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TRANSFORMING MISSION

Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission

Twentieth Anniversary Edition

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the optimism of the nineteenth century and of the Social Gospel had reemerged. It was heralded first by the Strasbourg Conference of the World Student Christian Federation in 1960, where J. Hoekendijk urged the students "to begin radically to desacralize the church" and to recognize that Christianity was "a secular movement" not "some sort of religion" (cf Anderson 1988:109). In 1968 the WCC held its third general assembly, in Uppsala, where it was boldly proclaimed that "the world provides the agenda for the church." The terminology of the Social Gospel had been dropped; one now talked about "development" rather than "civilization" as the task of mission, but the dynamics remained the same. In an almost convulsive fashion the church was going to remake the world, once again in the image of the West. It was hard to define exactly how mission differed from the ethos and activities of the Peace Corps. Small wonder that, in this same year (1968), R. Pierce Beaver, respected North American theologian of mission, reported that "students are now cold, even hostile, to overseas missions" (quoted in Anderson 1988:112).¹⁰

In 1968 the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops met in Medellin, an event that provided the setting and stimulus for the emergence of Latin American liberation theology, which finally ended the hegemony of Western mission's cultural and ideological assumptions (cf Gutierrez 1988:xvii, xx-xxv).

Still, recent developments in missionary thinking only really make sense if we see them as being both a reaction to and a result of the evolution of ideas discussed in this section, that is, of the various manifestations of both premillennialism and social Christianity. The Social Gospel, in particular, has been "America's most unique contribution to the great ongoing stream of Christianity" (Hopkins 1940:3), "the first expression of American religious life which is truly bom in America itself" (Visser 't Hoof! 1928:186). Because North American Protestantism at the time had been contributing the lion's share to the international missionary enterprise, the influence of the Social Gospel reverberated around the world and made itself felt not only in Third-World Christianity, but far beyond.

Voluntarism

One of the most remarkable phenomena of the Enlightenment era is the emergence of *missionary societies*: some denominational, some interdenominational, some nondenominational, and some even anti-denominational. They first appeared on the scene haltingly, extremely apologetic about their existence and very uncertain about their nature and future. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the situation had changed dramatically. New missionary societies exploded on to the scene in all traditional Protestant countries: Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries, and the United States. In the 1880s, with the advent of the high imperial era, a second wave of new societies was in evidence; once again the entire Protestant world was involved, but by now it was clear that the United States was edging its way ahead of others, not only in the numbers of missionaries sent abroad but also in the numbers of new societies

formed. The end of the Second World War saw yet another wave of missionary enthusiasm and the formation of new societies. Prior to the year 1900, a total of eighty-one mission agencies were founded in North America. During the subsequent four decades, 1900-1939, another 147 were formed. The next decade, 1940-1949, recorded the creation of eighty-three societies, followed by no fewer than 113 new agencies during the decade 1950-1959, 132 in the period 1960-1969, and another 150 in the next ten years (cf Wilson and Siewert 1986:81-314, 593f).

It is not easy to explain this astonishing phenomenon in Protestantism. Most certainly a variety of factors would have to be taken into consideration here, but it can hardly be denied that the spirit of enterprise and initiative spawned by the Enlightenment played an important role first in the genesis of the idea of missionary societies and then in their amazing proliferation. The fact is that, for more than a century after the Reformation, the mere idea of forming such "voluntary societies" next to the church was anathema in Protestantism. The institutional church, tightly controlled by the clergy, remained the only divine instrument on earth. Voetius spoke for the Reformed tradition when he said that, if there were to be any talk about mission (which there usually was not), only the institutional church—local church council, presbytery, or synod—could act as sending agency (cf Jongeneel 1989:126).

By the end of the seventeenth century, however, a new mood was beginning to develop. The Reformation principle of the right of private judgment in interpreting Scripture was rekindled. An extension of this was that like-minded individuals could band together in order to promote a common cause. A plethora of new societies was the result. Many stood in the religious mainstream and were promoting a great variety of religious and societal concerns: antislavery, prison reform, temperance, Sabbath observance, the "reform of manners," and other charitable causes (cf Bradley 1976). An increasing number of new societies, however, championed the cause of foreign missions. Basically, the societies were all organized on the voluntary principle and dependent on their members' contribution of time, energy, and money.

The ideology behind the societies was that of the social and political egalitarianism of the emerging democracies (Gensichen 1975b:50; cf Moorhead 1984:73). Networks of auxiliary associations were organized in outlying districts, sent their contributions to the central office, and were fed with information from there. People of the most modest position and income became donors and prayer supporters of projects many thousands of miles away. Women also came along, to play a leading role in various agencies, "far earlier than they could decently appear in most other walks of life" (Walls 1988:151). Their involvement in mission constituted "the first feminist movement in North America" (cf the subtitle of Beaver 1980), and certainly not only there. They went out, literally to the ends of the earth, no longer just as the wives of missionaries but as missionaries in their own right. At home, women's missionary organizations undergirded the missionary movement with prayer, study, financial support, and dissemination of

information. By the year 1900 there were forty-one American women's agencies supporting twelve hundred single women missionaries (cf Anderson 1988:102).

This was the Reformation principle of the office of the believer, wedded to the Enlightenment's optimistic view of the world and of humanity: people were able to do something, not only about their own circumstances, but also about the circumstances of others. The increasingly dominant postmillennialism of the period further stirred people into action. The saints saw themselves, through their many goal-oriented communities, as God's co-workers in ushering in God's kingdom (cf Moorhead 1984:73).

It has in recent years become customary to devote an enormous amount of energy to theological discussions about whether missionary societies are legitimate agents of mission. Is mission not rather to be regarded as an expression of the church? Without denying the merit there is in such a discussion I would like to suggest that, within the framework of the paradigm spawned by the Enlightenment, there was not much to choose between the organized church as bearer of mission and the mission societies. The point is that, in Western Protestantism, the church was increasingly fractured into a great variety of denominations which, phenomenologically speaking, were not decisively different from missionary and other religious societies. Denominations, too, were organized on the voluntary principle of like-minded individuals banding together. They were, in a sense, para-church organizations.

In those countries where there were established churches the situation only appeared to be different. The mere emergence and existence of "free" churches (sometimes called "non-conformist" churches or "dissenters") next to or in opposition to the established church, suggested that, even if there was some pressure on people to stay members of the established church, individuals were free to follow their conscience and join churches of their liking. Where there was no established church—for instance in the United States where all churches were treated equally before the law—a bewildering variety of denominations soon emerged.

It is important to note that the very possibility of a dispensation in which there was no established or state church was a fruit of the Enlightenment; it was only when religious belief was removed from the realm of "fact" to that of "value," about which individuals were free to differ, that a societal system could evolve in which a multiplicity of denominations could exist side by side and have equal rights. Newbigin says:

It is the common observation of sociologists of religion that denominationalism is the religious aspect of secularization. It is the form that religion takes in a culture controlled by the ideology of the Enlightenment. It is the social form in which the privatization of religion is expressed (1986:145).

The Enlightenment was not the sole reason for denominationalism. North American denominations, for instance, were "the product of a combination of

European churchly traditions, ethnic loyalties, pietism, sectarianism, and American free enterprise" (Marsden 1980:70). It was only natural that in such a climate, "free" churches would thrive. I have mentioned that magisterial Protestantism was at its lowest ebb during the two decades immediately following the American Revolution; by contrast, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists were expanding rapidly in these years (cf Chaney 1977:31). They were the product of a marriage between rationalism and pietism and, as "revivalist" churches, benefited greatly from the Awakenings. None of the many Protestant denominations even dreamt of upholding the medieval idea of the identification of the empirical church with the kingdom of God.

For some five decades after Independence, a remarkable ecumenical spirit prevailed in the United States. The same obtained, by and large, in Great Britain and continental Europe (although the bewildering multiplicity of denominations which characterized the United States was unknown there). This ecumenicity was certainly to be attributed, to a large degree, to the Awakenings which were, by nature, "ecumenical." These years also saw the blossoming of interdenominational mission societies. Some of the most remarkable of these were the London Missionary Society (founded in 1795), the American Board (1810), and the Basel Mission (1816). The LMS stated its "fundamental principle" in the following terms:

Our design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government . . . but the Glorious Gospel of the blessed God to the Heathen (quoted by Walls 1988:149).

A "denominational" society was, of course, formed three years earlier than the LMS. I am referring to the "Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen," founded under William Carey's leadership in 1792. It is, however, important to note that Carey advanced no theological arguments in favor of a denominational society. His arguments were purely pragmatic: "In the present divided state of Christendom, it would be more likely for good to be done by each denomination engaging separately in the work" (quoted by Walls 1988:148). As a matter of fact, Carey's pragmatic reasons for initiating a denominational society were almost identical to those of the founding fathers of the *nondenontional* LMS three years later.

There was something businesslike, something distinctly modern, about the launching of the new societies, whether denominational or not. Carey took his analogy neither from Scripture nor from theological tradition, but from the contemporary commercial world—the organization of an overseas trading company, which carefully studied all the relevant information, selected its stock, ships and crews, and was willing to brave dangerous seas and unfriendly climates in order to achieve its objective. Carey proposed that, in similar fashion, a company of serious Christians might be formed with the objective of evangelizing distant peoples. It should be an "instrumental" society, that is, a society established with

a clearly defined purpose along explicitly formulated lines. So, the organizing of such a society was something like floating a mercantile company (cf Walls 1988:145f).

The new societies, even those which were consciously denominational, such as Carey's Baptist Society and the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society (founded in 1799), had nothing exclusivist or confessionalist about them. The CMS, for instance, experienced no difficulty in recognizing the validity of the office of missionaries not ordained in an Episcopal church (cf van den Berg 1956: 159f). In fact, most of its first missionaries were German Lutherans.

By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century the "ecumenical" climate was, however, on the decline. In an attempt to counteract the influence of rationalism and liberalism, confessionalism was revived. The SPG became more doctrinaire and rejected any form of missionary cooperation with other societies, even with fellow-Anglicans in the low-church CMS. Writing about North America, Niebuhr says that the denominations

confused themselves with their cause and began to promote themselves, identifying the kingdom of Christ with the practices and doctrines prevalent in the group . . . The missionary enterprise, home and foreign, was divided along denominational lines; every religious society became intent upon promoting its own peculiar type of work in religious education, in the evangelization of the youth, in the printing and distribution of religious literature . . . The more attention was concentrated upon the church the greater became the tendency toward schism (1959:177f).

Likewise, in Germany, Lutheran confessionalism (revivified, *inter alia*, by the third-centenary celebrations in 1830 of the adoption the Augsburg Confession) contributed to a new consciousness among Lutherans of being different from other Protestants. This manifested itself also in the foreign missionary enterprise (a development traced carefully and in great detail by Aagaard 1967). Several societies that were consciously transconfessional had been operating from the German-speaking world during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the most important of these being the Basel, Rhenish, and North-German Mission Societies (cf Aagaard 1967:182-306, 401-473). They were, however, not permitted to continue operating unchallenged. Tensions between Reformed and Lutheran supporters of the Basel Mission precipitated the formation, in 1836, of an exclusively Lutheran missionary society, later known as the Leipzig Mission (Aagaard 1967:357-381). Similar developments were soon to follow in other parts of Germany (:526- 705).

Events in North America were only marginally different from those in Great Britain and Germany. After 1850 various churches "became markedly less willing to leave foreign missions to pandenominational or nondenominational associations" (Hutchison 1987:95) and began to sponsor denominational mission projects. Eventually even the nondenominational American Board, for a half

century the largest of all American societies (Hutchison 1987:45), became "denominational"; it evolved into the missionary arm of Congregationalism. In Britain the same happened to the LMS, and under similar circumstances.

During the heyday of nondenominational mission societies, mission had been understood predominantly as *conversio gentilium* — the conversion of individual persons. It was only natural that in the subsequent defensive reaction of denominationalism to the relativizing tendencies of the Enlightenment, mission would again, as was the case in the medieval Catholic paradigm, be defined as *plantatio ecclesiae*, church planting. The nondenominational societies, heavily influenced by the Evangelical Awakenings, had been preaching "a Gospel without a Church" (S. C. Carpenter, quoted by van den Berg 1956:159; cf Scherer 1987:75); this was now regarded as inadequate and amends had to be made. The remedy was the planting of distinctly *confessional* churches on the "mission field." The new slogan was the establishment of "self-governing," "self-supporting," and "self-propagating" (or "self-extending") younger churches. The two main personalities in this regard were the general secretaries of the two largest Protestant missionary societies of the mid-nineteenth century, Rufus Anderson of the American Board and Henry Venn of the British CMS.

One should immediately add, however, that the intentions of the two men were noble. Great strides toward church independency were indeed made in this period, not least because they were putting greater trust in the integrity of their black and brown converts than most of their contemporaries did. It should also not be forgotten that both men—but Anderson, the Congregationalist, more clearly than Venn, the Anglican—were imbued with the rising mid-nineteenth-century spirit of democracy (Hutchison 1987:77).

In spite of the admirable ideals of Anderson and Venn, things did not turn out as expected, in part because their plans were often subverted by their own missionaries. Yet, quite apart from this, one has to say that there was something incongruous about the heavy emphasis on church planting as the goal of missions. The medieval missionary policy of *plantatio ecclesiae* had still operated on the assumption that, one day, all the world would be put under the sway of the church. By the middle of the nineteenth century such an ideal was no longer deemed possible, at least not in Protestant circles. It was subconsciously assumed that the secularizing and rationalizing impact of the Enlightenment could not be undone. So the Protestant variant of *plantatio ecclesiae* was the carving out of small, exclusive "territories" of Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Lutheranism, and the like. The "advance of the gospel" was measured by counting tangible things such as the number of baptisms, confessions, and communions, and the opening of new mission stations or outposts.

The church had, in a sense, ceased to point to God or to the future; instead, it was pointing to itself. Mission was the road from the institutional church to the church that still had to be instituted. It was the activity of professional agents of organized societies operating on the "horizontal" plane. The relationship of these churches to society and to the wider ecumenical and eschatological horizons was

largely ignored. What Scherer says about the Lutheran missions of the time could, by and large, also be said of the projects of other confessional groupings,

The kingdom of God was reduced to a strategy by which Lutheran mission agencies planted Lutheran churches around the world. Questions were seldom asked at this time about the relationship of these churches to the kingdom of God. Their very existence appeared to be its own justification, and no further discussion of mission goals was required (1987:77).

By the end of the nineteenth century the pendulum once again swung toward societal mission and a more ecumenical spirit. This was, at the same time, a reaffirmation of the principle of voluntarism. A plethora of new voluntarist missionary agencies have been formed in the course of the last hundred years or so. But precisely as expression of the spirit of voluntarism, they have also been illustrations of the modern Western mood of activism, do-goodism, and manifest destiny. The eager young missionary recruits' "crusading spirit," says Anderson (1988:98), was fuelled by "duty, compassion, confidence, optimism, evangelical revivalism, and premillennialist urgency."

Many of the newer type of Protestant missionary agencies belong to the category usually referred to as "faith missions." The pioneer and prototype of all these societies, and still the most famous, was the China Inland Mission, founded in 1865 by J. Hudson Taylor. The new societies represented an adaptation of the late eighteenth-century voluntary society, rather than a totally new departure (Walls 1988:154). Here the eschatological motif dominated. An urgent appeal was made to young men and women to sacrifice themselves without reservation so as to save the millions of China and other distant countries before the last judgment.

At the same time the new societies represented a radicalization of the voluntary principle. People were challenged to go without any financial guarantees, simply trusting that the Lord of mission would provide. In the eyes of some they were heroes of the faith; in the eyes of others they were fools; in their own eyes they were but "fools for Christ's sake." No time was left for timorous or carefully prepared advances into pagan territory, nor for the laborious building up of "autonomous" churches on the "mission field." The gospel had to be proclaimed to all with the greatest speed, and for this there could never be enough missionaries. It also meant that there was neither time nor need for drawn-out preparation for missionary service. Many who went out had very little education or training, although the recruits also included well-educated persons such as C. T. Studd and the other members of the famous "Cambridge Seven."

The weaknesses of the faith mission movement are obvious: the romantic notion of the freedom of the individual to make his or her own choices, an almost convulsive preoccupation with saving people's souls before Judgment Day, a limited knowledge of the cultures and religions of the people to whom the missionaries went, virtually no interest in the societal dimension of the Christian gospel, almost exclusive dependence on the charismatic personality of the found-

er, a very low view of the church etc. The movement also had its strengths, however, particularly in the pristine form it took in Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission. The "home base" of the mission agency would no longer be in London, Berlin, Basel, or New York, but in China, India, or Thailand. The missionaries were not to live on "mission stations," isolated from the population, but in the very midst of the people they were trying to reach, eating the food they ate and wearing the clothes they wore. The emphasis was not on doctrinal distinctives and confessional divisions but on the simple gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Some of the elements listed above, both negative and positive, became the common heritage of the modern evangelical missionary movement. There is still, among many Christians, an impatience with the cumbersome machinery of the institutional church, which tends to thwart any new initiatives. Many young people are leaving the "mainline" churches and offering their services to any one of an incredible variety of evangelical mission agencies. Today's evangelical world is full of itinerant evangelists, of magazines and Bible schools and fellowships of churches. But here, too, we notice the same curious ambiguity we identified earlier with respect to the phenomenon of denominationalism. On the one hand, evangelical groups reveal an amazing tolerance toward each other and a rejection of any doctrinal rigidity or inflexibility in favor of the free, creative adventure of serving God together. On the other hand, an equally astonishing bigotry is sometimes the order of the day, coupled with an emphasis on the exclusiveness of a given group because of its doctrinal distinctives. The "voluntary principle" appears to have an inherent predisposition to either tolerance of others or the absolutization of one's own views.

Wherever the "voluntary principle" became constitutive in Protestant missions—in nondenominational or denominational societies, in well-organized and well-prepared projects or in faith missions, in ecumenical or evangelical circles—the operative presuppositions were those of Western democracy and the free-enterprises system. It proceeded from the assumption that the missionary traffic would move in one direction only, from the West to the East or the South. It spawned an enterprise in which the one party would do all the giving and the other all the receiving. This was so because the one group was, in its own eyes, evidently privileged and the other, equally evidently, disadvantaged.

Missionary Fervor, Optimism, and Pragmatism

In spite of the fact that missionary circles in the West, on the whole, reacted rather negatively to the Enlightenment, there can be no doubt that this movement unleashed an enormous amount of Christian energy which was, in part, channelled into overseas missionary efforts. More than in any preceding period Christians of this era believed that the future of the world and of God's cause depended on them.

In this respect the Enlightenment era represented a significant shift away from two other developments—the one cultural, the other ecclesiastical—that

our mission is to be christological and pneumatological, it also has to be ecclesial, in the sense of being the *one* mission of the *one* church.

Sixth, ultimately unity in mission and mission in unity do not merely serve the church but, through the church, stand in the service of *humankind* and seek to manifest *the cosmic rule of Christ* (cf Saayman 1984:21—55). The church (but only insofar as it is the *one* church) is “the sign of the coming unity of mankind” (Uppsala, Section 1.20 WCC 1968:17). The 1989 San Antonio Conference of CWME concurs: “The church is called again and again to be a prophetic sign and foretaste of the unity and renewal of the human family as envisioned in God’s promised reign” (Section 1.11; WCC 1990:28). The reign of God is not only the church’s final fulfillment but also the *world’s* future (Limouris 1986:169).

Lastly, we have to confess that the *loss of ecclesial unity is not just a vexation but a sin*. Unity is not an optional extra. It is, in Christ, already a fact, a given. At the same time it is a command: “Be one!” We are called to be one as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, and we should never tire of striving toward that day when Christians in every place may gather to share the One Bread and the One Cup (cf Crumley 1989:146, 149). At the moment, this appears to be nothing more than an eschatological lightning on a distant horizon. Both the “world church” and the “unity of humankind” are, in a sense, fictions. But both fictions are indispensable if we wish to do justice to what it means to be church and to live creatively and missionally in the face of the eschatological tension which belongs to our very being as Christians (cf Hoedemaker 1988:174).

MISSION AS MINISTRY BY THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

The Evolution of the Ordained Ministry

The movement away from ministry as the monopoly of ordained men to ministry as the responsibility of the whole people of God, ordained as well as non-ordained, is one of the most dramatic shifts taking place in the church today. Boerwinkel (1974:54-64) has identified the “institutionalization of church offices” as one of the characteristics of the Constantinian dispensation and the contemporary “laicization” of the church as indicative of the end of Constantinianism. Moltmann (1975:11), in addressing the task of church and theology in our time, formulates six theses, one of which reads: “Christian theology . . . will no longer be simply a theology for priests and pastors, but also a theology for the laity in their callings in the world.”

The crisis we are facing in respect to ministry is part and parcel of the crisis church and mission face in this time of paradigm shifts, when virtually every traditional element of faith and polity is under severe pressure. For almost nineteen centuries and in virtually all ecclesiastical traditions ministry has been understood almost exclusively in terms of the service of ordained ministers. In order to grasp something of the magnitude of the shift that is now taking place and its significance for the mission of the church today, it will be necessary to survey, very briefly, the developments that have led to the present impasse.

There can be no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth broke with the entire Jewish tradition when he chose his disciples not from among the priestly class, but from among fisherfolk, tax-collectors, and the like. This was part of his “wineskin-breaking ministry,” of the “reversal” feature in Jesus’ teaching, of turning the proprieties of the time upside down by going contrary to normal human expectations (cf Burrows 1981:44f). I have argued, in Chapter 1 of this study, that the Jesus movement began as a renewal movement within Judaism, not as a separate religion. This may be the reason why the terminology used for the movement and its members was borrowed neither from Jewish nor (after the movement consciously began to recruit non-Jews) from Greek religious culture. The main word for the community, *ekklesia*, was a term from the secular sphere. Meeks (1983:81) draws attention to the fact that the Pauline churches are not called “synagogues.” Neither, in fact, are they called *thiasoi*, the common Greek word for cultic or religious meetings. The believers simply “gather” (cf I Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:23, 26), mostly in private homes (cf Beker 1980:319). Indeed, the *household* may be regarded as the basic unit in the establishment of Christianity in any city (Meeks 1983:29). The church has offices — if we wish to call them that — particularly those of *episkopos*, *presbyteros*, and *diakonos* (all of them secular terms). But, first, these offices are always understood as existing within the community of faith, as never being prior to, independent of, or above the local church (cf de Gruchy 1987:27), and, second, it would be grossly inaccurate simply to plug these terms into a later sacral-judicial understanding of ecclesiastical office (Burrows 1981:77, drawing upon H. von Campenhausen and H. Conzelmann). Most of the “leaders” in the early church are charismatic figures, natural leaders, both men and women.

By the eighties of the first century ad it was, however, clear that Christianity had become a new religion and could no longer be contained within Judaism. This also meant that the terminology used by adherents of the new faith was increasingly understood in a strictly religious sense. The church now had to cope with heresy from without and a hollowing-out of faith from within. In these circumstances the most reliable antidote appeared to have been to encourage believers to follow the directives of the clergy, in particular the bishops, who soon — particularly because of the writings and influence of Ignatius and Cyprian — were regarded as the sole guarantors of the apostolic tradition and the ones endowed with full authority in matters ecclesiastical. Henceforth the ordained minister would hold a dominant and undisputed position in church life, a situation that was further bolstered by the doctrines of apostolic succession, the “indelible character” conferred on priests in the rite of ordination, and the infallibility of the pope.

The clericalizing of the church went hand in hand with the sacerdotalizing of the clergy. Apart from a questionable reference in Ignatius, the term “priest” was not applied to Christian clergy until around the year 200. After that the term, and the theology behind it, was the “received view,” strengthened by an elaborate “sacrament of holy orders,” which gave the ordinand the power to represent sac-

ramentally the sacrifice of Christ and brought about a mystical and ontological change in the soul of the priest (cf Burrows 1981:61). At the same time it cut off the priest from the community, putting him over against it as a mediation figure and as a kind of *alter Christas* ("another Christ") (:60, 88). The priest had *active* power to consecrate, forgive sins, and bless; "ordinary" Christians, enabled thereto by their baptism, had only a *passive* role to play, namely, to *receive* grace (:105). The church consisted of two clearly distinct categories of people: the clergy and the laity (from *laos*, "people [of God]"), the latter understood as immature, not come of age, and utterly dependent on the clergy in matters religious.

It was inevitable that, in this arrangement, it would be believed that the church's sole business was the sacred (even if clergy, in particular bishops, often wielded secular power!). In reviewing the five models of the church identified by Dulles (1976), Burrows (1981:38) points out that all of them (the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant) actually understand the church almost exclusively as a means of communicating grace and thus reinforce the sacerdotal picture of the church. The church is a community mainly concerned with mediating eternal salvation to individuals. The ordained ministry is the primary vehicle for that work, so the shape of the church is built around it (:61f).

As the hegemony of the Catholic Church was not disputed in medieval Europe, it became customary for the church to understand itself as the actual kingdom of God on earth. The simple sociological fact at work here is that any dominant religion tends to adopt this sort of position. In this case, the Catholic Church viewed itself as stocked with a supply of heavenly graces which the clerical proprietors could disburse to customers. When, in the sixteenth century, its supremacy was challenged by the Protestant Reformation, it reacted (in the Council of Trent) by dismissing the Protestant claims out of hand. At the same time it embarked on "mission," an activity of a corps of "specialists," priests, and religious, authorized by the pope to extend the church's hegemony to other parts of the world. In those countries, ecclesiastical structures identical to those on the "home front" were erected and an analogous leadership cadre installed.

The question is whether *Protestants* have really done any better. It is true that Luther is to be credited with the rediscovery of the notion of the "priesthood of all believers." In his thesis that "the Christian . . . congregation has the right and power to judge all teaching and to call, install and dismiss teachers" (quoted in Pfuertner 1984:184—my translation), Luther most certainly broke with the dominant paradigm. However, when Luther's understanding of church and theology was under assault from Anabaptists (some of whom had jettisoned the idea of an ordained ministry altogether) and Catholics alike, he reverted to the inherited paradigm. In the end, he still had the clergyman at the center of his church, endowed with considerable authority (cf Burrows 1981:104).

The other Reformers and their heirs followed Luther in this. To be sure, they rejected Catholicism's sanctioning of the form of the priesthood as it had stood at the end of the fourth century and settled, instead, for the shape the offices had

taken at the close of the formation of the New Testament. The key to this was the "threefold office of Christ"—King, Prophet, and Priest—which, in the Protestant view, had clearly crystallized in the three offices of pastor, elder, and deacon. Instead of showing appreciation for the fact that, in the early stages, these offices had evolved only to a rudimentary degree, they took them to be explicitly instated by Christ and therefore immutable. In practice, most denominations in main-line Protestantism today are muddling along with an understanding of the ordained ministry vacillating between the traditional Reformation definition and a view closer to that of Catholicism. On the other hand, many evangelical denominations, which tend to follow a congregationalist polity, are struggling to avoid one of two pitfalls: either the minister becomes a little pope whose word is law, or the congregation regards him as their employee who has to dance to their tune.

The net result was not fundamentally different from the dominant Catholic view. The church remained a strictly sacral society run by an in-house personnel. Only, the focus for the "cure of souls" was not, as in Catholicism, the sacraments but the proclamation of the word of God (cf de Gruchy 1987:18, on Bonhoeffer). For the rest, what Protestants and Catholics shared regarding the role of the ordained ministry was far more significant than their disagreements—in both traditions the clergyman-priest, enshrined in a privileged and central position, remained the linchpin of the church (cf Burrows 1981:61, 74). With the increasing specialization of theological training, the elitist character of the "clerical paradigm" was further reinforced (cf Farley 1983:85-88). Like Catholic missions, Protestant missions as a matter of course exported their dominant clergy pattern to the "mission fields," imposing it on others as the only legitimate and appropriate model, clothing David in Saul's armor, and making it impossible for the young church either to execute its particular ministry or to survive without help from outside.

It was highly unlikely that any change would appear in the dominant pattern until a transformation of profound proportions would manifest itself in both church and society. This is what has begun to happen in our time, in respect of the rediscovery of the "apostolate of the laity" or the "priesthood of all believers."

The Apostolate of the Laity

Catholic missions have always had a significant lay involvement. Their participation in the missionary enterprise was, however, clearly auxiliary and firmly under the control and jurisdiction of the clergy. In Protestant missions the prospects were more auspicious, particularly as the "voluntary principle" (see Chapter 9) gained momentum.

Actually, from the very beginning Protestant missions were, to a significant extent, a lay movement. The voluntary societies were not restricted to ecclesiastics. Normally there were clergy involved in the founding of mission societies but they were often, as in the case of the CMS, clerical nobodies, who usually cooperated closely with prominent laypersons (Walls 1988:150). Walls (:142) describes the societies as free, open, responsible, embracing all classes, both sexes,

ail ages, the masses of the people—a truly democratic and anti-authoritarian movement, to some extent also anti-clergy and anti-establishment. North American societies, in particular, attracted large numbers of women. In some instances, women founded their own mission societies (by 1890 there were thirty-four of these in North America alone) and periodicals, and raised their own support (cf Anderson 1988:102f). On the “mission fields,” even in the case of societies run by men, women were soon the majority (cf Hutchison 1987:101). And they did all the things men used to do, including preaching (excluding the administering of the sacraments, of course).

After World War II the “home front” slowly began to catch up. It dawned upon the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, that the traditional monolithic models of church office no longer matched realities. The theological *aggiornamento* in both main Western confessions discovered again that apostolicity was an attribute of the entire church and that the ordained ministry could be understood only as existing within the community of faith.

In various ways Vatican II gave expression to the new theological and societal mood and to a new awareness about the central role of the laity in the church, particularly in respect to the church’s missionary calling. The mood was, in this respect, fundamentally different from that of several earlier councils. Y. Congar has noted that words repeatedly used in Vatican II had never been used by Vatican I—words like *amor* (“love”) 113 times, and *laicus* (“layperson”) 200 times (quoted in Gomez 1986:57). LG 33 states: “The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.” It adds that the laity have “the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation to all people of every epoch and all over the earth.” AG 28 (cf LG 12) urges every member of the church “to collaborate in the work of the Gospel, each according to his opportunity, ability, charism and ministry.” It even states categorically (AG 21), “The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy.” The *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops* defines bishops primarily as pastors, not as “holders of the fullness of priestly power” (cf Burrows 1981:109). Most important, however, Vatican II produced *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*, a document which describes the laity preeminently in terms of the church’s mission, having the “right and duty to be apostles” (paragraph 3).

Not that all problems were suddenly solved. Far from it! Vatican II still refers to laypersons as “auxiliaries” of the “sacred ministries” (cf Gomez 1986:51). Also in other respects the old dichotomy between clergy and laity seems to be firmly upheld, so much so that Boff (1986:30) maintains that, in spite of Vatican II, the participation of the faithful in decision-making is totally mutilated. It seems, in fact, as if the tension between the “top” and the “base” has been increasing rather than decreasing in recent years, as more and more base communities, so-called “ecclesias,” “critical congregations,” and the like are being formed

within the Catholic Church (cf Blei 1980:1). There is, on the part of the hierarchy, a certain apprehension about the consequences of according a larger role to the laity, a fear of what N. Lash (quoted in de Gruchy 1987:35) has called “the rediscovery of the ‘congregationalist’ element in Catholicism” (cf also Burrows 1981:39f; Michiels 1989:106f).

In respect to the laity, post-Vatican Catholicism thus reveals both old and new versions of ecclesiology. It is not essentially different in Protestantism. This is understandable if one keeps in mind the almost two millennia during which the ordained clergy model persisted unchallenged. The watertight division between the “teaching” church and the “learning” church (the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*), between the active mediating of grace and the passive receiving of grace, is too deep-seated to be expunged without some ado.

Even so, an unmistakable shift is taking place. Laypersons are no longer just the scouts who, returning from the “outside world” with eyewitness accounts and perhaps some bunches of grapes, report to the “operational basis”; they are the operational basis from which the *missio Dei* proceeds. It is, in fact, not they who have to “accompany” those who hold “special offices” in the latter’s mission in the world. Rather, it is the *office bearers* who have to accompany the laity, the people of God (cf Hoekendijk 1967a:350). In the New Testament dispensation the Spirit (just as the priesthood) has been given to the whole people of God, not to select individuals. “The clergy, then, come from the community, guide it, and act in Christ’s name” (Moltmann 1977:303).

For it is the *community* that is the primary bearer of mission. The project on the “missionary structure of the congregation,” launched by the WCC’s New Delhi Assembly in 1961 (a project which, however, to a large extent aborted), together with the rediscovery of the local church in Catholicism, are perhaps—from a missiological perspective—the most far-reaching contributions of the WCC and Vatican II. Mission does not proceed primarily from the pope, nor from a missionary order, society, or synod, but from a community gathered around the word and the sacraments and sent into the world. Therefore the ordained leadership’s role cannot possibly be the all-determining factor; it is only one part of the community’s total life (Burrows 1981:62). Gradually, churches are beginning to adjust to the new theological insight. The vertical, linear model, running from the pope via the bishop and the priest to the faithful (a model which has its parallels in Protestantism) is gradually being replaced by one in which all are directly involved (cf Boff 1986:30-33).

It goes without saying that a new model of church is of great significance for the entire debate about the ordination of women (cf, among other examples, Burrows 1981:134-137; Boff 1986:76-97). Their ordination is, however, only one component of the issue involved, as is the notion of authorizing laypersons to be directly involved in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (cf Boff 1986:70-75). The problem with this undoubtedly legitimate and crucial debate is that it still suggests that some form of ordained ministry and some form of authority to celebrate the sacraments is the be-all and end-all of what the church is all about.

Forms of Ministry

If it is true, as has been argued throughout this study, that the entire life of the church is missionary, it follows that we desperately need a theology of the laity—something of which only the first rudiments are now emerging. But also, such a theology is only now becoming possible again, as we are moving out of the massive shadow of the Enlightenment. For a theology of the laity presupposes a break with the notion, so fundamental to the Enlightenment, that the private sphere of life has to be separated from the public (cf also Newbigin 1986: 1421). Moltmann, in his thesis that the theology of the future will no longer be simply a theology for priests and pastors but also for the laity, goes on to say:

It will be directed not only toward divine service in the church, but also toward divine service in the everyday life of the world. Its practical implementation will include preaching and worship, pastoral duties, and Christian community, but also socialization, democratization, education toward self-reliance and political life (1975:11).

One must therefore say, emphatically, that a theology of the laity does not mean that the laity should be trained to become “mini-pastors.” Their ministry (or perhaps we should say their “service,” for “ministry” has come to be such a churchy word—cf Burrows 1981:55f) is offered in the form of the ongoing life of the Christian community “in shops, villages, farms, cities, classrooms, homes, law offices, in counselling, politics, statecraft, and recreation” (:66f). The contingent form this ministry will take must be recognized—as we should, in fact, recognize the contingent shape of the ordained ministry. It will not be the same for every age, context, and culture. In some parts of the Third World, in particular, the ministry of both laity and ordained will be much more extensive than it is in the West. Its wider scope may be occasioned by the circumstance that in a developing country the church’s efforts may be more comprehensive than those of the government (:72) or, in a country like South Africa—which is going through a painful process of democratization—by the fact that, where the voices of political and community leaders have been silenced, the church is left as almost the only voice of the voiceless. In most such cases, it will be a combined ministry of clergy and laity, to the extent that it becomes impossible to distinguish who is doing what.

A striking example of lay ministry is to be found in the phenomenon of “base” or “small” Christian communities which, having begun in Latin America,²⁵ are today spreading across the entire globe, even in the West. It takes many forms: house church groups in the West, African independent churches, clandestine gatherings in countries where Christianity is proscribed, etc. The movement is, as far as Catholicism is concerned, so exceptional that scholars are easily tempted to become too starry-eyed in their evaluation (cf, for instance, Boff 1986:1, 4). Still, it is a development of momentous significance. Bihlmann (1977:157) even ventures to say that these “experiments” are more significant than the theology of

liberation and can, with better reason, be taken as the contribution offered by Latin America to the universal church. And their significance lies particularly in the fact that here the laity have come of age and are missionally involved in an imaginative way.

It took a very long time before the Christian church discovered that Christ, who had turned upside down the hallowed forms of ministry of the Jewish establishment of his time, might perhaps also challenge the established “theology of ministry” of the Christian church (cf Burrows 1981:31f). But, as always, Christ is not intent on destroying, but in fulfilling. This applies also to the ordained ministry. Nothing will be gained by abolishing it. Boff (1986:32), in spite of all his criticism of the structures of the Catholic Church and all his enthusiasm for the base communities, repudiates any attempt at “despoiling the bishop and priest of their function in a sham liberation process.” Indeed, clericalism is not overcome by rejecting an ordained ministry or by downplaying its significance and task. De Gruchy (1987:26) quotes E. Schillebeeckx in this respect: “If there is no specialized concentration of what is important to everyone, in the long run the community suffers as a result.”

Therefore, Hoekendijk’s tendency to regard church offices merely as functional and therefore, in the final analysis, as contingent (cf also Riitti 1972:311-315) leads us nowhere. Some form of ordained ministry is indeed essential and constitutive (see also Moltmann 1977:288-314), not as *guarantor* of the validity of the church’s claim to be the dispenser of God’s grace, but, at most, as *guardian*, to help keep the community faithful to the teaching and practice of apostolic Christianity (cf Burrows 1981:83,112). The clergy do not do this alone and off their own bat, so to speak, but together with the whole people of God, for all have received the Holy Spirit, who guides the church in all truth. The priesthood of the ordained ministry is to enable, not to remove, the priesthood of the whole church (Newbigin 1987:30). The clergy are not prior to or independent of or over against the church; rather, with the rest of God’s people, they *are* the church, sent into the world. In order to flesh out this vision, then, we need a more organic, less sacral ecclesiology of the whole people of God.

MISSION AS WITNESS TO PEOPLE OF OTHER LIVING FAITHS²⁴

The Shifting Scene

The *theologia religionum*, the “theology of religions,” is a discipline that has evolved only since the 1960s. The same impetus that made Christians of a given theological denomination ask, “Who are these Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Orthodox?” also led to the question, “Who are these people of other faiths, these Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims?” At least in this *formal* sense, then, there is a relationship between ecumenism and the theology of religions.

The issue of the attitude Christians and Christian missions should adopt to (adherents of) other faiths is, of course, an ancient one, with roots in the Old Testament. For many centuries, however, this was hardly ever debated. Emperor