was characterized by challenging the dominant ideology of laissez-faire capitalism, the individualism of religious and moral commitment, and secularization.[17] The Social Gospel movement was an effort to combat the growing problems of the emerging urban-industrial America, to which it sought to apply Christian principles. Although the Social Gospel developed within Protestant churches, the issue of theological liberalism with which it became associated came to a bitter confrontation in the churches after World War I.

The Social Gospel's best-known spokesman is Walter Rauschenbusch through his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published in 1907.[18] Rauschenbusch was a German-born Baptist pastor to a small church of immigrants in an area known as Hell's Kitchen, New York City, in the late 1800s. This area was one of the infamous tenement settlements that weighed upon the conscience of Christian people:

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[16] For example, American Ice Trust, a company that provided ice in the summer, regularly jacked up prices, making the ice unaffordable for the poor.

[17] The Social Gospel did not seek to eradicate capitalism; its intent was to reform it. Rauschenbusch said, "Our effort must rather be to preserve all the benefits which the elaboration of the productive machinery has worked out, but to make these benefits enrich the many instead of the few." Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic that Woke Up the Church,* ed. Paul B. Raushenbush (New York: HarperOne, 2007; originally published as *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 282.

[18] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity.*

> There are crowded tenements in our cities where hundreds of souls are herded together through greed of grasping landlords under conditions inferior to those of the cattle in the stockyards; in some of these tenements are sweat-shops where clothing is made at starvation wages and disease bred and scattered wherever their products go; there are dram-shops, brothels and gambling dens open in multiplying variety . . . [19]

Pastoring in this setting gave Rauschenbusch an inside glimpse of how laissez-faire economics—a system firmly entrenched in and protected by the American middle class— trickled down to the most vulnerable in society: to the waves of immigrants, women, children, and those without land or access to capital. He was convinced that in order to address the spiritual needs of his congregation he had to address their physical needs as well.

Rauschenbusch deplored the revivalist emphasis on individual salvation that characterized his times.[20] He was convinced that Christianity was intended to be social and community driven. "Jesus," he said, "worked on individuals and through individuals, but his real end was not individualistic, but social . . . his end was not the new soul, but the new society; not man, but Man."[21] In Rauschenbusch's view salvation was not merely personal but was primarily social; it was transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven.[22]

There is much in Rauschenbusch's work that should be taken seriously. He pointed out that the Old Testament prophets were a force against the oppression of the weakest in

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[19] Marsden, *Fundamentalism,* 89, quoting a sermon by James M. Gray circa 1900. Gray would become the president of Moody Bible Institute and his views would later become rigidly conservative. He was no friend of the Social Gospel, but in 1900 he clearly identified with Social Gospel concerns.

[20] These were the days of Charles Finney (1792–1875), D. L. Moody (1837–1899) and Billy Sunday (1862–1935); compare Rauschenbusch (1861–1918).

[21] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 50.

[22] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 54.

society. For Rauschenbusch, the solution to social injustice began with these early prophets, whose preaching theme was that God demands nothing but righteousness.[23] Following the prophets, Jesus also focused on ethical concerns; he spoke sharp warnings to the rich, often siding with the poor and oppressed. A follower of Christ will likewise participate in the ethics of Jesus: love, service, and equality.

Christians today would agree that listening to the Old Testament prophets would provide much needed correction to our wealth-driven and over-consuming society. Rauschenbusch's essay on Jesus' teachings concerning wealth (chapter two of his book) packs a powerful warning for wealthy Christians in the West. After more than one hundred years of economic experience since this book was written, do we perhaps agree that laissez-faire capitalism is an evil if unrestrained by either God or government?

Another key element of Rauschenbusch's social gospel theology was the belief that the kingdom of God had come at the first advent of Christ. The kingdom of God ("always but coming"[24]) was Jesus' central message, and provided the theological basis for transforming society. The ideals of social justice, prosperity, and happiness, along with religious purity and holiness were possible in this world because of the present reality of the kingdom of God.[25] In this, Rauschenbusch was accused by evangelicals of naive utopianism. He countered the criticism by saying,

> It is true that any effort at social regeneration is dogged by perpetual relapse and doomed forever to fall short of its aim. But the same is true of our

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[23] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity*, 5.

[24] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 338.

[25] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 48.

personal efforts to live a Christian life; it is true also of every local church, and of the history of the Church at large. Whatever argument would demand the postponement of social regeneration to a future era will equally demand the postponement of person holiness to a future life.[26]

In Rauschenbusch's theology, Christians are able to work for the consummation of the kingdom. Kingdom ethics stress the law of love, the brotherhood of man, and concern for the common good. Humans have the potential to contribute to historical progress, seen as "the always and coming kingdom," through love and concern for the common good.[27] The kingdom would not come by force or divine catastrophe; it would grow organically out of the present by divine help.

Every human life brought under control of the new spirit which he himself embodied and revealed was an advance of the kingdom of God. Every time the new thought of the Father and of the right life among men gained firmer hold of a human mind and brought it to the point of action, it meant progress.[28]

Rauschenbusch felt that one of the biggest mistakes Christians make is to postpone social regeneration until the return of Christ, seeing this as a failure of faith in the power of God and resulting in paralyzing human initiative.[29] He pointed out that the Old Testament prophets only turned to "apocalyptic dreams and bookish calculations" in troubled and abnormal times of political and national loss.[30] Therefore, he argued that Christians needed

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[26] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 283.

[27] William Schweiker, *Social Gospel,* in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, eds. Lochman, Mbiti, Pelikan, Vischer Fahlbusch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 5:67–69.

[28] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 50.

[29] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 283.

[30] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 30.

to stop depending upon individualistic salvation, eschatological hope, and apocalyptic deliverance to alleviate social problems in the present.

While there is much in *Christianity and the Social Crisis* with which we are eager to agree, we also catch a glimpse of theological liberalism. It is never clear that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. It is never clear that Christ's suffering on the cross was to atone for the sin of humanity. In fact, Rauschenbusch says that Christ failed in his initial purpose because he died on the cross![31] Nonetheless, Jesus ended up succeeding because he was able to introduce the kingdom of God, an ethical and harmonious world.

Further, Rauschenbusch's low view on the need for individual salvation cleaved the rift completely in the minds of conservative evangelicals. "Sin" in Rauschenbusch's theology was primarily socially defined: he saw its hallmarks of moral blindness and lack of conviction as the failure to acknowledge the evil rooted in the constitution of the present order, not the depravity of each human heart.[32] It follows from Rauschenbusch's view that salvation is not merely Jesus forgiving our personal sin; it is primarily the deliverance of people and communities—society—from the results of sin and degradation. Rauschenbusch taught that mankind's hope for the future is anchored in "present realities" which he saw as Christians beginning to effect positive changes in this world.[33] In essence, this meant that the final consummation of the kingdom of God was a gradual process of humanly achieved perfection.

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[31] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 54, 71, 334.

[32] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 285.

[33] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 53.

Today, evangelicals can agree with Rauschenbusch that Jesus did inaugurate the kingdom of God but believe that it is found in his Church, which is the sign of hope to the entire world of what life after the final consummation will look like. With Rauschenbusch we agree that Jesus does have the power to transform social evil, but it is through his death and resurrection that the foundations for his moral and ethical teachings are laid. Evangelicals can also agree with Rauschenbusch that a life shared with God naturally flows outward into all aspects of one's society with consequential impact and transformation.[34] We are our brother's keeper and ought to be governed by the law of love.

It was Rauschenbusch's theological liberalism that caused evangelical Protestants of his day to suspect, and consequently reject, his social justice concerns. The early twentieth century saw the American Protestant church tearing itself apart in what is known as the fundamentalist-modernist split.[35] This acrimonious debate between theological conservatives (fundamentalists) and theological liberals (modernists) was occurring simultaneously with the rise of Social Gospel writings and thinking such as Rauschenbusch's. The debate swirled around the following issues: the authority of scripture (inerrancy), rationalism vs. revelation, the deity of Christ, the historicity of the supernatural (i.e. Christ's miracles and his resurrection), the literal return of Christ, proper interpretation of history, Darwinian

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[34] Rauschenbusch, *Christianity,* 42.

[35] A full accounting of the intricacies of this historical event are beyond the scope of this paper. For further helpful study see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (2006). This controversy was also strong in Canada as Protestant groups in Canada had strong ties to those in the U.S. The union of Methodist, Presbyterian (minus one third of its congregations), and Congregationalist churches in 1925 (United Church of Canada) was seen by theologically conservative Canadian Protestants as the result of liberalism, and many would exit the UCC in coming years. The ensuing years have proved their case: the UCC today has very little vestige of the Christian faith.

evolutionary theory, and most dramatically, the need for individual salvation through the atoning work of Christ. With the rise of higher criticism,[36] many of the tenets of the Christian faith were being seriously challenged. Conservative Christians at the turn of the twentieth century found their orthodox faith challenged at every level, and living in a culture that was rapidly turning away from God—a situation that was exacerbated by the social upheaval of World War I. The Social Gospellers, on the other hand, easily accommodated and embraced modernist theological ideas. Hence, the Social Gospel became inextricably connected with theological liberalism.

It is perhaps one of the most bewildering aspects of church history that generally speaking, in the early twentieth century, most of the people and organizations who most ably advocated for the poor most grievously deviated from the tenets of orthodox Christianity. This remained true well into the century with the World Council of Churches (noted for its liberal theology) carrying the banner of Christian advocacy for social reform while discounting the task of evangelism as the need for individual salvation became increasingly questioned.

It is not difficult to understand why the liberal theological tenets of the Social Gospel were categorically rejected by conservative evangelicals. Perhaps it is not difficult, either, to understand why the economic solution of Christianized socialism was also rejected by most evangelicals. What is more difficult to grasp is the fact that social interaction of all kinds with the surrounding culture became suspect and evangelical Christians so universally

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[36] The science of evaluating the textual source of the books of the bible. Biblical criticism, as a science, has been invaluable to our understanding of the biblical text. However, many theologians employed in this research were rationalists, choosing to "stand over" the text of scripture as they brought history, science, and literary evaluations to bear on the text. Scripture, as the revelation of God, became secondary to the science.

disengaged. In conservative evangelical circles the term "social gospel" became a pejorative and was fully equated with liberal theology. Thus a rich tradition in Christian advocacy and involvement in social justice that was part of the Judeo Christian heritage was interrupted for the greater part of the twentieth century.

Spreading the gospel both at home and abroad became the stated task of conservative evangelicals, supporting and sending missionaries with great enthusiasm and a sense of urgency. Paradoxically, the disengagement from social issues did not apply to foreign missions. Whatever the rhetoric might have been at home, on the "foreign field" Christian missions established institutions such as hospitals, schools, and orphanages, while preaching the gospel and planting churches. They were the front line in relief and disaster—abroad. As the century wore on, Christian missions would initiate development projects to meet long-term needs. In a 2004 convocation address to Knox College, Toronto, Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC) senior correspondent Brian Stewart said the following about Christian missions:

> This "force" has been there from the very beginning of Christianity—and mysteriously, seems never to weaken nor grow weary. I've found there is no movement closer to the raw truth of war, famines, crises and the vast human predicament, than organized Christianity in action. And there is no alliance more determined and dogged in action than church workers, ordained and lay members, when mobilized for a common good. It is these Christians who are right "on the front lines" of committed humanity today—and when I want to find that front, I follow their trail. It is a vast front, stretching from the most impoverished reaches of the developing world to the hectic struggle to preserve caring values in our own towns and cities. I have never been able to reach these front lines without finding Christian volunteers already in the thick of it, mobilizing congregations that care, and being a faithful witness to truth—the primary light in the darkness, and so often the only light. . . . Let me repeat, I've never reached a war zone, or famine group or crisis anywhere where some church organization was not there long before me—sturdy, remarkable souls, usually too kind to ask "What took you so long?" . . . These Christian "foreign legionnaires," as I've come to think of them, never cease to amaze. Once, flying to a disaster story, our twin-engine plane had to make an

emergency refueling stop at a nearly deserted landing strip in the dense jungle in central Africa. We stepped out into the middle of absolutely nowhere, it seemed—only to be greeted by a cheerful Dutch Reform minister offering tea. My veteran cameraman, Mike Sweeny, later sighed in exasperation: "Do you think you could ever get us to a story—somewhere, anywhere—where those Christians aren't there first?" I was never able to.[37]

This passage illustrates that the so-called "great reversal" that occurred within the North American church was an aberration, and not consistently applied to missionary endeavours.

In 1947, in *The Uneasy Conscience of the Evangelical Mind,*[38] Carl F. H. Henry called evangelicals back to their historical roots of a theologically based, integrated mission model. Carl Henry's book had an impact on many evangelicals who saw the inconsistency of their missional practice. Henry's publication, along with conferences held by like-minded evangelicals in the 1950s and 1960s, and especially the Lausanne Movement conference in 1974, began to awaken the social conscience of conservative evangelicals. After almost fifty years of social and cultural separation the tide began to turn.

As evangelicals began to sort out re-engagement with their surrounding culture and with social concerns, several conferences were held in an attempt to restore a complete understanding of the gospel. Henry had noted that while evangelicals have repudiated movements like the World Council of Churches (who had, up to this time, led the most forceful attacks on social ills,) they had developed no accompanying strategy based on a redemptive framework. In 1966 the Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission was held

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[37] Brian Stewart, "Canadians are on the Front Lines of Compassion," speech given May 12, 2004, at the 160th Convocation of Knox College, Toronto; available at http://www.canadianchristianity.com/cgi-bin/bc.cgi?bc/bccn/1104/16ed; accessed 5 February 2011).

[38] Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience*.

in Wheaton, Illinois. This conference called on the church to address contemporary issues such as racism, war, the population explosion, poverty, and the disintegration of the family. [39] The corrective discussion continues today, most notably in the Lausanne Movement as well as in missiological publications, and it is a foregone conclusion among most evangelicals that Christian mission will encompass social justice issues as the gospel is preached throughout the world.

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[39] Paul G. Hiebert and Monte B. Cox, "Evangelism and Social Responsibility," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 344–346. See Hiebert's article for a complete list of conferences focusing on the integration of evangelism and social responsibility. There have also been several conferences focusing on evangelism and church planting sponsored by the Global Consultations on World Evangelization group. It is beyond the scope of this paper to trace the progression of all these conferences. Suffice to say that evangelical theological development in this area has been extensive.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The introductory vignette of this study showed a real, contemporary evangelical church that has fully embraced ministries of compassion and social justice as an integral component of their mission in this world, yet asking the question, "Is this really missions?" Evangelicals take seriously the words of Jesus: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Mt 16:26) and "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10:28). As Christians we recognize that our greatest need is reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins, yet we also recognize the truth of James 2:14–17:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Still, the controversy and suspicion of the last century with regard to Christian social activism haunts the evangelical church in its position on mission. This is most apparent when decisions need to be made about mission policy, direction, and funding. It appears that the great twentieth-century rift that occurred between evangelism and social action has been difficult to mend without emphasizing one aspect of Christian mission at the expense of the other.

It is helpful to remember, as Dr. John Frame has cautioned, that often these kinds of tensions in the Christian family are mere matters of emphasis and not fundamental differences.[1] We have seen that the differing streams in mission are indeed matters of emphasis, and that all emerge from biblical presuppositions. The responsibilities that ensue by virtue of our being created in the image of God and for his glory are derived from the creation mandate (Gn 1:28); the call to love our neighbour as ourselves comes from the great commandment (Mt 22:37–39); the obligation to live as Jesus lived as his representative is based on Christ's own words (Jn 20:21); the command to make disciples—going, baptizing, and teaching—comes from the great commission (Mt 28:19). Choosing one or the other of these biblical missional mandates naturally leads to different emphasis, but they are not mutually exclusive, and they ought not to be ultimately competing.

This study has proposed that, in fact, a model for mission truly based on the great commission of Mt 28:19 will integrate these different emphases. It bears repeating the great commission in full: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." The imperative in this commission is to "make disciples." The implicit transformational starting point for making disciples is the gospel message, which, as we saw in chapter three, was believed, proclaimed, and practiced by the New Testament church. This was also explicitly stated in the books of Acts (1:8) and Mark (16:15). Whatever else mission includes, the proclamation of the gospel for the transformation of individuals and society cannot be diminished. We cannot fulfill the

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[1] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1987).

creation mandate or the command to love God and our neighbour, and we cannot live as

Jesus lived, until we have been transformed by the gospel. Being transformed by the gospel

means we are a disciple of Jesus, obeying all that he has commanded.

The verbs "go," "baptize," and "teach" also imply that the transformational starting

point for making disciples is based on the gospel message, but they expand the possibilities

and means. "Go" is an explicit command, and it is not selective: it addresses every Christian

in every generation. "Baptize" is the process of bringing people into the church community

to be discipled. It reflects the central role of the church in the task of missions. "Teach

everything that I have commanded you" reflects the vast scope of the church's task in

making disciples. Included in "teach everything" are the lessons of righteousness and justice

from the law and the prophets. Jesus said, "I have not come to abolish [the law and the

prophets] but to fulfill them" (Mt 5:17).

The working definition of mission that was chosen for the purposes of this study (see

chapter two) reflects the integrative model of disciple making. The work of the Triune God in

sending "ambassadors to proclaim to the world the gospel of His covenant of life (grace) that

men from all nations might be made disciples . . . " reflects the foundational task of gospel

proclamation. The history of the Apostles and the early church (chapter 3) gave evidence that

gospel proclamation was the transformational starting point of disciple making. The life of

William Wilberforce (chapter four) provides an example of discipleship that, in keeping with

our definition of mission, endeavours to "build His church and fulfill their covenant task,

seeking to bring all things into subjection to God for the true restoration and advancement of

men and the glory of God."[2] Wilberforce's life offers an example of a disciple of Jesus who integrated the dual responsibilities of the Christian: evangelism and social justice. Coming before the time of the "great reversal," Wilberforce's life demonstrates that disengagement from social justice was a tragic aberration in the history of church.

The congregation of the local evangelical church in this case (see chapter one) has adopted a mission statement that states its goals to be "growing disciples of Christ, by loving God, loving one another, and serving the world." This congregation is deliberately seeking to make disciples by proclaiming the message of the gospel while accompanying this with acts of compassion and works of social justice as a demonstration of the authenticity of the faith they profess. This ethos takes seriously the changing dynamic in today's society and culture, which demands authenticity. For the sake of the integrity of the church and the name of Christ, every local congregation must show that the gospel makes a transformational change in a community of people. David Wells writes in *Above All Earthly Pow'rs—Christ in the Post Modern World* the following:

> The postmodern reaction against Enlightenment dogma will not be met successfully simply by Christian proclamation. Of that we can be sure. That proclamation must arise within a context of authenticity. It is only as the evangelical Church begins to put its own house in order, its members begin to disentangle themselves from all those cultural habits which militate against a belief in truth, and begin to embody that truth in the way that the Church actually lives, that postmodern scepticism might begin to be overcome. Postmoderns want to see as well as hear, to find authenticity in relationship as

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[2] John M. L. Young, *Missions: The Biblical Motive and Aim* (Pittsburg: Crown & Covenant, 1962, 2007), vi; from the definition of mission adopted for this paper (see chapter 2).

the precursor to hearing what is said. This is a valid and biblical demand. Faith, after all, is dead without works . . . [3]

Arising from the vignette of one local evangelical church and its relationship with the water project is another very specific question: "Should a church fund projects and organizations that do not allow for direct disciple-making?" This question has not been directly answered in this thesis, although the larger question—"What is the relationship between gospel proclamation and social justice in Christian missions?"—has been. The more specific question is complex, and circumstances will vary with each local congregation. The local church in this case realized that the complexities and opportunities for mission in the global context dictate flexibility. There may be opportunities of this nature where it is not possible to partner with a local church, but help cannot be categorically ruled out. The accompaniment of gospel proclamation may take place at another time and by other Christians.

In the context of mission, "making disciples" integrates the proclamation of the gospel and the demonstration of the gospel. The task of making disciples necessitates that we obey everything Christ has commanded, which is done by going to the communities of our world with the gospel in word and deed. The proclamation of faith by the people of God through evangelism and the demonstration of that faith through works of social justice will fulfill another biblical mandate for mission: being salt and light and a city on a hill (Mt 5:13–16), the result of which will be that all "[will] see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

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[3] Melvin Tinker, "The Servant Solution: The Co-ordination of Evangelism and Social Action," *Themelios* 32, no. 2 (2006), 6–32. Tinker cites David F. Wells, *Above all Earthly Pow'rs—Christ in the Post Modern World*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006).

In the first clause of the great commission Jesus says, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." And he concludes, "and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Christ's authority and presence are the church's twin anchors in the missional enterprise. We do mission in word and deed under the authority of Christ with the promise of his presence, all for the "true restoration and advancement of men and the glory of God."

EPILOGUE

THOU GREAT I AM,

Let me remember that life is short and unforeseen,
and is only an opportunity for usefulness;
Give me a holy avarice to redeem the time,
to awake at every call to charity and piety,
so that I may feed the hungry,
clothe the naked,
instruct the ignorant,
reclaim the vicious,
forgive the offender,
diffuse the gospel,
show neighbourly love to all.[1]

AMEN

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[1] Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 104.

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