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MISSION BY THE PEOPLE

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(Editor's Note: "If we are to mobilize all of God's people for mission in today's world we must demonstrate in just as clear and vital terms the role that they are called to play..." words written by Dr. Kinsler in this paper presenting a challenge to look for a new base for mission. Dr. Kinsler also describes how Theological Education by Extension is responding to this challenge as its primary goal).

Where there is no vision, the people perish.

Proverbs 29:18

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who
shall prepare himself to the battle?

1 Corinthians 14:8

Mission is characterized in many sectors of the Christian church today by confusion, division, frustration and uncertainty. The recognition that modern missionary movements have in some ways been tied to western imperialism, the call for moratorium, the demise of Christendom, and the rise of secularism and other faiths have blurred the trumpet sound and left the people without a clear vision.

The challenge to our generation is certainly as great as that of any previous age. Depravity and suffering are ever more evident: the survival of humanity itself is now seriously in question. On the other hand God's power to save is still in force; his love and purpose for the world endure. The church must discover its real nature between these realities and sound an unequivocal call to mission to which all God's can respond.

The Mission of Jesus

Our starting point is the mission of Jesus. As followers of Jesus Christ we must be certain of what he came to do and what he expects of us. The following selection of materials from the Synoptic Gospels is basic and straightforward. The requirements that Jesus makes of us are clear.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Perhaps we have too quickly identified the Gospel with affirmations about the person of Jesus Christ. The earliest Gospel, Mark, states at the outset that Jesus came into Galilee preaching "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel". The central theme of Jesus preaching and teaching was the Kingdom of God. This is confirmed in the parables (Mk 4), his sayings about discipleship (Mk 10:15,23), the discussion about the Great Commandment (Mk 12:34) and elsewhere.

Biblical studies have long stressed the importance of understanding the Kingdom in dynamic terms as God's *rule*. God is sovereign; he comes to rule among his people. Repentance and faith mean submission and obedience, not simply acceptance of doctrines, membership in an organization or some kind of emotional experience. Jesus himself was totally obedient at his baptism, throughout his ministry, and in his death. He thus fulfilled his mission. He was the incarnation of God's rule.

As sovereign, God rules over all of life. In Matthew's Gospel the story of Jesus' ministry begins with the same reference to the Gospel of the kingdom, a general statement about Jesus' healing ministry, and then the beatitudes. In this passage Jesus affirms that the Kingdom of God brings blessing to the poor in spirit (cf. Lk. 6:21 "you that hunger now"), the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (for

justice). In Luke's Gospel, Jesus' ministry begins with what many call his inaugural sermon at Nazareth, which refers to the well-known passage of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk. 4:18-19).

The obvious challenge to us today, to all Christians everywhere, is to restore the sense and reality of God's rule in all its depth and breadth. This is not to deny that it is in Christ that we are both accepted into God's rule and enabled to obey His will. Mark's Gospel actually begins with the words. "The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1). But it is to affirm that followers of Jesus Christ are called to total obedience to God, as Jesus himself lived and taught. We must be as concerned about healing and liberation as we are about preaching; our mission is directed to the poor and the oppressed as much as it is addressed to sinners and the sick. These are not options, with some primary and others secondary; all are mandates of God's rule.

Our problem is not so much to understand the nature of the mission of the church but to create a clear focus and a definite challenge to which every Christian can relate. The Student Volunteer Movement called for "the evangelization of the world in this generation: Church growth advocates have set forth specific, even measurable goals. The challenge of "unreached people" is now being mapped out for strategy and recruitment. If we are to mobilize all of God's people for mission in today's world we must demonstrate in just as clear and vital terms the role that they are called to play, individually and corporately, in the fulfillment of God's rule.

Salvation

Salvation was central to the mission of Jesus, and it must be central to the mission of the church. Consider Luke's use of the terms "to save" and "salvation".

- In Luke 6:9, confronted by the man with the withered hand, Jesus asks, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath...to *save* life or destroy it?"

- In Luke 7:50, having told the sinful woman that her sins are forgiven, he tells her, "Your faith has *saved* you".
- In Luke 8:36, the herdsmen who saw Jesus cast out the demons from the Gerasene testify how he was healed (*saved*).
- In Luke 8:48, having healed the woman with the flow of blood, Jesus tells her, "Your faith has made you well (*saved you*)".
- In Luke 9:24 Jesus speaks of discipleship in terms of *saving* one's life by losing it.
- In Luke 18:42 Jesus tells the blind man at Jericho, "Receive your sight: your faith has made you well (*saved you*)".
- In Luke 19:9, after Zacchaeus the tax collector vows to give half of his goods to the poor and restore what he has defrauded, Jesus declares, "Today *salvation* has come to this house".

In the mission of Jesus salvation means liberation from disease, demons, impediments, sin and exploitation. It means restoration of physical and mental health, of social and economic relationships, of the whole person in relation to others and God. Surely this is the mission of the church today as well. The message of salvation is clear; the mandate is unequivocal.

But is it? We know, for example, that most infant mortality is due to malnutrition, which results from extreme poverty, the common condition of half the world's population. We know that the earth could easily produce sufficient food for all, but in fact its wealth is being squandered on a few. To save the lost and heal the sick today means to challenge the economic structures which exploit and increase inequalities among classes and among nations, to struggle for basic human rights, to denounce all kinds of oppression and violence. It requires not only healed bodies and transformed lives but new communities and new social, economic and political structures. The church as an institution cannot pretend to bring about these kinds of changes. In fact the churches and their members are deeply implicated in these injustices and in the existing structures. Recent attempts to deal prophetically with racism, transnational corporations, militarism and arms escalation, and other controversial issues have produced strong reactions. Nevertheless, as the human condition becomes increasingly intolerable, all of God's people must find their place in these debates and in the mission of salvation-not just intellectually or marginally but existentially and integrally. Our own salvation is at stake.

Discipleship and Service

Jesus did not carry out his mission alone. He called others to be with him and to enter into this mission. The central section of Mark's Gospel, Mark 8:27-10: 52, deals with this matter. The disciples had been called earlier: they had followed Jesus for perhaps two or three years; they had seen and performed miracles; they had heard his teachings. But Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27-30) is the turning point. For the first time (in Mark) the disciples (through Peter) declare that he is the Messiah. At this point Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, and in three successive passages (Mk 8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:32-34) he tells them that he must suffer and be killed. It is evident here that Jesus' understanding of his mission is based on the Suffering Servant passages of Isaiah. This is revealed also by the voice from heaven at his baptism (Mk 1:11, cf. Is. 42:1) and by his words at the Last Supper (Mk 14:22-25). It is especially clear in Mark 10:45: "For the son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many".

It is equally clear throughout this central section of Mark that the disciples are called to give their lives in service also. In fact each of the three passages where Jesus explains that his mission leads to the cross is succeeded by one or more concise and penetrating sayings about discipleship. Listed together, with three intervening sayings, they are remarkably similar in meaning and tone.

- "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."
- "Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life... will save it."
- "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"
- "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."
- "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."
- "How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God."
- "Many that are first will be last and the last first."
- "Whoever would be great among you must be slave of all."

The essential nature of discipleship is self-giving service. The references to the cross and losing one's life, taken in their context, cannot be spiritualized away. Followers of Jesus Christ are expected to make a total commitment.

Our churches today affirm that we stand in that apostolic tradition, for we too are called to be Jesus' disciples and to continue his mission. But do we understand what this means? Do we carry out this service? Cynics argue that people in positions of privilege and power, whether Christians or not, will never give up what they have. The Gospel of God's rule realized in Jesus Christ and evidenced among his followers in partial but striking ways down through history, can both transform human will and effect institutional change. Our challenge is to unlock that motivation among all God's people today.

A New Base for Mission

The call to mission is radical, and it is complex. The needs of humankind today are overwhelming, almost hopeless. The reality of the churches, at least as viewed from the older base for mission in the West and from the ecumenical and ecclesiastical hierarchies, can be depressing. It is time to look for a new base for mission.

From the beginning the Gospel was proclaimed to all, but it was among the common people that it took root and multiplied-thirty, sixty, a hundred-fold. So it is today. If we look at the mission of the church from the bottom up, we may discover there the spiritual dynamics which can revitalize the whole church and offer signs of hope for the world.

The Ministry and Theological Education

Throughout their history the churches have struggled with hierarchization of authority, initiative, and leadership. The problem still persists. In western countries this may no longer be a theological problem so much as reflection of the broad drift towards specialization and professionalism in every sphere. Whatever the reasons, the major ecclesiastical traditions continue to experience massive clericalism, dependency, nominalism. Even in third world countries where local untrained leaders carry 90% of the pastoral responsibilities, it is commonly affirmed that the church can fully carry out its ministry only through ordained priests or pastors.

In contrast there is now a growing groundswell of indigenous churches and communities where the people themselves and their local leaders are the primary agents for ministry. The Pentecostals of Latin America have grown enormously in recent decades, largely through this process; they now number 80% of the Protestant population, which as a whole is growing

rapidly. The African Independent churches continue to expand and multiply; they have created at least 7,000 new dominations; they too are popular movements with charismatic leadership. The historic denominations, also, seem to develop dynamically in inverse proportion to the sophistication and professionalization of the leadership.

These currents can teach the whole church an important lesson about the nature of ministry. The ministry cannot be coopted by any ordained, official, or specially trained group. Ecclesiastical and theological education structures must be judged in terms of their effectiveness in allowing and enabling the people themselves to discover and give expression to their faith.

This is the primary goal of the new approach to ministerial formation called theological education by extension (TEE). Instead of training professional leadership *for* the churches these programmes open the doors to ministry by extending the resources for theological study throughout their constituencies. Local leaders-lay persons and catechists as well as ordinands, elders and young people, women and men, peasants and professionals, representing all academic levels and sub-cultures-are now for the first time becoming fully involved and fully recognized as ministers of the Gospel.

The response of the people exceeds all expectations. TEE was introduced in Brazil in 1968; ten years later there were forty-four programmes with more than 5,000 students; many are directing congregations and many others carry the church's witness into society at all levels. The Theological Community of Chile, which has a residential programme in Santiago, sponsors an extension programme up and down that 4200-kilometre-long country with 2,600 students, most of them Pentecostal leaders with obvious gifts but very limited schooling and no possibility of going to seminary for three years. The TAFTEE programme of India (the Association for Theological Education by Extension) is beginning to graduate BTh-level students from its thirty-four centres, most of whom will serve in non-church vocations, and it is beginning to develop vernacular courses that will be offered to the tens of thousands of village leaders who have been exempted from serious theological education and disenfranchised from the ministry. The council of churches and association of theological schools in Southern Africa launched an ecumenical extension programme in 1977 and by the end of 1978 their resources were strained to the limit with an enrolment of 892 students in

eighty-five centres throughout the sub-continent – representing all the major racial, linguistic, ecclesiastical and social divisions.

A recent consultation at Tempe, Arizona, brought together fifty people engaged in alternative theological education in North America and revealed the same rapid growth of extension programmes, indicating the hunger for serious engagement in theology and ministry. Fuller Theological Seminary, which has a large resident student body, now offers five different extension programmes at different levels, for specific constituencies and with diverse goals. The TEE programme of the University of the South (Episcopal) expects to have 4,000 extension students by June 1980. The Southern Baptist Seminary Extension Department reported last year an enrolment of 10,477 in 340 centres in forty-eight of the fifty states and twenty-one foreign countries.

These are not second-rate programmes for second-class pastors. The experience, motivation and maturity of these natural leaders carry the potential of renewing the whole church for mission. These hundreds of nuclei for theological reflection and action among people engaged in every walk of life demonstrate that ordinary Christians want to involve themselves in training and assume responsibility for leadership and to help the churches grow not only in numbers but in witness and service.

Health Care and Wholeness

Even more serious than the professionalization of the ministry has been the transmutation of health care into "scientific medicine", setting aside the individual, the home, the church and the community, and lodging all understanding, expertise and authority in the medical guild. One result is that resources for health service are concentrated in hospitals in urban centres; large sectors of the population, both rural and urban, are completely unattended. Most of them also lack basic foods and safe drinking water. Another result is that people are alienated from their own health care and become totally dependent on specialists. Medicine is so specialized and mystified that, even among the most educated, common ailments require professional attention, and those who most need care – the sick and the aged and the dying – are cut off from those who should and do care for them.

During the last decade both the Christian Medical Commission of the WCC and the World Health Organization of the UN have launched a worldwide campaign to reverse this tendency and to place the primary responsibility and resources for health care in the hands of the people. The urgency of this challenge is expressed by WHO's Director General in these terms: "If we do not succeed in making radical changes, the vast majority of the world's population will still have no access to decent health care at the end of this century."

The new approaches that are springing up in many parts of the world (third world, first world, and also in the socialist countries) are called "primary health care" or "community-based health care". Though it is never easy to break the attitudes and structures of dependency, the basic philosophy of primary health care is quite simple. First, the people should be responsible for determining their own needs and looking after them, so local health committees of some kind are essential. Second, primary health promoters, selected and/or approved by their communities, are capable of providing the basic leadership for health education and health care; with only minimal formal education plus basic practical training they can handle up to 90% of the cases needing treatment. Third, most of the health problems cannot be solved by medical treatment; they require land reform, change in diet and customs, clean water supply, agricultural improvements, etc., which in turn require community action and local leadership. Fourth, health care should focus on health and wholeness rather than the treatment of disease; it is fundamentally concerned with human, family, and community relationships, i.e., the psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of life. These guidelines indicate that the communities themselves and their local health promoters must be the primary agents of health care. Hospitals and highly trained professionals are essential for certain tasks, but they must be perceived as auxiliary to the basic process of health promotion.

The development of primary health care programmes follows a pattern similar to theological education by extension. In fact some specialists in public health, surveying the seemingly insurmountable health needs around the globe, propose the redirection of existing resources through "health education by extension". Primary health workers are being trained through extension network in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. One Catholic diocese in an extremely poor mountainous section of Guatemala is already training 385 health promoters, 500 midwives, 60 agricultural promoters, and 200 spiritual leaders, all of whom are community selected and self-supporting. It is through such networks that the gloomy

prognosis for the future is being reversed. This hope is expressed by two WHO publications. *Health by the People* and *Health for All by the Year 2000*.

The challenge to the whole church for new engagement in this dimension of life is as striking as it is boundless. Local congregations should of course be healing communities; they provide an ideal base for primary health care. Primary health care programmes – in first-world as much as in third-world countries – provide opportunities for "ordinary" Christians and local leaders to exercise their ministries and to love their neighbors. In the process the church can rediscover its mission and the people of God their missionary calling.

Development and Justice

The word "development" no longer has credibility in much of the world, because it has come to mean a continuation of the existing patterns of dependency and assumes that poorer groups and nations need simply to "catch up" with the more advanced. In recent years this mentality, in spite of some noble efforts, has led to a greater widening of the gap. Furthermore, abundant statistics prove that the world just doesn't have enough resources to bring the bulk of its population up to the levels of consumption now operative in western countries.

There is now widespread consensus that genuine development must come from the people, by the people, if it is to be for the people. The process can begin at a hundred different points: agricultural improvement schemes, alternative energy projects, environmental hygiene, appropriate technology, credit cooperatives, land reclamation, cottage industries, wholistic health centres, community science centres, people's coalitions for urban action, or Bible study groups. The important thing is not the starting point but the growing consciousness among the people that they can change their world and the growing commitment to community welfare.

This process is equally important in first world countries, where people are trapped in a treadmill of consumerism and where Christians need desperately to find ways to break out of the structures that dominate their own lives and exploit the poor around the world. Here, too, small basic communities of different kinds are springing up and providing opportunities for alternative living and action. One example is the Sojourners Community in Washington, DC,

which maintains a creative balance between pastoral care and prophetic witness, personal and community lifestyle and global justice, evangelism and service, spiritual growth and engagement in the whole range of human issues. A recent number of their monthly review contains articles on the biblical bases for community, non-violence, prison ministries, the ecology struggle, and the nuclear debate plus news and resources for Christians to act upon – a manual for groups committed to lifestyle assessment, a catalogue of social and cultural movements in the depressed region of Appalachia, a liturgy on capital punishment, a new journal on justice ministries, a workshop on religious non-violence, educational films on Southern Africa, and a study packet dealing with the nuclear arms race, energy choices, and the church's response. One indication of the effectiveness of their challenge is the fact that the circulation of this new publication is expected to reach 50,000 this year, and already 12,000 "nuclear packets" have been sold.

The potential of the local manifestation of the church and the need for the church to be engaged in popular movements should be self-evident. This is the meaning of God's rule, the call to discipleship, in concrete, understandable ways. And Christian people are responding. Roman Catholic basic ecclesial communities, for example, have multiplied in astounding numbers in Latin America, parts of Europe, and elsewhere. One report indicates that there are 80,000 of these communities in Brazil alone – meeting for biblical reflection, sharing common concerns and struggling for human rights and human dignity. They are signs of hope not only for the church but for all people.

These scattered references to widespread phenomena in the life of the churches today suggest that a new base for mission is emerging. It is among the people of God that the connection between the Gospel of the Kingdom and the needs of the world is being made. When this happens, faith comes alive, witness becomes genuine, and the enormous spiritual dynamics of the church are released in service.

Church hierarchies, ecumenical bodies, theologians and even pastors will have to listen carefully to this call in order to play a helping rather than dominating or condescending role. If the people in local congregations and communities do indeed take the initiative and become the primary agents, they will have to deal first-hand with the complexities and frustrations of

mission today. But it is far more likely that they will create a true vision of God's will for humankind, sound the trumpet, and prepare themselves for the battles that lie ahead.

NEWS OF EXTENSION

Uruguay

In April of this year the first servant of the Lord to complete his studies through Theological Education by Extension, was ordained into the pastorate. The now Rev. Jose Da Motta completed his studies at the Lutheran Institute of TEE at Rivera, Uruguay, and was therefore the first Lutheran pastor to be ordained and at the same time the first Uruguayan, that within the Lutheran church received such a privilege.

Mexico

There is an extraordinary amount of enthusiasm for the creation of an Extension Seminary in northern Mexico. The churches interested in this program are: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Mexico, the Alianza Apostolical Lutherana Mexicana and the group Leon Guanajuato Mexico. In a meeting that took place May 17-19, 1979, it was decided to encourage the interested churches to make a definite decision. If the project were to take place, it was decided that the best location for the Extension Seminary would be Saltillo, Coahuila where there could be different centers in the surrounding area including Nuevo Leon, Durango, Tamaulipas, Sinaloa and Puebla. If you would like more information write to: Ref. Nehemías Díaz, Apartado Postal 20-416, Mexico 20, D.F.

Bolivia

Pastor Sixto Gutierrez, who received his preparation for Extension through the ALISTE program, and is presently the Director of the Theological Seminary by Extension in Bolivia, has informed us of their new program called RESIDENCIAL. This will consist of periodical meetings at the Seminary for the students of that institution. At each of these Residencial meetings there will be a different theme presented, along with practical affairs for the work of the future pastor.