

CHAPTER VIII

JOHANNINE MISSIOLOGY

We have emphasized the fact that God's mission is his message actualized in a real world—a world of people within a God created environment. John's Gospel develops the concept of the *world* more clearly than the other Gospels and hence we look there to develop several themes that relate to a theology of mission. Once we get a grasp of John's cosmology we are in a better position to understand his Christology and soteriology. The themes are interlinked. Surprisingly, some dismiss John's Gospel as having little missiological value, despite his extensive and varied handling of the concept of the world (*cosmos*).

John has a clearly defined evangelistic objective. He spells out his aim, ". . . These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). He wants his readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, for in doing so they will have life. Some see this to imply that John is not concerned so much with historical facts as with theology. This may be so, but as we have already stressed, there should be no conflict between theology and history.

John interprets facts. But to assume that history is not to be interpreted reverts to nineteenth century scientific positivistic attitudes which saw history as cold, bloodless facts. There is adequate scholarship sustaining the fact that John in no way disrespects history. His references to times, places and events bear witness to this. Our problem lies with attempting to look at first century writings with twentieth century eyes. Even if we look at the Gospels with present day perspectives, we must first and foremost understand the writers' objective.

Basically, John is interested in something far more than history. Both his christology and his soteriology are cosmic in scope. If there is little attempt at factual accounts as in Mark, it is because John's purposes are cosmological. While the other Gospels speak of the kingdom, John uses the symbol of the "cosmos". And yet he anchors the cosmic mission solidly within historic factuality. Jesus Christ is thus "the Saviour of the world" (4:42), "the light of the world" (8:12, 9:5), the "bread for the life of the world" (6:51).

Secondly, John asserts the universality of God's salvation. It is not to be restricted to the Jews nor even to those who find access into the Jewish circles. So, he is able to declare "God so loved the world" and that "whoever believes" will qualify for the life that God gives. God's concern is not for a chosen few but for everyone and everything that he has created. The universal and cosmological stress is clear right from the start of John's Gospel.

The universality of salvation is contrary to our present day ideas. In our preoccupation with inclusivistic and pluralistic ideas of dialogue some accept that the historic and cultural changes of today do not permit "superiority" to the Christian revelation. The question is not whether it is acceptable to the modern world, but whether it is in consonance with the biblical claim. That is the kind of a biblical theology we are attempting to draw out for mission.

Contrary to the belief that John is not interested in history we must note that it is a historical Jesus that the historical John the Baptist attests. Through this one who came into the world, life, true light, authentic fellowship with God and the fulfilment of ultimate cosmic purposes is made possible. It is obvious that John is preoccupied with theology, but this in no way diminishes his concern for a real historical Gospel. After affirming Jesus' historical validity, he goes on to demonstrate far greater dimensions of Jesus' influence. Hence, cosmic concerns become the focus of John's attention.

John's introduction with its reference to *Logos* underlines this cosmic interest. This all pervading, rational principle of the world has now been made flesh and blood to bring rationality to mankind. Whatever *logos means*, it is clear that John's intends to show that what was thought to be detached and unconcerned for this world has now entered into history in order to concretise God's redemptive purposes for real people and a real world.

This concretizing of God's concern is the most adequate model for mission. So much of mission is in the form of action without adequate biblical foundation. Mission is God's word actualized. This is the central message of John's prologue—The word has become flesh. The same God who created the world is the one who cares for the world now in darkness. This concern does not merely remain in words, but becomes flesh and demonstrates the grace and truth of God.

There are attempts to draw parallels between *logos* and the Hindu *Om*. In the Upanishads, *Om* is said to be all that was, all that is and all that will be. It is the unique sound in which God utters all that he utters. We may draw parallels as long as this does not infer that they are one and the same. In fact, there is hardly any comparison, for John utilizes the term to depict God's incarnation identifying with the struggles of this world. The "all pervading force" continues to abide in eternity blissfully ignorant of the realities of our present world.

John's concept of God's mission portrays a God who is interested in real human beings in actual history, one who seeks to identify with them personally. We have earlier stressed the "personalness" of the biblical God, and again note that ours is a mission of a personal God who reveals himself personally and identifies himself with the joys and struggles of people. This is the most potent argument against the "god" of the New Age religion.

Moreover, when John speaks about the Word, he is not referring to something separated from God, nor even the

words or activity of God. God expresses himself totally in Jesus Christ. The "Word was God". There is personality to the Word in contrast to the static utterances of whatever parallels we wish to draw. It is not just an affirmation of divinity but a confirmation of identity. A theology of mission must point to the total involvement of God who desires for all of himself to become concretely expressed completely in his message to the world.

Jesus and Creation

In developing our thesis on mission from the kingdom perspective, we have implicitly stressed the foundational element of the Creator God who manifests himself as the Redeemer God. This is nowhere more clearly expressed in the New Testament than in John's prologue. And the *Logos* theme proceeds naturally to the "Creation" theme, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (1:3). The fact that everything owes its existence to God is the premise on which God builds his concern for all things. "The whole creation is included in one broad sweep. Nothing is outside the range of his activity."¹ Here is a powerful antidote to the illusory (*maya*) understanding of creation which, in fact, is unreality. The world is as real as God meant it to be, and hence worthy of God's personal involvement.

We must repeat our concern for a more positive attitude to creation. Hindu and Buddhist attitudes, like the Ancient Near East, identify impermanence with meaninglessness. True, creation is subject to decay and hence is impermanent. But, the biblical God deliberately invests meaningfulness into temporal created things. There is purpose in his relationship with people and the created order.

This stress is absent in Hindu teaching. For instance, the assertion, "Brahman is impersonal . . . the world is not only worthless as compared to Brahman but in its very truth illusion, *maya*."² Such teaching devalues both personality and creativity. John in his time was dealing with ideas of early Gnosticism which attributed negative

properties to creation. "The world is due to God himself acting through His word."³ If this is true God takes full responsibility for creation and hence his redeemed children should act more responsibly towards creation.

Ecological concerns are not to be shunned by evangelical community fearing that they water down God's redemptive intentions for humanity. Even if our definition of mission ignores creation as a legitimate concern, we need at least to accept that it ought to be a Christian concern. It will be a rebuke to Bible believing Christians if we put aside ecological involvement and allow the non-Christians to take it over. John's concern is for a positive attitude towards God's creation.

Life and Light

The object of God's mission in relation to our world today must be tangibly experienced by men and women in their lives. This is why John's points to Jesus' mission to impart life. The *logos* life is actualized in human life. Even a casual reading of the Gospel will reveal the stress on the concept of *life*, so peculiar to John. Life is not an accident, nor even something existing by itself. There is an intrinsic connection between Jesus and life and this is underlined frequently. This life is the "light of men" (1:4), it is "eternal life" (3:16), "abundant life" (10:10), and in fact it is only those who come to him who really have life (5:40).

The question of the meaning of life is vital to all men and women. Where have I come from? Where am I going? What is the significance of the present? Missiology must handle such questions. Perhaps, the success of Transcendental meditation could be attributed to its clever handling of such basic questions. Hinduism itself teaches that it is only the privileged upper caste that can claim life in its fullness. In contrast, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi entices people by saying that one is born to live a perfect life, encompassing the values of the transcendental absolute. The two ways of life, the relative and the absolute need to be brought together, according to Mahesh Yogi, and this

union will produce two hundred percent life.⁴ John is concerned with such fundamental issues and therefore he states that he is writing his gospel so that by believing in Jesus people may have life in his name (20:31). And this is life in all its fullness.

The evolutionary hypothesis does not take into account the uniqueness of humankind and the quality of life. This should be the basis of any attack on this hypothesis. The biblical teaching of human separateness and superiority over all other aspects of the created world must be clearly underlined. The difference is essentially *qualitative*, and has to do with the essence of life that humanity possesses. Men and women are made in the image of God. This life has been affected by the fall and consequently the mission of Jesus primarily aims to restore this quality of human existence. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn. 10:10).

This is explicitly stated in John and the evangelistic message must fully explore the fact. We constantly speak of the need for relevance to the local context and perhaps, focus solely on socio-economic issues. But life is so fundamental to human existence and provides an acceptable common point of relevance to all people. In this broader context the Gospel has to be expressed.

Left to themselves, people are pessimistic. There are so much suffering, conflicts and tensions. It is not surprising that one would be tempted to dismiss this world as an illusion. Gloom and despair drive people to either resign themselves to the belief that there is nothing beyond what is observable, or else to look deeper believing that beyond all this seeming meaninglessness there must be some purpose.

Marxist philosophy attempts to look beyond for meaning. The individual trapped in a capitalistic environment can find fulfilment in ultimately freeing oneself into the new society of humankind. Oppression and the exploitation within evil society is the root of many problems, they say.

The Christian is able to recognize the evil structures of this world as part of the reason for his struggles with the meaning of life. But the Bible goes further to show that we ourselves are part of the problem.

The eternal life—*aiōnios*—that Jesus gives is not merely some future hope, but the quality of life in our relationship to God at present. John tells us that this eternal life is ours when "we remain in the Son and in the Father" (1 Jn. 2:24). God's mission is not merely to clean up our environment and in doing so clean up humanity. His ultimate desire is to bring us back into a purposeful relationship. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you", Jesus advised his disciples.

Not every one is capable of philosophizing and rationalizing about ultimate questions. To many in this world, life is merely the opposite of death. The Bible, not oblivious of this fact, constantly seeks to address the issue. People in utter desperation are willing to pay any price to prolong life but despite all the advances in modern medicine they are frustrated by the inevitability of death. We have been successful quantitatively, extending life to a certain extent. But the question is whether life has improved qualitatively. In many cases all that medicine has achieved is to prolong death.

Men and women are the only living beings who know that they must die. And it is precisely this question that makes them ask whether there is life beyond. John addresses this saying,—“Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”. Although Jesus has also promised everlasting life in terms of continuity without end, eternal life has to do with quality rather than quantity of life,

The question of death also leads us to the question of wholeness. Dominated by Greek philosophy of the immortality of the soul, Christians have popularly tended to accept that while death is the cessation of bodily life, eternal life is the continuation of soul life. We may not agree to such a dichotomy, but have often used language that is

guilty of separating “body” and “soul.” And most times we have shown more concern for the soul. It is primarily this attitude that not only limits evangelism but restricts any concrete involvement in God’s world.

We have been reminded that the individual is neither a ‘body-less soul’ nor a ‘soul-less body’. The human being is one complete whole. Hence, the continuation of life after death must continue the life of the whole person. This understanding cuts right across the Hindu belief of the independent existence of the soul and transmigration—its ability to be transferred into any number of bodies.

John is not concerned with merely soul-talk. He is concerned with a Jesus who relates himself to real people, offering to them the water of life, the bread of life and the way, the truth and the life. In John 14:6, Jesus is not merely talking about the soul or existence but life in opposition to death. Since he has “life in himself” (5:26), he has the ability to supply the lack of life in the individual. Knowing Jesus is therefore directly related to experiencing real life. Accepting that life is so central to humanity in every situation, mission must stress the centrality of God’s concern to deal with it in all aspects. Any lessening of this concern will be unbiblical. It is for this reason that God sent Jesus into the world, and consequently Jesus sends his disciples into this same world. The reality of the biblical message will be tested by its relevance to every aspect of life.

The Concept of the World

The “sent-ness” of Jesus Christ is a clear feature of the Gospel. Just as Jesus is sent, so also his disciples are sent to accomplish God’s mission—“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (20:21). This is the equivalent of Great Commission in Matthew, and Jesus sends his disciples into the world to fulfil the task entrusted by God to him. Jesus came into the world (1:10f) in response to God’s love for the world (3:16), and his disciples are to go into the world similarly.

A Variety of Meanings

The concept of the “world” occurs with a variety of meanings:

The first is in the sense of the orderliness of the universe as in Jn. 1:10 “The world was made through him”. “Cosmos” refers to an ornament, something beautifully built and artistically arranged and that is how we get the English word “cosmetic”. “The universe with all its harmonious relationships is the outstanding ornament”.⁵ Jesus uses the word when he prays (17:5), “Glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began”. The glorious aspect here is Jesus as creator of the entire universe in all its orderliness, and not merely for the earth. But “for men this earth is the most significant part of the universe so it is not surprising that the term came to be used for this world in which we live”.⁶ It is interesting to note that the Greeks used ‘cosmos’ to refer also to the heavens.

Secondly, the “world” in Johannine usage refers to its inhabitants in the sense of the human race. It is this “world” that is the object of God’s love (3:16). God loved men and women, his creation, so much that he sent his Son to live amongst them. Men and women are central to God’s created order. It is not in keeping with God’s redemptive purposes if we totally digress to deal with ecological concerns or structural sin. God’s redemption is directed primarily at people and salvific blessings are first for “whoever believes on him”. Through the salvation of men and women all else will receive God’s redemptive benefits. Mission solely dealing with social structures and environmental concerns cannot stand. The concreteness of God’s concern for a mission to a world of people in need of redemption is John’s concern.

Importantly, the biblical use of the term “world” is not totally negative. We have often used the term “worldliness” to mean something contrary to Christ’s desires. Biblical spirituality is interpreted as being alien to this world. The

resulting attitude is one of separateness or superiority. This attitude needs to be corrected. There is a positive emphasis that must be restored for the Church in mission to recognize its belongingness in the world. It is then that we can demonstrate the reality of the incarnational mission of God to the world.

The world as the object of God's mission and his incarnation must remind us that we belong to the human race. The commonality we share is the image of God. The universality of God's concern is based on this commonality of his created beings. And our mission to the world must be grounded in this commonality. The criticism of many non-Christians is that we have approached them with a "superior" attitude, unfortunately referred to as the "missionary mentality". The only way we can dispel this attitude is to recognise that the Bible uses an identificatory communication. That is why John emphasizes that—"he came to that which was his own" (1:11).

When mission is conducted on such ground we will see more effective communication of the redemptive intentions of God to the world. While the modern missionary movement needs to be acclaimed for its sacrificial contribution, bringing salvation to millions all over the world, it has been criticised in many cases because total identification was lacking. In fact, this was inevitable, as the prevailing attitude considered the "civilized" Westerner to be taking the Gospel to the not so civilized "heathen". One can sympathise with the missionary facing the shock of an alien culture in many cases. They may be expected to carry over some of their own culture, even condemning local culture. Rather than being critical, this should come as a reminder to be more sensitive to people, their culture and tradition. There are no superior or inferior cultures in God's sight. That is why he cuts across all cultures to incarnate his message to men and women.

The Opposition to God

Having emphasized the positive aspect of the world, we must not neglect the negatives, as the the realm of evil and

at enmity with God. John emphatically treats this in 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:30; 15:18; 17:9,14; 1 Jn. 2:15. This is the significantly new meaning that the term acquires in the New Testament usage, bringing out the sharp contrast between the beauty of God's creation and the ugliness of human sin. Therefore "the shattering thing was that the men who inhabit this beautiful and ordered universe acted in an ugly and unreasonable way when they came face to face with Christ". Sinful men and women cannot confront the perfection of Christ and his righteous demands. They experience discomfort and hate Christ because he confronts their evil (Jn 7:7).

Triumphalistic ideas of mission tend to gloss over this realistic depiction of the world. Winning converts and planting churches may not always work according to set plans, for there is resistance from the world to the work of God. One wonders whether goal setting and strategising for mission programmes, with neat and carefully worked out plans have been taken too far. This does not mean that we discard all goals and strategies, but that we submit our plans to the will of God as well as to the reality of the resistance of a world under Satan.

We face not merely apathy towards Christ, but also rejection and even antagonism to his claims. Those working in fields where there are more observable Satanic manifestations are familiar with this. It is to be expected as Jesus judges the "prince of this world" (12:31). John makes it very clear that the "whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19) What this means is that since Satan has a hold on this world there is to be opposition. The phenomenon of devil possession even today is an extreme demonstration of satanic influence, and confrontation with Christ in such situations is open conflict.

Luke records the amazement of the crowds and the Pharisees' response, when Jesus' drove out demons, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons" (Lk. 11:14). Jesus counteracts such a claim with the

simple but powerful argument—if the devils themselves can cast out one another then their kingdom will not stand. Jesus replies, “But if, I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Lk. 11:20). “This passage is not an isolated one. The whole struggle of Jesus against the devils is determined by the antithesis between the kingdom of heaven and the rule of Satan, and time and time again Jesus’ superior power over Satan and Satan’s dominion proves the breakthrough on the part of the kingdom of God.”⁷

The conflict on the mission field is a kingdom conflict, and hence the devil will violently react against the authority of Jesus. Those at the cutting edge of mission must expect hatred, opposition, conflict, violence, antagonism and all kinds of demonstrations against the purposes of God who is establishing his kingdom through the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. John underlines the role of the Spirit in convicting the world of sin and guilt as the “prince of this world now stands condemned” (Jn. 15:8ff).

John also portrays the world in the sense of an evil system standing against Christ. When John pleads with the early Christians not to “love the world or anything in the world” (1 Jn. 2:15) he refers to the principles, the attitudes or the evil system of this world “For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world (1 Jn. 2:16). Jesus uses the world in this sense when he tells the Jews that they are “of this world” (8:23). Talking of the “antichrist” John speaks of the “viewpoint of this world” (1 Jn. 4:5).

Our Involvement in the World

Evil has penetrated the very structures of this world, and God’s kingdom mission confronts the kingdom of Satan that is manifest here. Liberation theologies have advocated the transformation of existing evil structures. Such theologies first criticize individualistic ideas of sin which have flourished in “capitalistic” societies which

totally ignore structural evils within their systems. The existing structures have only aided the oppressor and increased injustices and so we are called to struggle against oppressive structures and to construct a more just society.

Simultaneously there is a call to turn from being preoccupied with sin as an impediment that hinders the experience of the after life.

Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of men with each other, it is a turning in of man on himself which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others. And because sin is a personal and social intra historical reality, a part of the daily events of human life, it is also, and above all an obstacle to life’s reaching the fullness we call salvation.⁸

We should be concerned with the religious significance of human action in history: “The Grace-sin conflict, the coming of the kingdom, and the expectation of the *Parousia* are all necessarily and inevitably historical, temporary, earthly, social and material realities.”⁹

Traditional ideas of sin, spirituality and worldliness have ignored the cry of the prophets against sinful structures:

A poorly understood spiritualization has often made us forget the human consequences of the eschatological promises and the power to transform unjust social structures which they imply. The elimination of misery and exploitation is a sign of the coming of the kingdom.¹⁰

We must appreciate the concern to expose the evil systems of this world. John is definitely concerned about this. Certainly, a fallenness characterizes the world and our mission must address fallen structures of this world. We have had too much of an unreal other-worldly spirituality which has seen the world as a totally fallen realm into which we have no spiritual sanction to enter. How soon we forget Jesus’ words—“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (17:15). Jesus has already clarified that we are “not of the world” i.e. part of the evil systems of this world. We have

taken this to mean that we need not belong to the world and have developed an individualized spirituality which has insulated us from the rest of the world.

Mission must be in the context of God's message of the kingdom to the world. C. S. Song pleads for a "mission of enfleshment"¹¹ the kind of mission that accepts that the "God of creation is the God of incarnation".¹² This is seen to be the basic message of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. John grasps the mystery of all mysteries, namely God's mission of enfleshment. "World history is part of the totality embraced by the framework of creation and incarnation."¹³ Therefore Christian mission, we are reminded, must reflect the nature and essence of such an enfleshment.

C. S. Song recommends that the first step is to become almost everything the Church has so far forbidden itself to become. The Church's Western identity is blamed for this:¹⁴

The chief task of Christian mission is to let the faith in Jesus Christ become the element which enables civilizations to be renewed as witness to the glory of God's creation and manifestation of the presence of God as Saviour in the world.¹⁵

Civilization itself, the world we have abhorred as contrary to the Christian world, needs to be renewed not merely Christianised.

Second, "God's mission of enfleshment means that God has now become available to people. Jesus Christ is this availability of God".¹⁶ And because in Jesus Christ, God stands where we stand, we cannot go to the world armed with our doctrinal orthodoxy. Value judgments, cultural immunity or moral standards. "You must be ready to accept their standards as your standards, their values as your values. Their sin as your sins".¹⁷ Song betrays an anti-missionary (Western) attitude, particularly from the Chinese perspective accepting that the "communist use of power in China was God's judgment upon the flabby Church".¹⁸ Regardless, Song is keen to show that the

legitimate centre of Christian mission should be Christ in the context of this world.

A confusion arises. Where do we draw the line between what Christian mission offers to the world and what the world has even without the Christian mission? And even if it is to receive something through this mission, can it be offered without Christ? All that the Christian influence appears to do is to alleviate the terrible situation in the world rather than to bring them to any commitment to Christ. This vague concept in the name of enfleshment leaves us wondering what the uniqueness of the Christian mission is all about.

The mission of the kingdom adds the future horizon to all our efforts, giving to it something more than what we are to do by ourselves. The present is a movement towards the ultimate fulfilment in God's time. The future horizon, totally controls our present horizon and all that the Church must be in relation to all that it will ultimately become in God's kingdom. Any mission written with the desire of only correcting the faults of the past will therefore lack the totality of the kingdom perspective as in the Bible.

John is absolutely clear that Jesus Christ sends his disciples into the world to contribute something unique. It is the message of the future life already available to the believer in the present. It is a concrete contribution through a life changing message. The ones who accept this message have had the quality of their existence changed in terms of their relationship to God, and this changes their existence in relationship to the world. It is not merely a spiritual life geared to the future, but eternal life here and now.

However, in depicting the evil systems of the world which are the result of the sin, John is not portraying a God who only condemns this world. It is a love through which he desires for the world to be saved (3:17). John the Baptist announcing the coming of Jesus Christ declares—"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Nicodemus hears of the God who so loves the world

that he sends Jesus. All these and several other references remind us of God's passionate concern to save the world. Mission that cannot present this kind of a God will fail to fully concretize the mission of God.

Our Identity in the World

We have discussed very forceful reminders for missiology today. First, the world is the ultimate concern of God. He created beauty and order, and now seeing its fallenness desires to redeem it. Salvation in this sense is a restoration of beauty and order. Humankind has fallen from the glory of God, and God's mission to humanity is to restore this glory. Because of human sinfulness even the created order has been subjected to decay and disorder. God desires restoration for all of his creation. What God had intended initially is now actualized in the mission of his Son.

We also need to identify with the world, just as Christ did. Christians have attempted to separate from the world, and in doing so have failed to communicate the loving heart of God. The Church must spell out its identity within the world, and not retreat into an unreal spirituality or an other worldly superiority. It is a call to demonstrate itself as part of the world—real people in a real world.

To do this, we are not to act like aliens in the world. This attitude has hindered true identification. In fact, the overemphasis on cross-cultural mission tends to perpetuate this attitude of aliens identifying with something that is strange to them. The resulting condescension alongside other struggles has hindered the impact of the Gospel in many cases. It is time the Church recognizes its "*intra-cultural*" mission, mission within its own culture. The call for indigenisation and contextualisation is timely, but these are all human attempts to make the message relevant. The intra-cultural mission is mission from people within their own cultures to others within that same culture. However, when God truly speaks, his message is concretized; there is an actualization of the message that spontaneously bears witness to God's work.

What we term as intra cultural mission needs further explanation. If Jesus sends us into the world just as God sent him, the Church needs to manifest its existence in more concrete cultural and national identities. We have accepted that there is a universal "Christian" culture which is different to the "non-Christian" cultures. Our own cultures need to be understood in order to communicate Jesus Christ from within. This natural process of communication is what we call "intra-cultural" mission. "cross-cultural" mission does not get set aside, but is put into its proper perspective within God's total mission. The church must first flesh out its message within its own culture before it crosses cultures seeking to communicate the message.

Culture is very much part of God's concern for his people, as we have seen in discussing creation, God himself introduced the elements of human culture. Human fall results also in culture's fall. But that does not sanction a detaching of the Christian from culture. Jesus Christ fully identified with Jewish culture, not because it was a perfect culture but it was his culture. The fact that he sends us into the world in this sense implies that he has called us to be part of our individual cultures and thereby eventually contribute even to the redemption of culture to conform with the ultimate kingdom culture.

Secondly, we need to make a more concrete contribution to the redemptive process of God's world. This does not advocate kingdom theologies of the nineteenth century which gave birth to the "Social Gospel". The kingdom was thought to be realised here on earth. The preaching of the Gospel without an equally strong demonstration of its life changing power has been severely criticized by non-Christians who sincerely seek to see the reality of Christ's claims. The Church must awake from its complacency and make an impact that actualises the message we preach.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ will definitely change the evil structures of this world. The three horizons of the kingdom concern give to mission the totality of the God's

perspective that will issue in concrete action. Hence, it is wrong to attack such social efforts as unbiblical. Wilberforce in England, Pandita Ramabai in India and others confronted not merely personal sin but its influence on the systems of this world. These are not wasted efforts. In our overreaction to the one-sided theologies of social action we retreat into absolute non-involvement. Christ gave himself for the sinful world and we too need to give ourselves totally to demonstrate Christlike concern in a fallen world.

But, how should the Church engage itself in attacking evil structures? The Church is made up of people and individuals must get into action. This could even be the commitment of a particular church in a particular situation. John depicts the heart of God to get to the very root of structural evil. John 3:3 employs the word "born anew" or "born from above" and structures can change in their subjection to Jesus Christ. Being born anew confuses Nicodemus. The kingdom of God demands a radical change from any one seeking to enter it. Merely cleaning out externally or even cleansing out structures will not be sufficient. Jesus makes very clear to Nicodemus that it is the Spirit who will bring about this newness. The change will come not by human effort but by God's own intervention. Moreover, it is human fall that has resulted in sinful structures and hence it is only in human redemption that there can bring transformation of these structures.

God's kingdom concern starts with the renewing of humankind and setting men and women on course towards their life in the kingdom. The new humanity desires to bring about new structures in keeping with his kingdom concern. Merely attacking structural sin is abstract, whereas the activity of renewing humankind is concrete. God's mission to a concrete world of people aims to touch every aspect. We will certainly experience structural changes in the new heaven and the new earth. Meanwhile, the world as the object of God's love is people and not a system or structure, and in need of God's intervention. But God's kingdom mission penetrates even these abstract

systems through the actualising of his concerns for real people in a real world.

Notes

1. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1974, p. 802; Bong Rin Ro. (ed.), *God in Asian Contexts*, ATA, Tiachung, 1988.

2. *God in Asian Contexts*, *op. cit.*

3. Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

4. For comprehensive summaries of Mahesh Yogi's teachings, see Vishal Mangalwadi, *The World of Gurus*, Good Books, Delhi, 1987; Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and You*, Victor Books, Wheaton, 1977; Kushwant Singh, *Gurus, Godmen and Good People*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1975.

5. Morris. *op. cit.*, p. 126.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

7. H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1962, p. 62.

8. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1977, p. 152.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

10. Choan-Seng Song, *Christian Mission in Reconstruction*, The Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1975, p. 54.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 54 .

18. *Ibid.*