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EVANGELICALS RETHINKING EVANGELISM

- B. Nicholls: *In Word and Deed*, 1985, 238 pp, £6-95 (Paternoster Press)
- R. Padilla: *Mission Between Times: Essays on the Kingdom*, 1985, 199 pp, £10-95 (Eerdmans)
- C. Marchant: *Signs in the City*, 1985, 158 pp, £1-75 (Hodder)
- R. Dowley: *Towards the Recovery of a Lost Bequest*, n.d., no pagination (Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission)

Many regard the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation, held in 1974, as a watershed for evangelicals. The Berlin Congress on Evangelism eight years earlier was supposed to have settled the question of the theology of evangelism: Lausanne was free to deal with the methods by which that theology would win the world for Christ. But it was not to be. The participants at Lausanne found themselves hearing the Spirit of God saying new things and to some extent rewriting the proposed agenda. Some of the most persuasive voices at the congress were those of Samuel Escobar and René Padilla from Latin America. The persuasive call was for a rejection of cultural Christianity (that is Christianity which was indistinguishable from Western culture) in favour of a radical discipleship in which the social implications of the gospel were given full weight. These imperatives, familiar to other groups within the church, sounded novel to evangelicals, though they were in fact a rediscovery of true evangelical tradition, which sadly had got side-tracked because of evangelical over-reaction to the social gospel movement earlier this century.

Ever since 1974, evangelicals writing about mission have had to react to the insights of Lausanne's message. Not all have welcomed it and some have positively struggled with it. But many, and the books under review are among them, have sought to expand and apply the Lausanne position. The crux of the debate has concerned the relationship between evangelism and social concern. Is social concern a partner to evangelism, a distraction from evangelism, a means to evangelism, or a result of evangelism? Or perhaps social action is evangelism? If they are separate tasks of the church, which takes the priority?

These were the questions which fifty evangelical leaders addressed in a consultation called together in 1982 by the Lausanne Continuation Committee and the World Evangelical Fellowship. Their final statement has been available for some time under the title of *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: an Evangelical Commitment*. Now the papers presented at the consultation have been published under the title of *In Word and Deed* (edited by Bruce Nicholls, a New Zealand Baptist minister). Two papers are scene setters. Bong Rin Ro provides a historical overview of the churches' social involvement. Tokunboth Adeyemo surveys the various possible relationships between evangelism and social action and sets out the various strengths and weakness of the arguments.

Arthur Johnstone, a key advocate of a narrower evangelical position, in his paper on the Kingdom of God sets out the view that evangelism is to do with the verbal proclamation of the good news, advocating an individualistic understanding of the kingdom as the rule of God in the believer and arguing against more recent corporate thinking. *Inter alia* he maintains that the New Testament does not portray the church as a prototype and example of a new society. In direct opposition is a paper by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden who chart the emphasis on community in Scripture from the time of Abraham onwards. They go on to show that to divorce a man from his relationships and from his socio-economic context is to misunderstand the doctrine of salvation and mission. Further justification for their position comes in another paper from a word study on salvation which concludes that salvation clearly has both social and corporate aspects to it and relates to every aspect of life.

Two other papers are worthy of comment. Peter Kuzmic writes on evangelical views of History and Eschatology, which takes sensational premillennial views of the Second Coming to task for atrophying evangelical social concern. Kuzmic argues that evangelicals, of which let it be said that he is one, tend to think simplistically and fail to live in the dialectic tension of the kingdom which is already present yet still to come. One wonders whether his Yugoslavian context helps him to appreciate dialectic more than most of us do! David Bosch claims that the tennis match which has been going on between the claimants that evangelism is the church's priority and those who claim that social action should be our priority is a nonsense. The whole problem arises from the duality which such a debate assumes. Evangelism is one with social concern and other serving and self-emptying responsibilities of the church as aspects of the one indivisible mission of the church. To debate priorities is academically arid and practically irrelevant. At last, someone has blown the whistle!

One of the major stimulants in the whole debate has been René Padilla, a Baptist pastor from Buenos Aires, a collection of whose essays, *Mission Between Times: Essays on the Kingdom*, has just been published. All his essays hang on the common thread which he began to spin at Lausanne. The twin knots which keep the beads on the thread are these. '... The gospel is addressed not to man as an isolated being called to respond to God with no reference to his life context but rather to man in relation to the world' (p.27). It is real man, in his concrete, socio-political, materialistic human context who must be addressed and commanded to repent. But the church must remember that it 'only has two alternatives in its confrontation with the world: either it adapts itself to the world and betrays the gospel or it responds to the gospel and enters into conflict with the world' (p.58).

Several of the essays expand on the theme of conflict and spiritual warfare. All of them provide an incisive critique of contemporary practices of mission and show how in adopting secular Christianity, in exporting cultural Christianity or advocating the homogeneous unit principle in Church Growth thinking we are being worldly. Here indeed is a passionate call to a commitment to the Kingdom and its radical ethics. Padilla's is a voice that must be heard.

Two books by British authors demonstrate the same outworking of Lausanne. Colin Marchant, a Baptist minister who is now Warden of Lawrence Hall of the West Ham Central Mission in the East End of London, has written *Signs in the City*. It describes his own pilgrimage to ministry in the inner city and invites the reader to understand the plight of those who live there, to hear their cry of anguish. A disembodied gospel will make no sense to those who live in the city. It is the same message as Padilla's, even if written in a very different manner. Though it covers a wide range of material and provides a mass of evidence, you never get the impression you are reading a sociological report or a government green paper. Replete with full theological and sociological theory, it remains immensely practical and gives plenty of guidelines for actions together with addresses where various suggestions can be followed up. It is realistic and yet not pessimistic. One of the delights is that Marchant looks for the signs of spring in the inner city and amidst the terrific problems he points out where the trees are breaking into bud and the bulbs are poking above the surface. That is rare. Much literature from the inner city is either depressing or angry, for perfectly understandable reasons. Colin Marchant woos his readers and takes them with him and enables us to hear the immensity of the problems and some of the blessings too.

Two things become very clear from reading it. Traditional church structures and approaches to ministry simply hold no water for the inner city. And, therefore, traditional training for ministry needs drastic revision.

The last work, *Towards the Recovery of a Lost Bequest* by Roger Dowley, at first sight looks a little eccentric. But if you can get past the cover and the title, it is a gem. Roger Dowley, a solicitor who has chosen to live and work in the inner city for years, has earned the right to speak where many of us must remain silent.

The sub-title, 'A layman's work-notes on the biblical pattern for a just community', accurately reflects the intention of the book. Fifty-four different sections allow us to hear Dowley think aloud about the Scripture on the theme of social justice. Each section contains evidence of his wide-reading and is littered with pertinent quotations from the scholars. For that alone, Dowley has done us a great service. He is fully aware of other Biblical themes but believes that this is a neglected theme which needs restating. Starting with Creation, Abraham and Noah, he works right through scripture examining events and concepts afresh. One of his great contributions is to show how certain themes unfold throughout the Old and New Testaments and how the message of the Testaments is one. Incidentally, this confirms Marchant's confession that he read the Bible with fresh eyes when he ceased reading it in little bits and stood back to look at the broad sweep.

Again it is the corporate dimension of sin and salvation which comes to the fore. On the question of *Shalom*, for example, Dowley shows how we misunderstand the Bible's teaching because we interpret peace as inner peace whereas the Bible speaks of a peace which is infinitely more profound and which can only be understood in terms of community.

Of course he does not settle all the arguments. He is convinced that the Jubilee legislation was acted upon until AD 33-34. Others might dispute that. He rejects the idea that the background for the concept of *ekklesia* is to be found in the Greek city state and finds it instead in the Jewish synagogue community. But even where the reader might question or disagree he will find it a stimulating book that provokes his thought in a constructive way. At the very least the book is a great source book. But it would be a shame if that was all it achieved. For without betraying any chip on the shoulder, Dowley has provided us with a powerful polemic:

It must at the outset be stated firmly that the root cause of the Church's departure from the biblical pattern has been the persistence of the influential, the affluent and the socially aspiring in taking over 'power' in the Church and moulding its structures, teaching and policies in a way that best suits their own interests, namely, maintaining paternalistic 'charity'.
(Section 46b)

Each writer here considered is a committed advocate of a particular position in the debate and, although other sides are still presented and argued from an evangelical standpoint, these books are a measure of how much the thinking of evangelicals has changed since Lausanne. Evangelism can no longer be exclusively seen as bearing a message of salvation to an individual, regardless of his social context, about his vertical relation with God. Evangelism must address men in their social context about their relation with God and that inevitably means that one cannot avoid talking about his relationship with his fellow men.

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A PIONEER WOMAN MINISTER

Inspired by the focus on women in Baptist life (*Baptist Quarterly* July 1986), the Revd Violet Hedger sent a contribution. Miss Hedger, who entered Regent's Park College in 1923, reflects on the role of women in ancient religions and in the history of the church. She remembers the Baptist leaders who encouraged her to enter the ministry, and reminisces on her experiences and on some of the practical considerations for the pioneer. Throughout she conveys her sense of privilege at spending her life in the ministry and her continuing joy in the Master's service.

Much of Miss Hedger's article reflects what she wrote in an earlier article (*Baptist Quarterly* X, 1940-41, pp.243-253), but more recent members might like to have a copy of the revised paper, which is available from the treasurer, price 75p.