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THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE
OF
THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

NEW TESTAMENT IV
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This study was begun as an attempt to discover where the New Testament doctrine of the Church has a bearing on the mission of the Church. Does the New Testament itself say "The Church IS a mission to the World"? Is Bruner's famous phrase "The Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning" an idea actually set forth in the New Testament? It came upon no simple answer. Too many significant problems turned up in areas where exegesis was the problem, not the solution. Perhaps the most significant impact upon the author in making the study, was upon his doctrine of scripture. It does not settle an ecclesiological question to know how half a dozen primitive Christians thought about it. These opinions are very significant, but not in their own right. As witnesses and signs to a Reality which is the Word of God, namely Christ Jesus, they are a means of grace. But finally it is the Living Word in Christ which is the true source of a Doctrine of Church or Mission. This means that a modern view of the relation between the Church and the World might reflect the mind of Christ and be close to the essential meaning of the New Testament, although its precise exposition cannot be found in the document.

The thesis of this paper is that though it may have awaited our era to have spelled out in its present fullness the doctrine of the Church and the World, the antecedents for it are in the canonical writings.

As the study is part of a seminar course which has already had a paper on the Church, the writer has felt free to neglect ecclesiological questions which do not bear directly on the Church's relation to the world.

Direct References to the Mission.

The Classic New Testament Summons to World Mission is at the close of Matthew's Gospel.

"All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and Lo I am with you always" (Matt 28: 14)

Luke's Gospel closes with:-

"Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. . . . but stay in the

city until you are clothed with power from on High (Lk 24: 46-49). The text here points forward to Acts 1: 8-11 where it is made even more clear that the gift of the Spirit has the purpose of making the chosen apostles witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

In the New Testament linking of the terms Apostle and Witness we have some implications for the mission of the Church. A study of the New Testament use of the word μαρτυς and its derivatives reveals that this document also makes the connection between Witness and Martyr.

ΜΑΡΤΥΣ and Derivitives

The root meaning of the word is to remember. In Acts, the most common use of the term is to designate those who were eyewitnesses to Christ's death and resurrection and all that he had done (Acts 2:32, 3: 15, 10: 29, 41, 13:31). Their role was to bare testimony to the fact of the events. The apostle who was to replace Judas had to be one who had partaken of Christ's ministry from the beginning (Acts 1:22). The use in 1Corinthians 13:15 cannot be said to be different. There is no way of making any of these passages say without any shadow of doubt that every believer is an evangelist. While New Testament exegesis itself will not be able to settle whether this role of witness was confined to apostles in the primitive church, it cannot be doubted that New Testament thought took the matter of witnessing to Christ very seriously. In Acts 8:25 and other places it appears that in New Testament times this was almost a technical term referring to preaching the Gospel.

Certainly, within the primitive church the idea came to mean more than eye-witnessing the event of Christ's life death resurrection, and came to include testifying to the truth of the gospel. The complex of ideas seems to indicate the act of attesting to the fact that the Christ was Jesus (Acts 18:5). The Apostle-eyewitnesses were not the only ones doing this. Jesus is seen as the faithful witness (Rev 1:5, 3:14) with a testimony greater than John's (Jno 5:36). The Father witnesses to the Son(Jno 8:13ff) , so does the Holy Spirit (Jno 15: 26-27). The Spirit confirms the testimony to Christ. (1Cor 1:6). Certainly one essential activity in the church conducted by God, Christ the Holy Spirit and either ^{through} either

specialists or everyone was this witnessing activity: the act that occasioned saving faith on the part of the hearer. However it would be difficult to prove by New Testament quotations that every believer is an evangelist

The classic passage in II Cor 5:18 regarding the ministry of reconciliation does not necessarily mean that all believers are ambassadors and insight from more than isolated passages must be brought to bear before a full appreciation of this witnessing activity is to be gained.

In this connection a study of the relation in New Testament usage between Witnessing and Martyrdom is enlightening. Because of New Testament and early church influence the Greek word has come over into English with the meaning of Martyr. Did the concept of witnessing come finally to mean a martyr's witness? We note first that the general believer was accorded a witnessing role whenever he was before the judges of the land or the courts of the synagogue. (Mat 10:18ff Mk 13:9ff Lk 12:12, 21:13ff) Here the persecuted believer is promised that he will be given what to say, either by Christ or by the Holy Spirit.

It can be argued that the meaning Martyr came to be the dominant one in the church. This would have significance for the understanding of the New Testament doctrine of mission, if witness should fade into martyr. It would mean that the significant act in witnessing was the act of sitting tight when under persecution. The beginning of this movement from "witness to martyr" can be seen in Rev 12:12 where a special reward is mentioned for those who "Witness unto death". Has an activity originally directed at the world now become an inner directed activity pointed at the perfecting of the saints? There is no doubt that this sort of turning from an inclusive and outward to an exclusive and inward concern has taken place in Christian thought again and again. It is equally evident that a narrow passage or word study of the New Testament is no remedy for this. It is as the larger concepts, and finally as Christ himself illumines the individual passages or word study that the true New Testament Word can be heard.

The larger concept that is especially pertinent at this point is the eschatological concept of Christ as Lord of the Cosmos. The New Testament proclaims

that Christ is Victor and Lord over the principalities and powers of this world. It is for this reason that any witness to Christ precipitates the opposition of the powers of this world as Rev 12:17 suggests. It is the witnessing that precipitates the persecution therefore, and even in Martyrdom the element of witness is determinative. Now does Rev 12:12 suggest that there is any fundamental difference between those who "Loved not their lives..even unto death" and those who have "Died with Christ" in the act of accepting salvation in him.

However it is the basic soteriological position in the New Testament that determines the witnessing role of either the specialists in the church or the church itself. The most significant contribution to the New Testament meaning of witness is the fact that Christ is seen as the first witness:- To be in him is to be a witness such as he was. At the conclusion of this paper more will be said in this regard.

During the next discussion which is concerned with the ecclesiological image of the Body of Christ, it shall be seen that even if the New Testament relegates the witnessing role to specialists, they have this role as members of the Body. The Witness cannot be seen as something separated from the Church.

The Body of Christ

Modern proponents of the idea that the Church IS Mission have leaned heavily on the New Testament image of the church as the Body of Christ. They have taken this image to mean that the church is Christ's instrument in the world, continuing his saving work. Due to the work of men like Ernest Best¹ it is now no longer possible to make this assumption regarding the image of the Body of Christ. Best has made very clear that the New Testament use of the image was NOT to make the point that the Church was Christ's hands and feet in the world.

The use of σωμα in the New Testament has certainly made a tremendous contribution to Christian Thought. There are many implications here for both soteriology and ecclesiology. However the use of the Body of Christ image in the New Testament cannot be pointed to as a thundering proclamation of the Church's relationship to the world.

Dr. Best certainly makes his case for the fact that the Body of Christ image has to do with the inner structure of the church - her relationship to her Lord and the interrelatedness of her members. The image serves as a vehicle to keep before the early Christians the nature of the church's unity with her Lord and the fact that she could not be identified with her Lord. It also illumines the nature of the relationship believers have with each other.

It is true that New Testament ecclesiology does have an inward side. It expects a new relationship to exist between believers. One can expect a different reception (Ro 9:1, 16:2). One can expect to be listened to (1Thes 4:1). One can expect a quality of life from members. One can expect a mutuality despite differences of gifts and viewpoints. The Body Image makes very clear that the New Testament writers held unique expectations regarding members. It is not at all clear however whether ~~New~~ Testament writers saw members as having a different responsibility towards fellow members than they had towards others.

The use of the Body image does clearly establish life in Christ as a corporate life. But it does not follow that because isolated study of this image points up its inward look, that the New Testament doctrine of the church has an exclusively inward concern. Closely related to this image in early Christian thought is the metaphor "edification" (house building) . The role that every member has in the use of his gifts is the edification of the whole body. The passage in the early epistles that most fully exploits the Body image (I Cor 12ff), when seen in its context, is itself a plea on behalf of edification. The very problem that is being ~~the~~ faced here is that some of the Corinthians are exalt-ing those gifts (like Tongues) which praise God but do not edify either members or outsiders. The whole point of the discourse is that love is the highest gift. The whole drift of the argument is against an understanding of life-in-the-Spirit as a Union with the divine which forgets human relations and which is spiritualized into exoteric adoration of the divine.

Here again of course there is no specific mention of the fact that love is to be directed equally towards the world as towards others in Christ, or that

edification refers to anything more than the qualitative building up of the membership. We shall have to look elsewhere for this than in specific verbal references. First we will look at the more complex use of the Body image in Colossians and Ephesians. Later we will consider two other clusters of ecclesiological images - The People of God and the New Creation. It is not until we gather all these together, and see the interrelatedness of them as the New Testament treats them, that we will feel the full impact of the New Testament doctrine of the Church and her mission.

The Body Image in Colossians

Paul's use of the word *σῶμα* everywhere confirms that the New Testament takes the world seriously. Not so much by defining the word, but by acquiring its meaning from the author's use of the word in its context, do we get the full force of his thought. The Body is the whole man, as this whole man is meant for God. Indeed the meaning of the Good News is that "The Lord is for the body" (1 Cor 6:15). In Paul's criticism of the act of joining the body to a prostitute, and of the misuse of the Lord's Supper at Corinth, his position is made strikingly clear. The union of the believer with Christ has to do with his body.

This same use of *σῶμα* also points up the distinction between life in Christ and life in the world. While the 'Lord is for the body', believers are not to be subject to the wrong sovereignty in the world (also Luke 4:5). Life IN the flesh cannot be escaped, but life FOR the flesh is to be rejected. The slavery to the elemental spirits of this world (Gal 4:3-5) must be broken. There is a real warfare therefore between the Body of Flesh and the Body of Christ. This is a constant New Testament theme.

However the relationship between Christ and the world is not seen quite so simply as Christ against the world. This peculiarly Christian understanding is set forth most clearly in the epistle to the Colossians. The reference was made to answer a specific problem in a congregation but the implications are clear for systematic theology. In the early epistles the problems were disunity and a heretical spirituality without ethical implications. In this epistle the problem

is a congregation which thinks it has to appease the elemental powers and angels with attention to festivals and a host of ceremonial prohibitions. In speaking to this Paul sets forth one of the clearest proclamations of the lordship of Christ in the New Testament.

* He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. God in Christ, not only worked our forgiveness, but has also disarmed the principalities and powers (Col 1:15).

Christ is not only head of the church, he is lord of all. And through him God is to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven. This lordship over the elemental powers is indeed hidden, but is even now being made manifest to his saints.

Later in this paper we will discuss more fully the implications of New testament eschatology for the mission of the church, but here let us observe at least the implications which Paul himself draws. Individuals are urged to do their daily work as serving the Lord, and not man (Col 3:23). Paul himself has become a minister of this gospel which has been preached to every nation under heaven (Col 1:23). Paul himself has become a minister of the church to make fully known this mystery hidden for ages and generations (Col 1:26). Paul feels constrained to warn every man and teach every man. In chapter 4 verse 3 Paul calls for the prayers of the Colossians that God may open to "us" a door for the world to declare the mystery of Christ.

It is perhaps not inevitable that we see anything here but a recognition of the fact that some specialists are called to be missionaries. One can still argue that we have no specific proclamation of the relationship of the Church to the world. The problem cannot be solved by reference to the epistle alone. It awaits an examination of more New Testament ecclesiological images, as well as New Testament eschatology and Christology. Indeed a full understanding of (1) Col 1:15-20

this letter may await a certain fullness of time for the church. As E Stauffer¹ points out in his New Testament Theology, the message of Galatians had to wait for Luther before the church could enter into its full meaning and "The Colossian legacy for the theology of history, no one has really entered upon yet".

Before turning to a consideration of other ecclesiological images we must deal with a troublesome verse in this epistle.

Completing Christ's Suffering

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what remains of Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church, of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. (Col 1: 24-26)"
 The troublesome verse is "It completes what remains of Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church". These and similar passages - "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Gal 6: 17); "For as we share abundantly in Christ's suffering, so through Christ, we share abundantly in comfort too" (II Cor 1: 5); "Rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (I Pet 4: 13); present a knotty exegetical problem. Some detect here support for the contention that the church is the extension of the incarnation. This identification of the church with Christ is heretical to others and it would appear that there is ample New Testament support for rejecting it. The relationship of Christ to the church is not one of identity but rather one that is analagous to the relationship between the Word and words in preaching. The church can never assume that it is not in a state of disobedience. Throughout the New Testament it is always being called to BE what it IS.

Furthermore if the Incarnation is continued it follows that the Atonement is continued, and this destroys the 'once for all' nature of the sacrifice of Christ, and threatens the fundamental Christian doctrine of Salvation by grace. This passage must be understood in a way that does not do violence to New Testament

(1) E Stauffer. New Testament Theology, SCM Press, London, 1955, page 39.

eteriology.

Some of the passages can be taken to have no more than ethical meaning:-
 "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6: 2); and
 the passage referring to Epaphroditus who "nearly died for the work of Christ,
 risking his life to complete your service to me" (Phil 2: 30). But nothing is
 merely ethical in the New Testament.

It can be claimed that many other passages in similar vein refer simply
 to the salvation experience. "You have died to the law through the body of
 Christ." (Ro 7: 4); "For I, through the law, have died to the law ---- I have
 been crucified with Christ." (Gal 2: 19-20); "All of us who have been baptized ~~throu~~
 into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death (Ro 6:3); "We know that our old
 self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed" (Ro:6:6);
 But the New Testament doctrine of salvation is misunderstood if it is taken to
 mean a mystical transaction whereby a person simply passes through a door.
 Life in Christ is a way rather than a door. The transaction is not simply a
 celestial one going on over the initiate's head. The 'Baptism' the sons of
 Zebedee are invited to partake of is a life-long affair. Christians are "always
 carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be
 manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death
 for Jesus sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh"
 (II Cor 4: 10-11). "I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the
 tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance - -" (Rev 1:9a) also
 indicates that salvation is a matter of participating in Christ's life. "If any
 man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me"
 (Mk 8: 34) . "Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus,
 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing
 to be grasped, But emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in
 the likeness of men." (Phil 2: 5-7) "For ~~this way you have been called, because~~
 Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in
 his steps." (I Pet 2: 21)

The doctrine of the 'Once for all' nature of Christ's atonement was never put forward as a proclamation that Christians would not have to suffer. It protects the idea that it is God alone who works our salvation, and that it is ours by grace. While we must be careful therefore not to deny the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice we must also be careful not to drain the suffering role of the Church of all significance. Best links this idea of the suffering of the church with the theme of the 'Suffering people of the Messiah' in current apocalyptic writings.¹ Thus it has eschatological meaning. But to admit this is precisely not to minimize the role. The New Testament does not relegate its eschatology to a side issue. Eschatology is at the heart of the New Testament. The discussion of the implications of New Testament eschatology for our problem will be picked up ^{again later} ~~further~~ in the essay. It is asteriology that concerns us here.

Life in Christ is seen as participating in Christ and this has no significance if it does not mean participating in his suffering love. Redemption in Christ is both an invitation to this participation and an enabling power for it. Life in Christ is a sin-bearing life: "For it has been granted to you, that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine" (Phil 1:29-30) As the author of Ephesians puts it, Paul is a "Prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you gentiles (Eph 3: 1) "what I am suffering for you... is your glory." (Eph 3: 13)

It could still be claimed that all this refers to the inter-member relationship within the church, and that the only relationship the church's suffering bears to the world, is that of enduring the latter's persecution. As we have seen the solution to this problem lies not in an exegesis of specific passages but in an embracing of the meaning implied in the whole complex of New Testament images of the Church.

We turn now to clusters of images - The People of God, and The New Creation.

(1) Ernest Best. Op.Oit. page 131.

The People of God

One must read a survey like the one in Chapter 3 of Paul Minear's book "Images of the Church in the New Testament" ¹ to come to the full realization of how pervasive in the New Testament is the assumption that the church is the Israel of God. Minear names eighteen in this cluster of images although many others like the vine, the olive and fig trees, the tent, and the building could also be classed as related. The list, including only some of the references is impressive.

1. The People of God: John is the only New Testament writer who is reluctant to make full use of this concept. It appears again and again in all writings except I & II Tim and Phil, where there is no reason to expect it, and the three epistles of John.
2. Israel: Sometimes this is the New Israel, sometimes the True Israel, but more often simply Israel. Gal 6: 15-16 Eph 2:12 Heb 8: 8-13, 11:25 Rev 2: 4 Matt 15: 24 Act 5:8 Luk 2:32-34 Mk 12: 29.
3. Chosen Race: I Pet 2:9
4. Holy Nation: I Pet 2:9 (c.f. Matt 21: 42-43)
5. Twelve Tribes: I Cor 10: 1-10 Ro 2: 15:8-10
6. Patriarchs: Rev 21: 12-14, 7:4-9 Matt 19: 28, 22: 30.
7. Circumcision: Phil 3:11 Ro 2: 25-29 Acts 7: 5 Col 2: 11-12.
8. Abraham's Sons: Gal 3: 29 Ro 4: 16.
9. New Exodus: Jno 3:14 Acts 3:22, 7:34 Heb 11: 23-29 I Cor 10: 1-12.
10. House of David, The dynasty of David is more directly associated with the Messiah than with the Church.
11. The Remnant: Ro 9:27, 11: 5-7.
12. The Elect: This is a strong element and appears in all four Gospels, Acts Paul's letters, the Pastorals, I Peter and Revelation.
13. Holy City: Galatians, Hebrews and Revelation.
14. Holy temple and Mount Zion: I Cor 1:6-19, 3: 16-17 Eph 2:18 I Pet 1: 2-5.
15. Priesthood: Heb chap 5-8 I Pet 2: 5-9 Rev 1: 6, 5: 10, 20: 6.
16. Sacrifice: Heb 13 and many of the lamb references.
17. Aroma Phil 4:18 II Cor 2: 15.
18. Festivals, Passover, Pentecost , Feast of Unleavened bread , and especially the Sabbath rest (Heb).

(1) Paul S Minear. Images of the Church in The New Testament, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960.

The list is indeed impressive but the real impact is due, not so much to the addition of specific references, but to the evidence this brings of the fact that this concept was so taken for granted throughout the whole Christian community in New Testament times. This fundamental presupposition, linking the church to Israel has the following implications for our problem.

First of all it confirms the concept, established in the 'Body' images, that salvation is of a corporate nature. While recognizing individual election to special tasks like the apostolic ministry, this cluster of images makes the strong emphasis that it is the People of God which is created to fulfill his purposes. In I Peter 2: 5-9 and Revelation 1: 6, 5: 10, 20: 6 the church as a whole is accorded a priesthood.

This set of images serves to link salvation in Christ and the Church to history and to God's saving acts in history. It makes the same point as the body images, that Christian salvation takes mundane life seriously but adds the dimension of history. The insistence that there are not two Israels but rather one, in spite of the logical problems this raises with the equally strong insistence that the church is the New Creation, points up that God's saving activity is activity in history. It is the promise to Abraham and his seed that is fulfilled in the church. For all the heart-searching it brings with it the New Testament does not consider the sociological, ^{could} biological form of the elect people of God as being outside salvation history, but as being an essential part of the economy of God. We do not have a Gnostic kind of salvation in the New Testament

This cluster of images also serves to point up the nature of the origin of the saved community - that it is created by God. Its theological ground rather than its sociological or racial ground is emphasized. The community is entirely dependent upon God's activity for its existence. God can raise up children unto Abraham at will (Matt 3: 9 Lk 3: 8). Here again we have a parallel emphasis with the body images.

It is true that this kind of thinking collides with the emphasis on

discontinuity. The image of the church as Israel does not always stay in place. In Acts 26: 17 the church is set over against both people and gentiles, In Revelation 15: 7-12 the church is seen as including both people and gentiles. A solution was found in distinguishing between Israel after the flesh and Israel after the spirit:- "We are the true circumcision" (Phil 3: 11). Circumcision is an inner matter - of the heart, not of the flesh (Ro 2: 25-29, Acts 7: 5). "Dying with Christ" is the circumcision not made with hands. A central point in the New Testament understanding of the People of God is that there is nothing automatic or necessary about membership in it. People can be deceived about their biology (Heb 3: 7-10). Patrimony is on the basis of decision and faith. In Matthew 23: 29-31 the Pharisees are called the sons of those who killed the prophets. The New Testament warns Christians about their membership in the people of God, they may not BE members. (I Cor 10: 1-10)

New Testament writers had to take seriously the problem of the rejection of Israel. This was a constant theme. It appears in many of the Kingdom parables and the images of the vine the fig tree and the olive tree. But as is clearly seen in Romans 9 - 11, the real burden of the New Testament concern was with Israel's rejection of Christ. The central theme is not God's rejection of Israel but Israel's rejection of God. This can surely be interpreted in no other way than as Israel's rejection of her God given mission - to be a blessing to the world.

It is true that now and again this cluster of images serves to point up the church's warfare with the world. The Holy City for instance is set against the City of Babylon. However the dominant element in these images serves to emphasize the mission of the church to the world. Minear claims that there is a marked tendency among New Testament writers to move towards ancient and away from recent analogies in Israel's past. Except for 'Remnant' analogies the New Testament makes almost no use of post-exile images. National images of the exile and monarchy have lighter weight than those of the exodus and patriarchs. The whole thrust is towards Abraham and God's promise to Abraham.

The whole significance of this thrust was to avoid the exclusiveness of one kind of Israelite tradition in the interest of the inclusiveness of another side of the same tradition. This is the continuity the New Testament assumes. The new community in Christ is the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham, (Acts 15: 14-18, Lk 24: 29-32 Acts 26: 22-23, Ro 15: 8-12). Again the inescapable implication is that Israel's apostasy lies in its rejection of its mission to the world.

It is interesting to note that Minear places a light value on the influence the 'Remnant' had on New Testament writing while the group of Swedish scholars which published The Root of the Vine ^① takes an opposing position as doubtless O Castrén would. The problem is a difficult one, but it makes no difference to our problem which way it is settled. If the value of the remnant image is light it serves to point up the concern of the church for its inclusive mission. If the value of the remnant image is strong, it serves to emphasize that the history of election narrowed more and more to the person of Christ, who alone saw salvation's work to be a cross of shame. If we afford a strong value to the image its message is that Israel's, and indeed all mankind's, apostasy lies in its rejection of its mission to the world.

The cultic images in this same cluster ~~also~~ make the same point. The new and perfect sacrifice was one of self-giving, not self-securing. (Heb 13: 10-16) Mercy and Love are greater than burnt offerings. (Matt 9: 13, 12: 6, Mk 12: 31)

The implications of this cluster of images cannot be escaped. In isolation the 'Body' images might be seen as reflecting an exaggerated concern in the New Testament for the inner relationships in the church. One could get the idea that the New Testament thought of the church as existing for its own sake. However the central point of the "Israel of God" theme stands in judgment of precisely this point of view. Israel is apostate when she thinks she exists for ~~herself~~ ^{herself} alone.

This inclusiveness might still be limited to a select few as the perfect number of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes seems to suggest (Rev 7: 4-8), although the same book, in the very next verse names the saved as a host from every nation that no man can number. (Rev 7:9) The problem is not solved by throwing a proof text

① Anton Fridrichsen (Ed), The Root of the Vine, Dacre Press, London, 1953

at a proof text. Rather let us turn to another cluster of New Testament images for the Church.

The New Creation

While sharing emphases with the others this cluster of images has emphases of its own. These reflect a cosmic and eschatological concern. It is in its eschatology that the New Testament reconciles its doctrines of creation and salvation. A faith which takes both with absolute seriousness and at the same time recognizes the depth and seriousness of evil is driven to an eschatology. Indeed it can be called an eschatological faith and its community an eschatological community.

While the 'People of God' cluster of images emphasized the continuity of God's activity in history, the understanding of the church as the new creation emphasizes the uniqueness of God's saving act in Christ. While this is a fulfillment of the original promises it is nonetheless a new and decisive act and the church is part of this New Creation. (Gal 6:15, II Cor 5:17, Jas 1:18)

This cosmic interest serves to reinforce the inclusiveness of the New Testament idea of the saved community. The promise given to Abraham was meant for all men. The figure of Adam becomes significant thrusting New Testament concern beyond Abraham to the first human. In Romans 5 the relation between creation and redemption is spelled out in terms of the first and second Adam. Clearly the emphasis is on a redemption for humanity. Indeed all creation was included in God's saving purpose and God's saving work in Christ.

It is at this point that eschatology becomes necessary. The claim that Christ was Lord, that the reign of God had been established was accompanied by the proclamation that this lordship and this reign were hidden. They were not manifest, they could be partly seen in the church. But even here there was a 'not yet' as well as an 'already' quality to the manifest nature of Christ's lordship. The church could be called the New Humanity, and the Christian called the New Man, but the actual group at any given time showed many signs of being still the old humanity. The church however was the first fruit of the New Creation (James 1:18, Rev 14: 4, II Thes 2: 13). It was on the way to receiving the full image of God. The Church was between what God had done and what God would do.

The New Testament description of the church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit carries the identical implications: - Salvation is God's act; it is the act of the same God who created all things; Salvation is corporate; it is pointed at all men. In Acts the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost is seen as the gift of power to start the mission. The presence of the Holy Spirit is seen as the earnest, the sign and the guarantee that this saving work which has begun will be completed by the same holy God.

It is within this eschatological understanding of "The church between the times" that we must find the New Testament understanding of the church's mission. It is spelled out literally in Matthew 24: 14, "and the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The cosmic implications are also spelled out :- "To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places". (Eph 3: 8-10) "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." (Ro 8: 19)

The groaning of the church, which has the first fruits of the Spirit, awaiting the full adoption as sons (Ro 8: 23), can hardly be confined to concern for the perfecting of itself. Such exclusiveness cannot be derived from an inclusive study of all the New Testament images of the church. It is impossible when we permit New Testament Christology illumine them all. Put together the 'Body' images, The 'Israel of God' images, the 'New Creation' images and then try to envisage this life in Christ as demanding anything less than what is demanded in Hebrews 13: 12-13:- "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him .

A closely related image which has implications for the church's relationship with the world is that of light. This image appears in nineteen New Testament writings and the designation of the church as the light of the world, or light to the Gentiles appears in Matthew 5:14, Luke 16: 8, Phil 22: 5, Acts 13: 47, I Peter 2:9.

While this gives the church a responsible role on behalf of the world it can still be interpreted as a passive one.

This set of "New Creation" images also sees the church's role with the world as one of warfare. Put on the whole Armour of God (Eph 6: 10-12) et alia. It is possible to insist that this is intended as a war of self preservation. However it is the total impact of the New Testament doctrine of salvation which prevents the interpretation of the church's warfare as defensive, and her illumination as passive. There is one verse of scripture, which because of its central place in the history of New Testament ecclesiology, ought to come to our attention here. This is the passage in Matthew 16: 18, where the charge is given to Peter - "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The RSV renders the key phrase "The Powers of Death". Even though this presents us with the meaning of the idiom, such a rendering buries a very important implication for the church. The use of the image the gates of Hades makes it clear that it is the defensive power of Hades that is being discussed, and not the church defences. The church here is not seen as being engaged in a defensive warfare with the powers of darkness. The latter powers are on the defensive, and the promise is that such defense is vain.

The only way to reach the New Testament doctrine of the church is to embrace all the images together. This in itself is not sufficient. These images, either individually or collectively, are not the truth. They point to a living reality which is the church and help us to recognize it when it is present. However it would be wrong to think that the New Testament doctrine of the church was given its content by the images used. The church received its being from God in Christ. the determining element in the doctrine of the church is Christ. The images, while helping to play out the implications of this fact, receive their distinctive meaning from Christ.

Christology precedes Ecclesiology

It is not the institution of marriage that illumines the relationship of Christ to his church, but rather this relationship which illumines the meaning of Christian

marriage. The Old Testament doctrine of election does not determine what the church thinks of Christ, ~~but~~ Christ ~~who~~ gives election its specifically Christian meaning. The meaning of the promise to Abraham is not derived from the Old Testament but is given its New Testament meaning by Christ. The Reign of God is given its decisive meaning by the interpretation Christ gave to the messiahship. The Lordship of Christ does not simply announce the victory of this particular group's founder, but of a specific quality of Sovereignty, Illumined by the life, teaching and passion of Jesus Salvation in Christ is not an esoteric Gnosticism, but a participation in a specific life and a specific death. The person and work of Christ are decisive for ecclesiology.

Everything depends upon who Christ was, what he taught, how he lived and how he died. Everything about the church's role depends upon how Christ interpreted his role. Christ's interpretation of his messiahship, which links the Son of Man with the Suffering Servant, is absolutely decisive. Only Jesus linked these. To everyone else this was an impossible scandal. It is the teaching and life of Christ that illumine Christology. This is the one about whom it is claimed "He is the Lord's Christ" - the one who came to serve and who reversed the whole idea of greatness in his life and teaching. It is the passion story that is behind all the images of the church. It was at the hands of exclusive Judaism, which panicked at the idea that Israel was to die to bless the world, that the Lord of the church was crucified. It was for sinners that Christ died. How could participating in Christ's dying mean anything less than suffering for sinners? God sent his son not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. How can the Church's ~~mission~~ be primarily a ~~mission~~ for survival, and how can its responsibility for edification be on behalf of itself alone?

There may not be many specific references in the New Testament which spell out the mission of the church in unambiguous terms. It is not so much what the early church said as what the early church was. This speaks even more eloquently when we remember the circumstances of those first days. The conviction regarding the mission to the world must have been enormous for it to

consider one let alone embark on one. It is not so much what Paul said as what Paul was. It is not so much what Christ said as what he was. It is very difficult to read the New Testament and escape the inference that Christ IS a world mission. Corporate life in this Christ cannot be anything less.

Conclusions

Our survey has discovered that the New Testament doctrine of the church includes a strong sense of mission. It can be claimed, on the basis of countless isolated references, that in the New Testament church this mission was largely entrusted to people specially called as apostles, messengers, ambassadors etc. However, with evidence pouring in from all sides that the New Testament considered salvation to be a corporate matter, it must be admitted that even this specialist activity was carried on by members of the church AS members. The church was responsible for sending them if nothing else. The corporate nature of the New Humanity and the Israel of God leaves us with no escape from the admission that ^{the church} has a mission to the world. The New Testament view of the apostasy the old Israel leaves us no doubt about the fact that the mission is essential to the church. New Testament eschatology, with its cosmic view of salvation, linking creation and redemption, gives the church an inescapable role in the world. New Testament Christology prevents this role from being limited to a passive illumination and a defensive warfare. If it is true that Christ is God's mission to the world, then it is impossible to escape the fact that corporate life in him is also a mission to the world. It is indeed in the New Testament that we learn that the Church IS mission.

It is also true to say that in the New Testament there is much testimony to the fact that the church is more than mission. The church is not only a means, it is also an end. As has been pointed out, almost the whole of the writing dealing with the Body of Christ has to do with the inward life of the church. The inter-member relationship is for the mutual edification of all. The Member-Christ relationship is for the fulfilling of the members. These are to also the glory of God. These are also fulfilment in a fragmentary way. The

church is a foretaste of the consummation, and as such is end as well as means. The very Glory of God however, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is Holy self-emptying love. This is the heart of the scandal, and it will not permit us to separate church and mission.

Bruner's statement, "The Church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning" has not been spelled out anywhere in the New Testament. The Word of God is not spelled out anywhere in the New Testament. Indeed "freed from the idolatry and tyranny of words by the sovereignty of the Word made flesh"¹, the modern church may be in just that situation to hear God's full word on the mission of the church. Now may be the hour for the clearest of all Christian understandings of the relation between the church and the world, to be given to the church. It may not be one that the New Testament has ever mentioned, but it will be one that the New Testament church would have fully understood.

The most promising of these insights is that one derived from the eschatological doctrine of the Lordship of Christ in the world. It leads the church to expect to meet Christ in the world. Our era is perhaps one of the best for the church to come to a recognition of her own sin. We can see a new meaning in Christ's hidden reign in the world in that it will be as she relates to the world that the church will meet the judgment of Christ. This may be the hour for the church to realize in a new way, that the world has a mission to the church, - Christ's mission. This is not a foreign idea to the New Testament. In Acts 15:11, when Paul is reporting on his missionary activity, he says "But we believed that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." It was the Gentile mission that firmed up the doctrine of Justification by grace.

However it has probably awaited for our time to have the definition of the Mission as the 'Road from the Church to the Church', and someone like J C Hoekendijk flying for some unchurchly air.² Ecclesiology can be a dreadfully stuffy place to search for the mission of the church. Surely both mission and ecclesiology

(1) Paul S Minear. op cit page 267

(2) J C Hoekendijk. The Church in Missionary Thinking, International Review of Missions, Edinburgh, London, New York, 1952, p 324.

take their starting point from Christ and "we cannot obtain joyful certitudo with regard to the gospel, and still live in confident securitas with regard to the church".¹ The modern view, which finds the distinction between the church and the world as problematical, and which sees Christians as called to treat their Christian and non-Christian fellows alike, may not be able to find support in any New Testament verses, But it is from the New Testament that such a word was heard.

* We cannot think of the church without the question 'The Son of Man, when he comes, will he find faith of the earth?'. Let us not try to silence or even answer that question. -- We cannot think of the church without hearing that startling promise 'Thine eyes will see his glory'. Let us not try to silence this promise. Between this question and this promise all missionary thinking of the church should take place.*²

(1) J C Hoekendijk. Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

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