

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Theological Students Fellowship (TSF) Bulletin (US)* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tsfbulletin-us.php



BULLETIN

THEOLOGICAL STUDENTS FELLOWSHIP

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1982

Vol. 6, No. 1

\$2.00

EDITOR

Mark Lau Branson TSF General Secretary

ADVISORY EDITORS

Clark H. Pinnock, *Systematic Theology*
McMaster Divinity College

Paul A. Mickey, *Practical Theology*
Duke Divinity School

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Stephen T. Davis, *Philosophy*
Claremont McKenna College

Donald Dayton, *News Analysis*
Northern Baptist Theological Seminary

Robert L. Hubbard, *Old Testament*
Denver Seminary

Grant R. Osborne, *New Testament*
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Donald Tinder, *Church History*
New College, Berkeley

David Lowes Watson, *Evangelism*
Perkins School of Theology

PERSPECTIVES EDITORS

Elward D. Ellis Madison, WI

Luis Cortes Philadelphia, PA

Nancy A. Hardesty Atlanta, GA

Thomas F. Stransky Oak Ridge, NJ

FACULTY CONTRIBUTORS

Bernard Adeney Church Divinity School
of the Pacific

Donald Bloesch University of Dubuque
Theological Seminary

Geoffrey W. Bromiley Fuller Theological
Seminary

Charles Ellenbaum College of DuPage

Vernard Eller University of LaVerne

David Gill New College, Berkeley

Larry Hurtado University of Manitoba

Susanne Johnson Perkins School
of Theology

Richard Mouw Calvin College

Thomas Oden Drew University
Theological School

PHEME PERKINS Boston College

Bernard Ramm American Baptist
Seminary of the West

Gerald Sheppard Union Theological
Seminary

Keith Yandell University of Wisconsin

Gregory A. Youngchild New Haven, CT

FOUNDATIONS

How I Use Tradition in Doing Theology Clark H. Pinnock 2

INQUIRY

Nag Hammadi and the New Testament PHEME PERKINS 6

EDITORIALS

TSF Bulletin Readers: Unity and Diversity John Duff 8

INTERSECTION

Striving for Obedience, Haunted by Dualism
The Consultation on the Relationship between
Evangelism and Social Responsibility Mark Lau Branson 10

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual Formation in the Seminary Community:
Signs of Renewed Concern Dick Daniels 13

ACADEME

Student Initiative: A Strategy for Service Mark Lau Branson 15

REVIEWS

Book Reviews (Itemized on back cover) 19

Striving for Obedience, Haunted by Dualism

The Consultation on the Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Responsibility

by Mark Lau Branson

... the Kingdom of God is the present inner rule of God in the moral and spiritual dispositions of the soul with its seat in the heart. God does rule as King in the lives of those "born again." He is not present as Savior and King in the lives of the "world" who are already condemned because of unbelief. ... The mission of the church is primarily evangelism even though good works and social responsibilities are essential expressions of Christian life.

—Arthur P. Johnson, U.S.A.

Both evangelism and social responsibility can only be understood in the light of the fact that in Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God has invaded history. ... The Kingdom of God is ... God's redemptive power released in history and bringing good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, liberation for the oppressed. ... In actual practice the question as to what comes first, evangelism or social action, is irrelevant. In every concrete situation the needs themselves provide the guidelines for the definition of priorities.

—Rene Padilla, Argentina

Conservative Christians have a tendency to combat one heresy with another. They confront the "Social Gospel" with an individualized and purely spiritual view of salvation. They oppose a "realized eschatology" with an other-worldly, futuristic eschatological emphasis. ... Such "reactionary theology" does no justice to the complexity and richness of biblical teaching. ...

Christian ethics as an ethics of change should not be understood only in terms of individual repentance. It must also be extended to the area of social relationships and societal structures.

—Peter Kuzmic, Yugoslavia

The ecumenical One World utopia is based on a monistic universalism: It does not take into account the forces of radical evil which are effective in this world, and which poison every human progress. ... [This] ecumenical vision ... builds on ideological premises which are completely unacceptable to biblical evangelical thinking.

—Peter Beyerhaus, West Germany

Beyerhaus immediately associated some Christian theologians with Marxist philosophy because they talk of human rights and human dignity. It should be clearly stated that liberation is not neo-Marxism,

Mark Lau Branson, editor of TSF Bulletin, attended the Consultation as one of ten invited representatives of the press.

but biblical truth. Its seeds lie not in Das Kapital, but in the Book of Exodus. God has heard the cry of the oppressed and set them free.

—Gordon Moyes, Australia

... [It] is false anthropology, sociology and biblical theology to divorce the personal sphere entirely from the social sphere. Men live in a series of integrated relationships. How is it possible to be a mature man in Christ if one is being mercilessly exploited by others? ... The Church's mission is summed up in the two commandments to love God and to love our neighbour, when these are understood as mutually integral, interdependent and interpretative of one another.

—Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, India

Those were the starting positions, developed in fourteen papers and responses. The Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility, meeting during June, brought together sixty evangelicals from around the world to listen, read, study, converse and write. Under the sponsorship of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, the conference was chaired by Bong Rin Ro (Taiwan) and Gottfried Osei-Mensah (England). The geographic distribution of participants and consultants was notable—twenty-five from the Third World and twenty-three from the North Atlantic. The denominational spectrum was also widely varied.

Position papers examined issues raised within several major categories: church history and historical theology, contemporary theological formulations, eschatology and missiology. A number of ministry projects were presented as models which shed light on the discussions about evangelism and social action: John Perkins' Voice of Calvary Ministries (Mississippi), World Vision's "Precious Jewels" program (Philippines), a self-help development project among the B'laam sponsored by the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches, and a health care practice in rural India which received awards from Hindu state authorities and was the subject of a BBC documentary. These "case studies" modeled a biblical integration of evangelism and social responsibility for which many of the week's deliberations failed to find a theoretical framework. Perhaps this occurred because biblical material, claimed as the basis for evangelical thought, focuses on concrete, historical activities of God and his people, and is thus more easily translatable into action than into systematic theology.

Although we did not witness any substantial evidence of repentance, changed minds, new theological formulations or new ministry partnerships, a certain amount of respect and increased understand-

ing were apparent. Maybe that is all that can occur in such times of study and conversation. Conversions (changed minds and behavior) probably come more from involvement in partnership than from theoretical discussions, no matter how sincere the effort. Yet the conceptual framework is important. The contributions, responses, and interaction at the consultation did help clarify the issues.

Arthur Johnson spoke of a *deja vu*—citing current parallels with earlier shifts in the YMCA and the Student Volunteer Movement. He contended that social action replaced evangelism, and that “there is a danger that evangelicals right now will lose the primacy of evangelism and repeat the cycle of 80 years ago.” Such a reading is a misinterpretation of history. These movements, along with much of the liberal church of that era, had gone through a world view change. They were living out an impoverished world view with decreasing vision and power. Having lost confidence in Scripture, faithfulness to church creeds, and belief in a personal God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, these people and organizations had no way to maintain a biblical mission. Social action did not displace evangelism; rather the loss of faith in Jesus Christ created a predictable result—proclamation decreased. If a people are faithful to Scripture, both evangelism and social action will increase.

Evangelical missions today *are* facing a crisis. But Johnson has drawn the wrong parallel with the earlier betrayal of the gospel. Evangelicals in the North Atlantic are now also often crippled by an impoverished world view. This world view splits thinking from acting and preaching from serving. This dualism is tacitly assumed in the current debate about the relationship between evangelism and social action. The case studies and papers at the consultation from Argentina, India, South Africa and elsewhere show that this dualism has not similarly affected other parts of the world. Historical studies, in fact, would probably show that the degree of North Atlantic influence on national churches corresponds to the severity of the problem. Where all or significant parts of a national church are indigenized, a more holistic framework for mission is possible.

Kefa Sempangi provided a perceptive analysis concerning the church in Uganda, a church still strongly influenced by the dualism of early missionary efforts. How could a nation that is at least 75% Christian allow Idi Amin to gain such power? That church has had a long history of avoiding issues of politics and economics. Only spiritual concerns and works of charity are encouraged. This history has left the church unequipped to deal with the terror of Amin or even the continuing political and economic crises. Are there parallels with pre-Nazi Germany? Klaus Boehmuel, a West German currently teaching in Canada, observed notable similarities, but did not want to emphasize the parallels because he believed the Christian faith of Germany

had been much more nominal. Except for the Confessing Church (which produced the Barmen Declaration), many Christians lacked both spiritual depth and political discernment. Yet Sempangi would argue that the same was true in Uganda. A form of religion was present in both situations. It was perhaps more traditional or orthodox in Uganda than in Germany, but the results were the same—the church

Evangelicals in the North Atlantic are crippled by an impoverished world view which splits thinking from acting and preaching from serving.

was unable to confront the forces of darkness. Therefore it seems that spiritual vitality, orthodox beliefs and faithful involvement of Christians in society are actually intimately related.

Peter Kuzmic of Yugoslavia provided insights into the church's mission under Communist rule. The church is not allowed to enter political spheres. Worship is allowed, but witnessing is illegal. The church is finally forced into a non-biblical position of social irrelevance. Thus Communism coerces the church to be what Marxism says: irrelevant, an opiate. The church must therefore seek new forms and strategies for expressing the work of the kingdom.

As Harold Lindsell discussed his belief that the church as an organization could become corporately involved in “acts of mercy” but not in causes of justice, he was questioned concerning specific examples. Would visiting prisoners (an act of mercy) be an allowable official activity of the church even in South Africa, where it easily becomes a political act? Would giving food to the hungry have been encouraged in the 1960s if those who were hungry lived in North Vietnam? Lindsell admitted that there is actually a continuum rather than clearly delineated categories.

Ironically, although Lindsell and others were confronting such “grey areas” in discussions all week, these were forgotten when it came time to produce a statement. Hardline positions began returning and energy for listening seemed to wane. Even so, the statement that emerged is an amazingly honest, faithful step forward. The drafting committee's diligent work and John Stott's ability to synthesize and capture nuances were remarkable. The entire statement and many of the papers will be published this spring. Some noteworthy paragraphs are included here which show how the creativity and hard work of such an international gathering can produce a valuable analysis and prescription for the church.

EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: AN EVANGELICAL COMMITMENT

These selections provide only a very small sampling from a forty-page report. Some final editing is yet to be completed prior to publishing this spring. Further information is available from LCWE, P.O. Box 1179, Wheaton, IL 60187 or from the WEF Unit on Ethics and Society, 312 W. Logan St., Philadelphia, PA 19144.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Historical Background

It appears to us that evangelism and social concern have been intimately related to one another throughout the history of the church, although the relationship has been expressed in a variety of ways. Christian people often have engaged in both activities quite unselfconsciously, without feeling any need to define what they were doing or why. So the problem of their relationship, which led to the convening of this Consultation, is comparatively new, and for historical reasons it is of particular importance to evangelical Christians.

The Great Awakening in North America, the Pietistic Movement in Germany, and the Evangelical Revival under the Wesleys in Britain, which all took place in the early part of the 18th century, proved a great stimulus to philanthropy as well as evangelism. The next generation of British evangelicals founded missionary societies and gave conspicuous service in public life, notably Wilberforce in the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself, and Shaftesbury in the improvement of conditions in the factories.

But at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the so-called

“social gospel” was developed by theological liberals. Some of them confused the Kingdom of God with Christian civilization in general, and with social democracy in particular, and they went on to imagine that by their social programs they could build God's Kingdom on earth. It seems to have been in over-reaction to this grave distortion of the Gospel that many evangelicals became suspicious of social involvement. And now that evangelicals are recovering a social conscience and rediscovering our evangelical social heritage, it is understandable that some of our brothers and sisters are looking askance at us and suspecting us of relapsing into the old heresy of the social gospel. But the responsible social action which the biblical Gospel lays upon us, and the liberal “social gospel” which was a perversion of the true Gospel, are two quite different things. . . .

Particular Situations and Gifts

In wanting to affirm that evangelism and social action belong to each other, we are not meaning that neither can ever exist in independence of the other. . . . There are . . . occasions when it is legitimate to concentrate on one or the other of these two Christian duties. It is no wrong to hold an evangelistic crusade without accompanying program of social service. Nor is it wrong to feed the hungry in a time of famine without first preaching to them, for, to quote an African proverb, “an empty belly has no ears.” It was similar in the days of Moses. He brought the Israelites in Egypt the good news of their liberation, “but they did not listen to him, because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage” (Exod. 6:9).

There is another justification for sometimes separating evangelism and social ac-

tion, in addition to the existential demands of a particular situation: namely, the distribution of spiritual gifts. The church is a charismatic community, the Body of Christ, whose members are endowed by the Holy Spirit with different gifts for different forms of ministry. . . .

Three Kinds of Relationships

Having seen that both particular situations and specialist callings can legitimately separate our evangelistic and social responsibilities, we are now ready to consider how in general they relate to one another. . . .

First, social action is a *consequence* of evangelism. That is, evangelism is the means by which God brings people to new birth, and their new life manifests itself in the service of others. . . . We can go further than this, however. Social responsibility is more than the consequence of evangelism; it is also one of its principal aims. For Christ gave himself for us not only "to redeem us from all iniquity" but also "to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:14). . . . In saying this, we are not claiming that compassionate service is an automatic consequence of evangelism or of conversion, however. Social responsibility, like evangelism, should therefore be included in the teaching ministry of the church. . . .

Secondly, social action can be a *bridge* to evangelism. It can break down prejudice and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain a hearing for the Gospel. Jesus himself performed works of mercy before proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. . . . Further, by seeking to serve people, it is possible to move from their "felt needs" to their deeper need concerning their relationship with God. Whereas, as another participant put it, "if we turn a blind eye to the suffering, the social oppression, the alienation and loneliness of people, let us not be surprised if they turn a deaf ear to our message of eternal salvation." . . .

Thirdly, social action . . . accompanies [evangelism] as its *partner*. . . . This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus, who not only preached the Gospel but fed the hungry and healed the sick. In his ministry, *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakonia* (service) went hand in hand. His words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be of ours. Both also issue from the lordship of Jesus, for he sends us out into the world both to preach and to serve. . . .

The Question of Primacy

First, evangelism has a certain priority. We are not referring to an invariable *temporal* priority, because in some situations a social ministry will take precedence, but to a *logical* one. The very fact of Christian social responsibility presupposes socially responsible Christians, and it can only be by evangelism and discipling that they have become such. If social action is a consequence and aim of evangelism (as we have asserted), then evangelism must precede it. . . .

Secondly, evangelism relates to people's eternal destiny, and in bringing them Good News of salvation, Christians are doing what nobody else can do. Seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls, since an authentic love for our neighbor will lead us to serve him or her as a whole person. Nevertheless, if we must choose, then we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all humankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and that therefore a person's eternal, spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal and material well-being (cf. II Cor. 4:16-18). . . . Yet this . . . must not make us indifferent to the degradations of human poverty and oppression. The choice, we believe, is largely conceptual. In practice, as in the public ministry of Jesus, the two are inseparable, at least in open societies, and we shall seldom if ever have to choose between them. Rather than competing with each other, they mutually support and strengthen each other in an upward spiral of increased concern for both. . . .

SALVATION

We all are agreed that salvation is a broad term in the sense that it embraces the totality of God's redemptive purpose. . . . Having agreed on . . . three dimensions of salvation (personal, social, and cosmic), we went on to pose a further question: is salvation experienced only by those who consciously confess Christ as Lord and Savior? Or is it right in addition to refer to the emergence of justice and peace in the wider community as "salvation," and to attribute to the grace of Christ every beneficial social transformation? Some of us do not find salvation-language inappropriate for such situations, even when Christ is not acknowledged in them. Most of us, however, consider that it is more prudent and biblical to reserve the vocabulary of salvation for the experience of reconciliation with God through Christ and its direct consequences. None of us would dream of following those who have portrayed Hitler's Germany or Mao's China or Castro's Cuba as having experienced "salvation." All of us are united in wishing to honor Christ as universal Lord. . . .

HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY

False Dreams

We have been conscious of the special need to distinguish between the social responsibility to which we as Christians are called, its reasons and its content, and that which modern ideologies have generated. Both dogmatic and Messianic Marxisms, for example, proclaim a bogus millennium which recognizes neither the Creator of the world, nor his Christ, and yet anticipates that by changing social structures, frequently by violent means, they will by human effort alone bring about a fully just and perfect society. A program for change such as this, because it denies the stubborn reality of evil and ignores our deepest human needs, is bound to end in failure, even in disaster.

We also reject the Messianic Western dream which aims at erecting a counterfeit materialistic Kingdom. We recognize, of course, the divine command to subdue the earth and harness its resources for the good of all. But selfish secular materialism pur-

sues its own economic growth irrespective of the need to conserve the environment and to serve the development of the poorer nations. It is characterized by self-absorbed individualism and insensitive affluence, which are incompatible with Christian—let alone truly human—values, and which unwittingly foster increasing inequality between the rich and the poor. . . .

It was, therefore, with relief that we turned from all ideological substitutes to the authentic Christian hope, to the vision of the triumphant return of Jesus, and of the Kingdom he will consummate, which God has revealed to us in his Word. Our concern was to relate this hope to history, and to our concrete duties within history. . . .

The Eschatological Vision

The eschatological vision . . . is a revelation of what God himself is going to do in the end. This vision can give both direction and inspiration to our present day. . . . The glimpses God has given us of the end disclose the kind of community life which is pleasing to him. . . .

GUIDELINES FOR ACTION

Much of our debate has been at a theological level, for we have felt the need to wrestle with the issues which relate to salvation and kingdom, history and eschatology. Nevertheless, our theologizing all has been with a view to determining what practical action we should take to forward the mission which God has given us. . . .

Forms of Evangelism and Social Responsibility

It may be easiest to divide our Christian social responsibility into two kinds, which for simplicity's sake we will call "social service" and "social action," and which can be distinguished from each other in several ways:

<i>Social Service</i>	<i>Social Action</i>
Relieving Human Need	Removing the Causes of Human Need
Philanthropic Activity	Political and Economic Activity
Seeking to Minister to Individuals and Families	Seeking to Transform the Structures of Society
Works of Mercy	The Quest for Justice

In making this necessary functional distinction, we recognize that in practice it is not as neat as it looks. On the one hand, social action of a political kind lacks integrity if it is not supported by a personal commitment to social service. On the other hand, some works of mercy have inescapably political implications. . . .

The Local Church in a Free Society

In spite of our differing theological and cultural backgrounds, on account of which some of us assign social action (of a political kind) to individuals and groups rather than to churches, all of us agree that the church has definite evangelistic and social responsibilities. This applies especially to the local church, which should be committed to the total well-being of the community in which it is permanently situated. . . .

So . . . whenever the Word of God speaks clearly, the church must speak clearly also, as for example did the German Confessing Church in the Barmen Declaration of 1934, and the Norwegian Church while Norway was under German occupation in World War II. If such speech is condemned as political, we need to remember that silence would be political, too. We cannot avoid taking sides. But when the teaching of Scripture seems unclear, and human reason has to seek to develop a position out of biblical principles, then the church should make a pronouncement only after thorough study and consultation. When the church cannot agree on an issue, then the issue cannot be dealt with in the name of the church; instead, Christian individuals and groups should handle it. . . .

All of us are agreed that a local church should not normally engage in partisan politics, either advocating a particular party or attempting to frame political programs. We also are agreed, however, that the local church has a prophetic ministry to proclaim the law of God and to teach justice, should seek to be the conscience of the nation, and has a duty to help the congregation develop a Christian mind, so that the people may learn to think Christianly even about controversial questions. . . .

The Church Under Repression

There are many settings in the world where today's church is like the early church, where it suffers from harassment or active persecution. We have thought particularly about churches repressed by Marxist, Muslim, or extreme rightist regimes, or by state-related churches. In such situations, it has been suggested to us, the church always has faced three temptations—to *conform* (tailoring the Gospel to the prevailing ideology), to *fight* (losing its identity by resorting to worldly weapons), or to *withdraw* (denying its mission, betraying its calling, and losing its relevance). . . . Our brothers and sisters in repressive situations have recommended that, resisting these three temptations, the church rather should develop a critical involvement in society, while preserving its primary allegiance to Christ. . . .

There are occasions of moral principle in which the church must take its stand, whatever the cost. For the church is the community of the Suffering Servant who is the Lord, and it is called to serve and suffer with him. It is not popularity which is the authentic mark of the Church, but the prophetic suffering, and even martyrdom. "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Tim. 3:14). May we be given grace to stand firm! . . .

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO OBEDIENCE

We request the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the World Evangelical Fellowship, who jointly sponsored our Consultation, and other bodies of like mind, to call Christians and churches around the world to a more costly commitment to the lost, the needy, and the oppressed, for the greater glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.