

WITNESS TO THE WORLD

*The Christian mission
in theological perspective*

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To the Church in South Africa—
‘ecumenical’ and ‘evangelical’
Protestant and Roman Catholic
Black and White

CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
PART I CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF MISSION	
1. Mission in Crisis	2
2. Mission and Evangelism	11
3. Theology of Mission	21
4. Contrasting Missionary Models	28
PART II THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF MISSION	
5. A Biblical Theology of Mission	42
6. God's Compassion	50
7. God and History	58
8. Martyria in Old and New Testament	71
9. God's Mission	75
PART III THE THEOLOGY OF MISSION THROUGH THE AGES	
10. The Historical Perspective	86
11. The Early Church	93
12. The Constantinian Era	102
13. From Alexander VI to Pius XII	115
14. From Martin Luther to Martin Kähler	120
15. From John Eliot to John Mott	140
16. Ecumenical Missionary Theology	159
17. Developments Since 1960	182
PART IV TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF MISSION	
18. The Centrality of Mission	198
19. An Emaciated Gospel	202
20. A Diluted Gospel	212
21. The Church and the World	221
22. Mission, History and Eschatology	230
23. Missio Dei	239

NOTES	249
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	264
INDEX OF PERSONAL NAMES	267
GENERAL INDEX	272
INDEX OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES	275

PREFACE

This is not a book for the expert. Its primary purpose is, rather, to acquaint pastors, missionaries, theological students and interested church members with the problems facing the Church-in-mission today. Some knowledge of the general terrain of theology has been presupposed, and yet an attempt has been made to write in such a way that even those readers who have little background, and theological students in the early stages of their studies, should be able to follow the argument with reasonable ease. Where necessary, reference has been made to other publications so as to enable the reader to pursue points not dealt with extensively in this study.

General introductions to missiology appear to be extremely rare in the English language. The best-known ones are, probably, J. H. Bavinck's *Introduction to the Science of Missions* (1960), B. Sundkler's *The World of Mission* (1965), and J. Verkuyl's *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (1978)—all three, incidentally, translations from Dutch and Swedish originals. General and systematic introductions to missiology, in fact, appear to be something for the continental European rather than for the Anglo-Saxon. Apart from the three books mentioned above, we could refer to the introductions to missiology by G. Warneck, J. Richter, T. Ohm, H. W. Gensichen, G. Rosenkranz (all in German), A. Seumois (French) and A. Mulders (Dutch).

What we offer here is, however, not another 'introduction to Missiology'. It is concerned with the *theology* of mission. A large variety of missiological issues (such as the relationship between 'older' and 'younger' churches, the problem of the cross-cultural communication of the gospel, the evaluation of non-Christian religions—to mention but a few) are not discussed. I have limited myself, rather, to some fundamental questions regarding mission, such as: Why mission? What is the aim of mission? How has the Church, in the course of nineteen

centuries, understood her responsibility towards the world? What is the relationship between 'mission' and 'evangelism'? How should we interpret the confusing plethora of answers given today to the question about the Church's mission?

All these are, I believe, questions of fundamental significance. They can, perhaps, all be reduced to one: What does it mean to be the Church of Christ in the world of today? If the following pages stimulate the reader to reflect in a responsible way on these questions, even if this leads to disagreement with me, I will regard my effort as more than worthwhile.

I have attempted to be fair to all theological persuasions. This is, incidentally, also the way in which I try to teach missiology at the University of South Africa. Our students hail from a bewildering variety of theological backgrounds and a rich diversity of racial groups. It is a challenge, but also a privilege, to teach missiology in such circumstances. Hopefully the reader will discover that, in spite of all my attempted fairness, I have not been too hesitant to adopt a viewpoint of my own.

Lastly, I wish to express my gratitude to two friends, my colleague Canon Trevor Verry of the University of South Africa, and Dr Arthur Glasser of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, who have read the entire manuscript and have given me invaluable advice—which, however, I did not always follow. I also wish to express my indebtedness to Dr Peter Toon and Dr Ralph Martin, general editors of this Theological Library, as well as to the publishers, for including this volume in their series.

Pretoria
September, 1979

DAVID J. BOSCH

PART I

CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY
OF MISSION

CHAPTER ONE

MISSION IN CRISIS

‘THEN MISSIONS HAD PROBLEMS ...’

The International Missionary Council (IMC) held its last plenary meeting in Achimota, Ghana, from 28th December 1957 to 8th January 1958. The milestones in the history of the Council were Edinburgh (1910—where it was decided in principle to found the IMC), Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram, near Madras (1938), Whitby, Ontario (1947), Willingen, Germany (1952), and finally Ghana (1958). Three years later, in New Delhi, the IMC was to be integrated into the World Council of Churches (WCC) and thus lose its independent character.

The Ghana meeting was therefore primarily intended as an opportunity for stock-taking and preparation for integration into the WCC. One of the speakers was the German missiologist, Walter Freytag, who discussed the changes in the pattern of Western missions. He was one of the very few who had attended all meetings of the WCC since Jerusalem (1928). He summed up the difference between 1928 and 1958 by saying that, in 1928, missions had problems; by 1958, however, missions had themselves become a problem.

Another two decades have passed since Freytag uttered those words. It has become increasingly clear that his evaluation of the modern missionary situation was correct. Mission is today a greater problem and more disputed than ever.

In his doctoral thesis, *The Theology of Mission: 1928-1958*, Gerald Anderson summarises the situation as follows: In Edinburgh the dominant question was: *How* mission? In Jerusalem it was: *Wherefore* mission? In Tambaram the key question was: *Whence* mission? At the first post-war conference, in Whitby, delegates grappled with the question: *Whither* mission? Finally, in Ghana, the main question was: *What* is mission?

There is undoubtedly considerable schematisation and oversimplification in Anderson's analysis. It nevertheless contains an element of truth to which we should not close our eyes. For the Edinburgh conference, and to a large extent for Jerusalem as well, the questions concerning mission were of a practical nature. How should we embark upon the missionary enterprise? What are we aiming at? Gradually, however, and especially since Tambaram, the questions concerned themselves more and more with matters of principle. Mission was no longer self-evident to everybody. The questions of Willingen and Ghana—Why mission? What is mission?—were not even asked in Edinburgh. Everybody still knew exactly what mission was. It required two world wars to make Christianity aware that not only mission but the Church herself was experiencing a period of crisis unprecedented in her history.

Naturally, even after the two world wars, there were people who believed that the crisis in Church and mission was of a merely transient nature. Even today many adhere to this view. As early as 1951, however, Johannes Dürr warned that it would be a serious misjudgment to believe that we were passing through an extraordinary period and no more, and that we could soon revert to earlier views and approaches as if nothing had changed.¹

The time for clearcut, easy answers has irrevocably passed. We may, if we so wish, proceed as if nothing has happened and repeat the unmodified answers of earlier generations. The danger then, however, is not merely of becoming irrelevant to the situations in which we live but also of being disobedient to the Lord who has called us to mission.

THE END OF AN ERA

We do not, at this point, wish to review the origins of the present crisis of Church and mission in any detail. Hopefully the full extent and gravity of the crisis will unfold itself gradually as we proceed, especially in the third part of this book. It is nevertheless necessary to indicate some of the elements of the nature and extent of this crisis by way of introduction and paradigm.

The history of the Christian Church (and with it the history

of the whole Western world) can be subdivided into three parts: the early Church (the first three centuries), the Constantinian period (from the fourth century onward), and the post-Constantinian or modern era. The Constantinianisation of the Church manifested itself especially in the following characteristics. The small, disparaged community developed into a large, influential Church; the persecuted sect in time became the persecutor of sects and dissidents; the bond between Judaism and Christianity was finally severed; an increasingly close liaison developed between throne and altar; it became a matter of form to belong to the Church; preoccupation with the immortality of the soul replaced the expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God; the gifts of the Spirit were largely unrecognised; the ecclesiastical offices became institutionalised; the Church became wealthy and no longer quite knew what she ought to do with the message of Jesus (especially the Sermon on the Mount); Christian doctrine and practice became increasingly fixed in rigid moulds.²

These elements dominated the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and later also the Protestant churches, and remained almost unchallenged until relatively recently. The acceptance of this domination as self-evident is today largely a thing of the past. It goes without saying that the Constantinian era did not come to an end for all countries and communities at the same time. Whereas the dismantling of Constantinianism began in parts of Western Europe as long ago as the Renaissance, there are even to this day regions and communities where for all practical purposes the population still thinks and acts in Constantinian categories.

On the whole, however, this is a thing of the past. The typical power-structure during the golden age of Constantinianism was, in descending order, God—Church—kings—nobles—people. The Renaissance in principle deleted the Church from the list. The American and French revolutions subsequently challenged the divine rights of kings and nobles. Even in countries where no revolutions took place, the monarchy increasingly ceased to play a decisive role. Of the original order only God and people remained. During the periods of the Enlightenment of Rationalism, and of the rise of the natural sciences in the nineteenth century, God, too, was to

be eliminated. Only man remained. Instead of tracing back his origin to God, man would now trace it back to the world of plants and animals. His position at the bottom of the God—Church—kings—nobility—people scale had been reversed. Now man held a position at the top: man—animals—plants—objects.³

In addition to the termination of the acceptance by all and sundry of the ruling position of the Church and the Christian ethos in society, we must underscore, secondly, the fact of the changed *political* situation of today and the influence this has on Church and mission. During the Middle Ages Christianity was, for all practical purposes, a European affair. The global expansion of Christianity was really to start only in the sixteenth century. This process coincided almost exactly with the expansion of European dominance over the world, inaugurated by the discovery of the Americas by Columbus (1492) and the sea route to India by da Gama (1498). The Vasco da Gama era—as it came to be known—is, however, now irrevocably behind us. In some parts of the world, notably South America, the process of the gradual termination of Western dominance started in the nineteenth century. For most of Asia and Africa it began only in 1947, the year India gained her independence from Great Britain.

The end of the dominance of the 'Christian West' has brought, as an inevitable consequence, far-reaching changes in the way the religion of the West is regarded in the erstwhile colonial territories. In some former colonies missionaries from the West are no longer welcome.

On today's *ecclesiastical* scene we also find ourselves in a totally new situation. Thanks to the global missionary enterprise of the (predominantly Western) churches, there are now younger churches in practically all non-Western countries. However, some of these churches are increasingly refusing to accept assistance, in whatever form, from churches in the West, because such help is regarded as indefensible paternalism and enslavement. In February 1971, John Gatu of Kenya suggested a *moratorium* on missions and missionaries from the West for a period of five years. At both the Bangkok conference of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (1973) and the Lusaka meeting of the All Africa Conference of Churches

(1974) the moratorium call was extensively discussed. Its importance moreover is underlined by the fact that the April 1973 issue of the *International Review of Mission* was devoted almost entirely to the moratorium issue.

Fourthly, we find ourselves today in a totally new situation as far as *religion* in general is concerned. Ever since the Church in Europe, towards the end of the Middle Ages, became aware of the large non-Christian world beyond her borders and of her missionary responsibility to that world, she had little doubt that she and she alone carried the only true message and would eventually triumph. This triumphalism sustained itself uninterruptedly until the second decade of this century. Typical of the then dominant spirit is the title of a book published by Johannes Warneck in 1909, *The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism*. Equally typical is a calculation which Lars Dahle, a Norwegian, made in the year 1900. Comparing the numbers of Christians in the Third World in 1800 and 1900 respectively, he was able to develop a mathematical formula which revealed the exponential growth rate of the Church in the nineteenth century. He proceeded to apply this formula to successive decades of the twentieth century and calmly predicted that by the year 1990 the entire human race would be won for Christianity.

The optimism of Warneck and Dahle is today a rarity. In many circles it is tacitly accepted that Christianity will remain a minority religion. In the year 1900 some 36 per cent of the world population were Christian. By 1973 this percentage had dropped to only 26. According to some calculations a mere 16 per cent of the world's population will still regard themselves as Christians by the end of this century. We should, however, not exclude the possibility of a new awakening which may lead to a quite different picture by the year 2000. Renewal movements in the past, such as the sixteenth-century Reformation and the eighteenth-century Evangelical Awakening would have upset calculations, had there been any in those days.

Some would, of course, argue that the real issue at stake is more radical than the mere question whether or not Christianity will be able to hold its own. The prominent Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng, for instance, takes a hard look at the traditional doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church

(*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). At present, he says, Christians are still a minority in the world; can we really say that those now living outside the fold of the Church are lost? Can we, he adds, regard with complacency the past, knowing that in bygone ages millions of people lived in total isolation from the Church, and say that they are all lost? Can we, looking at the future, continue to insist that salvation is to be found in the Church only, when statistics indicate that Christians will constitute a steadily decreasing percentage of the world's population? Küng therefore believes that the time has come to take a fresh look at this traditional doctrine.⁴ Others have agreed with Küng. Indeed, across the years there are those who have gone even further in their theological speculations. The non-Christian religions should, together with Christianity, be incorporated into something larger (W. E. Hocking); there should be a complete and whole-hearted 'participation' in one another's religion (W. Cantwell Smith); or non-Christians should be regarded as 'anonymous Christians' and their religions as the 'latent Church' (Karl Rahner)—to mention only a few suggested refinements of the ever more popular universalism.

To underscore the whole problem, attention is sometimes drawn to the fact that the Christian mission has only been really successful—at least in the numerical sense of the word—among the adherents of tribal or primal religions. The oldest and best example of this is Europe where pre-Christian paganism took the form of non-literary tribal religions and where the Church scored extraordinary successes. Similar successes were later to be achieved in Africa, Latin America, throughout the Pacific basin, and in parts of Asia. Wherever—so the argument continues—the Church encountered closed, literary 'higher religions', such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, her progress was almost negligible.

Further, we are reminded of the fact that these religions have themselves become missionary. Some Western scholars have even begun to believe that salvation will come from Asia.⁵ The 'spiritual East' rather than the 'materialistic West', so they say, holds the answer to man's deepest needs. Hinduism is no longer confined to India; in the form of the Ramakrishna Mission, Transcendental Meditation, the spread of Yoga, and the *ashrams* of the Hindu saint, Sri Aurobindo, it has appeared in

many Western countries. Islam is no longer confined to North Africa, the Arabic world and isolated parts of Asia, but has expanded to parts of the world where it used to be completely unknown. Buddhism is no longer a religion of south and east Asia only; it has penetrated the West, largely in the form of Zen. The conference of the World Federation of Buddhists held in Cambodia in 1961 revealed an energy and missionary fervour which contrasted significantly with that of some of the large modern Christian world missionary conferences.⁶ Of special importance, in this regard, are the many new religious movements (notably in Japan, but elsewhere as well) which present a special challenge to Christianity. We mention only Sōka Gakkai, a religion which has risen like a phoenix out of the ashes of post-war Japan and which emphasises inner-worldly salvation and happiness. Many of these movements reveal an aggressiveness which—so some would argue—puts the Christian mission to shame.

All this leads to a final element of the contemporary crisis of Church and mission—the fact that, in many circles, there is a great deal of uncertainty about what mission really is. To some extent this present study in its entirety will attempt to grapple with the problem: What is mission? Each of the elements of crisis already identified—the uncertainty of the position of Church and mission in a post-Constantinian world; the shifts in political power, away from the traditionally Christian West; the call for a moratorium and the other critical voices from Third World churches; and the increasing self-assurance and missionary consciousness among adherents of non-Christian religions—has in certain ecclesiastical circles given rise to the question whether Christian mission work still makes sense and, if it does, what form it should take in today's world. A fortnight before his death in August 1977, Max Warren, long-time general secretary of the Church Missionary Society, lamented the 'terrible failure of nerve about the missionary enterprise' in many circles today.⁷ Stephen Neill likewise makes mention of 'a certain failure of nerve and unwillingness'⁸ with regard to mission; and Samuel Moffett, a prominent Presbyterian missionary, writes: 'In my father's day coming home was a kind of triumph. The missionary was a hero. Today he is an anti-hero.

Even in Christian churches I am eyed askance as a throw-back to a more primitive era.⁹

This 'failure of nerve' is by no means universally in evidence. Still, even where this is not the case, people are grappling in a new way with the question about the essence of mission. Is it identical to evangelism in the sense of proclaiming eternal salvation? Does it include social and political involvement, and if so, how? Where does salvation take place? Only in the Church, or in the individual, or in society, or in the 'world', or in the non-Christian religions?

Such, then, is the complex situation facing those who would reflect seriously on mission in our day. The picture is one of change and complexity, tension and urgency, and no small measure of confusion exists over the very nature of mission itself. Our task is to enter the contemporary debate and seek answers that are consonant with the will of God and relevant to the situation in which we find ourselves.

MISSION IN DISPUTE

It is, of course, possible simply to ignore the elements of crisis just referred to (many others could be added) and encourage the Church to proceed as if these matters are only of peripheral concern. Merely repeating vigorous affirmations of the validity of the Christian mission without seeking to take the full measure of the present crisis in mission into account, would however certainly be culpable in God's sight. He wants his Church to discern 'the signs of the times'. To ignore the present crisis in mission may only aggravate its magnitude and gravity.

It is, in fact, theologically far more correct and practically far more realistic to regard the Church's missionary enterprise as something that, because of its very nature and being, will always be in dispute. It was an anomaly that there was a time when mission was *not* disputed, and we would have to ask ourselves in all seriousness whether what the Church was engaged in then, could *truly* be called mission—for instance, when mission work in Europe was conducted with the aid of the sword, or when popes literally promised heaven to those who would chase the Muslims from Palestine, or when mission, no matter how compassionately performed, became the companion

and handmaid of European expansion in Africa and Asia. And yet even in those unfortunate episodes and epochs signs of true mission were always to be found.

The practical missionary endeavours of the Church always remain, under all circumstances, ambivalent. Mission is never something self-evident, and nowhere—neither in the practice of mission nor in even our best theological reflections on mission—does it succeed in removing all confusions, misunderstandings, enigmas and temptations.¹⁰

In our theological reflections on mission it is, therefore, a more serious matter than merely one of making a choice between the optimism of an earlier period and the pessimism of today. Neither is relevant here. Theology concerns itself with reflection on the nature of the gospel, and the theology of mission with the question of the way in which the Church spreads this gospel. Putting it differently: the theology of mission concerns itself with the relationship between God and the world in the light of the gospel.

Walbert Bühlmann is therefore correct when he declares: 'It is certainly no anachronism to go on speaking of mission.'¹¹ Mission is a permanent aspect of the life of the Church as long as the Church is, in some way or another, standing in a relationship to the world. Mission is the traditional and scriptural symbol that gives an answer to the question about the dynamic and functional relationship of the Church to the world.¹² In the words of Emilio Castro: 'Mission is the fundamental reality of our Christian life ... Our life in this world is life in mission.'¹³

CHAPTER TWO

MISSION AND EVANGELISM

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL COMPONENTS

Our conclusion at the end of the previous chapter that mission is a 'fundamental reality' of the Christian's life in this world, does not in itself help to explain *what* mission really is. We shall now try to move a step nearer to an answer to that question by investigating the relationship between mission and evangelism.

The tremendous increase in the use of the word 'mission' in recent decades, especially in circles close to the World Council of Churches, appears to be a hindrance rather than a help. The word 'mission' was once as rare in the vocabulary of certain churches as it has become commonplace in our time.

The escalation in the use of the concept 'mission' has indeed had an inflationary effect, for 'mission' has now become the flag under which practically every ecclesiastical (and sometimes every generally human) activity is sailing. Stephen Neill has therefore repeatedly pointed out that if everything is mission then nothing is mission. Walter Freytag likewise referred to the 'ghost of pan-missionism'. This development reached its apex at the Fourth Assembly of the WCC (Uppsala, 1968) where practically everything was brought under the umbrella-term 'mission'—health and welfare services, youth projects, activities of political interest groups, projects for economic and social development, constructive application of violence, combating racism, the introduction of the inhabitants of the Third World to the possibilities of the twentieth century, and the defence of human rights. Small wonder that Donald McGavran, in an open letter, criticised the Uppsala assembly for allowing mission to develop into 'any good activity at home or abroad which anyone declares to be the will of God'.

Since the middle of the seventies the concept 'evangelism', long neglected and under-accentuated in ecumenical circles,

gained currency again, partly due to the emphasis it received at the International Congress on World Evangelisation and at the Fourth Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, both held in 1974. At the Fifth Assembly of the WCC (Nairobi, 1975) evangelism was, as it were, again given place of honour in the ecumenical movement, especially because of the stimulating contribution of Mortimer Arias and the ensuing discussions. Subsequent to this Assembly, however—as often happens nowadays—the concept ‘evangelism’ has begun to be used as frequently as ‘mission’ and often in the same all-inclusive sense. It then becomes doubtful whether anything of significance was achieved in calling the Church back to her evangelistic task.

These most recent developments have, nevertheless, made one important contribution: they have broken with the earlier view according to which both mission and evangelism had to do only with the verbal proclamation of the gospel. The one difference, in the older definition, was that the objects of mission and evangelism were distinguished.

Sometimes the difference was deemed to be merely geographical in nature. ‘Mission’ was something we did in far-off, pagan countries; ‘evangelism’ was something for our own environment. This difference in meaning was related to the fact that the concept ‘mission’ in the sense of christianisation came into vogue only gradually, beginning with the sixteenth century. This development coincided with the early period of the European colonisation of Africa, Asia and the Americas. ‘Mission’ thus presupposed an established Christian Church in Europe which sent missionaries overseas to convert the heathen. In this way the word developed a strong geographical component. Somebody was a ‘missionary’ if he stood in the service of a church or society in Europe (or another Western base) and was sent to a remote area by that agency. If he worked in the vicinity of his home, he was an ‘evangelist’.

Sometimes a theological rather than a geographical difference was decisive. ‘Mission’ had to do with ‘not-yet-Christians’; ‘evangelism’ meant reviving ‘no-more-Christians’ or nominal Christians. In practice this interpretation did not differ much from the previous one; after all, the ‘not-yet-Christians’ usually were in the countries of the Third World and the ‘no-more-Christians’ in the West. Nevertheless, for some the primary

consideration was indeed theological. The Dutch theologian A. A. van Ruler argues that one has to distinguish between the apostolate in the West and in non-Western cultures, otherwise one thinks individualistically and unhistorically. God-in-Christ, he avers, has walked a long way with the peoples of the West and they cannot undo this history, even if they wished to. In Europe God himself is (in a way quite different from that which obtains in Asia) the point of contact for the gospel. A secularised, de-christianised European is not a pagan. The Westerner *cannot*, in fact, revert to paganism, for that has been totally destroyed in Europe. He can never again become pre-Christian (or pagan), but at most post-Christian. For precisely this reason we have to maintain the difference between mission and evangelism.¹

In Roman Catholic circles this distinction is often still in vogue, albeit without explicitly using van Ruler's arguments. We find this for instance in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In both the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Decree on Mission (*Ad Gentes*), the 'not-yet-Christians' are described as objects of mission; albeit the Council fathers refrained from identifying these 'not yet-Christians' with inhabitants of specific geographical areas.

It may, however, also happen that mission and evangelism (both still essentially understood as verbal proclamation) are used as alternatives without distinguishing between the addressees. Hendrik Kraemer and Johannes Hoekendijk for instance both pleaded for an interpretation of mission and evangelism as synonyms: Europe was, just as Asia and Africa, a mission field, with the Church in a minority position. Whether we work among non-believers in Europe or Asia, and whether we call this mission or evangelism, ultimately makes no difference.

In the English-speaking world the two words are likewise often used as interchangeable concepts, apparently without necessarily reflecting any theological considerations. The same guileless usage is still reflected in the name of the World Council of Churches' 'Commission on World Mission and Evangelism'. When this division was created in 1961, its mandate was defined as follows: '... to further the proclamation to the whole world of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to the end that

all men may believe in him and be saved'. Philip Potter thus correctly points out that 'mission', 'evangelism' and 'witness' are, as a rule, interchangeable concepts in ecumenical literature.

IN SIX CONTINENTS

We have already inferred that objections could be raised to all the interpretations discussed above. If one maintains that the difference between mission and evangelism is essentially of a geographical nature, Christians in the West may be accused of persisting in thinking in colonialistic categories and of simply dividing the world into a 'Christian' West and a 'non-Christian' Third World. This distinction is not acceptable any more and in any case both existentially and theologically indefensible. This is one of the reasons why, especially since the meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism in Mexico City in 1963, ecumenical spokesmen tend to talk about 'mission in *six continents*'. The three continents' view of mission, in which the geographical component was the constitutive element, is thus increasingly rejected.

The attempt to confine mission to work among 'not-yet-Christians' and evangelism to work among 'no-more-Christians' does not provide a solution either. It becomes increasingly difficult to draw this distinction. Is a secularised and dechristianised European, whose parents and grandparents have already lost all contact with the Church, a not-yet-Christian or a no-more-Christian? Van Ruler may be correct in contending that such a person is a post-Christian rather than a pre-Christian. This, however, merely calls for a special approach in communicating the gospel to him; it does not necessitate a separate theological terminology. To this we must add that, increasingly, we have to do with people in Asia and Africa whose grandparents were Christians, but who themselves have been completely secularised and dechristianised. Would we regard them as objects of mission or of evangelism? They are 'no-more-Christians' in an environment made up predominantly of 'not-yet-Christians'.

Would it be preferable then, to use 'mission' and 'evangelism' interchangeably, as the tendency is in many English-speaking churches? Then when an evangelistic campaign is being

launched, whether it is in New York or New Delhi, we refer to it either as 'evangelism' or as 'a mission to ...'.

This view has some advantages but does not provide a solution to our problem of trying to establish what mission is. Where the first view we discussed absolutises the geographical component, the danger in this third view is that this component may disappear altogether. What the Church does *in* England or Germany is, after all, also 'mission'; therefore she does not *need* to cross geographical and cultural frontiers any more to become involved in mission. Traditionally mission *only* had to do with the non-Western world; that was wrong and one-sided. Today we face the possibility of an opposite one-sidedness. People can argue that mission will have less and less to do with the great unfinished task which, at least for the time being, awaits us especially in the Third World. Church and mission then develop a lamentable myopia and parochialism, and lose the breadth of vision of people like Wesley who could say, 'The world is my parish.'

GOD'S SALVIFIC INTERVENTION

Should we not approach the whole matter of the relationship between mission and evangelism from a completely different angle? We have seen that the traditional view was that these two activities differed only in respect of their 'objects'. Perhaps the difference should be looked for in the nature of the two enterprises themselves. If we concede this, we may define the relationship as follows: Mission is more comprehensive than evangelism.

We have already mentioned that there has of late indeed been a tendency in ecumenical circles to define mission as something more comprehensive than used to be the case. This is in itself a promising development. Two points of criticism may, however, be raised. First, mission may be defined so comprehensively that, in the words of Neill, everything becomes mission. It becomes a collective noun for everything God does as well as for everything Christians believe they should be doing. Secondly, a problem develops in that, since more or less the middle of the 1970s, evangelism has often been defined as widely and

comprehensively as mission. And then we are back where we started.

There is even a tendency to widen the meaning of the word 'evangelism' and to narrow the meaning of 'mission'. 'Evangelism' then becomes the umbrella-term 'for the entire manner by which the gospel becomes a reality in man's life', and includes proclamation, translation, dialogue, service, and presence, in other words all the activities, methods and techniques of the Church's involvement with the world, whereas 'mission' becomes a purely theological concept, 'used for the origin, the motivation and the ratification' of all these activities.²

In his contribution to the Lausanne Congress (1974) and in his very readable *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, John Stott made a commendable attempt to bring clarity to the whole discussion. He came to the conclusion that 'mission' is a comprehensive concept, 'embracing everything which God sends his people into the world to do'. Evangelism, on the other hand, is less comprehensive and actually constitutes a component of 'mission'. Mission is then defined as 'evangelism plus social action'.

This view undoubtedly has merit, but it does not satisfy in all respects. Evangelism is something more than a mere component of mission and mission is something more dynamic than the sum total of evangelism and social action. It is precisely when we subdivide mission into two such distinctly different components that a battle between the two for supremacy may easily develop. Stott himself is, in some respects, a victim of this. In his chapter on 'mission' he still, with approval, quotes a document of the National Evangelical Anglican Congress that 'evangelism and compassionate service belong together in the mission of God' (p. 27), that the priority of one or the other may be dictated by circumstances (p. 28), and that Jesus' 'Great Commandment' and 'Great Commission' belong inseparably together (pp. 23 and 29). In his chapter on 'salvation', however, social action is relegated to a secondary position. We shall look at this whole problem more closely at a later stage.

We should rather try to explain the relationship and difference between mission and evangelism in another way, while making use of some of the analyses of Stott, and also of others, among them Jürgen Moltmann.³

Mission and evangelism have both to do with that aspect of the Church's life where she crosses frontiers towards the world. This is not the only feature of her existence. She is also to be a worshipping presence, providing for the building-up of her members (*oikodomē*) through liturgy (*leitourgia*), fellowship (*koinōnia*) and teaching (*didaskalia*). We may therefore not call everything the Church does 'mission' or 'evangelism'.⁴

Mission has to do with the crossing of frontiers. It describes the total task which God has set the Church for the salvation of the world. It is the task of the Church in movement, the Church that lives for others, the Church that is not only concerned with herself, that turns herself 'inside out' (Hoekendijk), towards the world.

Mission thus defined is comprehensive (but not all-inclusive) and comprises more than the proclamation of the gospel. When Jesus begins his public ministry in Nazareth, he outlines it in terms of mission: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4.18-19). The Mexico City conference, to which we have already referred, rightly described mission as 'the common witness of the whole Church, bringing the whole gospel to the whole world'.

Mission is the symbol of the Church moving towards the world. The Nairobi assembly of the WCC (1975) formulated this in the following words:

The Gospel is good news from God, our Creator and Redeemer ... The Gospel *always* includes the announcement of God's Kingdom and love through Jesus Christ, the offer of grace and forgiveness of sins, the invitation to repentance and faith in Him, the summons to fellowship in God's Church, and command to witness to God's saving words and deeds, the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hinders human wholeness, and a commitment to risk life itself.

There may be questions about some aspects of this formulation and about the practical implementation thereof by the WCC

itself, but it does give expression to the wholeness of God's involvement through the Church with the world. It identifies some of the frontiers the Church should cross in her mission to the world. These frontiers may be ethnic, cultural, geographical, religious, ideological or social. Mission takes place where the Church, in her total involvement with the world and the comprehensiveness of her message, bears her testimony in word and deed in the form of a servant, with reference to unbelief, exploitation, discrimination and violence, but also with reference to salvation, healing, liberation, reconciliation and righteousness.

THE CENTRE OF GOD'S MANDATE

What, then, is evangelism? We noted that John Stott defines it as a component of mission, adding that 'social action' is the other part. Evangelism is, however, *more* than a mere segment of mission (which, of course, as segment, may easily be isolated from the other segment). Evangelisation is, rather, an *essential dimension of mission*. It is the core of the Christian mission to the world, 'the centre of the all-embracing mandate of God to the Church', as Hans Bürki puts it.⁵

John Stott is therefore correct when he argues that evangelism should not be described in terms of its 'objects' or results (pp. 37-40), but rather of its *contents*. When he identifies the contents more closely, he rightly does it in the form of an exposition of the New Testament *kērygma* which, as he puts it, consists of at least five elements, 'the gospel events', 'the gospel witnesses', 'the gospel affirmations', 'the gospel promises', and 'the gospel demands' (pp. 44-54). He explicitly says (p. 40) that evangelism is more than verbal proclamation. The preaching of the word should be accompanied by signs of the approaching Kingdom and a new life in obedience and community.

Evangelism is moreover, by virtue of the primary meaning of the word *euangelion*, always the bringing of good news. It always contains an element of invitation: The God of grace invites us. The *euangelion* is, however, never good news in general, but always quite concretely and contextually good news

over against the 'bad news' which threatens and governs the lives of the addressees.

Evangelism is thus never merely the proclamation of 'objective' truths, but of what Emil Brunner used to refer to as 'truth as encounter'.⁶ The person or Church which evangelises is not only an agent of evangelism but himself a part of the message. The Church's credibility is of the utmost importance, not only in order that her evangelistic enterprise may 'succeed', but to allow her witness to be authentic and to give substance to it. The gospel takes shape concretely in the witness, in the Church, and is never a general, objective, immutable revelation. True evangelism is incarnational.⁷ The situation of the person to whom the gospel is being brought and the involvement, with that situation, of the one who brings the gospel, concretely determine the content of evangelism—naturally nurtured by the Scriptures. The New Testament reveals this pattern in many ways; the content of evangelism frequently differs, depending on whether it is addressed to Zacchaeus, or the criminal on the cross, or the rich young ruler, or Cornelius, or the Ethiopian official, or Saul in Damascus. Truth is, in each of these instances, truth-as-encounter. Immediately after his assertion that evangelism is the centre of God's all-embracing mandate to his Church, Hans Bürki correctly states: 'But different times and different societies need different emphasis. In one country and in one place the city slums are such that suburban Christians just cannot go on a kind of an evangelistic trip to "preach the Gospel" to these "poor masses" and then retreat to their comfortable homes, without blaspheming the love of God.' If there is no truth-as-encounter, in other words, if those who evangelise are not themselves part of the message they proclaim, there is no evangelism.

Now, if we delineate evangelism in this way, it comes close to the description of *mission* we have formulated above. There should be no objection to this. Paul Löffler says: 'When referring to its theological meaning, "evangelism" is practically identical to "mission"'. When referring to the evangelistic witness, "evangelism" more specifically means "the communication of Christ to those who do not consider themselves Christians" ... Thus, evangelism is sufficiently distinct and yet not separate from mission.⁸ It also has, like mission, to do with

the crossing of frontiers, but then very specifically with those between belief and unbelief. Emilio Castro adds, '... it will be "evangel" only to the extent that it points to the wholeness of God's love breaking through in the world ...'⁹ It therefore remains an essential dimension of mission, in which the crossing of all frontiers between Church and world remains crucial. The one may never be seen in isolation from the other.¹⁰

CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGY OF MISSION

FOUNDATION, MOTIVE, AIM

We are specifically concerned with the *theology* of mission, which Anderson describes as a study of 'the basic presuppositions and underlying principles which determine, from the standpoint of the Christian faith, the motives, message, methods, strategy and goals of the Christian world mission'.¹ Our concern here is therefore less with the *how* of mission—the study of which belongs elsewhere—than with the *why*, the *whereto* and the *what*.

To put it differently: in the theology of mission we occupy ourselves primarily with the *foundation*, the *motive* and the *aim* of mission. We could, supposedly, subdivide the theology of mission according to these three aspects. Some missiologists, such as Thomas Ohm,² have tried to do precisely that, and with some success. In reality, however, foundation, motive and aim are so intertwined that it would be difficult to treat them completely separately. After all, the motive of mission usually arises from the foundation, whereas both have a decisive influence on the aim. If it is judged, for instance, that the source of mission is to be found in the Church, the motive of mission will also be found there and the extension or planting of the Church regarded as the primary aim of mission. Similarly, if Western Christian culture is considered to be the basis of mission, then the consciousness of the superiority of that culture will function as missionary motive and its expansion as missionary aim. Instead of treating foundation, motive and aim each in isolation, we should therefore rather pay attention to their interaction. The two examples just referred to in any case underline the necessity of careful theological distinctions in our study.