

November/December 2007 Volume 4, Issue 7

Editor's Note

Does God call the church to transform the culture? To seek mercy and justice in the city? That's the question considered in this issue of the 9Marks eJournal.

It's easy to say, "Churches should match their creeds with their deeds by seeking to change culture." But the issue is more complex than most probably expect. It requires tangling ourselves up in knotty questions about the mission and marks of the church, the spirituality of the church, the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church, already/not yet eschatology, what's normative and what's not in redemption history, and more.

Not only that, this isn't the first time in church history in which the possibility existed of Christians becoming more concerned about the moral culture outside the church than they are about the moral culture inside. Attempting to understand the decline of church discipline between 1850 and 1920, for instance, historian Greg Wills has observed, "From temperance to Sabbatarian reform, evangelicals persuaded their communities to adopt the moral norms of the church for society at large. As Baptists learned to reform the larger society, they forgot how they had once reformed themselves...The more evangelicals purified the society, the less they felt the urgency of a discipline that separated the church from the world." Is the so-

called missional church, which leads the way in talk about cultural transformation, at risk of becoming a temperance movement for the 21st century?

A roundtable of pastors and theologians offer their two cents on these questions. Michael Horton provides an extended historical and theological consideration. Robin W. reviews a couple of books relevant to the topic. And Steve Boyer and the CHBC elders (which we present as an example of the best kind of theologizing: theologizing *in* and *for* the local church) reflect on the matter in the context of caring for the poor. Meanwhile, Priya Abraham gives us several concrete proposals for how to care for the some of the most downtrodden in our culture today.

9Marks doesn't presume to have the final answer on these topics, but since more and more churches are structuring their ministries around this idea of transforming culture, we thought it would be worthwhile to present a couple of arguments outside of this new trendy mainstream.

Speaking of trendy, Mike McKinley isn't. He's punk rock. But does he care? Owen Strachan certainly cares about age groups. And David Wells cares, well, about the globe. Check it out.

—Jonathan Leeman

TRANSFORMING CULTURE

A Pastors' and Theologians' Forum

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We asked a roundtable of pastors and theologians whether Scripture calls the local church to the work of cultural transformation.

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By Priya Abraham

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By Steve Boyer and the Capitol Hill Baptist Church Elders

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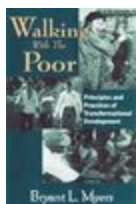


Book Review:

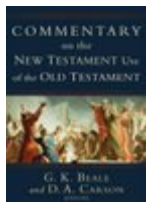
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Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible, by Arthur F. Glasser with Charles E. Van Engen, Dean S. Gilliland, and Shawn B Redford

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Book Review:
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Book Recommendation:
Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament
edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson
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AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

The New Perspective on Paul with Simon Gathercole and Peter Williams

Posted 10/1/2007 at <http://resources.christianity.com/default/mrki.aspx>

Pauline scholar Simon Gathercole and Cambridge scholar Peter Williams take Mark Dever on a tour of recent trends in New Testament studies.

Life and Ministry with Derek Thomas

Posted 11/1/2007 at <http://resources.christianity.com/default/mrki.aspx>

Mark Dever asks this one-time Welch Baptist how he became a Presbyterian minister and seminary professor in Jackson, Mississippi.

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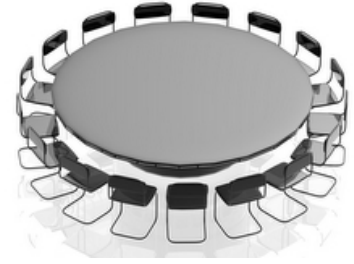
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Pastors' and Theologians' Forum

We asked a roundtable of pastors and theologians the following questions:



Does Scripture call the local church (by which we mean the local church as the local church, not as individual Christians) to the work of cultural transformation? For example, is a failing school system the responsibility of the local church?

Answers from

- Thabiti Anyabwile
- John Frame
- Michael Horton
- David Jackman
- Jonathan Leeman
- Aaron Menikoff
- Tony Payne
- Philip Ryken
- Stephen Um

Thabiti Anyabwile

Okay, first the easy response. What is primary in the church is preaching, applying, and living the gospel. The church is to make disciples and teach those disciples to observe all the Lord commands. The gospel is central and without the gospel a "church" ceases to be a church. So nothing that comes under the banner of "cultural transformation" is to displace that most central of concerns.



Having said that, does not Christ command his people to do some things that touch upon cultural transformation or social issues? And insofar as the church is to teach disciples to obey all those commands, then I think on some level we're in the business of "cultural transformation" (though that's a hideous and misleading label).

I really dislike this question. It's problematic in two ways. First, the question forces us to make a decision that's too blunt or sweeping. It's "all or nothing." And, I think it may suggest that there is a "letter" to be obeyed without necessarily attending to a corresponding "spirit." For example, I can't think of chapter and verse (which the question seems to call for) that assigns the role of "cultural transformation" to the church qua church. And yet, I can't reason that there is no role for the church when there are plenty of places where Christians *universally* are called to do justice in their cultural setting. What does it mean for there to be such a universal call to Christians and there to be no role for the church qua church (a gathering of said Christians in a particular locale preaching, administering the ordinances, and living out the faith)? The distinction the question imposes between the church and individual Christians breaks down, I think, when you're talking about obligations Christians are universally to observe.

A second way in which the question is problematic: it seems to (a) assume a political and social context where government and perhaps a non-profit sector are intact and responsible for such things as education, and (b) overlook extraordinary social problems. So what is the church's responsibility regarding cultural transformation in a developing nation (which is most of the world) where there are no basic governmental structures and no non-profit sector as in the United States? And can we comfortably conclude the church has no role to oppose things like the slave trade, sex trafficking, abortion, or provide disaster relief in famine or hurricanes?

We could rule some of these things in by exception. That is, we could say, "of course the church has a role in those limited extraordinary cases." But if it has a role in such cases, why does it not have a role in the more mundane, ordinary, or chronic situations? Are we to organize mercy when the problem is glaring, but remain disorganized and disinterested when they are "every day"? I can't see that.

So, right now, I'm left to conclude that there is Christian liberty in deciding whether a local church will involve itself in this or that social issue. A great deal of discernment is required, for obviously not every social issue is "close" to the church's core mission, and there is a long history of social causes displacing gospel order. In my experience, Christians are generally nervous about exercising the liberties that Christ provides. Perhaps this is a corporate exercise in that nervousness.

Thabiti Anyabwile is the senior pastor of the First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman and the author, most recently, of The Decline of African American Theology (IVP, 2007).

John M. Frame

The task of the church is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)—to make disciples, teaching them "to observe all that I have commanded you." By God's grace, we train believers in obedience. That obedience inevitably transforms culture, as it has done now for nearly 2000 years. Christians have made huge contributions to learning, the arts and literature, the treatment of women, the abolition of anti-biblical slavery, the care of the poor, the sick, the widows, and orphans. Sin, of course, has impeded our mission; but the grace of God working through his people has accomplished amazing things.



Now some have argued that cultural transformation is the work of Christian individuals, but not of the local church. They argue that the latter should be limited to the area of the "spiritual," the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. But the spiritual/secular distinction is not biblical. The gospel as proclaimed by John (Matt. 3:2), Jesus (Matt. 4:17), Philip (Acts 8:12), and Paul (Acts 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31) announces the coming of the kingdom of God, a new order of righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom. 14:17). In the kingdom, we do all things (not just "spiritual") to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), all things in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17). It is plain that care for the poor, orphans, and widows is part of that.

Is a failing school system, then, for example, the responsibility of the local church? Education is part of our kingdom responsibility (Deut. 6:6-9, Tit. 2:12), part of the gospel of the kingdom. This may mean encouraging believers to educate their children at home, or in Christian schools. It may mean advocating a new commitment to excellence in the public schools. It is better that schools not be administered directly by the church: that is not necessary and it can be a distraction. But where there is no alternative, yes, the church may start a school, bringing to its children (and even to children of non-Christian parents) the riches of human knowledge within a kingdom-centered worldview. There are legitimate questions as to how best to handle such matters in different localities. But the question is not, whether the church has a responsibility, but how should it undertake that responsibility. The gospel of the kingdom is comprehensive—good news for every aspect of human life.

John Frame is a professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, and is the author, most recently, of Salvation Belongs to the Lord (P&R, 2006).

Michael Horton

This question is carefully framed. It may be assumed that to say "no, the church isn't called to cultural transformation" means that one doesn't think that Christians should try to improve their surroundings during the time that God has given them. Yet the reality is more complicated than that.



In my understanding, the local church is not free to do anything in Christ's name that Christ himself—the King of the church—has not commissioned it to do. Preaching the Word, administering Baptism and the Supper, teaching, and providing spiritual fellowship and discipline receive clear mandates in Scripture, with instructions for offices and procedures for carrying out this sacred embassy.

Now, as citizens of temporal kingdoms as well as the kingdom of Christ, believers are called to be husbands, wives, children, parents, employers, employees, voters, and neighbors in a variety of daily callings. In these vocations, they love and serve their neighbor. With no expectation that they are transforming the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of Christ, they nevertheless "aspire to live quietly, and to mind [their] own business, and to work with [their] hands, so that [they] may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one" (1 Thes 4:11-12). Besides the imperatives given for proper conduct in the household of faith, there are commands to live with integrity in the world, to submit to those in authority, to pray for rulers, and so forth. So there is indeed much for us to do in this matter of fulfilling our vocations, loving, and serving our neighbors.

There is no call to cultural transformation in the New Testament. Yet if Christian churches are fulfilling their specific mandate and believers are being built up in the faith and practice through the Word, we can expect to see distinctive effects in the culture.

The kingdom of Christ itself is something that we are receiving (Heb 12:28), not something that we are building. In this present age, Christ is reigning in his church, as his unique and exclusive office of Prophet, Priest, and King is realized through the ministry of pastors, deacons, and elders. It is this ministry that creates a "new society" within the structures of this fading evil age.

Michael Horton is a professor of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary California, editor of Modern Reformation magazine, and the author, most recently of Covenant and Salvation: Union With Christ (WJK, 2007).

David Jackman

The corporate social role of believers, expressed at its most basic level in the local congregation, is to act as "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matt 5:13-14). Jesus tells us that our light shines before men in our 'good deeds' (v. 16). Similarly, Peter exhorts the scattered house churches to which his first letter is addressed to "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:12).



This will happen in the lives of individual Christians, of course, but the original setting seems to be corporate and congregational, which means that the local church is being encouraged to be involved and play a strong role for good in the culture. The implication is that this will open the door for the gospel to be listened to, in that this quality of selfless Christian living will be a stimulus for enquiry to the unbelievers (1 Pet 3:15-16). "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal 6:10). The church fellowship is a model.

All this is part of our corporate expression of loving our neighbour as ourselves. We

do this firstly by holding out the gospel and seeking to bring its good news to as many as possible in our community and we must never dilute this priority perspective, because it is eternal. But if we have no interest in the everyday needs of our community, where for many people their greatest needs and struggles are experienced, our expression of gospel love can sound pretty hollow. Only the gospel can transform human lives and culture, but compassionate Christian service, in love for our neighbour, will always be a powerful validation of its truth.

David Jackman is the president of the [Proclamation Trust](#), a ministry dedicated to equipping preachers and teachers with a commitment to proclaiming God's Word.

Jonathan Leeman

No. Huh uh. The church is *not* called to transform culture, at least not in the sense that most people use that phrase today. If by transform one means "convert," then fine. But that's not how the phrase is being used. You cannot transform what is blind except by giving it sight. You cannot transform what is deaf except by giving it hearing. You cannot transform what is stone except by making it flesh. You cannot transform what is dead except by making it alive.



How do you "transform" something that's dead? If you happen to be supernatural, you can make it alive (John 1:13). But you cannot transform it.

Are churches called to love, to serve, to care, to bring justice and mercy? In some capacities, yes; in other capacities, no. That's a more complicated discussion, and I refer the reader to Steve Boyer and the Capitol Hill Baptist Church elder's discussion on caring for the poor. Here, I simply want to state for the record that the entire discussion about "transforming culture" is only possible when Christians have begun to blur the line between church and world, between the city of God and the city of man, between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world, between children of the Father and children of the devil, between those who are God's people and those who are not God's people.

This exclusivistic line is offensive to our cultural sensibilities, so we talk about everyone being on a journey. We euphemize about the "unchurched" or "pre-Christian"; the label "non-Christians" sounds stark, absolutist, and intolerant. Am I claiming that any church knows precisely who the wheat are and who the tares are? No, but that's not the point. The point is simply that wheat cannot "transform" tares other than by asking God to convert them into wheat. A tare is a tare is a tare.

Now, is a failing school the responsibility of the local church? No, of course not. Where does the Bible say churches are responsible for schools? Are the people who comprise a church responsible to love and serve their neighbors in myriad ways, including the education of the neighborhood's children? Potentially, yes! In the same way that Christians are called to live and love like Good Samaritans, we should always be looking for ways to serve our non-Christian neighbors—that they might be given sight, hearing, hearts of flesh, and life!

Jonathan Leeman is the editor of the 9Marks eJournal.

Aaron Menikoff

Let me begin with four biblically informed assumptions. First, an overarching concern of the New Testament is *personal* transformation (c. f. Mark 7:14-23; Rom. 3:21-27; 1 Pet. 2:24); Jesus implied as much in John 18:36 when He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Second, there is a clear emphasis in Scripture on the responsibility to care for *Christians* (c. f. Acts 6:1-6; Gal. 6:10; 2 Cor. 8-9). Third, the marks of the *church*, biblically and historically, are the right preaching of the word and the right administration of the ordinances (c. f. Eph. 2:20; Col. 1:28, 1 Cor. 11:20). Fourth, physical care for those *outside* the church is important (c. f. Gal. 6:10; Tit. 3:1-3; Matt. 5:13-16).



Combining these assumptions leads me to conclude that the church should focus on doing that which she is uniquely charged to do: guarding doctrine, preaching it boldly, and calling her members to live it out vigorously and practically in their communities. This excludes the church, as the church, from taking responsibility for the culture, though it does not exclude the church from changing the culture indirectly through the work of individuals. In fact, if a church is not expressing a Scriptural concern for those outside the church—leading and equipping her members to act—she is not preaching the whole counsel of God.

It is easy to set up a straw man by arguing a church that adopts this position has no corporate social conscience, but nothing could be further from the truth. Just look at the Second Great Awakening! Evangelical Christians, who believed that faith without works is dead, fed the poor and ministered to the blind, to name just a couple issues they targeted. Some of them even did so "as the local church," but most did so as Christians who, transformed by the gospel, married physical and spiritual ministry—all with a heart to bring sinners to repentance.

Cultural transformation undertaken by individuals need not be thought of as the ugly-step sister of ministry sponsored by the church, especially when it is fired by the prophetic preaching and encouraged by the tender love of a local congregation.

Aaron Menikoff, a Ph.D. student in church history at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is an elder at Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and a writer for [Kairos Journal](#) for pastors.

Philip G. Ryken

Does Scripture call the local church (by which we mean the local church as the local church, not as individual Christians) to the work of *cultural transformation*? For example, is a failing school system the responsibility of the local church?



There is a sense in which the answer to this question must be "no." The church's primary calling is to preach the gospel and to worship God in the ministry of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. While the worship of God and the proclamation of the gospel have a transforming influence on the surrounding culture, this does not happen directly, but indirectly, as the people of God live out the implications of their faith in every aspect of life.

Yet there are also ways in which the answer to this question must be "yes." In its priestly ministry of intercession, the local church prays for the needs of its community—all of the areas where the surrounding culture needs to experience the transforming influence of the gospel. In its prophetic ministry of preaching and teaching God's Word, the local church discipled

its members to fulfill their various callings as parents, teachers, artists, students, politicians, business people—callings that have culture-transforming power. In its diaconal ministry of mercy, the local church offers practical service in the name of Christ—service that transforms the lives of the poor, the homeless, and the elderly, as well as children, prisoners, and Finternationals. In these ways, at least, the local church is called to the gospel work of cultural transformation.

A church that regards such transformation as its primary goal may well miss its more fundamental calling to glorify God in preaching the gospel. Yet a church that minimizes the importance of its legitimate calling to cultural transformation may fail to do the full work of discipleship or of bearing full witness to the kingdom of God.

To take education as an example, a failing school system ought to be a matter of deep concern to Christian people. In appropriate ways, it can also be a legitimate area for local church involvement. Local churches can and should pray for the education of local children. They can and should support local Christian schools through their benevolences. Where permitted, they can and should lead Bible studies, provide Christ-centered religious education, or do other evangelistic work in local schools. Where invited (as is the case in Philadelphia), they can and should respond to the request of the civil government to offer spiritual and educational mentoring to local students.

Philip G. Ryken is the senior minister of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and is the author, most recently, of What Is the Christian Worldview (P&R, 2006).

Tony Payne

One is hard pressed to think of a word from Scripture that calls local Christian congregations to see cultural transformation (of the kind envisaged in your question) as part of their God-given work and mandate. Then again, one is hard pressed to think of many things at all in the New Testament that are given to local gatherings (considered as such) to be their work or mandate. D. B. Knox was fond of pointing out that, in the New Testament, the activities of the local congregation (as a congregation) do not go beyond loving, Spirit-filled fellowship with one another around Christ based on the heavenly gathering of which we are all members, and mutual edification as we look forward to the Day of his coming (see e.g. Heb 10:24-25; 12:18-24; Col 3:1-4f.).



Of course, because of our heavenly fellowship in and with Christ, and because of our desire to love and do good to all people (especially the household of faith), we will band together for all manner of purposes, in all manner of associations, both short- and long-term, depending on our opportunities and circumstances.

Prayerfully proclaiming the gospel will remain the chief of these purposes—not least because Christ has commissioned his people specifically to do so—but it will not be the only one. Tackling besetting social and cultural problems (such as a failing education system) may well be a good purpose that Christians work together on, and Christians have famously done so throughout history. But, as far as I can see in Scripture, it is not the particular responsibility of the local congregation, viewed as such.

Tony Payne is publishing director at Matthias Media and the author of multiple books.

Stephen Um

All peoples, institutions, and groups are interested in changing, renewing, or transforming society by impressing their core values on the culture. For that matter, we cannot help but make an impact on our culture. The minute anyone opens his mouth, he is speaking in a particular language, from a particular cultural context, with a particular worldview vision of morality and various definitions of what he believes to be the "true", the "good", and the "beautiful." As such, no one should be led to think that he is not "getting into the public square."



In addressing the question, "Is it the church's responsibility to embrace or assume the civic responsibility of the state (e.g. education, the poor, social injustice, the arts, etc.)?", we need to consider the following. The church does not have any juridical authority in the city/state public square, but that does not mean that the Church ought to stay out in the periphery. The church does have the responsibility for acts of mercy and for engaging our community with acts of social justice (cf. Jas. 1.27). Paul states that "as we have opportunity, let us *do good* to *all* people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). He is clearly referring to a deed ministry that should be shared with all people as they have need. James says that

true religion is this: "*to look after* orphans and widows in their distress and *to keep* oneself from being polluted by the world" (Jas. 1.27). In other words, it is the church's responsibility to pursue both public compassion and personal piety. For example, although a failing school system is not the civic responsibility of the church, the church could get involved in "doing good" by perhaps coming along side of the local school in providing after-school tutoring.

Unfortunately, some activist or fundamentalist groups have thought that they should either assume the responsibility of the state (whether conservative or liberal) or impede the government's involvement in the lives of individuals. However, the gospel calls individuals in the church to pursue the common good in our culture and to enter into the public square by encouraging and promoting gospel values and by engaging in an incarnational/grassroots strategy for cultural renewal and community development. This is *not* to suggest that social action, political involvement, or pursuing the common good is a replacement for evangelism.

What does this gospel response look like? There is to be an integration of faith and vocational calling in bringing cultural renewal. Thus, the church and its members should cultivate friendships with people in their neighborhoods, join clubs and associations, and partner with organizations that are also involved in acts of mercy and social justice. In other words, because the ministry of the gospel is both a ministry of word and deed, we can actually promote the public witness of the gospel by pursuing the common good and engaging in acts of social justice.

Stephen Um is the senior minister of Citylife Presbyterian Church in Boston, Massachusetts.

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Transforming Culture with a Messiah Complex

By Michael Horton

Evangelicals have been talking lately about transforming the culture, doing kingdom work in all of life, and incarnating the church in the world. Sound good? The trouble is, these movements can conceive of the church as a substitute for Christ, shifting the focus of Christians from his promised return to your best life now.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM REVIVALISM TO WARREN

To understand this, it's helpful to consider how the evangelical church has related to the wider culture over the last couple of centuries. We are often told that evangelicalism was a sleeping giant—aloof and passive toward social, political, economic, and wider cultural concerns. As the story goes, the separatist giant was awakened from its dogmatic slumbers by Francis Schaeffer and the Moral Majority, unleashing the enormous energy of conservative Protestants, with the result that, at least since the 1980s, evangelicals can make or break political campaigns.

However, this picture isn't quite accurate. The evangelical revival in Britain, led by both Calvinists like George Whitefield and John Newton as well as Arminians like John and Charles Wesley, contributed significantly to the abolition of the slave trade throughout the empire. Historians often credit this movement, known in its American theater as the Great Awakening, with galvanizing the colonies into a republic. It is impossible to tell the story of American independence, abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, child labor legislation, and prohibition without mentioning the impact of revivalism.

Moral Reform

In fact, by the nineteenth century, the leading evangelist Charles Finney was actually defining the church as "a society of moral reformers." Taking advantage of every opportunity to attack Calvinism, Finney's theology was not even Arminian, but Pelagian: he explicitly denied original sin, substitutionary atonement, and justification; and he considered the new birth to be a self-generated conversion from sinful behavior to upright living. His sermon with the title "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," which he preached at Park Street Church in Boston, summarizes the Second Great Awakening and much American revivalism ever since.

True to their pragmatic and self-confident instincts, American Protestants did not want to define the church first and foremost as a community of forgiven sinners, recipients of grace, but as a triumphant army of moral activists. Even if one does not explicitly endorse Finney's Pelagianism, the undercurrent of assumptions and practices that evolved from his Pelagianistic social activism are powerful and pervasive. In the nineteenth century, most Protestants were optimistic about wider cultural change. Temperance societies emerged as one of many movements organized around the vision of a Christianized America.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, fellow evangelicals Josiah Strong and D. L. Moody would represent the growing cleavage between the triumphalistic postmillennialists and the pessimistic premillennialists. "The kingdoms of this world will not have become the kingdoms of our Lord," Strong opined, "until the money power has been Christianized." Long before the conservative-liberal polarizations, American evangelicalism had championed the so-called "social gospel," as one notices in the following comment from Horace Bushnell:

Talent has been Christianized already on a large scale. The political power of states and kingdoms has been long assumed to be, and now at last really is, as far as it becomes their accepted office to maintain personal security and liberty. Architecture, arts, constitutions, schools, and learning have been largely Christianized. But the money power, which is one of the most operative and grandest of all, is only beginning to be; though with promising tokens of a finally complete reduction to Christ and the uses of His Kingdom....That day, when it comes, is the morning, so to speak, of the new creation. Is it not time for that day to dawn?

But evangelist D. L. Moody marched to the beat of a different drummer. Although he was initially representative of Charles Finney's social activism, Moody became increasingly pessimistic about the extent to which earthly empires could become the kingdom of God. "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel," he would later write. "God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'" Whereas many people increasingly regarded revival as an instrument for Christianizing society through evangelism and social action, Moody saw it as a means of converting individuals. In Josiah Strong's vision, however,

an American version of the Holy Roman Empire began to proliferate with Protestant hospitals, colleges, women's societies and men's societies, all signs of God's approval and, indeed, of the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Everyone's Hero

Finney has been hailed as an evangelical hero by Protestants as diverse as modernist Harry Emerson Fosdick and fundamentalist Bob Jones, Sr., and, more recently, as the exemplar of left-wing political causes by Jim Wallis and right-wing causes by Jerry Falwell. It is perhaps no wonder that a bewildered visitor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, could describe American religion as "Protestantism without the Reformation." As George Marsden has documented in various places, both the Christian Right and the Christian Left derive from this late nineteenth-century evangelicalism. It is this quite recent train of thought (or, more precisely, activism), rather than the profound reflection of Augustine and the reformers, that guides contemporary evangelical activism. Ironically, even staunch premillennialists like Jerry Falwell sound a good deal like the postmillennialists of yesteryear. The agenda for moral reform may have divided in liberal and conservative directions, but both owe their origin to the revivalism of Charles Finney.

So when a conservative Southern Baptist like Rick Warren embraces "new measures" in church growth by advocating a vision of the church as an army of reformers who can end the plagues of disease, war, and poverty as well as promiscuity, abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and alcoholism, he stands in a long line leading from Finney to Strong to Sunday to Graham. "Deeds, not Creeds!" used to be the mantra of the social gospel of mainline churches, but Warren has revived it today as if it were newly minted. After a brief dispensationalist interlude, American evangelicals returned to their more positive and triumphant (postmillennial) message of transforming American culture into "a shining city upon a hill."

Of course, this cursory overview does not answer the normative question about what the church should be doing in relation to the wider culture, but it does provide a context that helps us understand perennial assumptions often taken for granted at least in American churches. Ironically, in the land that prizes the legal separation of church and state, the identification of church and sub-culture, each with its political agenda, is nearly total: white suburban evangelicals, the Black church, mainline social gospels, and the more recent "new urbanism" of the emergent movement. Yet in spite of their different agendas, each of these ecclesiastical demographics is largely dependent on the heritage of American revivalism.

So far we've considered the historical context of the question, "What should the church's role be in the wider culture?" Now to the biblical and theological context.

BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT: CHURCH AS MESSIANIC SUBSTITUTE

Many writers today are calling for a greater emphasis on the resurrection. What's overlooked, ironically, is the importance of Christ's ascension.

Christ's Ascension

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus generate a remarkable paradox. Right at the place where the Suffering Servant has been exalted as conquering Lord, the first fruit of a new creation, and the head of a body, he disappears. Then, precisely in that place that is vacated by the one who has ascended, a church emerges.

The most direct ascension account comes from Luke (Luke 24:13-27; 24:50-53). Acts 1 reprises this episode in its opening verses (Ac 1:6-11). Thus the ascension (and parousia) became part of the gospel itself. Not only was Jesus crucified and raised according to the prophets, but the Messiah will be sent again. Jesus, says Peter, "must *remain* in heaven *until the time of universal restoration* that God announced long ago through his holy prophets" (Ac 3:20-21, emphasis added).

As they were taught by Jesus in the Olivet and Upper Room discourses and on the road to Emmaus (Matt. 24-25; John 14-16; Luke 24:13ff), the apostolic preaching in Acts follows the familiar pattern of descent-ascent-return, justifying the confession in the eucharistic liturgy, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." Jesus' departure is as real and decisive as his incarnation, and he "will come [again] in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Ac 1:11)—that is, in the flesh. In the meantime, he is absent in the flesh.

Under-realized Ascension, Over-realized Eschatology

One problem in the history of interpretation, however, has been to treat the ascension as little more than a dazzling exclamation point for the resurrection rather than as a new event in its own right. The ascension of Jesus in the flesh opens up an interim within history that keeps us looking forward to the return of the same Jesus. Nothing can replace Jesus in the flesh.[1]

As the first fruits of the new creation, Jesus in his ascension does not abandon history but redefines all that has preceded it as the old age of sin and death, subjecting it to judgment.[2] The history of human misery and pomp, autonomy and strife, which can only yield the fruit of condemnation, is now passing away. It's becoming obsolete. Even now the "age to come" is reconfiguring reality around its glorified head. The time that the church thus occupies because of the ascension is defined neither by full presence nor full absence, but by a eucharistic tension between "this age" and "the age to come." The church is lodged in that precarious place of ambiguity and tension between these two ages, and it must live there until Jesus returns, relying only on the Word and Spirit.

Yet the church does not like to stay put. It wants to jump the gun and realize the kingdom of glory when, for now, God has determined for it to be a kingdom of grace.[3] Looking away from the absence of Jesus of Nazareth, the church, as the body of Christ, can easily come to see itself as his visible and earthly replacement. As Douglas Farrow notes, "When the earthly church is seen as a mirror of heavenly triumph, when its success on the horizontal axis is thought to display the dizzying heights to which its Lord ascends, it is difficult to set limits to the glory which should accrue to it." Augustine spoke of a *totus Christus*, the whole Christ consisting of its head and its members.[4] In other words, that which is human about *Jesus*—visibility, temporality, fleshiness—is now transferred to the *church* as a historical body. Jesus proclaimed himself as Jacob's ladder (Jn 1:50-51), but in his bodily absence the church offers itself for that mediation. The history of Jesus in the flesh is at least implicitly replaced by the history of the church as the kingdom of God. The deity of Christ remains transcendent, but his incarnate existence is "fleshed out" by and as the church.

In this context, it is not surprising that the kingdom of God was identified directly with the church—a kind of "over-realized" amillennialism that was no longer palpably aware of the church's location in the already/not yet tension of God's plan in history. The kingdoms of this world are gradually becoming the kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

Church As Christ's Regent

This transition to what we might call anachronistically a "postmillennial" optimism was more plausible with the conversion of Constantine since Christianity was given imperial status. Constantine's admiring assistant and biographer Eusebius announced that Christ had, as it were, handed over earth's title deed to his servant, Constantine, who advances Christ's reign "through the ordinary usages of war." Eventually, the bishop of Rome would vie for the keys to the kingdoms of this world.

For Thomas Aquinas, Christ's physical presence was under the control of the church, which could summon him with the ringing of a bell in the mass. The miracle of transubstantiation "placed Christ fully in the church's possession," notes Farrow. "Indeed, it meant that the church now controlled the parousia. At the ringing of a bell the *Christus absens* became the *Christus praesens*...Seated comfortably with the Christ-child on its lap, the church soon became his regent rather than his servant." [5]

Incarnation Or Substitution

Why this excursus on the ascension? Because there is so much dangerous talk these days about the church as the continuing incarnation of Christ, the active agent of redemption, who completes the work that Christ came to accomplish. In short, the church is substituted for Christ.[6] Both Protestant and Roman Catholic followers of German idealism have made this move, and the trail leads all the way to Pope Benedict XVI, Lutheran theologian Robert Jenson, Baptist theologian Stanley Grenz, and the circle of brilliant writers known as Radical Orthodoxy.[7]

Graham Ward, a representative of Radical Orthodoxy, has recently written,

We have no access to the body of the gendered Jew...It is pointless because the Church is now the body of Christ, so to understand the body of Jesus we can only examine what the Church is and what it has to say concerning the nature of that body as scripture attests it...As Gregory of Nyssa points out, in his thirteenth sermon on Song of Songs, 'he who sees the Church looks directly at Christ.'

I realize that most evangelicals bristle at such grandiose claims for the institutional church, much less the pope, but do we not regularly encounter the claim that Christians are called to save Western civilization, transform the culture, and build the kingdom of God as the extension of Christ's redeeming mission in the world?

According to the late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, "The church should recognize in itself the earthly body of the ascended Lord; and not only in itself, but also in the world, it should recognize the work of the Spirit drawing all things to God." The question of Christ's bodily whereabouts is no longer important, because the church is alive and well, picking up where he left off.[8]

In fact, "incarnational" is becoming a dominant adjective in evangelical circles, often depriving Christ's person and work of its specificity and uniqueness.[9] Christ's person and work easily becomes a "model" or "vision" for ecclesial action (*imitatio*

Christi), rather than a completed event to which the church offers its witness.[10] We increasingly hear about "incarnational ministry," as if Christ's unique personal history could be repeated or imitated. The church, whether conceived in "high church" or "low church" terms, rushes in to fill the void, as the substitute for its ascended Lord. In its train, the sacramental cosmos returns. As Christ and his work is assimilated to the church and its work, similar confluences emerge between the gospel and culture; between the word of God and the experience of our particular group; and between the church's commission and the transformation of the kingdoms of this age into the kingdom of Christ.

It is this recurring temptation to look away from Christ's absence—toward a false presence, often substituting itself as an extension of Christ's incarnation and reconciling work—that distracts it from directing the world's attention to Christ's parousia in the future. Yet a church that does not acknowledge Christ's absence is no longer focused on Christ; instead, it's tempted to idolatrous substitutions in the attempt to seize Canaan prematurely.

The parallel with Moses is striking:

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him" (Ex 32:1).

Of course, the church has seen and heard a lot since then, including confirmation upon confirmation of God's saving promise. Yet we must wait for the restoration at the end of the age. We hope and act in the present not in order to save the world or build the kingdom of God, but because "we are *receiving* a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Heb 12:28).

IS ALL OF LIFE KINGDOM WORK?

If this theological argument is correct, then we should question popular statements like, "All of life is kingdom work." No, proclaiming the Word, administering baptism and the Supper, caring for the spiritual and physical well-being of the saints, and bringing in the lost are kingdom work. Building bridges, delivering medical supplies to hospitals, installing water heaters, defending clients in court, holding public office, and having friends over for dinner are "creation work," given a pledge of safe conduct ever since Cain under God's regime of common grace. In this work, Christians serve beside non-Christians, as both are endowed with natural gifts and learned skills for their common life together.

Only when Christ returns in glory will the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. Until then, the New Testament does not offer a single exhortation to Christianize politics, the arts and sciences, education, or any other common grace field of endeavor.

Of course, Christians will bring their worldview and values to their secular callings. Instead of simply working for the weekend out of pure self-interest, believers should choose and fulfill their vocation as a way of best loving and serving their neighbor. What the church does for those who are of the household of faith is different from what individual Christians do as neighbors in the world.

Where we might hope for triumphant calls to "redeem culture," the New Testament epistles offer comparatively boring yet crucial exhortations to respect and pray for those in authority, to treat employers and employees well, and to be faithful parents and children. We are called "to increase more and more" in godliness through the ordinary means of grace in the church. And in our secular vocations we are called to "aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside and that you may lack nothing" (1 Thes 4:10-12).

SHOULD THERE BE "CHRISTIAN" INSTITUTIONS?

Again, if this theological argument is correct, we should ask whether there should be Christian hospitals, Christian businesses, or Christian entertainment industries. Haven't such enterprises, which often do no more than mimic their secular counterparts, distracted the church from its primary focus and ministry? What if *churches* were more seriously Christian, concentrating on Christ as he is delivered to sinners through Word and Sacrament, and their members were scattered throughout the week to occupy posts alongside their non-Christian neighbors instead of being driven into an ostensibly Christian sub-culture? What if, instead of trying to discipline a pagan culture, we restored the evangelical practice of church discipline in our own churches (a point made better by Paul in 1 Cor 5:9-12)?

Surely the abolition of the slave trade was a noble work. Yet in Britain it was not the church as an institution that abolished slavery, but Christians in public office who had been formed by the church's ministry. When William Wilberforce came to John Newton for advice on whether he should enter the ministry, Newton encouraged his friend to pursue politics instead. It was as a member of parliament that Wilberforce loved and served his neighbor, benefiting from the ordinary means of grace that

Newton ministered to him. The church preaches God's transcendent law and gospel, and her children pursue their cultural mandate in their secular vocations. One wonders what might have happened if, instead of dividing over national policy, Protestant churches in the antebellum American North and South practiced church discipline against slave-holders. After all, according to numerous accounts, South African apartheid in our own time came crashing down when the Dutch Reformed Church confessed that its religious justification of the system was "heresy." Disciplined by its sister Reformed churches around the world, the church did what only the church could do, and the result was that the system lost its moral legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

I realize that this argument only scratches the surface. It is too broad to offer an adequate answer to important questions about whether and to what extent mercy ministries should be extended to those outside of the household of faith. However, I hope to have offered some more general thoughts to help frame such a discussion.

- The ascension highlights Christ's bodily absence, while Pentecost highlights his presence in saving action by his Spirit, working through the Word. Even now, the powers of the age to come are breaking in on this present evil age, yet we remain pilgrims, not emperors or architects of a new world order.
- In imitation of our Father, who in this era of common grace sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike, we are called to fulfill our secular vocations as a loving service to our neighbors. As citizens of the City of God, we are called to grow up into maturity together in the body of Christ and proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. Only at Christ's appearing will these two callings—the creation mandate and the Great Commission—become identical.
- The law can guide us in godly living, but it can never—even after we're justified—give us any life. "Deeds, not creeds!" means "Law, not Gospel!" By going beyond God's law, this moral agenda imposes on Christ's sheep burdens that he has not commanded to be borne, agendas that do not have his authorization; and it dulls that patient and hopeful cry engendered by the Spirit in our hearts, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"
- At the same time, by placing an emphasis on unwarranted "kingdom movements," Christians are distracted from the concrete vocations God has given us in the world simply to love and serve our neighbor with patience, respect, and excellence.
- Just as we cannot derive any life from the law, we cannot derive any confidence in our cultural triumphs in so many fields. As with law-and-gospel, our earthly and heavenly citizenship are not opposed unless we are seeking a way of salvation for ourselves or our nation. But once we recognize that there is no everlasting rest from violence, oppression, injustice and immorality through our own political or cultural works, we are free to pursue their amelioration with vigorous gratitude to God for his saving grace in Jesus Christ.
- Furthermore, we pursue this cultural task looking back to the creation which God blessed and looking forward to this same creation that will be restored when the kingdoms of this world will finally be made the kingdom of our God and of his Christ forever, world without end. Amen.

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1 More than any work I have come across in recent years, Douglas Farrow's *Ascension and Ecclesia* has sought to remedy the apparent marginalization of the ascension in theology, seeing it as "the point of intersection in Christology, eschatology, and ecclesiology." The ascension was not invented by the church as a way of dealing with the failure of the kingdom and its king, but was understood by the early Christians as the very form in which the kingdom was being inaugurated in this present age.

2 In the epistles, the ascension marks the present heavenly work of Jesus Christ on behalf of his church (Ro 8:33-34; 1 Jn 2:1), as the first fruits of the harvest (1 Cor 15), who will return from heaven (1 Thes 4:13-5:11) in judgment and salvation to fulfill the "Day of the LORD" (Ro 2:5; 1 Thes 5:2; cf. Heb 10:25; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:10). The ascension is attested in Stephen's vision as he was martyred, not to mention Paul's on his way to Damascus. United to Christ, believers have been seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6-7) and there is explicit mention of the ascension (interpreting Psalm 68:18) as the source of the gifts being poured out on the church (Eph 4:7-10). The writer to the Hebrews appeals to the ascension as part of the contrast between old and new covenant worship (Heb 7:23-26; 9:25). A further contrast in chapter 10 is that whereas the Levitical priests never sat down during their liturgical service in the sanctuary, "when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet" (vv 11-13).

3 This doctrine of the ascension radically challenged Platonism, but it also burst the wineskins of early Jewish eschatology and cosmology. Nevertheless, the church has frequently looked away from the ascension of Christ in the flesh. Of course, there was the extreme position of

Gnosticism, which explicitly denied that God had assumed human flesh in the first place, much less died, rose, ascended, and will return in the flesh. However, even the orthodox, steeped in the Platonic worldview of their age, could fall short of realizing the full impact of the ascension on their whole outlook. Origen affirmed "more of an ascension of the mind than of the body," which explains the rise of monasticism and asceticism. Even Athanasius and Augustine explained the ascension as a way of Jesus' finally being able to free his disciples from their attachment to his humanity, so that they could recognize his deity. Jesus' being removed from us "exteriorly" in his ascension, says Augustine, allows finally for his filling us up "interiorly," which refers to the divine essence per se rather than to the Spirit. Christ's humanity is necessary "only 'for our weakness.'"

4 "The *totus Christus* notion combines with a Nestorianizing analysis of the ascension to allow what belongs to Jesus to pass more or less directly into the church." For Augustine, the church is now "'the ladder of heaven on which God descends to earth' and the one 'through whom we ascend to him who descended through her to us.'"

5 This totalizing and absolutizing trend is evident in the bull of Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam* (1302), which consolidated papal power over all souls and bodies, both the ecclesiastical and civil spheres, requiring submission as necessary for salvation. While Luther emphasized the humble descent of God in the flesh over personal or corporate striving to ascend triumphantly to the skies, Farrow judges that Calvin placed the emphasis once again on the ascension. Yet because he also believed that Christ--not just his spirit or divinity, but in the words of the Belgic Confession, "his true and natural body and blood"--was given to believers through the Supper, Calvin was able to reckon more clearly with the tension between absence and presence that required the Spirit's mediation. It also highlighted the "already" / "not yet" tension in the relationship of the visible church to its living head. The church could not substitute for Jesus Christ. The presence of the Spirit, through the Supper itself, was as much the source of expectant longing for his return as of fulfillment here and now.

6 As Origen's "ascent of mind" was revived by Hegel and Schleiermacher, the substitution of the church for Christ was complete.

7 Following the Hegelian Catholicism of Johann Möhler, Karl Adam insisted that as the extension of the incarnation, the church is the actual occurrence of the Absolute Idea in history. Only now are we at the place, according to Adam, where we can envision a return of alienated children to Rome, so that "the great and urgent task of the West is to close at long last the unwholesome breach that has divided us for centuries, to create a new spiritual unity, a religious centre, and so to prepare *the only possible foundation for a rebuilding and rebirth of Western civilization*" (emphasis added). (Only two months ago I read a TIME cover story in which a conservative Roman Catholic theologian said that Pope Benedict's "role is to represent Western civilization.") The Roman Catholic Church is "the realisation on earth of the Kingdom of God." "Christ the Lord is the real self of the Church," and the church and Christ are "one and the same person, one Christ, the whole Christ."

8 British theologian John Webster observes "the emphasis in certain Roman Catholic and Anglican ecclesiologies of the last two centuries on an 'incarnational' principle in which Christ, church, sacrament and ministry (and sometimes culture and ethos) threatened to become points on a continuum of God's 'embodied' saving activity." Such reflections owe "as much to Hegelian theory of history as to theology." This emphasis "has become something of a commonplace in some now dominant styles of modern theology and theological ethics" which "emphasize the coinherence of the divine work of reconciliation and the church's moral action, in such a way that the work of the ecclesial community can properly be considered an extension (fleshing out, realization, embodiment) of the gospel of God's reconciling act." Interpreted within a more cultural-linguistic paradigm, Stanley Hauerwas, Timothy Gorringer, and others join this trajectory.

9 To be sure, as Webster acknowledges, these approaches often appeal to the Trinity and grace. "Nevertheless, they are characteristically less drawn to expansive depiction of the sheer gratuity of God's act of reconciliation, and more commonly offer lengthy accounts of the acts of the church, sacramental and moral, often through the idiom of virtues, habits and practices." According to Timothy Gorringer, "the community of reconciliation" is "the means through which atonement is effected, which is the reason, presumably, Christ bequeathed to us not a set of doctrines or truths, but a community founded on betrayal and the survival of betrayal." To which Webster replies: "What this opposition of 'truths' and 'community' signals is simply...a theological ontology of the church's acts of reconciling...The moral force of the Christological *ephapax* [once and for all] is simply lost."

10 Robert Jenson goes so far as to say that the modernist Catholic Alfred Loisy's infamous quip, "Jesus announced the Kingdom, but it was the church that came," despite his sarcastic intent, "states the exact truth." Recognizing that the identity must leave room for referring distinctly

"to the one and then to the other," Jenson nevertheless appeals explicitly to Hegel and Fichte in developing his constructive proposal. "The church with her sacraments," Jenson summarizes, "is the object as which we may intend Christ because she is the object as which he intends himself." Therefore, "The relation between Christ as a subject and the church with her sacraments is precisely that between transcendental subjectivity and the objective self...; the church is the risen Christ's Ego." Fellow Lutheran Mark C. Mattes points out that the wide appeal to theosis/divinization represents this priority of ecclesiology over soteriology, the church over the gospel, and the inner word over the external word. Jenson and his circle ("evangelical catholics") are oriented toward a theology of "'supernaturalizing the natural,' as John Milbank has interpreted Blondel's and de Lubac's work." The problem with this view is not its refusal of autonomy to creation; rather, it is that its conception of participation is "configured within a transcendence dominated by the metaphor of 'ascent.' This implies that our agency has bearing *coram deo*."

It ignores the truth that before God, we are fundamentally passive—solely receivers...The moral life that accords with such passivity is active service to the neighbor, and the appropriate metaphor for the Christian life is 'descent' in charity toward others...In a radical departure from the Lutheran affirmation that the church is an assembly of people shaped by the gospel's message and sacraments, Jenson believes that God expresses his identity to the world as a creature, the body of the church.

In fact, according to Jenson, the church as "the body of the *totus Christus*" is "that creature that makes sense of the rest."

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How Christians Can Combat Slavery Today

By Priya Abraham

The word "slavery" conjures many images in our minds: Africans bent over cotton in the Deep South; filthy ships stuffed with shackled humans; and this year, perhaps, the moving film *Amazing Grace* about William Wilberforce's 20-year battle to abolish Britain's slave trade.

Wilberforce succeeded in abolishing the slave trade in 1807, and the film commemorates the important anniversary. Later, slavery itself was abolished, and is now illegal everywhere in the world. But shockingly, slavery still exists and flourishes today. The difference is that the victims are more numerous—perhaps 27 million in the world—and are worth far less than America's old chattel slaves.

That's the jarring discovery I made while researching a piece for *WORLD Magazine* earlier this year. A modern slave could be a teenager kidnapped for prostitution, an Afghan girl forced into marriage, or a low-caste Indian laborer held in debt bondage, all examples in my February article, "[Let My People Go](#)." Their faces and trials are many.

Broadly speaking, modern-day slaves are either in the commercial sex industry or in forced labor. The United States has an estimated 10,000 slaves, according to abolitionist group Free the Slaves. Half are in the sex trade, and half are in forced labor. Across the world, between 600,000 and 800,000 people are trafficked across borders into slavery; between 14,500 and 17,000 of those enter the United States.[1]

Two hundred years ago devoted Christians such as Wilberforce led the way to abolition. Today we might also ask, what can we do to combat slavery? How can the local church help?

With that in mind, I have compiled a few practical suggestions and points to consider, courtesy of modern-day abolitionists who are already hard at work. Put simply, we can do much just by acting locally and working with people we already know.

About 80 percent of the world's trafficking victims are women and girls, and most of them end up in the sex business. Christians understand that prostitution, pornography, and other distortions of sex are sinful and damaging. But we need to go further. To understand sex slavery, we should make no distinction between "voluntary" prostitutes and "involuntary" trafficking victims.

One could argue that women who "choose" sex work are exposed to the same degradation and coercion trafficking victims experience. That's often true, but the deeper problem is that, legal or not, commercial sex products—be they dirty magazines, strip clubs, or brothels—all end up feeding the demand for victims. An invaluable primer on this is [Demand](#), a new web documentary by Shared Hope International. (They have two versions; one shows more sin than the other).

Legalizing prostitution in the Netherlands was supposed to make its workers safer. Instead, it has swelled demand for sex, encouraging traffickers to bring in more women and girls from poorer European countries and the rest of the world.

Sex traffickers follow a common pattern. They promise girls jobs or schooling in a new, wealthier country. Once across the border, the traffickers snatch their passports, weaken them with violence and rape and force them to sell their bodies.

If we understand that "voluntary" prostitution and trafficking are part of one larger evil, we are better equipped to fight it. In our communities, it means we can tackle the local sex industry and know that we may help trafficking victims. This is largely uncharted territory for churches, however, so we need to approach it carefully.

Below are pointers gleaned from Lisa Thompson, who directs the Salvation Army's Initiative Against Sexual Trafficking. She is one of the most faithful, gutsy, and determined abolitionists I know.

1. Home is where the start is

Examine your own community. Flip open the yellow pages and see what they advertise. Massage parlors and escort services may be legal, but they are often fronts for prostitution. Learn where the strip clubs and prostitution corridors are. Cities that are hubs for travelers, businessmen, and immigrants are obvious prostitution points. The FBI estimates about 300,000 children are at risk for entering prostitution, and identified fourteen cities where child prostitution is highest.[2] They are orphans or runaways, come from abusive homes, or have suffered sexual abuse, making them prime quarry for pimps.

2. Making contact

Once you know where they are, how do you reach out to prostitutes? This one is tricky, but consider a street ministry. It will be tough, maybe even risky work, so talk to local community organizations that have done it for years. Most are not Christian, but they know their stuff, and it's another way to cultivate relationships.

Women in your church—only they can really attempt this—might go out to sidewalks or strip clubs where prostitutes and strippers work. They can develop friendships with the women, which opens the door to evangelization. Along the lines of Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree for families of convicts, plan a church meal or event for the workers. Lisa warns, however: "People might expect a Damascus road conversion, but that's not the norm."

3. Exit strategy

When a prostitute or trafficking victim leaves the business, one of their greatest needs is a safe house where they can readjust to normal life. The women may be fearful and untrusting from years on the street, and may need drug or alcohol rehabilitation and counseling. Churches can provide the transitional housing themselves, or work alongside a trusted local ministry or organization. The idea is to maximize your aid, not reinvent the wheel, Lisa says.

4. Going global

Though the United States has its problems, other countries bear most of the slavery. India, for example, has 20 million of the world's 27 million slaves. If we want to help slaves around the world, we need to think strategically. If your church already knows a ministry or missionaries working in a country, start with them. They will know best local needs, and may well know an indigenous Christian church or group that you can support.

That's how Ann Buwalda, U.S. director of the Jubilee Campaign, found a ministry to sponsor in Bombay's red light district. Rev. K. K. Devaraj runs Bombay Teen Challenge, for the children of prostitutes. When he finds them, they are often sick and skeletal, some with HIV, forced to cower under beds as their mothers service clients above. Many now thrive at Devaraj's sanctuary, going to school and escaping prostitution and drugs. Some of his boys have grown up to attend Bible school. In picking such a ministry to support, Ann says, you don't have to go with the big names.

When I was in college in Texas, I listened to an itinerant boys choir at my campus Baptist church. The kids were from Zambia, my home country, and they sang a cappella. Little did I know they were slaves.

A Baptist missionary named Keith Grimes gathered the boys, aged 11 to 17, from a Zambian slum to tour America, earn an education and earn money for their families. Instead, they worked grueling hours and never saw a cent as Grimes pocketed donations. Grimes died and the boys were eventually freed. The youngest of them, orphan Given Kachepa, now campaigns against modern slavery.

Victims of slavery, especially forced labor, are camouflaged in public. In the United States, most forced labor victims are immigrants. Many may have crossed the border illegally to work on farms or in other manual labor, only to find their new employer insists they first "pay off" the cost of transporting them into the country. The debt never diminishes, and the workers find themselves trapped.

As with sex trafficking, local groups can help churches identify labor victims and provide for their needs. An important difference, however, is that labor victims often won't need the same type of counseling. Several are "just men who want to get back to work," explains Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick of Free the Slaves. Churches can help them do that.

Slavery takes so many forms today it can be daunting to think about, let alone fight against. But where there are the poor and vulnerable in our own communities, we will likely find trafficking victims. We need to do our research and stay alert, and we may yet find ways to share the gospel of Christ.

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1 2007 Trafficking in Persons Report, U.S. Department of State.

2 Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New York, San Diego, San Francisco, St. Louis, Tampa, and Washington, D.C. See June 7, 2005, [Congressional Testimony before the Helsinki Commission](#), retrieved 10/09/07.

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What Does Scripture Say About the Poor?

By Steve Boyer and the Capitol Hill Baptist Elders

A position paper by the Capitol Hill Baptist Church elders presented to the members of the church over two Wednesday evenings.

Most people are sympathetic with the idea of caring for the poor. It's considered to be a worthy task. Yet the question about how to care for the poor is more contentious. The different solutions offered can remind one of debates on the floor of the United States Congress.

So what are we to do? How are we to help those in need? Most importantly, what does Scripture say about the poor? God has not been silent on this topic. Given this fact, the subject is worthy of our study.

Although Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC) has been congregating over the past 125 years, there has been much membership turnover in recent years, and many in the congregation have wanted to know not only how best to care for the poor, but also what the church's role should be in this endeavor. The CHBC elders have spent a lot of time over this past year reading, praying, and discussing this issue. Hopefully, by the grace of God, I will be able to clearly communicate to you what we the elders of CHBC collectively understand Scripture to say on this topic.

There are seven questions for which we want to seek out answers in Scripture:

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|---|-----------|
| I. Who are the poor? | (page 20) |
| II. What causes poverty? | (page 21) |
| III. How does evangelism and relief of the poor relate? | (page 23) |
| IV. Are there deserving poor and undeserving poor? | (page 26) |
| V. Does God call us to be poor or rich? | (page 27) |
| VI. Who should care for the poor? The church? The state? Individual Christians? | (page 29) |
| VII. What are practical ways to provide relief to the poor? | (page 35) |

I. WHO ARE THE POOR?

Who are "the poor" in Scripture?

Poor in Physical Resources

One broad category is those who are poor in physical resources. Some examples are those who are poor in family, such as widows and orphans (Exod. 22:22). Others are poor in wealth, such as the low-wage workers (Deut. 24:14) and prisoners (Heb. 13:3). They are devoid of food, shelter, and clothing. Still others are poor in health. This can be the elderly (1 Tim. 5:9), the disabled (John 5:3), or the sick (Matt. 25:36).

The statistics gathered regarding those who are poor in physical resources are alarming. One out of four people in the world are considered to be in poverty.[1] Here in America 17 percent of children live below the poverty line.[2] In the Washington, DC area we have 10,000 people who are homeless, and one-half of these are women and children.[3]

Where we live there are needy people, and we must not be indifferent to them. Although our Lord says that we will always have the poor with us, we should not be complacent because the problem is interminable (see Mark 14:7; Deut. 15:11). Instead, it should lead us to compassion.[4] Poverty was not to be tolerated or encouraged in Scripture but abolished (Lev. 25:35; Deut. 26:12).

Poor in Spirit

Although Scripture speaks about physical poverty, it means to use physical poverty to point us to spiritual poverty. Jesus did not come to earth to ultimately remove physical sickness. Instead, physical poverty is a parable of spiritual poverty. Whenever Jesus healed, he then taught about the kingdom of God or taught others to believe in him. Scripture gives many examples.

In Luke 4:38-44, Jesus healed many kinds of illnesses in the town of Capernaum, but then leaves the town because he "must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also." For this is why he was sent, Jesus says. More people in Capernaum were sick, but healing the physically sick was not Jesus' primary mission.[5] It was preaching the Kingdom.

Not only was his healing ministry not primary, it did not serve an end in and of itself. For example, in John 6:25-59 Jesus feeds the 5,000 and then describes the difference between bread that spoils and the bread of eternal life, which he claims to be. Jesus did not feed the 5,000 ultimately so that hungry people would have something to eat. He meant to show them the way to be spiritually fed for eternity. He meant to point them to himself. Another example of this lesson occurs in John 11, where Lazarus was raised from the dead to show that Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

So if the physically poor were to point us to the spiritually poor, who are the spiritually poor? In one sense, all people are spiritually poor because all people are sinful. But there is a special blessing for those who confess this deficiency and seek Christ's righteousness over their own. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [6] From this it appears that the poor in spirit are those who Scripture says are born again (John 3:3). It is those who personally acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy before God and put their trust in him for salvation. It is those on whom God has set his gracious love and is particularly concerned for (cf. Is. 29:19; Ps. 40:17.).

"Well," someone might ask "if Jesus was to come to help the spiritually poor, then why does he spend his time healing and helping the physically poor? Jesus even says that this was his mission, and he points to Isaiah's words to prove it."

It's true that Jesus refers to the prophet Isaiah's words to show his purpose for coming in the flesh. We read in the Gospel of Luke,

When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." (Luke 7:20-22; cf. Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 4:16-20)

Jesus says this to recall what the prophet Isaiah said about the Christ in Isaiah 61:1-3 and Isaiah 35:5-6. Jesus did heal and help the physically poor, but he didn't do this as a part of establishing the political rule that others (and perhaps John) thought the Christ would establish. Rather, these healings and miracles were used to demonstrate who Jesus was—the Messiah or God. [7] The healings and miracles testified to Jesus' divinity.

The climax of this passage in Luke does not appear to be in healing, but in preaching the good news. And we see this throughout the Gospels. [8] Jesus' main concern was not to make sure that everyone was physically healthy, even though he did spend time doing this. Jesus' main concern was preaching the good news of the gospel, which we have already seen in Luke 4.

What a great example Jesus gives us in caring for the poor. We must work to relieve suffering with the same intent Jesus had—to declare the gospel.

Conclusion

So what we find in Scripture are two kinds of poor—the poor in physical resources and the poor in spirit. There is not necessarily a link between the two. It would be wrong to equate all of the physically poor with those who are God's people, as some people have done. [9] Not all of the poor in Scripture are exalted and not all of the rich in Scripture are condemned. While it is true that God tends to use the weak things of the world to display his glory (1 Cor. 1:26-31), it would be a terrible exegetical mistake to teach that all of the physically poor are under God's electing grace. [10]

So when we read about those who are poor in Scripture, we must be careful to understand the context of the passage as it relates to the passages around it and as it relates to the whole of God's redemptive plan throughout Scripture.

II. WHAT CAUSES POVERTY?

Now that we have discussed what 'poor' refers to in Scripture, it's worth considering what causes poverty. Some people experience poverty because of government oppression, as the Israelites encountered when they were in Egypt (Ex. 1:11). Others come to poverty through personal disaster. This can come from a variety of sources, such as a hurricane destroying a home, mental illness, or job loss. Still others may find themselves working hard in a job, but because of the economy or lack of necessary skills, they are unable to make ends meet.

While the things just mentioned can bring material ruin, Scripture teaches that poverty began in Genesis 3 with sin. The Garden of Eden was ideal in every respect (Gen. 2:8-15). Yet when sin was committed and God's curse was pronounced, the necessities of life became hard to come by (Gen. 3:17-19).

And this is how sin has operated ever since. How many people have been deceived into sin's lure of promises only to experience utter pain and ruin? How many have become poor through laziness, greed, or self-indulgent to drunkenness or drugs? The book of Proverbs is full of warnings against falling into sin's snare (Prov. 10:4, 21:17, 23:21). We must not only heed these warnings with caution for our own sakes, we must recognize them when seeking to help the poor.

The Social Gospel

That brings us to a good question. What is the best way to help those who are poor and needy? One way that has been put forward by many churches is what is known as the "social gospel."^[11]

The proponents of the social gospel teach that the category of sin should be applied to society as a whole as well as to individuals (and most often to society instead of individuals). If a society as a whole can embody sin, then it is possible to fight that sin with Christian principles in order to save it. Social structures and institutions can thus be "evangelized" and transformed, or "converted."

The social gospel places blame for corruption and social injustices on an abstract, intangible society instead of on individuals. It says that the governments, justice systems, and economics are all set up to guarantee the failure of the poor, and therefore must be changed. The answer that the social gospel puts forth is to improve the social condition through good laws, civilization, education, social reforms, and so forth. It has a rather high or optimistic view of people and their ability to make the right choices.

The Gospel of Jesus

But there is another way that has been put forth to help the poor and needy—the gospel itself, or the gospel of Jesus. This gospel is defined in Scripture as the eternal salvation of sinful man from the wrath of a holy God through the death and resurrection of Jesus. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Even though it's biblically accurate and necessary to say that God means to save "a people," the gospel applies salvation to individuals and not to society as a whole. It places the fault of corruption on individuals and effectively saves the people of God as individuals—one person at a time. It is concerned with man's spiritual position before his Creator, and its work is to glorify God by building a people for himself.

The Social Gospel and the Gospel of Jesus Contrasted

When comparing the social gospel with the gospel of Jesus, we must first say of the social gospel that it's good to seek to improve the state of the poor. Yet the goal of the Christian is not to produce a better society. We must agree with Benjamin Moraes who said,

I reject the so-called social gospel. But that does not mean that the Gospel has no social implications. It has! And since the human being lives in an environment influenced by politics and the social order, it's necessary to bring to politics, to the social order, to the economy, the biblical principles that God has given to us. Otherwise we'd be very insane leaving in the hands of pagans and non-Christians the government and the economic conditions in the world.^[12]

Christians must promote biblical principles in the political, social, and economic realm. Yet this type of activism is not the final answer to the problem of the human condition, and it should not be elevated as such. It is only secondary in nature. The social gospel misplaces the blame for poverty on society and so it also misplaces the hope of "salvation" to something other than Christ. Ultimately, it sends the wrong message of hope, it distracts the local church from its true mission, and it leaves people in their sin. In the end, it produces a watered-down gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Man's sin was what brought us into poverty, and only Christ can bring us out. Salvation will not ultimately occur through the physical riches of this world but through the incomparable riches of the grace and glory of God, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus (see Eph. 2:7).

After all, the gospel deals with the heart and is not reliant on external rules that seek to obtain a certain, calculated response. The gospel helps Christians to care for the poor as it reminds us of Christ's love and what he did for us on the cross. Those who have been given the new birth through this gospel will have hearts positively inclined by God's Spirit toward doing good works and caring for the worst sort of people—because the worst of sinners we know is ourselves. The gospel of Jesus not only helps us care for the poor, it helps us to avoid the sinful dangers that often lead to poverty.

Conclusion

To conclude this second section, then, we must note that God is concerned with the poor. It is often through the poor that he shows himself to be utterly loving, kind, and faithful. When we consider ourselves before God, it is easy to see our own poverty, and this should help us to identify with and seek to help those who lack physical resources in this world. As concerned as God is with the poor, though, his solution is not finally to distribute physical wealth. Instead, he calls all people to deny themselves and to put their hope in the future grace of Christ, not in anything this world can give. Only in Christ will we ever experience the fullness of joy that we were intended to experience, regardless of whether we are rich or poor.

III. HOW DO EVANGELISM AND RELIEF OF THE POOR RELATE?

In this next section we want to try to answer some of the questions that are usually asked when Christians speak about caring for the poor.

Who Is Our Neighbor?

One of the sections of Scripture most quoted when speaking about caring for the poor is the story of the Good Samaritan:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)

This is a powerful passage to meditate on and to examine our own lives with. An expert in the law asks Jesus a question of great magnitude: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus points him to the two greatest commandments that sum up the entire law:[13] "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." But then the text says that the expert "wanted to justify himself." He wanted to narrow the commandment so that it would fit with his lifestyle and practice. He wanted a loophole. He wanted to confine salvation to a rule to follow instead of to the dependence on God which overflows with love for God and others. So he asks, "who is my neighbor?"[14]

The expert in the law was probably not a Pharisee because Luke doesn't use that specific word; though the Pharisees had a zeal for the law and studied it. Either way, it appears that the expert sought to narrow the law to justify himself—like the Pharisees did by not helping the unclean and making up traditions that superseded God's law.

Jesus then tells the story and shames the expert by using a Samaritan as the hero in the story, since the Jews hated Samaritans.[15] Jesus was showing the expert that a loving Samaritan was closer to the Kingdom than an uncharitable Jew, though the Jews had been given God's law!

Many people propose that this parable is ultimately about Jesus redefining what "neighbor" means. The word 'neighbor' is a covenantal term. To be a neighbor was to be a brother, or a member, or someone who lived under the covenantal rule. For example, Jeremiah 31:33-34 shows that these are covenantal terms by equating "neighbor" with "brother." God says through Jeremiah,

"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his *neighbor*, or a man his *brother*, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.

Another example of this can be found in Leviticus 19:18. Here "neighbor" parallels "God's people." God commands, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of *your people*, but love your *neighbor* as yourself. I am the Lord."

So although there may have been some minor disputes about what "neighbor" meant, all of Jesus' first hearers would have known it was being used in connection to those who were in the covenant community—Israel.

By using a Samaritan, Jesus shattered the idea that the Jews, as individuals, were only to help other Jews. They were to help anyone in need. Though the parable did not remove the prioritization that should be given to those inside the covenant community, it does show that the kindness of the covenant community (of Christians) must not be limited to other members of the community (to other Christians).

Interestingly, Jesus never specifically answered the expert's question of "who is my neighbor?" Instead, he turned the tables back on the expert (and on us) about whether he (and we) behave neighborly to others. Are we characterized as those who help others? Do we go out of our way for others? Do we love others sacrificially? Such sacrificial love is indicative of someone who has inherited eternal life, which was the first question the expert posed and what Jesus seems to be answering in the parable.

So how should Christians care for non-Christians? More particularly, what role does evangelism play in providing relief to the poor? Does relief of the poor have a priority over evangelism? Or does evangelism have a priority over relief of the poor? Or are they of equal importance? Should there be a distinction made at all?

Argument for Not Giving Evangelism Priority Over Relief of the Poor

Many confessed Christians are quick to assert that evangelism does not have a priority over relief of the poor. Evangelism is regarded as either on par with or below meeting the physical needs of the poor. Different arguments are put forth to defend this view.

Some people say that Christians tend to "spiritualize" verses in Scripture that deal with the physically poor. For example, they say that Jesus' is calling for a literal, physical relief when he reads from the Isaiah scroll and says that he came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (see Luke 4:18-19). He did not mean to refer to freedom from spiritual bondage, since physical needs are just as important as spiritual needs. And spiritualizing such passages is detrimental to caring for the poor because it reduces Christian care for people's physical condition. This imbalance hurts the plight of the poor.

Other people say that giving priority to evangelism wrongly exploits the poor's real needs in order to promote religious concerns. These people would say that prioritizing evangelism would be like giving a horse a carrot so that you can put him into a harness.

Still others would appeal to acts of mercy and evangelism as interdependent equals without a primary or secondary. They say that evangelism and acts of mercy are likened to the two wings of an airplane. Both are essential. They go hand-in-hand and must never be separated from each other. It is the practice of a word and deed ministry. "Evangelism" is the word portion, and "acts of mercy" is the deed portion. So, for example, there are times in Scripture when Jesus healed first and then spoke of salvation afterwards, as with the man born blind in John 9 (cf. Mark 5:24b-34). Incidents like these demonstrate that Jesus did not prioritize spiritual needs over physical needs, since he healed first before calling the man to himself.[16]

Argument for Giving Evangelism Priority Over Relief of the Poor

While these arguments present strong cases, they are not without objection, and we will try to address each in turn.

First, to the argument of spiritualizing verses in Scripture, we are not saying that the Isaiah prophecy Jesus read in the synagogue must only be interpreted spiritually. Jesus really physically restored sight to the blind. Yet we also believe that this was secondary to the fulfillment and meaning of the prophecy. Its ultimate meaning is found in the freedom we need from the bondage of sin through the words of the gospel. As one modern writer puts it, "While a significant aspect of Jesus' ministry was helping the poor and afflicted, it is the preaching of the Word of God to all people—wealthy and poor—which must take biblical priority..."[17]

We would be naïve to think that improving all the outward circumstances and conditions for the poor will gain them a higher quality of life when their fundamental need of redemption is still unaddressed. Man does not live on bread alone (Deut. 8:3).

Second, to the argument that prioritizing evangelism exploits the concern for the poor, we must say that it is wrong to accuse evangelicals of using social concerns as bait to speak the gospel. Evangelical Christians have long been showing compassion to the oppressed as those who have been created in the image of God.

Some people would say that Christians must help the poor without insinuating at every turn that they must become saved and join a local church. But if we exclude the promotion of the gospel, we remove the heart of what the Christian helper is compelled to do and what gives him the hope and motivation to help in the first place. It would be like cutting out the life-giving root of a tree that is the source of shelter for the birds of the air.

Finally, to the argument that evangelism and acts of mercy are interdependent equals like two wings of an airplane, we find a worthy position. How can we not be sympathetic to this idea that word and deed must go together? After all, this is how we are to live as Christians—in word and deed. Yet if you ask us the question of whether disseminating the gospel or distributing food should have priority, we are going to go with the gospel.

No matter how much assistance we give to the poor, it will never substitute for the saving power and grace of the gospel. Once again, Jesus did not attempt to eradicate the poverty of his day on a national or aggregate level but instructed his followers to minister to the larger needs of the poor. As Paul says, "For what I received I passed on to you as of *first importance*: that Christ died for our sins..." (1 Cor. 15:3).

Being made new in Christ is more than just being saved from eternal damnation, although it does mean that. It means that we now have a relationship with the Father and are the benefactors of God's specific and particular love. This love shows itself in that God takes care of his people. If we are God's children, we will undoubtedly receive the promises held out in Scripture. For example, at the end of Matthew 6, we are told that God takes care of those who seek his righteousness first. This is not a promise for non-believers but for Christians.[18] While God sends sun and rain on all men alike, he extends his saving grace to his elect only.

As for the times in Scripture when Jesus healed first and then spoke of salvation afterwards, there are plenty of verses that show that healing was only possible through faith.[19] Jesus healed often in response to faith and also to instill faith in him.[20] As for the John 9 passage about the man born blind, the fact that Jesus healed first and then spoke of salvation does not mean that evangelism does not have priority over physical healing. In this case, Jesus used this blind man to reveal his identity as God. In fact, before healing him Jesus teaches that this man was born this way "so that the work of God might be displayed in his life," and then he goes on to say that he is the "light of the world." The healing was done ultimately to teach about who Jesus was as the only way to salvation. Again, we see that a priority was placed on the gospel message.

Contact Evangelism

However, the priority given to evangelism does not necessarily mean it should be done first. It is often difficult to practice acts of mercy and evangelism at the same time. Practically, we must assess each situation and relationship first before unwisely blurting out the gospel message. For example, if a fire destroys a neighbor's home, it would not be wise to speak the gospel to them first. We must first help them find shelter and care for their immediate needs. This is a caution to what is known as "contact evangelism," which we will define as telling a stranger the gospel in a brief, initial, and forced encounter with the individual.

There are many Christians—perhaps you—who first heard the gospel and came to belief in Christ through contact evangelism. We can praise God for this. He is a sovereign God and can use anything to bring his elect to himself. That said, we should think carefully about the practice of contact evangelism.

While boldly proclaiming the gospel is a good thing, contact evangelism can also be insensitive and reflect poorly on Christ. It can be unhealthy because it involves witnessing to those whom we don't know and who don't know us. It's also unlikely that they would ever become a part of our lives. How much better is it to take time to understand someone and endear yourself to him or her while humbly speaking the truth of the gospel? Paul exemplified this for us well when he wrote,

We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. (1 Thes. 2:7-9)

We are not saying that one should avoid opportunities that present themselves with strangers. In fact, we should always be mindful of proactively seeking to share the gospel with anyone. Conversations on an airplane or with a hairdresser are good and glorify God. These are done in a natural setting rather than in a forced, interrupted context. What we want to warn against is sharing the gospel callously as so much of contact evangelism does. A good book to read on evangelism is Will Metzger's *Tell the Truth*. It reminds us that our whole lives and speech should be marked by and rich with the gospel.

Conclusion

So while evangelism needs to be primary, caring for the poor is an evident outpouring of the gospel message. The fact that the gospel alone brings sinners to repentance does not negate our need to care for a fallen world and for those made in God's image.

IV. ARE THERE DESERVING POOR AND UNDESERVING POOR?

Another question that often comes to mind when we think about caring for the poor is whether or not we are to differentiate between those we care for? In other words, are we to extend unconditional relief to everyone? Does Scripture distinguish between the poor who are deserving and those who are undeserving?

Many answers have been given to this question. Certainly we must remember that Christians must always be merciful, as our Savior is merciful. When speaking to this question, however, we think it's necessary to understand that showing mercy does not always require us to give someone a handout, just as loving a child does not always mean letting them do what they want to do. Discipline and correction are one way that God loves his children. So, too, mercy is more than just giving to all those who ask. We must care for the poor *responsibly*.

Two Extremes

There are two extreme approaches to caring for the poor that we want to warn against. The first deals with those who provide relief too casually. This kind of relief can be characterized by carelessly giving money out to those who ask for it on the street. It's easy to feel like we are helping in these cases, but are we? What if the person to whom you give money buys drugs with it? Then you would be aiding a possible drug addiction.

Surely, it's impossible to make sure that every dime we give to help the poor is used responsibly. When loving sinful people—such as ourselves—we will often be offended against. God loved us when we hated him, and this must be our attitude towards others. However, this does not excuse us from being good stewards of what God has given us, or from caring for others in how we give.

The other extreme deals with providing relief too strictly. This kind of relief can be characterized by setting the bar so high that few, if any, will receive relief. It is the attitude of dismissing the poor because they are lazy or because there is some sin in their lives. While being cautious with the resources God has given us is good, we must help those in need and not be tight-fisted. Jesus said, "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matt. 5:42). Are we deserving of God's mercy?

Balanced Responsibility

While both extremes skew what it means to care for the poor, there is a balance somewhere in between. It's here that we will find what it means to care for the poor responsibly.

When we look to Scripture, we can see that there were certain conditions set forth for providing aid to those in the first churches who were poor. While these conditions do not directly apply to those outside the church, it helps us consider some basic principles. In 1 Timothy 5:9-10, Paul gives instructions for caring for widows in the church. He says,

No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Here we see that there were conditions made for giving aid to a widow. A helpful principle to use when caring for people is to require commitments from them. This means building relationships. If they really want help, commitment is a good sign that they are putting effort forth in overcoming their situation. This is where good, Christian organizations committed to caring for the poor can help in holding someone responsible, such as a homeless man. It is often difficult for individuals to do this by themselves.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12, Paul strongly objects to advocating an unproductive lifestyle where someone does not work for their food. Working is the normal way the Bible tells us to provide for ourselves. The fourth commandment positively mandates work: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God." So in 2 Thessalonians Paul says,

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among

you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

In Ephesians 5:28, we are told that working allows us to provide for ourselves, but it also allows us to share with those in need.

Scripture teaches us that we must be wise in our charity. Aid done improperly can cripple and destroy the incentive for the poor to improve their financial situation. For example, take the practice of gleaning in the Old Testament. Those reaping the harvest were commanded not to reap to the very edges of the field, and they were commanded not to go over the field a second time (Lev. 19:9-10). This was so that the poor could work for their food. Gleaning did not foster a system requiring no effort for pay, and the poor were required to work, if they were able.

The Poor Who Reject the Gospel

One question that can be raised is whether or not we are to extend relief to those who openly reject the gospel? The short answer to this is "yes." Jesus tells us in Luke 6 to

love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

That said, we must not give to support someone in their rebellion against God, particularly if it is fostering a sinful habit. A point comes when we may have to shake the dust off our feet and move on from caring for an individual (see Matt. 10:14). Determining this point can be difficult, but we are commanded not to give dogs what is sacred and not to throw our pearls to pigs (Matt. 7:6). God's good gifts are not to be laid out for abuse and mockery.

Conclusion

While it is true that the Good Samaritan did not ask for a background check before he helped the man beaten by robbers, we should not conclude from this that we should not inquire of someone about his or her needs and the history related to their problem when trying to help. The man beaten by robbers was left half dead and his need was blatantly obvious. The Good Samaritan did not need to perform a background check to care for the man's life. We must love responsibly, even if—no matter how gently we try to go about it—it will sometimes appear intrusive.

V. DOES GOD CALL US TO BE POOR OR RICH?

As we think about what Scripture says about caring for the poor, it is natural for us to consider our own financial condition. This leads us to the question of what Scripture says about attaining wealth? Does God call us to be poor or to be rich? Does it dishonor God to gather wealth when so many are poor? Are we truly to give up everything we have in order to follow God?

Scripture's View of Wealth

Before we evaluate our own callings, it is good for us to understand what Scripture says about wealth. Throughout Scripture we see that material possessions in and of themselves are considered to be good gifts from God and are meant for his people to enjoy. After all, God created possessions for our use, and they should be received with thanksgiving. When we look to God's covenant with Israel in the Old Testament, we find that obedience was rewarded with prosperity (see Psalm 112). The blessings of prosperity are a taste of God's goodness to us that we, as adopted heirs who follow Jesus, will one day receive in its fullness (see Prov. 22:4).

So wealth is not inherently evil, as some may think. Rather it's what we do with our wealth that seems to be the key indicator of our hearts. Paul writes, "For the *love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim. 6:10).

Notice that it is not money itself but the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil. At the same time, generosity with one's material possessions is evidence of regeneration. In Luke 19 Jesus declares the tax collector Zacchaeus to have received salvation in part because of his action of giving half of his possessions to the poor. Zacchaeus was not saved because of this action. No one can obtain salvation through works; but Zacchaeus' works gave evidence of his regeneration, which is the work of God's Spirit.

Jesus' Example of Poverty

If material possessions are good, then why did Jesus forgo them when he came to earth? Shouldn't we follow Christ's example in how we live? In Scripture, Jesus' life was full of self-denial and poverty. He was born in a manger in a stable (see Luke 2:7). He grew up in a poor home and moved about without a home during his three years of public ministry and was cared for by others in his travels.[21] What's more, Jesus left heaven for earth and was unjustly murdered on the cross only to be buried in a borrowed tomb.

While it's basically true that we are to follow Jesus' example, we must also take note that we are not Jesus. Even more important that Jesus being the example we emulate is Jesus being our unique savior. Surely, the heart of Jesus' work was utterly unique. Isaiah 53:10 says that it was God's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. Instead of asking the question of "what would Jesus do?" and try to imitate God, perhaps it would be better for us to consider what God has expressly taught us on how we ought to live.

Jesus' Teaching on Attaining Wealth

In Mark 10, we can see what Jesus taught on this subject. It says,

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:17-31)

Does Jesus expect us to give up everything we have in order to follow him? Is giving up all our possessions the way to salvation? There are many people who would say that there is a direct connection between giving to the poor and salvation. Giving to the poor may be evidence of our regeneration, but, as we stated earlier, it is not something we do in order to obtain salvation, as though salvation comes by our good deeds.

The young man in this passage asked how he might obtain eternal life. This man had great wealth, and Jesus knew right where to put his finger to challenge whether the man had really put his faith in Christ—on his worldly possessions. If we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart and with all of our soul and with all of our strength, then we are to put him first in everything, trusting only in him (see Deut. 6:5). This is the meaning of the dramatic language used in Mark 10. It does not necessarily mean we must sell all that we have and give to the poor, as this was only a symptom of the young man's problem. But it does mean that all of our lives and all of our money must be used to glorify God. This may mean providing for our family or showing hospitality to others, but let it also mean giving ourselves and our finances to help the needy so that we can show God's love through his good gifts to us.

God's Call for Obedience

So does God call us to be poor or rich? God calls us to be obedient, wherever that may lead us. Abraham's obedience led to wealth and prosperity while Job's obedience led—for a time—to ruin and poverty. This difference necessarily destroys the "health and wealth" gospel preached by television evangelists. Obedience is more important than riches.[22] Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse (Prov. 28:6). There is dignity in our calling. The poor can be used powerfully by God as well as the rich.

Paul tells us to,

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (1 Tim. 6:17-19)

Of this passage John Stott comments,

We observe at once that the apostle does not tell "those who are rich in this present world" to "become poor." But he does not allow them to "stay rich" either. Instead, he first warns them of the spiritual dangers of wealth (as Jesus said, it is not impossible for the rich to enter God's Kingdom but it is hard), and then tells them to be generous with their wealth, which will inevitably result in a lowering of their own standard of living.[23]

We see then that we are not to work to become poor, nor are we to stay rich, because we are to be generous with our wealth. It should also be said that we must live in simplicity as Christians and be content in our circumstances, for this is pleasing to God.[24] Yet, if we are in poverty, it is good and right to seek to be able to provide for oneself and one's family.[25]

Conclusion

When considering caring for the poor, we should not be guided by worldly wisdom. We must seek God's Word in the Scriptures for our help. We should not view engaging with the poor as troublesome, but as opportunities to show God's love and to tell others the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If giving of your time and finances to help the needy is a struggle for you, take Proverbs 11:24 to heart: "One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty."

How does one who gives what he has away and become rich while another keeps everything and loses it? This is backwards according to worldly wisdom. Yet isn't it just like God to bless those who give of themselves to others?

VI. WHO SHOULD CARE FOR THE POOR?

Prioritized Responsibility

In America there are many arguments presented about *how* best to care for the poor. But another important question is, who is responsible? What does Scripture say?

Paul appears to present an order that prioritizes who is responsible to help the poor in 1 Timothy 5. He writes, "If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need" (1 Tim. 5:16).

Here we see that the widow's own family is to take care of her before the church is to help. Even in the secular world the immediate family is to care for the one in need before an outside party. Paul writes, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

This chapter provides us with the proverbial wisdom that there exists a natural order of responsibility for caring for the poor. It begins with oneself and then follows with the next closest covenantal relationship.

The State

So what about the government? Should the state care for the poor? To answer this question it's important to understand Scripture and the role it gives to government.

It seems from Scripture that the role of the state is to protect its citizens. God has established all authority for our good (see Rom. 13:1-4). This can be accomplished through a number of ways.[26] First, the government makes laws. Proverbs 8:14 says, "By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just."

Second, the government is responsible for enforcing those laws.[27] In this way, the government restrains injustice and improper behavior committed by the transgressor and positively commends those who do good (cf. 1 Peter 2:13-14). Romans 13:4 says, "For [the ruler] is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

Third, the government is to judge. Proverbs tells us that "By justice a king gives a country stability"; and "If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure" (Prov. 29:4; 29:14). When governors govern well the result is peace among their citizens.

So if the state is to protect its citizens against wrongdoers and unfair judgments, then the answer to our question is "yes"; the state is responsible to help the poor, albeit in a different way than the family or church does. Obviously, a government that protects and justly governs its citizens through laws and courts will be caring for the poor.[28] It may also be necessary for the government to provide food or shelter for its citizens in the event of a national crisis, such as Joseph did for Egypt (see Gen. 41:53-57, 47:13-26). In Scripture, rulers were often called on to help the oppressed and those who cannot speak for themselves (see Dan. 4:26-27; Prov. 30:8-9). In fact, Solomon understands this as his duty as king. In Psalm 72 King Solomon writes,

Endow the king with your justice, O God...He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice...He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor...he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

And so we see that the government does have a limited obligation to care for the poor. It may be inferred from the 1 Timothy verse cited previously that the state's obligation should not supplant that of the family; so the state must act prudently in providing assistance. Since the government has a responsibility to protect its citizens, part of our moral responsibility is to work for a just government. However, this does not exhaust the Christian's moral responsibility to care for the poor.

The Church

What about the church? Is the church responsible to care for the physical needs of the poor who are outside of the church?

Before we begin down this road, we must be clear about what the word "church" means. Scripture sometimes refers to "church" as the universal church—that is, all Christians everywhere for all time. The term "universal church" refers to all those whom Christ died for and redeemed. However, the more common use for "church" found in Scripture refers to the local church. A local church is an assembly of believers just like our church here on Capitol Hill. So when we refer to the word "church," we will be specifically speaking of the local church, since it is this use of the word that gives us direction in how we ought to live corporately.

Consider the following conversation taken from the book entitled *The Enduring Community*:

"I have an idea," said a friend, his impish smile indicating there was a point to his antics. "I want to open a used car lot at the church," he continued. *Huh?* "Yeah, think of it. It'll be great. We have all that parking lot space left mostly vacant throughout the week. We'll simply move the cars off the lot on Sundays for church and sell cars the rest of the week. It'll give Christians a place where they can buy their cars and give an opportunity for them to witness to lost people who come to the lot looking." I decided to play along with the game just to see where he was headed. *Well, who will run the used car lot?* "I will, and you can help me if you want. But we'll need to have the elders of our church oversee it." All of a sudden, it was clear where this friend was going. Why in the world would the church take on a project like a used car lot? Why would the elders waste their time overseeing something that is so clearly removed from their biblical job description? This friend was getting at a core church issue: just what is okay and is not okay for the church to do? A basketball gym? A school? A shopping mall? (All of these are now being run by American churches.) What would keep a church from opening a pawnshop, or a legal office, or a doctor's office, or an accountant's office? "Great question," this wise friend said, a grin spilling over his face. "Kinda makes you wonder about a lot of things the Church does, doesn't it?"[29]

This illustration goes to the heart of what many members of our church have asked about. Does God commission the local church to do the work of social welfare? Should a local church have a daycare, nursing, or hospital establishments? Does it need schools, counseling services, and the like to function as a church? Should the church be about preventing physical poverty and its causes?

Marks and Purpose of the Church

These are good questions, yet Scripture seems to suggest that a church is present where the Word of God is preached correctly and where God's ordinances are administered correctly.[30] As John Calvin said, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists."[31]

The right preaching of the Word and the right administration of ordinances mark both the creation and the preservation of the church.[32] While it is beyond our scope to do a detailed study of the marks of a church, it is important to note that what constitutes a church is not having a used car lot or a soup kitchen. Knowing this will help us to understand then what the purpose of the church is.

The purpose of the church is finally and ultimately to glorify God and reflect his divine character to the world. Paul writes, "[God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11).

Glorifying God can come about in many ways, but Scripture seems to key on a few specific purposes given to the gathered church. The first two that we will touch on briefly are edification and evangelism. We can see both purposes where Jesus commissions the church by saying to his disciples,[33] "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" (Matthew 28:19-20).

By making disciples, we see a call to evangelize. By teaching them the Word, we see a call to edify those who have been baptized (see Heb. 10:25).

A final specific purpose given to the gathered church is to mold and promote corporate and individual worship. The church is an assembly of people who fellowship together, seek to worship God together, and devote themselves to God's Word together. This is seen in Acts 2:42-47 where it says of the early believers,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God...

The gathered local church is given a specific role throughout Scripture. It would be a huge mistake to attribute everything Jesus did or everything individual Christians are to do to the function of the gathered local church. Just because Jesus healed the blind does not mean we should assume that the church is to open an eye clinic. Similarly, it would be absurd to commission the church with the responsibility for raising children, because that role has been given to parents (see Eph. 6:1-4).

The Spirituality of the Church

In all of this, we are trying to protect something referred to as the "spirituality of the church." The "spirituality of the church" is a phrase used to communicate the idea that the fundamental task of the church is different from the tasks of other institutions, such as the government, and should not generally be mixed, unless exceptional circumstances make it necessary.[34] To take a current example, it is the church's job to teach that God instituted the covenant of marriage to occur between a man and a woman only. This is seen clearly in Scripture and speaks to Christ's love for his church (see Eph. 5:22-33). The church should also teach that a Christian's actions should be consistent with his profession of faith (see James 2:14-17). But it is not the church's job to tell a Christian who to vote for in a presidential election, even if the election may have ramifications for what constitutes legal marriage. As John Murray has written,

To the church is committed the task of proclaiming the whole counsel of God and, therefore, the counsel of God as it bears upon the responsibility of all persons and institutions. While the church is not to discharge the functions of other institutions such as the state and the family, nevertheless it is charged to define what the functions of these institutions are...To put the matter bluntly, the church is not to engage in politics. Its members must do so, but only in their capacity as citizens of the state, not as members of the church.[35]

The church should never be reluctant to speak out against horrific acts of evil endorsed by the state, but it must do so only when circumstances call for it.

The spirituality of the church teaches that the church is to be the church.[36] For our purposes, the spirituality of the church reminds us that, while a concern for mercy ministries and caring for the physical needs of the poor is a good thing for members of a church to have, the local church is not normally the primary vehicle given to meet those concerns. Such physical mercy ministries are not essential components needed to be a local church, or for us to be counted as a biblically "faithful" church.[37] Yet we can say that such ministry *is* the work of Christians individually, since individual Christians are involved in other structures of society such as families, schools, governments, and other organizations. Ultimately, we are relying here on the distinction between the specific work given to the local church and the work called for in the kingdom of God.

Relationship Between "Kingdom of God" and "Church"

The word "church" (Gk. *ekklesia*) can be defined as a gathering, or assembly, of God's people.[38] As we have said before, it can refer to the universal church, but it mostly refers to the local church, which is how we are applying it.[39] When those

redeemed by Christ's blood gather and covenant together to form a local church, God gives them certain instructions of how they are to live together and be governed together. This is the specific, unique function and work of the church.

The work found in the kingdom (Gk. *basilea*) of God is somewhat different. The kingdom of God mainly refers to the reign, or rule, of God.[40] So in Matthew 6:9-10, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray by saying, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, *your will be done...*"

Working to make known the kingdom of God is both broad and comprehensive and extends to every sphere of life, both in the local church and beyond the local church. When Jesus sends out the seventy-two in Luke 10, he says,

When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The kingdom of God is near you." But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near." I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

Here we see that when healing comes to those who welcome God's messengers and judgment comes to those who reject God's people, the rule of God is displayed. This rule of God is regarded as both present and future (i.e. now and not yet). It is future when Christ returns bodily and God's rule will be consummated in the final defeat and judgment of Satan (see Rev. 11:15).

But the rule of God is also present because Jesus came and completed his redemptive work and greatly increased the present blessings of the kingdom (see Rom. 14:17). In Matthew 12:28 Jesus says, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, *then* the kingdom of God has come upon you."

All this is to say, whenever God's rule is expressed over evil and sin and brings the blessings of God's reign, there is the kingdom of God. Whenever an individual Christian spends his or her time helping the poor, or visiting the sick, or caring for the fatherless, there is an expression of the kingdom of God (see Luke 10:8-11 and Matt. 11:2-5). It can work through the local church,[41] but it is comprehensive and represents the dominion of God in every sphere of our lives. The local church's role, however, is more narrowly defined as God's instrument for preaching and displaying the gospel.[42] Not all worthwhile Christian service that is done in the world needs to be funneled through the local assembly of believers.[43]

Why This Distinction Is Important

The importance in understanding this difference is key to understanding the question of the local church's responsibility to care for the physical needs of the poor outside the church. Again, we are not here speaking about the individual Christian's responsibility. (We will come to that next.) The local church has a responsibility for *what* is taught and *that* it is taught. Therefore, it is harmful if the mission of the local church becomes diluted with other things that distract her from her primary purpose. Yet while the primary purpose of the church is the preaching of the gospel, she may pursue that in ways which include caring for the physical needs of non-Christians. **Such mercy ministries to those outside of the church are not biblically required to be ministries of any congregation. But they may be employed to the end (whether directly or indirectly) of promoting the gospel in the community.**

It is necessary, however, to emphasize that the church should not claim power and jurisdiction in every area of life, including social issues. There are greater calls on our compassion than even the most horrible physical sufferings, and no other body is charged with looking after meeting those greater needs and showing that kind of compassion than the local church.[44] It would be just like Satan and the world to desire the church to abstain from her role of proclaiming the exclusivity of Christ to become another welfare organization, when God did not give the church that function in Scripture. Ken Jones said it well at a CHBC Henry Forum. He said,

If the church never offers a single hot meal but preaches the gospel, then she is true to her calling. But if all she does is offer hot meals and dances in the neighborhood and gives away clothes but never preaches the gospel – she's not a church...The church is not called to economically empower anybody, but it is called to deliver the message of reconciliation. **But my concern is that...we are defining ourselves...by the programs that we offer and not the message we preach.**

Think of all the benefits that follow when the church sticks to its God-given role. First of all, the gospel is always held in the forefront and is not competing with other agendas. It keeps the church free from other priorities in order to be obedient to Christ and his calling for the church. Otherwise, a lot of time and energy can be spent in wrong ways.

Second, it keeps the elders, deacons, staff, and members of a church from burnout. We did not all come together because we had sociology degrees and are skilled in caring for the poor, but because we proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The

biblical qualifications for an elder are not the same qualifications needed to be a good administrator of a day care center, and it would be inappropriate for the elders of CHBC to extend their oversight to such matters.

Finally, it shatters the idea that ministry should only occur in the context of a church or in its building; rather, Christian kingdom ministry should extend to every area of life, just as our worship of God does (see Rom. 12:1). Members of a church should still evangelize, even though a ministry program is not set up for it. This keeps the responsibility *on* the individual and does not allow for a general, blurred responsibility to lie with a group of people (i.e., the church).

Israel's Relationship to Those Outside the Covenant Community

If we look to the Old Testament communal nation of Israel, we can see a consistency between Israel and the church. Israel is considered to be a "type" of the New Testament church, because the kingdom of God is no longer expressing itself through Israel with God's rule and blessings but through the church (see Gal. 3:7). So it is important to see how Israel related to caring for those outside the covenant community as a nation.

We know from Scripture that there were not to be poor among the Israelites. Brother was to help brother so that no one would be in need (see Deut. 15:4-11). Blessings were promised only to those who lived under God's rule. What we do not find in Scripture are commands for Israel to provide physical or monetary aid to the Philistines or to the Assyrians, that is, those who do not live under God's rule.[45] We can see an example of this in how Israel was to conduct their lending to others.

An Israelite could lend to a fellow Israelite in need, but they were not to charge interest on the loan. They were also not to require payment but cancel all debts in the seventh year. Yet this is different from how they were to relate to foreigners. With foreigners, Israel was allowed to charge interest, as well as demand payment back. Physical benefits were not given to those outside of the covenant community (see Deut. 15:3-6 & 23:19-20).

It is true that Israel was commanded to care for the physical needs of the resident alien (see Deut. 10:18-19), but the alien is described as one living among the Israelites and is expected to obey the law among the covenant community (see Deut. 16:11-14; 26:11; 29:10-11). The alien was not part of the covenant community nor circumcised (see Ex. 12:48), but he was expected to keep the laws and receive benefits of the community. This alien would be equivalent in the New Testament to the children of church members, who benefit from their parents' relationship to God and to other believers, though they themselves may not be Christians.

The Church's Relationship to the Poor Outside the Church

If this is how Israel understood its responsibility to the poor outside the covenant community, then we should not expect the church's responsibility to differ much. When the elders at CHBC prayed about, read about, and discussed this issue, we were all in agreement that there did not seem to be scriptural command for the church, as a local church body, to extend material resources to nonmembers. If the church were given scriptural command, for example, to feed all of the poor outside the church, then by inference the church would be commanded to feed the whole world. But this is not the case. Once again, Ken Jones says it well:

If a church never feeds a hungry, non-churched individual, if the church never puts clothing on a naked non-believing individual, it doesn't make it any less of a church. But if a church fails to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, it ceases to be a church.

When we look at Acts 6:1-7, we can see the church extending material resources to those inside the church. It says that there was a "daily distribution of food." In fact, a church office was set up for it—that being the office of deacon. This was done so that the leaders in the church, the twelve disciples, could give their attention and priority "to prayer and the ministry of the word." Since this was the case, it would stand to reason that another office would be set up to care for those outside the church—if the church was to function this way; but there was not.

We even see examples of churches caring for the physical needs of other churches, but not for nonbelievers. In Galatians 2:10 Paul was to "remember" the poor, as he went out to minister the gospel to the Gentiles. The poor in this passage refers to the Judean Christians in Jerusalem, where Paul and the other apostles met, and not to the poor in general.[46]

The Judean Christians were under great difficulties and hardships after the first days of Pentecost. Acts 8:1 tells of a persecution breaking out against the church in Jerusalem that scattered the believers throughout Judea and Samaria; and Acts 11:28-30 shows that a severe famine occurred, as well (see also 1 Thes. 2:14-15). It was proper then for the Gentile Christians, who shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, to share with them in their material blessings (see Rom. 15:27). This is what Paul helped to do as he ministered the gospel to the Gentiles.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 Paul instructs the church in Corinth to take up a collection for "God's people" in Jerusalem when they gathered together. Paul also collected offerings from other churches in Macedonia and Achaia for the poor saints in Jerusalem.[47]

But what about verses in the New Testament that seem to suggest the church is to help the physical needs of those outside the church, such as Galatians 6:10?[48] Such passages are unclear, and we do not find an explicit example or mandate to the church, as a church, to care for the physical needs of nonmembers.[49] While it is not the purpose of this writing to do a detailed exegetical study on different verses, one thing that has helped us in studying these passages is to ask the questions that we do in our Bible study every Wednesday night, particularly the questions of who is being addressed and to whom is the text speaking.

To summarize, we are not saying that we understand Scripture to teach the regulative principle in such a way that denies our right or ability as a church to care for the physical needs of non-Christians in our community. Nor do we understand the teaching of Scripture to require our congregation to alleviate the physical needs of non-Christians in our community. Rather our conclusion is that congregations have a call to preach, display, model, and express the good news of Jesus Christ. And in obedience to that call we have both the liberty and responsibility to take such initiatives in our community as it is prudent to do so.

While Capitol Hill Baptist Church does have the freedom and prerogative to give financially to help the poor outside of the church, if it is deemed wise and prudent to do so, we understand that the best way to help the poor is to teach them the gospel. The best way to serve them is to tell them of Jesus. As a local church devoted to Christ, we understand that spiritual needs have priority over physical needs. If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you tell him the gospel, you could be used by God to save his life for eternity.

The Individual Christian

Before we begin discussing how we, as a church, practically handle caring for the poor, we should look at a last group. And this group is ourselves, as individuals. We are all called by God individually to help the weak, poor, and needy, and Scripture says that we will be rewarded in heaven for our kindness.[50] As we see Jesus giving to the poor both physically and spiritually, so we too must help others.[51]

This is not something that you as a Christian can opt out of. We are *all* called to help. We should not place caring for the poor on the same level as serving the church in the nursery or helping with sound. Not everyone is called to these, but each member is called to use his or her Spirit-given abilities for the common good of the church (1 Cor. 12:7). In the same way, how we serve in caring for the poor looks different for each individual, yet we are all called to show mercy to others according to our capacity, just as we are all called to love others. We may not have directly contributed to the problem, but we are still responsible to help, as it is in our power and means that God has granted us to do so.[52] No doubt there will be differences in what this will look like for each person, but none of us are excluded from sacrificially helping others.

Scripture does not say that we are to only help only those who are in our family or only those who are Christians. We are to also to help the stranger (see Luke 10:30-37). In fact, we are to go as far as helping our enemies (see also Rom. 12:17-21). As, Jesus said,

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36)

God works through his people so that the world will better know of his love. We are to let our light shine before all men, that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven (see Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12). This means that we are all called to abstain from sinful desires and live a pattern of life that brings praise and glory to our Lord. It suggests that if non-Christians cannot see your good deeds, then perhaps they are too private. Sin includes acts of omission, as well as commission.

When we turn to Scripture to see examples of God's people caring for the poor, it is mostly within the context of the covenantal community. For example, in Acts 9:36-43 a disciple named Tabitha, who was raised from the dead, was characterized by doing good and helping the poor, particularly that of making clothing for the widows.[53] Acts 10:1-4 tells us that Cornelius' active faith of prayer and generously giving to the poor was considered a pleasing "memorial offering" before God.[54]

So we see that God's people care for the needy. This is evidence of a regenerated heart. "The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern" (Prov. 29:7). Scripture teaches that our attitude toward the weak and poor reflects our attitude towards God (see Prov. 19:17, 14:31; and Matt. 25:40). The gospel that affected our own lives so deeply will naturally overflow in love for others who are suffering physically and spiritually.[55]

The Sheep and the Goats

Jesus spoke about this evidence of being saved when he said,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. (Matt. 25:31-46)

This passage in Scripture is often used as the litmus test of whether one is a Christian or not. Some people would interpret Jesus' words to say that "if you do these six acts of charity, then you are saved." And so, as the thinking goes, it is essential for Christians and the local church to be exercising these acts of mercy toward the poor on a regular basis. But is this the case?

We must always keep our guard against teaching that suggests that our works are the basis for our salvation, and not God's grace. Scripture, all throughout, camps on this main message, and Matthew 25 is no exception.[56]

Here in our text, we see that salvation is based on election by grace. Look at verse 34 again: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take *your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*'"

First of all, an inheritance is never earned; it is given, just as grace cannot be earned. Otherwise it would not be grace (see Rom. 11:6). Second of all, those identified as the sheep have the kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world—before they were born or had done anything good or bad. Furthermore, Jesus does not say they were saved "because" they had done these acts. Instead, the word used in the beginning of verse 35 is "for."

It would be like saying, "My car is broken, *for* it could not get me to work today." My car was not broken *because* it could not get me to work. Instead, it was broken, and this is the *evidence* of how I know: it could not get me to work today. So to apply this to our passage, the sheep will not receive their inheritance because of their works. Instead, their kindness to the poor is cited as evidence about those who are the sheep.[57]

Notice also that the six acts of charity were done to "the least of these brothers of mine." Jesus was not speaking about being kind to just anyone but to those who followed him. Jesus does not refer to his enemies as his brothers. The terms "brothers" and "least of these" were terms Jesus used for his followers.[58] The kindness or lack of kindness extended to these "brothers" was shown as a response to the Kingdom of God. The receiving of Jesus' disciples was equivalent to receiving Christ.[59] By contrast, the world hates Christ and his followers. Perhaps this is why Scripture stresses that Christians are to love and help each other in need. 1 John 3:17 says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has not pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

We can see that we must be careful in studying God's Word so that we understand it correctly. Salvation is not based on how much we help the poor. We must never take pride in our acts of charity and look down on those who have not done as much as we have in helping the poor. Instead, we should gently encourage each other in the gospel, which is the root of all acts of charity offered in faith and love.

VII. WHAT ARE PRACTICAL WAYS TO CARE FOR THE POOR?

We now come to our final section where we will think about practical ways to help the poor. As we have already labored to say, the best way to help the poor is to tell them the gospel. Yet let that not be the only way! James is clear that faith without

deeds is dead (see James 2:17). Our actions must work together with our faith (see James 2:22). This means that if a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, we must not just wish them well but seek to help them (see James 2:14-16).

CHBC Church Covenant

Reading from the CHBC church covenant, it says, "We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, *the relief of the poor*, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations."

In light of this teaching, many church members have probably wondered what our promise to contribute to the relief of the poor means as we live out this covenant corporately. First, we must make sure that it must not mean something unbiblical. It must comply with Scripture. So in keeping with what we understand Scripture to teach, this phrase primarily refers to relieving the poor among the church congregation (see Rom. 12:13) and a happy encouragement for individual members to care for those outside of the church.

While contributing to relieve the poor oftentimes means to give financially to help them, it can also mean doing other things, such as helping a widow with groceries or transportation to church. In our church budget, we as a congregation have allocated funds to help with ministries that CHBC members have started and are involved with. The funds are allocated for evangelistic purposes and to encourage members as they seek to care for the poor by witnessing to them in love. We do not feel obligated to maintain these budget lines if members are no longer involved with these ministries. Each ministry that we support must have an evangelistic component to it (whether direct or indirect), and this evangelistic component is how we connect the ministry to the church's purpose in making disciples.

Angel Tree is a perfect example. The Angel Tree ministry started out as a project the church's youth began in order to reach out to those in the neighborhood who have family members in prison. All that was involved was buying gifts for the children of these families and giving them a banquet around Christmas where the gospel was presented to them.

As the years passed many members of the church began to get involved and made it a year-round ministry for the purposes of building relationships with those struggling in our neighborhood and sharing with them the gospel. As this ministry took root with more and more of our members, the church began supporting it with more and more of its funds.

Now if, all of a sudden, there was a large decrease in involvement with this ministry, the church leaders would not feel obligated to continue making the Angel Tree ministry work—it would just cease to continue. This is because, in the final analysis, Angel Tree is not a ministry of the church but a ministry of members in the church. Yet we are happy to use the relationships in the church as a way to make opportunities to give mercy known among the congregation.

Our church has also created a diaconal position entitled the Deacon of Community Outreach to help the members coordinate their efforts to help the poor. This deacon is the person you as a member should initially talk to about seeking ways to evangelize in our community through helping to care for the poor and needy. This position particularly aids the members in this church as we think about practical ways of being a witness for Christ and helping those outside the church with our individual lives. Any use of the church's resources or communication—whether it be through the weekly email or an announcement on a Sunday evening—should then come to the elders for approval, as those who are charged with overseeing the church's resources and meetings together.

For the poor who are in our own congregation, we have a benevolence fund. Our church established a benevolence fund to primarily assist members in financial need. On occasion the fund may be used to aid a nonmember upon the request of a member. However, the nonmember must either have an established relationship with the member or display a willingness to gather with the church regularly. Also, on occasion, the fund may be used to assist other local nonprofit organizations that help meet community needs in the name of our Lord Jesus.

If you are a Christian, being a member of a church is a great way to begin practically and intentionally caring for others. Roger Greenway says it well:

For churches, composed of the residents of the area, offer more effective remedies for the "hurts" of the city than any other form of association. The loneliness, insecurity, and frustration created by city life are ministered to best through the local assembly of Christians who meet regularly for worship and fellowship and belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. The social impact of the Christian religion through the transformed lives of believers has more influence than any other factor in improving the quality of life in an urban community.[60]

Practical Ways to Care for the Poor

That is a brief look at how Capitol Hill Baptist Church functions. What about ways to be involved outside of the church's ministry? There are numerous ways to practice caring for the poor. America is rich with volunteer not-for-profit organizations and other ways to care for those in physical need. Even in our own web of relationships, we have daily opportunities to care for those who need help, whether it is for a child, an aging adult, or someone who is ill. We have not spent a lot of time here on all of the specific opportunities in our city because there are so many and because it is more important to consider this matter theologically first.

That said, here is a quick summary of some ways that you can help.

Prayer

First, it is important for us to pray for opportunities and boldness in reaching out to the poor. Pray for wisdom and the skill to listen so that you may discern what is the best way to help. And pray that God would work compassion in your hearts. God shows compassion by listening to the needy, blessing those who care for them, and holding accountable those who oppress them.[61] The poor must never become inaudible to us. Compassion becomes possible when we begin to consider others more worthy than ourselves (see Phil. 2:3-4). It is understanding that the poor are not just those who have sinned—like everyone else in the world—but are also those who have often been sinned against; sometimes abusively. Compassion means wounding your pride and associating with people who are poor and needy the same way that God has dealt with you (see Rom. 12:13).

Giving Financially

Second, give financially to help. This is a good biblical way to care for the poor. God rewards those who give to the needy (see Matt. 6:1-4). Greed is just the opposite of this and works to exploit those who are vulnerable to perpetuating their poverty. Much poverty is caused by the selfish actions of others either directly or indirectly. We must be mindful of the ways we advance financially in life. In our sinful natures we are so prone to get what we can without considering how we are obtaining it and who it affects.

Many of you have very busy jobs and are unable to spend the time necessary to care for the poor, even if you want to. Well, charity depends on industry, and while you may not currently have time, you might be able to supply money for those who have time but not money. Consider giving a week's wages above and beyond your tithe to help the poor. The Salvation Army created what is known as the Self-Denial fund. This fund began by asking others to forgo a meal—or their "pudding"—and giving the money that would have been spent on that meal to help the poor. What a great way to love sacrificially.

Also, we encourage members to give to well-administrated organizations with a gospel emphasis, such as Central Union Mission in Washington. These organizations are specifically set up to assist the poor and can better hold accountable those they help. Giving to an organization can also help to maximize the financial support given. While it is not sin to give to a non-religious organization such as the Red Cross, you may want to consider how the money that God has given you is best used for his purposes and glory.

We believe it's generally prudent never to give money to a stranger. General, undiscerning contributions can be irresponsible and unhelpful. When homeless people ask for money in order to get something to eat, depending on the situation, one might point the individual to an organization that the church supports. It may be worth carrying around one of the cards that our church office provides with the phone numbers of shelters that can help. This is worth doing because it's difficult to know initially the real concerns of an individual, and we do not want to encourage a wrong way of living. If you are a man, it may be appropriate to buy a meal for an individual, but we would recommend doing this in order to have a conversation with the person, to listen to him, perhaps to build a relationship with him, and perhaps to share the gospel with him.

Building Relationships

That leads us to the third point, which is to build relationships with the poor. In Matthew 28:19 we are told to make disciples, not just converts. The most difficult thing to invest time in is people, but people are by far the most important. Who are you developing a relationship with? Let us encourage you to just jump in and begin investing into someone who wants to overcome his or her circumstances and is open to the gospel. This could be through a not-for-profit organization, through a mentoring relationship, or through some other avenue.

Sometimes building relationships means strategically thinking about where you will live. In the New Testament, Paul is very strategic in going to urban settings to declare the gospel to many people. We don't believe it's necessary to sell all of your possessions and move your family to a public housing area of the city because the poor won't listen to you or understand the

power of the gospel otherwise. We do believe that it can be beneficial to deliberately think about how your ministry can multiply to those around you because of where you live. One of the best ways, if possible, is to live close to the church where you are a member. This makes it easier to get involved with the church, which in turn makes it easier to demonstrate God's glory to the community through lives of shared love and responsibility. Besides that, it will be easier to invite friends and neighbors to gatherings of the church when they don't have to drive forty minutes.

"Okay," you say, "we need to pray and give financially. But developing relationships takes time. In case you haven't noticed, we live in one of the busiest cities; we have demanding jobs; some of us have families that we are caring for; and we desire to maintain a healthy attendance at our regular public gatherings with our church. How are we to help care for the poor outside the church also?"

To give you a definite answer to that question would make it too easy and would probably not be helpful. So let us encourage you to search your heart. **In what ways is your time being used poorly and selfishly? In America most people are fortunate to have two days off from work each week. How are you using those hours?** Go over your calendar with a friend and ask how you can better use the time that God has given you. Are there ways that you can combine any of your normal activities with caring for the poor? For example, could you include the time you spend with your spouse or child or discipleship relationship in helping others together? If fear is driving your hesitation, then how can you do better at trusting God? These are just a few questions, but you get the point.

The last thing that's worth mentioning is the immediacy that helping often requires. Many of our initial encounters with those in poverty are in apparent crisis situation, and we are faced with what appears to be a choice between reacting swiftly or causing a person to suffer. It may be an encounter with a homeless person on the street who needs money immediately for a medical prescription; it may be someone who is being evicted from his apartment the next day. These are the circumstances that can make us uneasy in helping because it requires urgency and, often, fast cash.

Just as fire safety officials tell us not to panic in the midst of a fire, so it is your responsibility to take time to understand the situation and what will be the best way to help. This may mean asking the person a lot of questions, and that's okay. It may also mean asking someone else who knows this person to independently vouch for them, and that's okay, too. The longer conversation you have with someone, the more apparent their needs will appear. Each situation is different, and it is difficult to speak to each without knowing all of the details. That said, we would encourage you to prepare yourself for these encounters ahead of time. Know the organizations around you that are able to help, and be wise in your compassion so that you love responsibly.

CONCLUSION

That is some practical advice for helping those outside of the church who are poor. Pray, give financially, and build relationships by being a help and a friend. What distinguishes good charity from bad charity is that good charity begins with forming a relationship that leads from poverty to responsibility and requires personal accountability. Do all of these things for the glory of God in sharing the gospel. Caring for others is a universal language. Throughout the New Testament we find that taking the gospel to the non-Jews or the Gentiles was the height of expressing love and concern for them. Let us not forget the importance of sharing the gospel in our own charity.

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¹ John Stott, *Social Issues*, 79.

² "Hot Topics" article, The Salvation Army National Headquarters, October 7, 2003.

³ *The Missionary*, Central Union Mission, October 2003.

⁴ Mark 8:1-3 shows Jesus having compassion on the four thousand and giving them something to eat. Compassion also extends to evangelism as seen in Acts 17:16-17.

⁵ Matthew 8 also speaks of the centurion who had great faith in Jesus although he was a Gentile. Jesus used this healing to teach that faith, and not racial origin, would be the basis of entrance into the Kingdom.

⁶ Luke's account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Luke 6 is often used to show that God is favorable towards the materially poor (Gk. *ptochos*) in verse 20 and against those who are materially rich in verse 24. On the surface Luke does seem to secularize this, but Jesus is not condemning rich people but those who place their *trust* in their riches instead of God for "[they] have already received [their] comfort." The poor then are those who have placed their dependence on God, such as the prophets did (v. 23). Matthew makes explicit in Matthew 5 of what Jesus was saying in Luke 6 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

7 John 3:1-2 shows Nicodemus confessing Jesus is from God because of his miracles.

8 Matthew 9:35-36; Luke 4:15, 5:3; John 7:14-15

9 It is true that those who humbly trust in God are those whose loyalty often results in oppression and material disadvantage because we are told in Scripture that those who are in Christ will be persecuted (1 Peter 4:12-14; Mark 8:34-35). God's people, also, do not seek to advance their own cause as the world does. Yet, it would be impossible to show a direct correlation between being physically poor and being a Christian. How else would we explain the physical prosperity of Christians in the U.S.?

10 James 2:2-6 seems to suggest this, but James is teaching against showing favoritism in the church and uses the example that God's electing grace has chosen the poor, as seen in the eyes of the world. This does not exclude the materially wealthy from salvation because "poor" is a general term. Instead, the passage reminds us that God does not view things the way the world does.

11 *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines the social gospel as "A movement in American Protestant Christianity initiated at the end of the 19th century and reaching its zenith in the first part of the 20th century, and dedicated to the purpose of bringing the social order into conformity with the teachings of Jesus Christ."

12 B. Moraes, *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, Vol. 1, 308.

13 See Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; and James 2:8. Also, notice that Jesus did not dismiss the law but pointed to it so that men might know their inability to keep it and seek Christ's righteousness over their own for salvation.

14 Notice that the second question was not a whole new question but an extension of the first question.

15 A Samaritan was not a Jew by race but was from an Israelite sect that adopted Jewish forms of worship and read the Jewish Torah. Samaritans were the people sent by the king of Assyria to inhabit the land of Israel after Israel's captivity and were considered an enemy of Jews. See 2 Kings 17:24-41; John 4:9; and John 8:48.

16 Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy*, 110-111.

17 *Applying the Scriptures* section on "A Response to Wealth and Poverty" by J.A. Sekulow, p. 470.

18 Matthew 6:33 indicates that only those who seek first God's kingdom and righteousness will be given all things as well, meaning food and clothing. While Christians are persecuted through means of starvation, this seems to be the only exception – self-sacrifice for righteousness sake. D.A. Carson does a good job explaining this point in his book *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount* on page 100.

19 See Matthew 9:1-8, 9:27-30, 15:21-28; Mark 2:1-12, 6:4-6.

20 Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches* (IVP), 135.

21 See Luke 2:22-24, Luke 9:58, and Mark 15:41.

22 See Proverbs 19:1, 19:22, 28:6, 28:11; Ecclesiastes 4:13.

23 John Stott, *Social Issues*, 95.

24 See 1 Timothy 6:8 and Proverbs 30:8. Both passages speak to being content with the necessities of life. Hebrews 13:5 reminds us that our contentment is to be focused on God.

25 Similarly, 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 tells the slave to gain his freedom, if he can.

26 What is not mentioned, because it is not relevant to our study, is that the state is also to help guard the people entrusted to its care. 1 Samuel 8:20 shows that this is one reason why Israel wants a king in order to be like the other nations. It is sad to see that just a few verses earlier in 1 Samuel 7:10-14 God clearly protected Israel and gave them victory over the Philistines and now they were slighting him.

27 Genesis 9:5-6 shows that God gives man the responsibility to account for his fellow man and to enforce justice. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, *by man* will his blood be shed."

28 Laws, such as the Sabbath laws found in Exodus 23:10-11, were examples of caring for the poor responsibly. Also, we are told in Scripture to judge the poor fairly (Proverbs 29:14) and also not to unjustly favor them either (Leviticus 19:15, Exodus 23:3).

29 B. Habig & L. Newsom, *The Enduring Community*, 79-80.

30 See 2 John 9-11; Galatians 1; and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

31 John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1023.

32 The right administration of ordinances deals with church membership both in baptism, which signifies entrance into the church, and the Lord's Supper, which admittance to is carefully examined throughout the life of the church member (1 Corinthians 5).

33 The apostles were representatives of the church to be. Not every individual is called to go out, but the church is to send messengers into the world. This seems to be fulfilled in Acts through the church, as they were scattered and sent into the nations (see Acts 8:1-4, 11:19-30) and proclaimed the gospel.

34 R.L. Dabney in *Lectures in Systematic Theology* says, "The ends of the State are for time and earth; those of the Church are for eternity. The weapon of the State is corporeal, that of the Church is spiritual. The two cannot be combined, without confusing heaven and earth."

35 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 255.

36 D.G. Hart & J.R. Muether, *Ordained Servant*, vol. 7, no. 3, 66.

37 Mark Dever speaks well to the spirituality of the church in a footnote of his ecclesiology chapter for *A Theology for the Church* (B&H, 2007)..

38 Acts 19:32 uses the word generically to indicate an assembly of people.

39 Colossians 1:18 uses the word in a universal sense, and Acts 13:1 uses the word in a local sense.

40 The kingdom of God, however, can be meant to refer to a place (see Matthew 23:13, 13:43; 2 Peter 1:11) and a people, (Revelation 5:10) but it is primarily meant to refer to the reign, or rule, of God. Mark 10:15 and Matthew 6:33 refer to "kingdom" as to accept God's rule. Psalm 145:11 expresses parallelism to associate the idea of kingdom with the power to rule.

41 In Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul shows that kingdom reconciliation ultimately finds itself within the church.

42 George E. Ladd writes an excellent study on the kingdom of God in *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Also, see Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* on pages 863-864.

43 B. Habig & L. Newsom, *The Enduring Community*, 86.

44 Quoted from Mark Dever's sermon on Ruth 2 (September 3, 2006). This sermon, along with the previous week's sermon on Ruth 1, speaks at length to the role of the church in caring for the poor outside the church.

45 Scripture does speak of Israel helping other nations (e.g. Jeremiah 29:7; the Israelites are exhorted to be good citizens of Babylon where they were exiled).

46 When Paul recounts his journeys, he notes in Acts 24:17 that he brought gifts to his people in Jerusalem. These gifts were the offerings given by the Gentile churches.

47 See 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15 where the Macedonian churches gave to the saints (v. 8:4; 9:1; 9:12). 2 Corinthians 9:13 says the church in Corinth shares their material wealth with "them" (i.e., the Judean saints) and with "everyone else". It is difficult to say who "everyone else" is referring to, but it is likely referring to other saints that are benefiting from the Corinthian church's gift because it was in the context of giving "to the saints."

48 Galatians 6:10 was written to the churches in Galatia. "Especially" (Gk. *malista*) can mean the more exact group of people Paul will then name (i.e., Christians), as is done in 1 Timothy 4:10, but it could also mean the more general and vague "especially" that would still leave some obligation to others. It is unclear which it is referring to.

49 The following are explanations of texts that people have taken as a mandate for the church to help the physical needs of non-Christians:

- James 1:27: James seems to be writing to a broad, general Jewish audience (v. 1:1) and not specifically to his church in Jerusalem, although the letter likely conveys issues with the believers in Jerusalem. While verse 27 appears to command the unequivocal looking after of all widows and orphans, James' primarily Jewish audience would likely understand that these particular categories of people referred to those inside the community of believers as James 2 expounds upon further. The widows and orphans are types of those who find themselves helpless in the world and helping them is considered true worship (see Isaiah 1:10-17).
- 1 Peter 2:12 (also see Matthew 5:16): Peter's audience is not clear as to whether it is to a church or individual Christians, but it is likely to a wide audience of Christians spread abroad (v. 1:1). Living good lives among the pagans refers to how one conducts himself and is to be taken together with verse 11 on abstaining from sinful desires. This language is then followed by an exhortation to submit to those in authority, as perhaps a practical example of how this living good lives among the pagans is displayed. It does not seem to mean that the church is to care for the physical needs of nonbelievers.
- 1 John 3:16-18: John is likely writing to a church and says that love of God is shown in loving his followers, or "brothers." "Brothers" is a covenantal term referring to those in the church and not those outside the church.
- Ephesians 4:25-28: Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus (v. 1:1) but is speaking to individuals as verse 25 states. Again, there is not a clear mandate for the church to share with nonbelievers in need.

50 See Luke 12:33; Proverbs 19:7, 22:9, and 28:27.

51 Jesus was apparently known for giving financially to the poor in John 13:29. 2 Corinthians 8:9 conveys his giving spiritually.

52 In *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Christopher Wright says that, "The law typically addresses not the poor themselves but those who wield economic or social power. Whereas it is common to see 'the poor' as 'a problem', and to blame them or lecture them on what they must do to redeem their situation, Israel's law puts the focus instead on those who actually have the power to do something, or whose power must be constrained in some way for the benefit of the poor. Thus the law addresses the creditor, not the debtor (Deuteronomy 24:6,

10-13); employers, not day labourers (Deuteronomy 24:14); slave-owners, not slaves (Exodus 21:20-21, 26-27; Deuteronomy 15:12-18)." (p. 174).

53 Acts 9:41 could be rendered that Peter "called the believers, including the widows." However, it was normal Jewish practice to help those who were poor in their midst.

54 Cornelius was not a believer in Christ yet but was God-fearing and not a pagan.

55 See Jer. 22:16; 1 John 3:16-18; Ex. 22:21.

56 Phil Ryken in his book, *City on a Hill*, on pages 158-159, excellently expounds on Matthew 25:31-46 and says that the six acts of charity described were done by his people because they were done by Christ first. Jesus feeds the hungry (John 6:35), quenches the thirsty (John 7:37), befriends the stranger (Colossians 1:21-22), clothes the naked (Romans 13:14), heals the sick (Matthew 4:23), and sets the captives free (Luke 4:18).

57 Phil Ryken, *City on a Hill*, 153-154.

58 See Matthew 10:42; 18:6; 18:10; and 18:14. Also, "brother" is a common term used throughout the New Testament for Jesus' followers (See Matthew 12:49-50).

59 See Matthew 10:40-42; Mark 9:41; and Genesis 12:3.

60 R. S. Greenway, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 916.

61 See Exodus 22:27; Deuteronomy 24:13, 19; and Deuteronomy 24:15.

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Contemplating Cool

By Mike McKinley

Show me a grown man with a goatee and I'll show you a major league baseball player. Show me a grown man with a goatee wearing sandals and I'll show you a youth pastor.

When I was a kid, I remember that the youth pastor at our church was totally different than any other pastor I'd ever seen. He quoted rock bands and wore blue jeans to church. He was cool in a way that the other adults in my life were not. I was proud to invite my friends to church and see their negative stereotypes of Christians get blown up. The youth group thrived and "unchurched" kids were reached. The one thing that distinguished our group from others was that our pastor was cool.

As the youth pastors and youth of the 1990s become the head pastors and congregants of the 2000s, it seems like the phenomenon has only grown. It is now an unexamined assumption in many quarters: the best way to reach people is to be like them. In order to reach our culture, we must embody what the culture defines as acceptable and valuable. We must be as "cool" as we can possibly be while still retaining the gospel. That way, people will see us and not be turned off by us. Maybe they'll even want to be us.

This shows up in both the private lives of pastors (you missional guys, I'm talking about you and your emo eyeglasses) and in the church's corporate worship, where we seek to remove everything that might seem foreign to the unchurched visitor.

In some ways, I think being connected to the culture around us is helpful. But there are ways in which a commitment to being cool can ultimately conflict with the call of a pastor. As the resident cool guy on the 9Marks docket (which is roughly like being the ladies' man at a Star Trek convention—damning with faint praise), here are a few thoughts:

1. Being connected to the culture is a double-edged sword.

In a sense, we all carry a set of unique interests, talents, characteristics, and strengths around with us. These can both serve the proclamation of the gospel and hinder it. So, for example, yesterday the copier repairman stopped by the church which I serve. He is a young guy who is into cage-fighting. We built a connection over that fact (one of the guys in our church also does MMA—mixed martial arts), and he was pleasantly surprised to find that a pastor could be heavily tattooed.* I shared Christ with him, and he asked for a Bible. Score one for enculturation.

But there are other ways that my appearance might be a hindrance to the gospel. I have been sharing Christ with a strict Muslim man that I see in the sauna at the gym once or twice a week. We have built a friendship and talked about spiritual matters quite often. I have little doubt that the fact that I have a large weasel tattooed on my bicep does not make him more attracted to the faith. Score one for not having tattoos. This is why I wear sleeves on Sunday mornings. In one situation my ink serves me well; in another it can make things more difficult.

2. We must always be on guard against pride.

How much of a pastor's desire to be perceived as cool or connected to the culture is motivated by vanity or pride? Knowing the depth of our depravity and self-deception and pride, we must examine ourselves. Am I motivated to dress a certain way or listen to certain music for good reasons? Or does part of me at least want to avoid being the butt of Ned Flanders jokes? We must beware that our quest for cool doesn't feed the vanity and pride which we need to be choking to death every day.

In fact, I fear (and here I am speaking from what I see in my own heart) that oftentimes we are at least partially motivated to reach people by pride. How much of our desire to be cool is a desire to reach people, not only for the gospel, but also for our own glory? Here's a diagnostic question for everyone who is a pastor: if the Lord called you to shepherd sixty uncool saints until they were safely home, with no spectacular revival or ministry explosion, would you consider that beneath you? Would it seem unworthy of your gifts and a waste of your life? If so, you are being motivated by pride.

3. Much pastoral ministry is profoundly uncool.

Don't sign up to be a pastor if you want to sound reasonable to most people or if you want to affect a cool detachment from people and ideas. The preaching of the cross is foolishness and a stumbling block to your average art community hipster. We must love the Savior more than we love the respect of others.

Also, the ironic detachment that cool requires finds little place in the work of a pastor. At times, you must be embarrassingly earnest and enthusiastic. You must love difficult and extremely mockable people with a real and true love that never seeks a laugh at their expense. You need to cry with people when they suffer unspeakable tragedy. Much of being a pastor is profoundly uncool.

4. We must never despise our brothers and sisters.

There is a real danger in becoming so puffed-up over our freedom in Christ to wear black t-shirts that we begin to look down on the Ned Flanders-style Christians who love the Lord and have served him faithfully for years. In fact, it may be that the Lord is more pleased with their humble walk (though not as sophisticated) than he is with yours. The fact is, love for other Christians is a hallmark of a true believer (1 John 2:10). Even more it must be the mark of a pastor. We have more in common with a believer in Myanmar and a believer in Duluth (even if they don't know a pilsner from a stout or Operation Ivy from Crimpshrine) than we do with the people we're trying to reach for Christ.

The fact is, we can't choose who will be in our flock, nor should we try. Should churches go after the "manly man" with gimmicks and mocking disdain for the average wussy church going guy? If I read Ephesians properly, the church should consist of all kinds of people: cool and square, macho and sensitive, punk rock and emo. Frankly, in my experience a sensitive guy who is not trying to be cool is about ten times more likely to fit the biblical profile of a man, even if he doesn't ride a Harley and watch contact sports on television. Pastor your people, thank God for the diversity in the body, and love people who aren't like you.

5. With a few exceptions, Christians who try to be cool are terrible at it.

When I was in middle school, a well meaning youth worker attempted to perform what came to be known infamously in Radnor Junior High School lore as "the Jesus rap." These were the earlier days of hip-hop, and the genre was still trying to find its sound. Well, this youth worker, a slightly pudgy white guy of about 28 years, put the effort back ten years in five excruciating minutes. I later came to find that this well-meaning man hadn't written this material himself (thank heavens!) but that it was later recorded as part of a song called "Addicted to Love" by a man named Carman.

The point is this: not many Christians can pull it off. A few can, but you probably can't. Seriously, ask your wife. She'll tell you the truth. Don't try to be something that you're not for the sake of impressing unbelievers. It's bad theology and it will fool no one. It's this kind of thinking that has gotten us Christian rock music. Please, stop it. No, really. Now. I insist.

6. Being like the culture can make it hard to see the gospel.

The more we understand the world (and its definition of what is compelling and cool), the less attractive we should find it. In fact, in a society that is increasingly morally and spiritually bankrupt, it may be our incongruity with the culture that serves to highlight the gospel. David Wells says this much better than I could in his book *God in the Wasteland*:

By this late date, evangelicals should be hungering for a genuine revival of the church, aching to see it once again become a place of seriousness where a *vivid otherworldliness* is cultivated because the world is understood in deeper and truer ways, where worship is stripped of everything extraneous, where God's Word is heard afresh, where the desolate and broken can find sanctuary [*emphasis mine*].

Let's pray that our churches recover that quality of vivid otherworldliness, even if it is not cool.

The conclusion of the matter is this: be who God made you to be. If you lean hipster, run with it. Be a hipster to the glory of God. If you lean in another direction, that's great too. But Christ must be central to all who will pursue the calling of a pastor. That means putting to death our pride and scorn for others who are not like us. That means evangelizing across the boundaries of taste and preference. In the long run, it might even mean that we're not cool.

Michael McKinley is the pastor of Guildford Baptist Church in Sterling, Virginia, and the 9Marks lead writer on church membership.

* If a member of my church is reading this and just got a shock, sorry about that. But take comfort, the fact that I have tattoos is nowhere near the worst thing about me!

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Coming Soon to a Planet Near You: Lausanne III

By David Wells

Plans are now afoot for the Third International Congress on World Evangelization. It will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010.

The first such congress, Lausanne I, was the brainchild of Billy Graham. It was held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974. A total of 2,700 Christian leaders from 150 nations attended, more than half from the Third World, many from countries which had just gained independence in the 1950s and 1960s from European colonial powers. They all gathered to consider the gospel and its proclamation in their own contexts. Out of this great gathering came the [Lausanne Covenant](#) which was drafted principally by John Stott. This *Covenant* has served as a basis for evangelical strategizing and thinking about evangelism in the global context since then.

Lausanne II was held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989. Over 3,000 Christian leaders attended from 170 nations, more than were represented in the United Nations in 1989. Its chief written accomplishment was the *Manila Manifesto*, again drafted principally by Stott. But it was not the achievement which the *Covenant* had been. Indeed, Lausanne II itself, while it had its high points, was something of a disappointment. There was much celebration but little serious wrestling with the issues of the day. And that left behind a lingering question: what is the point of having world congresses like these? Why, we may then ask, should we have a Lausanne III in 2010?

WHY ANOTHER WORLD CONGRESS?

The most obvious answer, of course, is that 2010 is the centenary celebration of the missionary conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910. However, not all centenaries are worth celebrating. Does this one justify the calling of Lausanne III?

The Real Heirs of Edinburgh

Lausanne III will, undoubtedly, deliver a message simply because it is a celebration of Edinburgh 1910. This famous conference came at the end of a long line of missionary conferences in Britain in the nineteenth century. The purpose of these conferences was to exhort, encourage, and stimulate fresh interest in the missionary enterprise. The conference in 1910, though, was a little different. Its participants were more theologically mixed; and whereas previous conferences had been an end in themselves, Edinburgh started a process. That process, through its continuation committee, was to produce the International Missionary Council which, in turn, joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961.

In the WCC, the heartbeat for evangelism slowly died, which, in the second half of the twentieth century, led to the increased marginalization of evangelicals. Indeed, at its meeting in Uppsala in 1968, the WCC actually called for a moratorium on missionaries from the West. Cape Town 2010 will, by the very fact that it's celebrating this centenary, be reasserting the truth that the real heirs of Edinburgh 1910 are not those in the WCC but, rather, those in this fraternity of evangelical churches and organizations represented by Lausanne.

Considering Challenges Together

This is a nice point to make, but it's not the main reason for a congress on evangelism. Congresses of this magnitude, or councils of an ecumenical kind, have almost always arisen in the life of the Church because of a challenge to Christian faith, either internally by way of heresy or externally by way of persecution. In this respect, the Second Vatican Council, called by the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-1960s, was unusual because there was no external or internal threat that justified its calling. The purpose of that council was simply to update the Catholic Church in its attitudes, doctrine, and liturgy. By comparison, the reason for calling Lausanne III probably falls midway between those for Vatican II and any of the early ecumenical councils which were called to address specific, serious issues in the life of the Church.

Until the Congress gathers in Cape Town and those in attendance hear from Christian leaders around the world, the magnitude of the issues facing the evangelical Church and confronting the preaching of the gospel will probably not be fully known. So the first thing that will come out of this Congress will be a renewed sense of what faces Christians in many other parts of the world and what opportunities they have to preach Christ. More importantly, a congress like this gives Christian leaders a rare opportunity to meet and to think together face-to-face about the current challenges and opportunities before the

Church. In the lives of most evangelical leaders, having such a global opportunity to wrestle with issues of Christian truth in this way and to think about how to evangelize best in our world today will come around but once.

It is one thing to read about persecution from hostile governments hindering gospel-preaching. It is quite another to sit, as I once did, in between an Ethiopian pastor who had spent many years in solitary confinement for preaching the gospel and an East German pastor whose every sermon was taped by the German secret police, amidst other threats and acts of intimidation. On that occasion, these pastors and I were part of the same consultation considering evangelism, and these instances of suffering for Christ, by the most unassuming of people, have left an indelible impression on me. It is out of encounters like these that we gain a new perspective and are given fresh incentives. They spur us to fresh thinking and to developing new strategies for implementing that thinking.

CHANGES IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

What will undoubtedly be different about Cape Town in comparison to both Lausanne and Manila is the changed complexion of the Christian world. Lausanne III will be meeting four decades after Lausanne I. In the interval of time between 1974 and 2010, the complexion of global Christianity will have changed drastically. Christianity has increasingly migrated out of the West and exploded in the global South and parts of Asia. The day of Western dominance of world evangelicalism is now over. A new day is dawning, and we are seeing signs of strong leadership arising from outside the West. One only has to think of the extraordinary and costly stand that the African bishops have taken against the moral corruption which the Anglican and Episcopal churches have sanctioned in recent years.

The irony, however, is that the West still has the lion's share of the resources—organizational, financial, and educational—but not of the Christians. So it may be that Cape Town will help us to formulate a new set of global, working relationships. In fact, they who are outside the West must be helped to increase, while we in the West, hard as it may be, must learn to decrease. And that could be the greatest gain that Lausanne III brings us.

David Wells is the Andrew Mutch Distinguished Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, and author of the upcoming *The Courage to Be Protestant: Marketers, Emergents, and Historic Christians in the Postmodern World, to be published by Eerdmans.*

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Countering Ageism

By Owen Strachan

As early as I can remember, Miss Elsie Dennison was my Sunday School teacher. The years have swiftly passed, but I can see her now, clear as then. She's 75, a little hunched over, with brown hair that I now suspect wasn't entirely natural. She's standing in a classroom in our small Baptist church in coastal Maine. There aren't many of us; just three or four kids. Yet a magic is in the air. Miss Dennison loves us, and she teaches us the gospel, using the church's flannel-graph board and her own earnest faith. There, in that little classroom, young and old joined together in the name of Jesus Christ.

This kind of gospel unity across generations is challenged today, as some Christians over-emphasize friendship with their peers and lose out on opportunities for cross-generational fellowship. This separation—called ageism—diminishes the gospel's power.

TYPES OF AGEISM

Early Christian leader Cyprian once said of division that “Anyone who rends and divides the Church of Christ cannot possess the clothing of Christ.”¹ Such behavior takes shape in two ways when it comes to generational differences.

First, the old separate from the young. We have all heard of churches in which youth is distrusted and elderly church members have control over church affairs. Though many elderly Christians adore young believers, aged Christians do sometimes distrust those younger than themselves, and create division within the body of Christ.²

Second, and more commonly today, the young separate from the elderly.³ When youths are not taught to reverence the aged, their behavior “opens wide the door to pride and folly,” in the words of theologian David Wells. This posture misses the blessings that accrue to those who seek to love and respect their elders.⁴ The strongest form of youthful ageism involves a sullen dislike for the elderly. Though many well-trained young people avoid this spirit and love the elderly, ageism does seem particularly manifest in my generation, the anti-authority cohort.

Some churches, wittingly or unwittingly, practice youth-oriented ageism. It is of course well and good to contextualize, to use one's natural proclivities and background to reach the lost. However, the matter seems to shift when congregations practice a style of music, sermon, and dress that potentially excludes an older generation. Though such congregations may not intend to practice exclusion of the aged, the elderly will likely stay away from them, and God will lose glory that is rightfully His.⁵

BIBLICAL TESTIMONY ON AGE

The Bible's teaching on this matter pushes us away from our natural tendency to associate based primarily on common background. To those of us who sometimes overlook the elderly, the New Testament authors direct us to love all who believe, regardless of how different from one another we may be.⁶ Christ's parting words to his disciples in John 15:12-13 lay the

¹ Cited in Alister McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 464; originally in Cyprian of Carthage, *de catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, 5-7; in *Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina* vol. 3, ed. M. Bevenot (Turnholt: Brepols, 1972), 252.117-254.176

² The problem is as old as Paul's counsel to Timothy in anticipation of such discontent: “Let no one despise you for your youth” (1 Tim. 4:12).

³ Youths who behave in this way overlook the biblical ideal that “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life” (Prov. 16:31). Thus the elderly are worthy of honor.

⁴ David Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 100.

⁵ I might say here that it is great to use commonalities such as age and interest for purposes of evangelism. This seems to be one of the primary ways that non-Christians are drawn to churches to consider the claims of Christ. But once unbelievers have turned to Christ, ought we not teach them that the church is the one place in the world where background is of no matter to believers, and that the gospel renders us all equal and united in Christ?

⁶ Paul develops this doctrine in his letter to the Corinthians where he introduces the idea of the Christian church as a body. We read in 1 Corinthians 12:12: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--

foundation for this idea: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."⁷

Paul reinforces this principle in Titus 2:2-6. Here, he teaches that an age-integrated church enables members of varied life situations to encourage and strengthen one another. He writes:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

This is a beautiful passage. Christians of different ages do not simply fill the same pews. We reach past our differences and build one another up in mutual faith.⁸

But there's more. When Christians of all ages gather together, something strange and magical happens: we display the gospel and we declare our true identity. This is what Christ promised in John 17:23: "I in them and you in me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that you sent me, and loved them, even as you have loved me." Here, John teaches ageism-prone people like me that the unified church speaks the gospel with a force we never know as individuals. The world may only fully understand the gospel when it observes the gathered church.

In so doing, additionally, we show the church's true nature. We are not a social club or a religious organization, a group of individuals paying dues and holding meetings. We are a little heaven, a living preview of a place to come. Our unity now shows the watching world a snapshot of a place where love is perfected and God is exalted.

ADJUSTING OUR PERSPECTIVE

Rock or soft pop? Ties or jeans? Hymnals or power point? Wise choices on these matters may affect our ability to connect with unsaved people. God is glorified in the diversity of His people, and He uses our natural interests for the advancement of His kingdom. Yet it seems clear from the brief textual survey above that congregational unity attests to the gospel's power with unique efficacy. Understanding this, theologian Francis Schaeffer challenged the church: "We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians."

We might ask ourselves, then: am I a vessel of unity for the furtherance of the gospel? None of us who love Christ desire to obscure the gospel—but is this happening in our lives and our churches? If so, how can we change this? With my lack of experience, I cannot suggest a perfect answer. Yet surely there is nothing lost and much gained in devoting ourselves to the cultivation of congregational unity. Such devotion promises to strengthen not only our evangelism, but our churches themselves.

CONCLUSION

Miss Dennison passed away some years ago. She worships in heaven now. As our Sunday School teacher, she taught us children a foundational truth: that the gospel is magnified most not in our clever words or strategies, but in local churches that proclaim Christ, places where the young and the old gather and bring a flannel-graph gospel to life.

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and all were made to drink of one Spirit." This passage is essential to understanding Christian unity. Also see Galatians 3: 27: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This passage does not teach us that the gospel of Christ obliterates our personalities and distinctive backgrounds, but rather that the unity of body is such that we are to treat one another as if such distinctions in fact do not exist at all.

⁷ Scholar D. A. Carson speaks of this transforming love: "God's love so transforms us that we mediate it to others, who are thereby transformed. We love because he first loved us; we forgive because we stand forgiven." *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 82.

⁸ Such is the thrust of 1 Timothy 5:1-2, where Paul writes, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity."

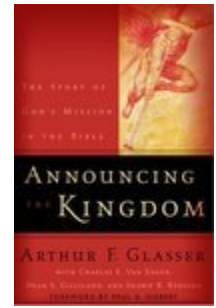
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Book Review:

Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible

by Arthur F Glasser with Charles E Van Engen, Dean S Gilliland, and Shawn B Redford

Baker Academic, 2003, 400 pages, \$27.99



Reviewed by Robin W.

Those familiar with Graeme Goldsworthy's *Gospel and Kingdom* and Vaughan Roberts' *God's Big Picture* will know the value of tracing the theme of the "kingdom of God" through the Scriptures. Arthur Glasser's *Announcing the Kingdom* does the same, though in greater scholarly depth and from a missiological perspective.

Subtitled "The Story of God's Mission in the Bible," Glasser's approach complements Christopher J. H. Wright's excellent Grove booklet *Truth with a Mission* in which Wright calls evangelicals to read Scripture missiologically. Commenting on the Lord Jesus' words in Luke 24:46-47, Wright says, "the proper way for disciples of Jesus of Nazareth (crucified and risen) to read their Scriptures is *messianically* and *missiologically*." [1] Wright believes that, whilst evangelicals have been good at messianic readings of the Old Testament, they have been inadequate in their missiological readings. Glasser's own life-work provides a major contribution to rectifying such evangelical inadequacies.

Having worked with China Inland Mission, Glasser became the second dean of the School of World Mission at Fuller where he has had an enormous influence over several generations of missiologists. *Announcing the Kingdom* will undoubtedly become a text book for many future generations, and for that reason alone is worth reading and reading carefully.

STRENGTHS

It is obvious from this book that Glasser is a man who takes Scripture seriously. This is seen in his rigorous handling of key biblical texts, and it is refreshing to see a book with a Scripture index twice as long as its subject index. Glasser's high view of Scripture is evident not only in his commitment to individual texts, but also in the strength of his biblical theology. As he traces the theme of the 'kingdom of God' missiologically, Glasser follows the sweep of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation in a way which honours the unity of the Scriptures and God's progressive self-revelation. Glasser's book is refreshingly free, in keeping with the Fuller tradition, from any dispensationalist confusion. [2]

Glasser offers many fresh insights by tracing the motif of God's kingdom with a missiological approach. For example, he perceives the unity of humanity in the creation narrative, and then he uses this insight to warn against two threats to that unity: individualism and nationalism. Even cross-cultural missionaries can be prone to the latter in their "unconscious or sometimes even conscious assumed sense of racial or cultural superiority" (37). Then, commenting on the linguistic miracle on the Day of Pentecost, he writes,

Actually, no linguistic miracle was really needed for interpersonal communication on that occasion, for the probability is that the pilgrims and residents in Jerusalem were already able to communicate with one another in either Aramaic or Greek. But hearing in the vernacular brought power and precision to the message. A person's heart language is always the best vehicle for gospel communication. (264)

Along the way Glasser also makes some helpful distinctions, such as the difference between the Old Testament's focus on centripetal mission (winning people by attraction) and the New Testament's focus on centrifugal mission (winning people through proclamation); the difference between an appropriate measure of NT contextualization and Israel's fall into syncretism with the Canaanite religion; and the shift from "kingdom" language in the gospels and Acts to "gospel" language in the epistles, which Glasser says helped the epistles' first readers avoid thinking that "the Christian message had subversive political overtones" (267). Whilst explaining these nuances, Glasser does well not to make too much of them. For example, we would not want to lose the centripetal (winning people by attraction) aspect of the New Testament church's witness. The church, too, is to be a display of God's glory which attracts unbelievers. Also, we don't want to abandon kingdom language for gospel language just because the epistles emphasize the latter.

At times, however, one wonders if his missiological framework forces some of his readings of the biblical texts. For example, commenting on Genesis 14, he writes, "When the people of God are in mission, they need to be alert to the possibility of encountering "Melchizedek people." What are those? "People like Melchizedek may worship the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, though they may never have heard the name of Jesus Christ. We should not deny the possibility of surprises, for he is most eager to draw people to himself" (63). Is that really what the Lord intended us to learn from the Melchizedek

narrative? Certainly that's not how Hebrews 7 interprets it, and it does raise questions about Glasser's approach to the fate of the lost, which we will consider in a moment.

A great strength of Glasser's book is that it reminds us that the Scriptures reveal a God who is a missionary God, that the church is to be a missionary community, and that God's people are to be missionary people. In other words, the whole Bible is a missionary book, a fact that all of us need to learn and live out. Otherwise, we end up like the Essenes who "saw themselves as a 'saved' community not a 'saving' community" (173). Understanding this will rescue mission from something we *do* and make it into something we *are*, wherever we are.

Throughout the book, Glasser addresses various contemporary missiological issues. He has an excellent section on the reality of the spiritual powers and forces, which includes helpful observations on "signs and wonders" and "power evangelism." He clearly repudiates the notion that signs and wonders are a necessary accompaniment to evangelism and argues that, according to Romans 1:16, "power evangelism" is preaching the gospel.

CAUTIONS

Whilst I would recommend this book, I would do so with some cautions. The first concerns Glasser's ecclesiology. In my experience on the "field," the perennial danger is for missiology to drive ecclesiology, and this would seem to be true in Glasser's case. He drives an unnecessary wedge between the kingdom of God and the church of God. Of course, as Ladd has made clear, the church is not the same as the kingdom.^[3] But in giving so much priority to the kingdom motif, Glasser is in danger of underplaying the significance of the church in God's purposes for the world. His statement that "On the basis of Jesus' explicit teaching, there is not a great deal of evidence that he had the church in mind" (221) does not sit comfortably with the rest of the New Testament's teaching (e.g. Eph. 5:25, Rev. 19:7). Doesn't Paul say that it is through the church—not the kingdom—that God intends to declare the glory of his manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:10)? Reading Glasser's bibliography, it is surprising that the most recent book listed was published in 1991 and the majority of the books come from the period 1950 to 1980. This may seem an unfair criticism of an octogenarian author, but given that the book was written with the help of some younger scholars, the absence of any interaction with more recent literature on ecclesiology does seem strange.

Another concern is that of Glasser's approach to the fate of the lost. Glasser has an excellent section on "there is salvation in only one Name" where he stresses the uniqueness of Christ and makes it clear that he is not some kind of Barthian closet-universalist. That said, he does seem to leave the proverbial cat flap swinging. In his treatment of Acts 17, for example, Glasser writes, "Paul addressed people, reaching out to the hungry hearted, the groping... The altar and its inscription [in Athens] revealed to Paul the ultimate agony of idolatry. But it was a hopeful sign" (282). To describe the Athenians as "hungry hearted" and their idols as "hopeful" is surely much too generous. What would the prophet Isaiah have made of Glasser's comment, "Paul saw no point in blasting the worship of idols, exposing to ridicule its foolishness, and scolding the Athenians for their stupidity. Why give needless offence through assaulting head-on the radical errors of idolatry" (282)?

Moreover, he ends his book by endorsing J. N. D. Anderson and John Wesley's approach to other religions, an approach which in my opinion makes too much of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in allowing the possibility of people to be justified without having heard the good news of Christ (see 372). In doing so, Glasser is perhaps in danger of undermining the urgency of the church's mission to bring God's word to God's world.

This is a long book, but an important one. Its message that the whole Bible is not just messianic but also missional is a valuable reminder of Jesus' great promise that "repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). May this book encourage many more to be involved with God's mission.

Robin W., originally from the United Kingdom, now pastors a church in a South Asian metropolis. His name is hidden for security reasons.

¹ *Truth With a Mission* (Grove Books, 2005), 4. Only available in the U.K. In the United States, see *The Mission of God* (IVP Academic, 2006).

² As George Marsden points out, the seminary abandoned dispensationalist theology early in its history, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1995)

³ George E Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964)

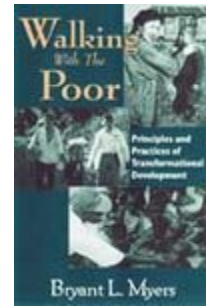
Book Review:

Walking with the Poor

by Bryant L Myers

Orbis Books, 1999, 279 pages, \$22

Reviewed by Robin W.



Commenting on the relationship between evangelism and social action Carl F. H. Henry once wrote,

The God of the Bible is the God of justice and of justification. The Christian evangelist has a message doubly relevant to the modern scene: he knows that justice is due to all because a just God created mankind in his holy image, and he knows that all men need justification because the Holy Creator sees us as rebellious sinners. The Gospel is good news not simply because it reinforces modern man's lost sense of personal worth and confirms the demands for universal justice on the basis of creation, but also because it offers rebellious men as doomed sinners that justification and redemption without which no man can see God.[1]

In other words, any ministry which seeks to be biblical must seek to keep in tension the fact that we serve and proclaim the God of justice and of justification. Or as Ranald Macaulay has put it, evangelicals must "relate the Gospel Commission of the New Testament to the Commission of Genesis (the Creation Mandate)."[2]

Bryant Myers' book, *Walking with the Poor*, is in many ways a seminal book and has become one of the key textbooks in Christian development work. In it he explores crucial issues related to the God of justice and the creation mandate. Written out of his many years of international experience with *World Vision*, Myers has reflected deeply on the nature of poverty and development. The result is a synthesis of theology, spirituality, and social science. The book is primarily directed perhaps at those involved in full time Christian development work, but those of us who pastor churches must certainly engage with what it means to serve "the God of justice."

STRENGTHS

Myers' biblical focus is clear from the outset as he seeks to set poverty and development within the context of God's revelation. Throughout the book he works hard to hold together "the constellation of stories" (22) as he tries to locate "our [the developer's] story" within "the people's story" which is part of the bigger "human story" and "Biblical story." In doing so he restates the importance of the community which can sometimes be downplayed by those who (rightly) insist that the gospel must be personally appropriated. Thus, "there is no transformational development apart from people who themselves are being transformed and who live in the community that is the home of their transformation" (44).

In his detailed examination of the issues connected with poverty and the poor, Myers makes shrewd observations. In questioning who really is "poor," he states, "It seems as if having too much is as bad for us as having too little. Too little food makes us weak and susceptible to disease; too much food makes us overweight and susceptible to heart disease and cancer" (89). He is also right to point out that the goal of any development work is transformed people and that "at the end of the day, any transformation, justice, and peace will be because God made it so" (121).

Refreshingly, Myers affirms possibilities for the church in development. Criticising those who see the church as a distraction or impediment to transformation, he says, "Our goal must be to help the church be what it is intended to be, not to judge it or relegate it to the transformational sidelines" (126).

As he brings together Christian witness and transformational development, there is also a helpful emphasis on the need for humility and the centrality of the Scriptures.

CAUTIONS

Whilst there is much in this book that is good, several things will concern the thinking Bible believer.

The Gospel and Repentance

Myers commendably connects his discussion on poverty with the gospel, but at times his view of the gospel appears deficient. Thus, in his section on the fall (27ff), the consequences of sin are presented primarily in terms of their impact on the world.

There is no mention of sin deserving the wrath of God. The atonement is then presented in terms of liberation and identification—"Jesus died alone on the cross" (36)—rather than in terms of propitiation and satisfaction.

Of course, this leaves little reason for repentance. So he writes, "the best news I have is the knowledge that God has, through his Son, made it possible for every human being to be in covenant relationship with God. We need only say yes to this offer" (3). Later he writes, "There is very little for us to do except say yes to God's invitation to faith in Jesus Christ" (118). How about repent?!

The Link Between Justice and Justification

In seeking to serve the God of justice, Myers loses sight of the God of justification and would do well to learn from history. The year 2007 marks the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of slavery. The great architect of British abolition William Wilberforce showed in his one major book, *A Practical View of Christianity*, that he saw with incredible clarity how the issues of justice and justification are linked. He said that all the spiritual and practical errors of the nominal Christians of his age "result from the mistaken conception entertained of the fundamental principles of Christianity. They consider not that Christianity is a scheme for 'justifying the ungodly' (Romans 4:5), by Christ's dying for them 'when yet sinners' (Romans 5:6-8), a scheme 'for reconciling us to God – when enemies' (Romans 5:10); and for making the fruits of holiness the effects, not the cause, of our being justified and reconciled." [3]

Commenting on Wilberforce's insight, John Piper writes,

It is a remarkable thing that a politician...should not only *know* the workings of God in justification and sanctification, but *consider them utterly essential* for Christian piety and public virtue. Many people say that changing society requires changing people, but few show the depth of understanding Wilberforce does concerning *how* that comes about. For him the right grasp of the central doctrine of justification and its relation to sanctification—an emerging Christ likeness in private and public—were essential for the reformation of the morals of England. [4]

We have much to learn from the biblical clarity which Wilberforce espoused. It was this kind of clarity which enabled him to grieve over not only physical poverty but spiritual poverty. He therefore regarded emancipating people from the spiritual slavery of other religions every bit as important as emancipating Africans from slavery.

Indeed, he believed it was more important. Wilberforce regarded gospel access to Asia to be "the greatest of all causes, for I really place it before Abolition [of the slave trade]." [5] In one of the most popular evangelistic tracts of the day, Wilberforce wrote that one soul saved was of more eternal value than 20,000 slaves set free. All this stemmed from his incredible ability to hold onto the fact that the God of justice is also the God of justification. Wilberforce knew that getting the gospel right mattered when it came to addressing issues of social concern.

This World Or the Next

Woven into much of Myers book are arguments against what he sees as modern blind spots, namely that God is more interested in the soul than the body and that life divides into two categories, the sacred and the secular. Whilst we must not be neo-platonic and downplay the importance of the body, does the Lord Jesus not suggest that our souls are of infinite value (c.f. Mark 8:36-37)? Moreover, whilst Myers rightly tries to break the secular and the sacred divide, is he right also to break the time and eternity divide given the eschatological nature of the gospel (c.f. 1 Corinthians 7:25-31)?

According to the chart on page 229 of Myers' book, I am a "traditional Protestant" because I understand the Bible as "primarily about the world to come." Myers' understands that it is "primarily about this world, and by extension, the world the come." One of the great insights of an earlier generations of "traditional Protestant" social reformers (like William Wilberforce) was that, in abolishing the non-New Testament distinction between the sacred and the secular, they upheld its distinction between the temporal and the eternal. One wonders if the modern church's mission would not be more effective and urgent if it maintained this biblical distinction between time and eternity.

Evangelism

It is good to find a book on transformational development that has so much to say about evangelism. But Myers' views on evangelism also raise questions. For example, he believes that word, deed, and sign are all integral parts of evangelism. Thus, "in dealing with the gospel message, we cannot separate word, deed, and sign without truncating our message. Words clarify the meaning of deeds. Deeds verify the meaning of words. Most critically, signs announce the presence and the power of One who is radically other..." (10). How does that square with Paul's insistence to "preach Christ crucified" despite the call for him to perform signs (1 Cor 1:22-23)? For Myers, evangelism seems less about proclaiming Christ, and more about provoking questions.

So, with questionable exegesis and the help of Lesslie Newbigin, Myers states that in Acts "the gospel is proclaimed, not by intent or plan, but in response to a question provoked by the activity of God in the community" (210). Thus the biblical command to repent becomes an invitation to faith. He quotes favourably Walter Brueggemann's definition of evangelism as "an invitation to choose a new story" (206). Perhaps Myers has lived and worked in so many developing countries that he's doing all that he can to avoid being "imperialistic" and to be more "customer-centred" (213) in his evangelism. Perhaps he has imbibed too many assumptions of the development world. But is it really the case that, "'Go and tell' evangelism and participatory, grass-roots-driven development are not consistent methodologies" (226)? From my own limited experience in Asia over the last seven years, they can be and often are consistent and work very powerfully together.

Scripture & Preaching

It's good to see that Scripture forms a large part of Myers' discussion. Again, though, the development world's assumptions seem to shape his approach. Just like he thinks that "'Go and tell' evangelism is inconsistent with participatory, grass-roots-driven development," so too he thinks that "the 'study, preach, and teach' frameworks of the expository preacher...contradicts the principles of local ownership" (226-227). This sounds like a case of the development tail wagging the Scriptural dog.

By all means we need the Bible to be "released from its spiritual captivity to Sunday morning" (19), and for the Word to penetrate people's lives in the community. But the two models Myers holds up as exemplary negate fairly fundamental biblical principles. In his "Scripture Search" method, "preaching or teaching from the text is discouraged" (230). In the "Seven Steps" method, developed by a lay Catholic institute in South Africa, "the emphasis is in group listening and receiving, not on the left-brain work of determining meaning" (231). Again, "this is not a time for discussion, teaching, or preaching" (232).

SUMMARY

This is a good book for helping pastors think through crucial issues of serving the God of justice who is deeply concerned for the created order, the poor, and the oppressed. And we do well to heed John Coffey's warning that "we should avoid one reductionist view of the Christian mission (the 'social gospel') only to replace it with another kind of reductionism (a Christianity shorn of concern for the created order, for the poor and the oppressed)."[6]

However, if you're looking for a book which is consistently biblical in its approach to social action, I would not recommend this one.

Something like Tim Chester's *Good News to the Poor* (IVP, 2004) might be better. Chester, who is no stranger to these debates having worked extensively for *Tear Fund*, argues compellingly that preaching the gospel is the priority; that social action and the relief of suffering and hardship is not the same as evangelism; and that preaching the gospel will always be accompanied by social concern. Putting it another way, we do not bring about the kingdom of God by our social action, but we do reveal that we are citizens of the kingdom by our active compassion on behalf of the poor and marginalized. Or as Carl F. H. Henry said so clearly, and as William Wilberforce lived so powerfully, we must serve and proclaim the God of justice *and* of justification.

Robin W, originally from the United Kingdom, now pastors a church in a South Asian metropolis. His name has been hidden for security reasons.

1 Quoted in Luis K Bush, *Catalysts of World Evangelisation*, (Bangalore: CCC, 2006) pp. 93-94.

2 Ranald Macaulay, *Cambridge Papers*, Volume 7 no 2 June, 1998.

3 William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of Christianity*, ed. Kevin Charles Belomonte (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), p. 198.

4 John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 25.

5 Quoted in John Keay, *A History of India* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 429.

6 John Coffey, *Cambridge Papers*, Volume 15 no 2 June, 2006.

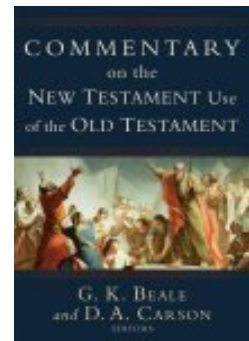
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Book Recommendation:

Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament

edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson

Baker, 2007, 1161 pages, \$54.99



Book recommendation by James Hamilton

Many of us studied under professors who said something like this: "the authors of the New Testament made the Old Testament say whatever they wanted it to say, but they had the right to do so because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. You can't interpret the Old Testament the way they did because you're not inspired."

Okay, maybe they nuanced the statement more than that, but the idea was plainly communicated that the authors of the New Testament had not interpreted the Old Testament according to the Old Testament's own meaning in its own historical context. Thus, whatever the authors of the New Testament may have been doing, we were not to read the Old Testament the way they read it. And we were taught this by evangelical scholars who signed a doctrinal statement that had the word inerrancy in it.

For some of us, that settled it. We trusted our professors, and what they said seemed to make sense. For others of us, a pesky thought lingered that we tried to push out of our minds and that went something like this: if the authors of the New Testament didn't interpret the Old Testament correctly, doesn't that invalidate their message? But we were busy, and maybe we didn't pursue that line of thinking any further. Maybe we just filed it away with the other suggestions from Bible professors that traditional Christian theology might really be a house of cards that won't bear the weight of evidence.

Then some of us ran across things like Greg Beale's article, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?," and we began to suspect that maybe those professors weren't to be trusted. Moisés Silva's comments only eroded our trust further, as when he declared, "If we refuse to pattern our exegesis after that of the apostles, we are in practice denying the authoritative character of their scriptural interpretation—and to do so is to strike at the very heart of the Christian faith."

More and more statements like these came to our attention, and we began to desire something that might enter the lists in defense of the Lord and his apostles; something that might vindicate them against all those slanderous insinuations; something that would demonstrate that the house of cards was built by the unbelieving academy, not by Christian theologians; and something—because we love them—that would lead our benighted Bible professors toward the truth that Jesus and the apostles were not playing fast and loose with the Old Testament.

And now we have that something.

That something would have to have academic credibility, and which evangelicals have more than G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson? It would have to be thorough, and what's more thorough than a commentary on the whole of the New Testament that treats every OT quotation and probable allusion? It would have to be sensitive to the evidence, and it would be hard to come up with a more careful or more sensitive treatment than the one pursued in the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.

SUMMARY

Carson and Beale have brought together well known scholars, many of whom have written monographs and/or major commentaries on the books they were assigned (Craig Blomberg on Matthew; Rikk E. Watts on Mark; David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel on Luke; Andreas Köstenberger on John; Mark Seifrid on Romans; Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner on 1 Corinthians; Peter Balla on 2 Corinthians; Moisés Silva on Galatians and Philippians; Frank Thielman on Ephesians; G. K. Beale on Colossians and Revelation with Sean McDonough; Jeffrey Weima on 1 and 2 Thessalonians; Philip Towner on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; George Guthrie on Hebrews; D. A. Carson on James through Jude).

And this all-star lineup has adopted a methodology beyond questioning: (1) attention to the NT context of the citation or allusion; (2) attention to the OT context of the citation or allusion; (3) attention to the use of the OT passage in the literature of Second Temple Judaism; (4) attention to textual factors—is the NT passage citing the Hebrew, the Greek translation of the Hebrew, or the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew or could the author be citing from memory?; (5) attention to the way in which the OT quotation or allusion is intended to function; and (6) attention to the theological contribution the NT author uses the OT

text to make. To this point, all this may sound rather bookish, but the utility of this volume is not limited to the groves of academe.

GOOD FOR PREACHING?

Preaching through a book of the New Testament? A great place to begin the study of that biblical book is this commentary, particularly in conjunction with articles in the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. For example, I found the *Commentary's* treatment of the structure of 1 Corinthians particularly insightful. The discussion of 2 Corinthians 3 sheds light on how Paul reads the Old Testament and will prompt long reflection on how Christians should read the Scriptures. The treatment of Paul's quotation of Psalm 68 [ET 69] in Ephesians 4 is fully conversant with the scholarly literature and advances the discussion in a creative, honest, and helpful way. Many more instances could be cited.

This new *Commentary* will establish its place among those reference works that every student and teacher of the Bible will constantly consult. There is simply nothing else like it, which augments the quality of the work done by the contributors and editors. Careful readers of the Bible will praise God for the help they receive from this book, and may the idea that we should not pattern our exegesis of the Old Testament after the method exemplified for us by Jesus and his apostles be dismissed to that place of darkness whence it came.

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1 G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?" *Themelios* 14 (1989): 89–96.

2 Moisés Silva, "The New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Text Form and Authority," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 164.

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