Theologies and Strategies for Development

Christian commitment to action in the world involves struggle in society. Struggle arises out of Christian understanding of the world, which is in rebellion against God and is the arena of his activity, loved by him. In each situation struggle is involved in moving society from what it is to what it ought to be. The Third World identifies that struggle as one between the strong and weak in society; the First World sees the struggle as a struggle to master God-given resources in nature. The First World tends to downplay the struggle between the strong and the weak in Third World societies because the First World has gradually developed checks and balances to produce countervailing power to limit the strong in their own societies.

In the three continents of the Third World, Christians are developing theologies and programmes for struggle against oppressive political and/or oppressive economic systems. In Latin America the context is struggle against oppressive governments and economic systems. They advocate a programme for the church to become educated about the rights of the poor, side with the poor, awake them to their rights and organize them to exercise countervailing power to achieve those rights. There is no disagreement over the central role of the church in the struggle. There is considerable debate about whether Christians can use violence. Everyone agrees that there is covert violence of the strong against the weak. Some from a Thomistic tradition regard that as grounds for legitimate self-defence by the weak in a just revolution; others stress that Jesus taught non-violence in resisting enemies and overcoming evil in society.

In Asia the struggle is also against oppressive political and
economic systems, often reinforced by religion. In many parts of Asia, violence is not an option for Christian obedience, because of the teaching of the gospel, the minority status of the church, and the religious and social traditions of non-violence in the cultures. But the place of the church in social change is under sharp debate. For thinkers like M. M. Thomas the church is less relevant. God’s action is taking place in society and the church is being formed wherever humanization occurs. Those loyal to Jesus Christ should find him in these ‘open Churches’. For evangelicals like Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, the church is central in any Christian social programme, as a model of what society ought to be like, a catalyst for achieving that goal, and the goal of God’s redemptive work in society in Christ. To achieve this end the church should engage in educating its members in issues of justice, making the poor aware of their rights, working with the poor in projects where the poor have maximum participation, and sharing in partnership with the world-wide church to achieve these ends.

In Africa the struggle is mainly against oppressive economic systems. In states such as Tanzania the government is itself committed to changing economic structures for the benefit of the poorest. So struggle is more formalized in political and educational institutions. People are encouraged in participation, self-reliance and community organization by the government itself. In South Africa the picture is different. The struggle is against an oppressive government which is seen as the source of racist and oppressive economic policies. South African theologians of liberation have not yet spelt out their programme, but their theology implies the struggle of the weak to attain the rights of human beings.

What methods should Christians use in the struggle between the poor and weak to move society to where it ought to be? There are a number of ethical options on which Christians in the Third World share common ground. They agree that the church should follow her master in identifying her concerns, her interests and her lifestyle with the poor, weak and oppressed in society over against the rich and the strong. The church should clearly take the side of the poor in society, not because the poor will always be right but because they are most likely to be taken advantage of and be unprotected against those who would exploit them. The church should make the poor aware of their rights and dignity as human beings, informed both by her own understanding of the dignity of man, and by the rights enshrined in national and international declarations, which spell
out justice in society. The church should work for change in the political and economic systems, so that there is room for the poor both to attain and to exercise their legitimate rights.

How should the church work for change in the political and economic systems? Here there is a clear difference of opinion. One school of thought identifies the problem as the exercise of power in society. Society is controlled by those who are enabled by their wealth, status, and followings to hold the levers of power. Christians should work with all groups who are seeking to gain those levers of power and try to operate them for the benefit of the poorest. If only a violent contest will remove the current holders of the levers of power from their positions, then Christians must not shrink from that necessity. They will be theologically fortified by a long tradition in western theology of legitimate Christian participation in just war and tyrannicide.

A second school of thought begins with the demonstration of God’s power in the New Testament through the powerlessness of Christ in his ministry and finally on the cross. During his ministry he renounced worldly power and spectacular displays of supernatural power. He moved among the powerless and exploited people of society and associated with those of low social status. He made himself vulnerable to jibes of illegitimacy and drunkenness, and had nowhere to lay his head. This display of the nature of God’s power in servanthood provoked the vested interests of Jewish society to have him crucified. The crucifixion saw Jesus at his most powerless in the world’s terms. But as the suffering servant he opened the way for the unstoppable resurrection power of God to burst in on human history through his resurrection from the dead thus confirming his Lordship over history. While the natural working of human power in the world produces distortions in society which bring injustice and suffering, God shows his power to correct and redeem these in the cross where Jesus took the consequences of men’s distorted use of power. The New Testament affirms not that Jesus had no power whatsoever, but that Jesus displayed the true power of God as he renounced worldly forms of power and lived, died and rose as the suffering servant.

The church is to be the community where this same power of God is demonstrated as she takes the same role as her master. The Acts and Epistles show that God’s power is active as barriers are broken down in human relationships and new relationships of justice and peace are built. Gentiles enter the infant Christian communities on the same footing as Jews. Masters and slaves, husbands and wives are mutually subordinate to
each other. These barriers are broken and these new relationships are built through repentance and forgiveness, through reconciliation in place of retaliation.

The church today is called to demonstrate this true power of God by learning the powerlessness and servanthood of Jesus. She should renounce worldly models of growth and success, and take the side of the socially oppressed, the poor and those who have no place in their own society. She should build relationships and structures in her own life and practice which challenge the prevailing injustices in the society around her. The church should also be engaged in promoting those structures in society which attempt to bring just relationships, and should be engaged in evangelism to share Jesus Christ as the one who makes them possible. In a recent meeting of Christians with Hindu businessmen discussion centred on whether it was possible to be humane and just in employment practices and at the same time make a profit. The concluding question was “How is it possible for self-centred men to become humane and just?”

The church will also seek to demonstrate ways in which the weak and the strong can be related in ways which neither continue the weak in false dependence on the paternalism of the strong, nor recruit a few members for the strong from among the weak, but achieve the goal of equality. This model must develop both within society, within national churches and between churches in the third and first worlds.

In the western world we discern three strategies for Christian action. The first strategy is of those western theologians who identify themselves closely with liberation theology. They call for a new international order and for radical changes within the western nations, not only to change the consumer patterns which determine international economics, but also to give justice to those groups whom they perceive as oppressed within the west: blacks, women, immigrants, and those in declining industries and neighbourhoods. This group of theologians would especially include Martin Luther King and James Cone. Martin Luther King’s actions and writings eloquently demonstrated the potential of a non-violent Christian critique of and resistance to endemic structural injustice, in the form of racism. His life and writings have long been an inspiration to both authors of this paper. James Cone has contributed a forceful critique of American society and of American theology, and done important work on how culture conditions biblical interpretation. Both these contributors must be taken especial notice of because they offer their critique from a non-Marxist stance, though of course
many of their detractors would disagree with that.³

Western theologians of similar sympathies now call on the Western churches to support liberation groups in Third World churches. This strategy clearly surfaced at the Uppsala assembly of the W.C.C. in 1968. The Programme to Combat Racism was formed as a mode of Christian obedience to alter the structures of racist Christian societies.

The second strategy is of those who identify the struggle in the Third World as a struggle to master God-given resources in nature. They advocate an enlightened capitalism as the way to win in this struggle, developing individual initiative and providing those resources that are lacking. They choose this path for a number of reasons. First, they see the success of enlightened capitalism in the west. Secondly, social struggle within the the west between the strong and the weak was carried on by and large within democratic frameworks and within the spirit of the Christian tradition where an appeal was always possible to the conscience of the strong. They do not see the priority of social struggle in the Third World. Thirdly, they suspect that issues of a struggle would involve the church in an improper and unchristian commitment to certain political stances.

We also discern a third group in the west who are distinct from the first two groups, and are gradually formulating a distinct theology and strategy. Those in this group are all evangelical, but have different roots.

In America Anabaptist Christians felt that the Anabaptist heritage had an important witness to the wider church which seemed to be flirting with violence to produce social change in response to the problems posed by liberation theologians. The Anabaptist tradition combined concern for structural change in society through new structures in the church with a commitment to non-violence. John Yoder’s Politics of Jesus comes from this tradition and became a seminal book for many who were asking for biblical guidelines for structural change when it appeared in 1972.⁴

The Vietnam experience prompted Jim Wallis and others in what is now the Sojourners’ Community to question the marriage between Christianity and the American dream which had appeared to sanction the Vietnamese war as a defence of Christian faith and values.³

These groups joined with those from more traditional reformed backgrounds such as Carl Henry to produce the Chicago Declaration in 1973.

In Britain in the late sixties the Shaftesbury Project of the
Inter-Varsity Fellowship, and The Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund of the Evangelical Alliance (TEAR Fund) began to develop practical projects for harnessing increasing evangelical discussion on social issues into concrete action. Many other small groups had been pursuing evangelical social concern, but these national movements put the social question firmly on the evangelical agenda.

At Lausanne in 1974, Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar brought the question of social justice into the centre of evangelical debate. Concern for social justice was expressed in the formal Covenant, but a large number of conference members produced a further statement strengthening the commitment to social justice in the mission of the church. Since then a major debate has begun in evangelical circles on the place of social justice in the mission of the church. Christian Mission in the Modern World by John Stott, and Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger by Ron Sider have been important trend-setting books in the evangelical community in the last few years.

This response by evangelicals has produced a lot of social concern, involvement, sacrificial giving, development projects and attempts at simpler lifestyle. But it has not produced a coherent theology of social change adequate to deal with the questions of structural change raised by theologians of liberation. So most evangelicals in the First World and their partners in Third World churches are largely found in category two of the strategies we discern. They also follow theology number 2 of the three theologies of social change that we outline.

Towards a Theology of Social Change

What development strategies arise out of the two understandings of Christian involvement in development that we examined?

Understanding one, that development activity expresses God's work in providence, issues in a strategy of disinterested concern in the welfare of society as a whole. The Lausanne Covenant gives succinct expression to this theology.

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society, and for liberation of men from all kinds of oppression. Because man is made in the image of God, every person... has an intrinsic dignity, because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited.

Christian involvement in development comes under the mandate of creation. It is the activity of the kingdom of God's left
hand. Christians act as salt and light in the world in their callings in secular society, to preserve a just human and social order. This theology of development extends Christian strategy to education, health, agriculture and other projects which enhance the dignity of man.

A leading advocate of this theology is John R. W. Stott. He writes: “God the creator is constantly active in his world in providence, in common grace and in judgment, quite apart from the purposes for which he has sent his Son, his Spirit and his church into the world.”¹⁰ In other words God sustains and judges in the world, quite separately from his redemptive work in Christ. The redemptive work of Christ is limited to where Christ is consciously acknowledged and that can be only in the church, not even in a “Christian” nation. This means that any true change towards God’s purpose for man in society, arising out of the death and resurrection of Christ, can take place only within the confines of the church.¹¹ This is the root of the tension in evangelical discussion between evangelism and social action; since the acknowledgement of Christ is always required for any true social change, evangelism always has a priority.

Third World Christians, including many evangelicals, are asking that the church around the world address itself to the problems of social change and the issues of struggle between the strong and the weak to achieve a just society. Those in the First World who have partner churches in the Third World favour a strategy of struggle to master natural resources, based on a theology where God is seen as the creator, preserver and judge of the natural order. Such a theology is in the eyes of some inadequate for grappling with the burning issues of social change and struggle between the weak and the strong.

Our fundamental criticism of this ‘creation-based theology’ is that it is divorced from redemption, from the eschatological recapitulation of all things in Christ which has been inaugurated with his coming. Our criticisms of the effects of this theology are therefore not to be taken as criticisms of the place of creation in Christian theologizing, but of a defective theology of creation divorced from eschatological salvation which is present now.

First, such a defective theology of creation gives no basis for identifying, entering or directing struggle between weak and strong. It sees the church only as a sign-post and conscience for society, speaking out prophetically against injustice and bad stewardship, setting a standard for society, and modelling what the church ought to be like. Secondly, without the eschatologi-
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cal dimension, the bias of the theology is for preserving the created order while the real task of redemption takes place on the 'spiritual' level. This gives little encouragement for social change and tends to help the status quo. God is identified as the author and preserver of the status quo, he preserves it, he will at the end of history judge it, but he does not change it now. This theological position becomes an unwitting ally of the status quo. Thirdly, such a defective creation theology can easily slip into a dualism: since the real sphere of God's activity is the spiritual sphere, creation and the created can be lower on the Christian agenda than it should be. Christian activity and action are directed more towards the expansion of the church. Costly involvement in issues of struggle which might hamper numerical growth is often missing from the church's witness.

Happily many people are better than their theologies and do not act consistently with their theologies. This makes it all the more imperative to develop a sound theological base for activity for social change, which Christian churches and agencies in the Third World are discerning as increasingly imperative if biblical justice is to be achieved. We wish to suggest that the Bible does not in fact stop at theology number 1, the theology which separates God's role in the world as creator, preserver and judge from his role in the church as redeemer. We suggest that biblical teaching supports the view that the struggle to achieve just relationships between the weak and the strong in society is not a secondary activity of the church. It is an application of the redemptive work of God in Christ to the world outside the church. In support of this view we cite a number of key biblical themes.

The kingdom of God

God is at work in the world in establishing his kingdom through Jesus Christ. An increasing body of literature is exploring and developing the theme of the kingdom of God in the gospels and its central place in the mission of Jesus and in the mission of the church. We are beginning to see that the scope of the kingdom of God extends not just to the community of the King that consciously acknowledges Jesus as Lord, but is also seen in God's kingdom activity in the world beyond the church. The kingdom of God is seen not only as God calls men in repentance and faith to join the church, but also as the just relationships that belong to the kingdom are established in society. These just relationships are seen clearly in Jesus' own ministry, as he announces
the kingdom as good news to the poor, as he declares that the bias of the kingdom is to invite the outcast and the oppressed to the king’s feast, as he casts the religious leaders for ignoring justice, as he gives a priority to the poor, sick and oppressed in his ministry.

There is a broad sense of agreement about the nature of God’s kingdom activity. But other biblical themes need further exploration in order to provide clarity in understanding the scope of God’s kingdom activity. We would like to dwell on these other themes.

**The world**

God’s kingdom activity has to do with the world God made. What is the world that God is at work in? The Bible has a double focus in discussing the world. The world is man-in-society in rebellion against God, the usage reflected in the term ‘worldly’. Paul advises that we should not be conformed to this world. The rebellion of the world finds its climax, reveals its nature and experiences complete defeat in the cross of Jesus. Paul writes in Galatians 6:14 “By means of his cross, the world is dead to me, and I am dead to the world.”

Secondly, the world is the arena of God’s activity. It is loved by him and destined not for final abandonment but to be transformed into God’s kingdom at the return of Christ in a new heaven and new earth.

From this theme we discern that God has a purpose for the world outside the church in his plan of redemption. If his plan of redemption is being put into partial effect now, that redemption could be at work in the world beyond the church.

**God at work in Christ**

God’s kingdom activity is focussed in, and inaugurated by Jesus Christ. The New Testament witness is that the God of the Jews is to be understood as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; that the work of God in creation and redemption is focussed, defined and executed in Christ. The theological question that this raises is whether God works in the world at present apart from what he has shown of himself in Christ. Does God work on the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection only in the church? Has the victory of Christ over sin, evil and death in his cross and resurrection no implications for the way God works in the world as a whole outside the church? Of course, conscious acknowledgement of that victory takes place
in the church, and salvation in its full sense is linked with that
conscious acknowledgement. But are the effects of Christ's vic-
tory limited only to where it is consciously acknowledged in the
world? Does his victory not have any implications for the work
of God in the world beyond the church? If we say that it has no
implications or effects, then we are saying that God works in the
world outside the church, without relationship to the victory of
Christ on the cross. If, however, God's whole work in the world
is related to the death and resurrection of Christ, we may look
for the pattern of redemption at work where God is at work in
the world beyond the church. We can say that God does more
than preserve and judge the world outside the church; he works
to change it into conformity with his redemption plan. This
theme is a Christological theme.

**God at work in law and promise**

If God works in the world beyond the church to apply the
results of the victory of the cross, how does he do so? The
answer we suggest lies in his Law and his promise. God's king-
dom activity is in fulfilment of his promise and to establish his
Law. In the Old Testament God worked among his people and
the nations through two agents — the Law and the promise. The
Law was given to the people who inherited God's promise to
Abraham; it was part of the promise. The Law defined God's
expectations of his people in establishing just and human rela-
tionships in society. The Law was meant to prevent structures
from exploiting and oppressing the poor, to provide protection
and relief for the poor and vulnerable. The Law was God's in-
strument of judgment for Israel. It was also his instrument of
judgment for the nations. The Old Testament prophets held the
surrounding nations guilty by the standards of God's Law.

God's work through promise was his intervention in grace to
bring renewal. His action in promise delivered Israel from Egypt
and made possible a new beginning in the promised land. His
promise prevented Israel's complete destruction and in spite of
her constant apostasy God used his people to manifest his Son.

Law was not separate from promise. Both worked together.
Law did not block the way for people realizing the need for the
promise. Both Law and promise, judgment and grace, went to-
gether. The gift of the Law was part of the fulfilment of God’s
promise to deliver his people and give them a land where they
could worship and serve him. Jonah's announcement of God’s
Law and judgment to Nineveh contained the possibility of pro-
mice and grace, much to Jonah's surprise and annoyance. Amos insisted that the Israelites were not the only ones who had experienced God's hand in a national exodus: "Did I not bring up the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?" God's work of Law and promise, judgment and grace, is neither indiscriminately universal, nor yet confined to Israel.

The Law and the promise are fulfilled in Christ — supremely in his atoning death. He fulfils the demands of the Law, for disobedient humanity and gives the decisive interpretation of the Law. In his death he took the full penalty of the Law on himself, in accepting God's judgment on sin; yet this was at the same time the fulfilment of God's promise of a new covenant. Jesus fulfilled the promise of Isaiah 61:1-4. Law and promise, judgment and grace are united in the invasion of God's kingdom into history. Jesus exercised a ministry of judgment on Israel in his prophetic denunciation of the Jewish leaders, and offered grace and shalom to God's covenant people: "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace." He called a community to be the sign of the kingdom by demonstrating God's action of Law and promise in their life. The community was to exhibit in her economic, social and political life the operation of God's Law and promise, breaking down and building up, putting to death and renewing.

If God's Law is so closely linked with his promise, can we describe God as at work outside the church in the world as judge without bringing some aspect of promise? The purpose of his Law in the Old Testament was to prevent structures from exploiting the poor and to provide protection and relief for the poor and vulnerable. The Law was not an instrument of condemnation without hope. It did not preserve the status quo, but sought to change it and open it up for the ultimate acceptance of God's promise.

God at work in judgment and grace

God's kingdom activity is expressed in judgment and grace. In the New Testament we find that when God is described as working in judgment beyond the church, judgment is clearly linked with grace, issues in grace and has a purpose of grace. Judgment without grace, that is, condemnation does not occur until the final judgment. John describes how light comes into the world and men love darkness rather than light. But this light is not a searchlight of judgment. It is life which brings light to all mankind. It is a sun of righteousness which offers light and life.
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their response men experience it both as a judgment on their deeds and the source of life. Christ’s work outside the church is therefore a work of grace, and an offer of grace. When men reject that offer, their rebellion is revealed and judgment follows. But that judgment is still with the purpose of grace.21

Paul shows that the purpose of God’s judgment in this world is grace. God’s judgment is kindness seeking to lead men to repent.22 Neither Paul nor John isolates judgment from grace. In the world outside the church God is at work in Christ through grace-judgment-grace: It is the light (Christ) which comes into the world; it is the Spirit of Christ which convicts the world of sin because they do not believe in him.23 This theme shows that we cannot interpret the work of God in the world beyond the church without relationship to Christ or to the work of grace. We can look for God at work in grace and judgment, changing men.

Judgment and grace in society

Can we look for God’s judgment and grace in man-in-society, and not just individual lives? In Romans 10, Paul deals with God’s purpose in the historical process for the Jewish and Gentile nations, considered as social entities rather than as collections of individuals. The message of grace comes to the Jews. Those who respond form a remnant; those who reject it grow deaf and dull of hearing. The nation is judged for its rejection. But that judgment has a two fold purpose of grace: it is so that the Gentile nations may be brought in and so that out of envy of the Gentiles, the Jewish nation may one day accept God’s offer. Here Paul applies the redemptive work of Christ to a group outside the church. In the historical process God is at work in societies to open them up to receive the full blessings of redemption. Before the nation responds, God acts in its history with the purpose of grace.

In Romans 13 and 1 Tim. 2 we see grace and judgment at work in the political structures of society. In Romans 13 the ruler is under the authority of God. He is to give approval to what is good, and to be the servant of God to exercise wrath on the wrongdoer. The purpose of the ruler’s authority in society is that “we may lead a quiet and a peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”24 God is at work in the political structures of society in judgment and grace, to open society up
to the conscious acknowledgement of Christ and thus the fulfilment of the purpose of God for man.

The goal of this work is always to bring men into the kingdom of God and membership in the body of Christ, in open acceptance of Christ as Lord. We must not identify the action of God's grace in the world outside the church with the conscious acknowledgement of the Lordship of Christ by his believing body. But we do claim that the Lordship of Christ is exercised beyond the church as God acts in judgment and (unacknowledged) grace, in the world. The difference between unacknowledged and acknowledged grace lies not in the manner of God's activity, but in the nature of man's response. Where men respond to judgment and grace, they receive Christ. Where men do not respond, they incur judgment on themselves. The work of evangelism is therefore to co-operate where God has already been at work in judgment and grace in his world, on the basis of the victory of Christ applying its effects to man-in-society.

Paul is confident that God works through kings and rulers and the political structures of society to open society up to the conscious acknowledgement of Christ, by judgment on its unjust structures and grace in moving it towards God's purpose for human life. This is the effective operation of the Lordship of Christ in the world beyond the church, to bring creation to its God-ordained goal.

This understanding gives a basis for seeing that God is at work in society beyond the church applying the effects of Christ's victory in society through social change. Thus all of history becomes the arena where God can be discerned at work, and all of history is moving towards fulfilment in Christ. We assert that this is true not only of those activities where Christ is consciously acknowledged, but also of those areas where 'ground-breaking' is going on, where structures of justice are being established, where opportunities for choice are being increased so that people can also choose Christ; here also God's grace can be seen at work. God's redemption activity is also at work, even though it is not consciously acknowledged as such.

The image of God

A central purpose of God's kingdom activity is to restore and recreate man. In explaining redemption in Christ Paul uses among other categories the category of the restoration of the image of God in man in Christ. This is linked with his understanding that Christ is the second Adam, the head of a new
humanity. Whether the image of God refers to qualitative aspects of man's humanity, such as his ability to make moral choices, or functional aspects, such as his vice-regency over creation, the Christian community is meant to display some of the marks of restored humanity. Paul clearly thought that the marks of restored humanity included equality between Jews and Gentiles, and an abolition of all distinctions of inferiority based on race, position or sex. The important question is whether some aspects of man's image can be restored for man in the church without a change in the social order. Could God's purpose that there be no distinctions between master and slave be achieved while wider society practised a system of slavery which inevitably affected Christians? If that system of slavery has to be changed, take it ever so long to do so, in order that the image of God may be restored to the new humanity God wills in Christ, must that change not be due in part to the work of Christ? In order that God's purpose for the new humanity in Christ be fulfilled, certain systematic and structural changes have to come in society. These changes are therefore related to what Christ achieved in his cross and resurrection. When non-Christian society beyond the church changes from a slavery system, can we not see also parts of God's image in man being restored, as society is opened up for the full restoration of humanity to be made possible in the church?

The church is always the goal and model for God's purpose for man in society. But to achieve that goal and model, we suggest that the effects of Christ's work in society beyond the church are at work to open society up for the full realization of God's purpose for man in society.

The principalities and powers

God's kingdom activity is cosmic in its scope. Some theologians discern a biblical base for asserting that Christ is at work in society beyond the church to apply the work of redemption in Paul's discussion of the principalities and powers. These powers are, in Paul's thought, demonic forces behind structures in society such as the state and the Jewish religion. Christ triumphed over their rebellion against God on the cross, and is sovereign over them. He is continually disarming them and triumphing over them by overcoming the injustice created by their rebellion in society. This work is not necessarily exercised by the church. Wherever justice replaces injustice in social structures, we can see Christ at work redemptively, as Lord of history.
Some evangelicals suspect that this is an attempt to reduce Pauline teaching about supernatural realities to merely humanistic categories, an attempt to demythologize Paul. However, those evangelicals who espouse a Pauline theology of principalities and powers neither demythologize Paul, nor do they identify structures and demons nor do they deny the reality of personal demons. They ask that a category of Jewish apocalyptic that Paul uses, that of demonic forces behind social realities, be taken in its widest sense, and not limited to demonic personal spirits which possess individuals.

The case for a theology of social change does not rest on the theology of principalities and powers. It rests on Christology. But if this theology of principalities and powers is accepted, it increases our understanding of how Paul thought of Christ as being sovereign of the world.

The groaning of creation

God's kingdom brings the promise of redemption to the whole created order which includes human society. What does Paul refer to when he speaks in Romans 8 of creation groaning as it awaits its final redemption? Some interpreters ask whether the personal categories that Paul uses, such as the bondage to decay and the promise of obtaining the glorious liberty of the children of God, do not point to the fact that Paul was contrasting those who already have the first fruits of the Spirit with the rest of mankind (not inanimate creation), who groan as they long for release from bondage into the freedom of God's children. If this case is made, it encourages us to look for signs of God's redemptive work in society which would represent the groaning of mankind as it longs for the fulfilment of this redemption. It longs for its fulfilment because it is aware of the painfulness of bondage to decay and has experienced some aspects of redemption. Christians themselves are not exempt from this groaning, for they experience only the first fruits of redemption and still long for its completion. This theme would then encourage us to look for God at work in society bringing some aspects of redemption on the basis of the work of Christ.

The goal is the church

Taken cumulatively, these themes would encourage us to see the work of struggle for social change and for justice as part of the means of applying the work of redemption which has been won in Christ, whether or not the work is carried on by Christians.
This does not hallow any social change in any direction; it applies only to that social change which would enhance biblical justice in society. The point of the case is that God works towards this goal of enhancing biblical justice in society by other means as well as by conversion and building up the church.

Yet the focus of his work is always the church, and the goal is always the open acknowledgement of Christ and the experience of redeemed humanity in the body of the second Adam. God’s redemptive work beyond the church is to open society up both so that that acknowledgement may take place, and so the new humanity may take as complete shape as possible. But his people may not always be his instrument in achieving this goal, and his method may not always be the method of preaching the gospel. For we must ask whether, if the church fails in its task, God is limited to the church. In the Old Testament he raised up Assyria and others to fulfil his purposes, even addressing Cyrus as his servant. The goal of God’s action was his people. But the method God used was to alter society in such a way that his purpose for his covenant people could be achieved.

We therefore see from these themes that a biblical case can be made for regarding the work of Christ beyond the church as not fundamentally inferior to his work in the church. Its basis is the same, the victory of Christ on the cross and in his resurrection. Its goal is the same, the creation of a new humanity in Christ which openly acknowledges him as Lord. Its method is complementary to the preaching and teaching ministry of the church: it both opens society up to the possibility of acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, and it enables those who acknowledge his Lordship to experience the full dimensions of the new humanity. We suggest that such a process can be seen in some of the struggles for social change in the Third World, where the weak are seeking full human dignity in struggle with the strong. The strong will also achieve a fuller humanity in true participation with the weak in society. The task of the church in development should be to co-operate with and where possible initiate such a struggle.

Theology, Ideology and Choices in Development

Why do people choose one theology and strategy for development rather than another? Is it solely that some people interpret Scripture faithfully because they set themselves under its authority and others do not? Is it solely because, among those who accept the authority of Scripture, some are more and some are
less accurate in their interpretations? Or do people have other commitments which also influence their choice, not only of strategy but also of theology? Do people have values and judgments about how society should be which influence their decisions in these areas?

John F. Robinson clearly thinks that people can be influenced in this way, and that this is a danger to avoid in development thinking. He writes:

Any theology that engages itself with the concerns of the poor and oppressed must deal with complex sociological, economic and political realities. Because of the pluralism in contemporary interpretations of society and the risk that they contain erroneous philosophical assumptions and views of man, evangelicals must be careful not to tie their faith to any particular sociological analysis or theory of change. Theologies of liberation which are yoked to such analyses and theories render themselves highly vulnerable to changing scientific thinking.

Robinson identifies an important point which raises the following questions:

1. Are evangelicals themselves free of a sociological analysis and vision for society?
2. Is it possible for people to have an increasing control over their environment and destiny, without adopting some sociological explanation of the cause of their deprivation and some theory and programme for change?
3. Is it possible to remain free of a sociological analysis till we adopt one, or do we all unconsciously betray an assumed analysis as soon as we ask the question “Why are poor people poor?”
4. Does loyalty to the authority of Scripture ensure that a person is unbiased in his view of society, or does it give grounds for forming a view on how society should be?
5. Is it possible to engage as Christians in development without having a commitment to some form of world view or ideology, Christian or secular?

We should all recognize that as men living in societies we all reflect the traditions and expectations of our culture. We have to. We all have a world view. David Lim summarizes Charles Kraft’s definition of world view in these words:

A world view forms each society’s basic model of reality from which the conceptual and behavioural forms (linguistic, social, religious, and technical structure) find their unified meaning. It explains how and why things exist, continue or change, evaluates which forms are proper or improper, gives a psychological stability in times of crisis and
Evangelicals and Development provides sociological identity in times of peace. It systematizes and orders the varied perceptions of reality in that society into an overall, integrated perspective.6

We adopt the term ‘world view’ because it is a less loaded term than the word ‘ideology’. But ideology is basically the same thing. Philip Wogaman writes:

An ideology is a complex weaving together of values and beliefs. It is our (often unconscious) picture of what society ought to be like. We may believe that this picture describes society as it once was, and therefore we seek to return to that golden age of the past. We may think it describes society as it is, in which case we will stoutly resist all change. Or we may think of it as a vision of what has never been, but may someday be, in which case we shall be ‘progressive’, or possibly ‘revolutionary’... All ideologies contain some element of value-judgment — some conception of the good. Hence while all ideology is not the same as religion or philosophy, it may depend on values and beliefs which have religious and philosophical origin.31

Evangelicals easily spot world views and ideologies in other theologians who are committed to a Marxist analysis of society and programme for change. Of course Marxists deny that they have an ideology: they claim that they are merely following the scientific laws of history. They are being realistic. But if we say to a Marxist “Why not take the side of the oppressors? It would be more comfortable”, he usually resorts to a value-judgment that it is wrong for people to be oppressed. In answering in this way he moves beyond his scientific analysis to give a value-judgment.

Laissez-faire capitalism often claims scientific validity for its vision of society: it claims that it is historically the case that market freedom produces the best economic results. But there is no certainty that capitalism has made its case on economic grounds as the most efficient way to steward resources.32 Apologists for capitalism usually claim that market freedom preserves the values of individual freedom and initiative. At once they have moved beyond evidence to values, to ideology.

The last twenty years have seen a rejection of both Marxism and capitalism as being doctrinaire systems which blindfold their supporters from seeing the reality of life. In Britain Anthony Wedgewood Benn and Keith Joseph are regarded as equally fanatic and myopic spokesmen for the left and right. What is needed for the complex, difficult problems of the day is simple pragmatism: taking the best solution in the circumstances, judging each case on its own merits. However, as soon
as pragmatists say “We have a problem here”, be it the problem of poverty or inflation, they cease merely to record reality. They are evaluating reality and saying that according to their values system poverty is wrong and something should be done about it.

Development agencies all operate with ideology. They have some vision of what society ought to be. This vision informs their strategies and the strategies they support in partner churches and groups in the Third World. It is of the greatest importance that development planners become consciously aware of their ideology, for it greatly affects their work. We give some examples:

a. A highly respected national leader of the Colombian church was reviewing an animal loan project with his North American evangelical colleague. The project is designed to help church families improve their diet and build economic independence; ‘starter’ animals are given to a few families, and gradually the stewardship/ownership plan is extended to additional families as new animals are born. Yet the Colombian was uneasy.

“‘We can’t do it this way,’” he finally announced.
“Why not?” asked the startled missionary.
“Because they’re making a profit.”
“But that’s what we want, don’t we?”
“No, we are brothers, not capitalists.”

b. In South Africa the government in pursuit of its apartheid policies forcibly cleared a city slum of black inhabitants, to force them back to the homelands. They approached the neighbouring Anglican church for help. Had the church supported apartheid, it would not have given them squatting facilities on its compound, which it proceeded to do. The church consciously opposed the ideology of the government.

c. From an historical perspective Carter Lindberg writes:

When we criticize the medieval church for paternalistic attitudes to the poor, as well as an ideology of poverty which posited the spiritual usefulness of the poor to the rich, we should recognize that this is formally similar to our involvement in the ideologies of ‘first-world’ nations toward ‘third-world’ nations. In both cases concern to the poor is shaped by an ideology which blinds us to the need for structural changes necessary for redistribution of wealth. E.g., the “help-a-starving-child” approach enables us to avoid serious judgment upon the social reality of poverty and its underlying structural causes.

d. Harvie Conn finds that the policies of evangelical missions and development agencies, far from being neutral in their
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By and large, evangelical missions drew their financial and personal strength from the growing middle class of North America. And from the cultural myths of that class there developed a strong feeling for the identification of Christianity with keynotes of laissez-faire capitalism — individual initiative, fear of governmental control of the market, the power of the consumer in social and economic change, the upward mobility of class structures, democracy as the most suitable (biblical) form of government, organization as the key to maximum development, the inevitability of progress, the middle class as the source of change and progress in every society. Pietism's highly individual mood, its ameliorative focus on societal change, its emphasis on the self-discipline of the virtues of moderation, thrift, hard work, only served to reinforce these cultural patterns of understanding and sanction the cultural myths, without any fully biblical evaluation of their legitimacy and value.35

In short, we echo the call of Bishop German Schmitz at the recent Conference of Bishops in Latin America. "Let him who is without ideology cast the first stone."36

Once we have recognized our ideology, it is vital to evaluate it by biblical criteria. We need to work at producing biblical criteria for a just society which are acceptable to the east and west, that is criteria which do not presume that any one way of reading the Bible or organizing society is ideologically pure or objective. The grammatico-historical method of reading the Bible is in fact informed by Graeco-Roman tenets of literary criticism; look at the trouble we have with Paul's use of the Old Testament.37 In organizing society we have seen in our overview of the literature that some theologies of development take over other ideologies wholesale and evaluate the Bible in terms of those ideologies.

Evangelicals need to develop biblical criteria for society around three foci: the transcendent Spirit of God who is not bound to any situation, who transforms every situation and enables us to be freed from the shackles of our own world views and ideologies; the community of the Spirit through whom the power of God is manifest to redeem what the power of man distorts, by reconciliation, forgiveness and sharing; and the Word of the Spirit which always challenges the community to fresh evaluation of their obedience.

It is absolutely vital that such criteria be developed in a multicultural debate. We can be exposed to our own blindspots in
reading the Bible not so much by continuing to read the Bible in our own context, or listening to scholars from our own context, but by listening to those who read the Bible in other contexts. A Christian from South Africa told one of us that he came to see the wrongs of apartheid only when he came and studied with Christians in England. Therefore we must give those evangelicals who profess loyalty to Scripture the benefit of the doubt when we hear them interpreting the Scriptures in a way that lies outside our own cultural evangelical traditions.38

Theology, Strategy and Development Agencies
For evangelicals the debate focuses on the issues of a theology of social change versus a theology of social preservation, and on a strategy of non-violent struggle versus modernization. What are the implications for evangelical development agencies and national churches?

Theology
It is vitally necessary to be clear about the difference between theology and ideology, and the effect they have on each other. Evangelicals in India produced the Madras Declaration on Evangelical Social Action in 1979. They called for the churches “to assess critically the role of Christian institutions for education, health, agriculture and relief, according to the principles of people’s participation, justice and service to the poorest” . . . “to refuse to co-operate with structures and laws which in our opinion promote injustice,” and “to be the agent of the Kingdom in society to create social structures which preserve and promote human rights and establish peace and dignity.” A number of critical responses were received, including one which noted: “There is nothing particularly Christian about these recommendations. The unique possibilities of social action based on local churches and assemblies are bypassed.”39

Is this criticism a theological criticism? No. It is a criticism of the strategy on the grounds that it is not distinctively Christian. We hope our paper shows the pitfalls to be avoided before we can claim that a strategy is distinctively Christian. The question should be whether any strategy has a sufficiently Christian theological basis, apart from whether or not only Christians practise it. For a strategy to be operated or based on churches does not guarantee that it is Christian.

The critic admitted in discussion that he did not fault the theology of the statement. If that is the case then some other
values have prevented his seeing the place of structural social change in Christian action. Has a different ideology informed his judgment and prevented his seeing the implications of the theological statements of the Declaration?

The details of the case are not important but the event is. It illustrates clearly what will happen in the evangelical constituency as evangelicals develop theologies and strategies of social change. Some will react to the strategies for ideological reasons and identify the issues as theological.

This will create unnecessary divisions. Western church leaders and development agency boards should clearly differentiate in their own minds and in their literature between theology and ideology in order to preserve evangelical fellowship. This does not mean that theology will have no effect on ideology, but it does mean that we must be clear about what we disagree on. People may disagree with Ron Sider about the causes of disparity in economic wealth, as Michael Alison does. It is confused thinking to disagree with him for this reason and at the same time base an attack on his work on selective use of Scripture and careless exegesis.

Others will read evangelical theologies and strategies, and because they may fail to find traditional evangelical terminology, or find it used in new ways to cover a wider field of vision, they will again suspect that a fundamental theological mistake is being made. For example, those who are attempting to understand Paul’s theology of principalities and powers over a wider canvas are thought to be abandoning the identification of these powers with demonic forces. Or evangelicals who come to the Scriptures with the questions raised by liberation theologians are suspect unless they explicitly affirm the acceptance of the traditional understanding of the doctrines of the cross and resurrection and the Holy Spirit in individual categories. Both evangelical gadflies and watchdogs are necessary. But they must not be distrustful of each other. They must both in good faith return to the Scriptures as their groundwork and ultimate bar of authority.

**Strategy**

It is important to develop strategies which produce true development in each socio-economic context. Some evangelicals are clearly searching for strategies which encourage the struggle of the poor to attain human dignity. They are aware that unless a positive strategy is developed along these lines, pragmatic stra-
tories will both reflect the interests of the donor culture and play into the hands of those who benefit from the current system.

**Partnership**

If the issue is the relationship between the strong and the weak and how both can grow to equality, then the partnership between western churches and agencies and national bodies in the Third World should model a pattern for that growth. 44

**Ecclesiology**

If the goal of all Christian development is to open society up for the acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord by a redeemed humanity, then it is vital that local churches are involved in development work at every stage. Western agencies should reflect on the implications of any proposal to bypass national and local churches in the Third World.

**Evangelical affirmation**

At the heart of the theology we propose for social change is the atonement, the resurrection and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The cross and resurrection of Jesus spelt the decisive defeat of evil, took the consequences of man’s rebellion, and made possible man’s entrance to the kingdom of God and the formation of a new humanity on earth. The cross and resurrection define the nature and purpose of God’s work in and beyond the church through the Spirit of God on the basis of the work of Christ. God’s work beyond the church and his work in the church are complementary. Beyond the church he is working in society to open society up to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and to make possible that new humanity which is being formed in the church. In the church the Spirit is building new relationships of love and justice which model to society the nature of God’s plan for man, both as judgment on society and hope for it. 45

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