
Mission Part II: Abandoning Basics

the Concept of Mission in the World Council of Churches 1961—1968

The year 1968 proved to be a watershed in the history of the ecumenical understanding of missions and the purpose of this paper will be to examine, albeit briefly, the background to the crisis and the ideas to which it gave rise.

Naturally, the missiological thinking in ecumenical circles during the decade of the sixties was influenced by that of the fifties and there can be little doubt that the outstanding concept developed during that period was the idea of “*Missio Dei*”. In this idea, the old notion that Mission is something that belongs to the Church has been abandoned. Mission is no longer regarded as something that the Church does but as something that belongs essentially to God.¹

This thinking was reflected in the editorial of the **International Review of Mission** for April 1969 which was the first issue of the oldest ecumenical journal to use the word ‘Mission’ in its title in the singular form. This change in title, it was claimed, was made not only to make the publication more palatable to Asian, African and Latin American readers but because there had been a growing conviction among ecumenists, finding expression within the journal, that “the mission of the Church is singular in that it issues from the one triune God and His intention for the salvation of all men”.²

A similar emphasis is to be found in Professor Alan Richardson’s **A Dictionary of Theology** where the contributor defines Mission as “an activity of God having its origin in the Holy Trinity”.³ This emphasis upon the Trinity is found particularly in the writings of Lesslie Newbigin and has served to guard against undue stress upon either christology or pneumatology.⁴

The ‘*Missio Dei*’ concept of Mission originated on the Continent in the 1950s and was disseminated through the writings of Professor Georg Vicedom. Briefly, in this idea a foundation was sought for Mission, not in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), but in “the fact of God’s action towards men. Here the entire emphasis is laid upon God’s activity and man is regarded as passive”. In addition:

If the Mission is not ours but the Lord’s, it can no longer be defined as a special activity of those Christians or Christian agencies who claim to have a special call or assignment for Mission, but it should rather be described as the dynamic structure of the total Church of Christ, as the *raison d’être* of the Church in the world.⁵

As a result of this dynamic concept of ‘*Missio Dei*’, Hoffmann calls for the abandonment of the old “platonic” and “heretical” dualism which defines ‘Mission’ in terms of the soul and ‘service’ in terms of the body. God’s actions, it is maintained, are aimed at the whole man and, therefore, witness and service and word and deed can never again be divorced.⁶

Such a concept has led to a reappraisal of the content of Mission. Indeed, it

enables Martin Achard to say:

The evangelization of the world is not a matter of words or of activity but of presence: the presence of the people of God in the midst of humanity, the presence of God among His people.⁷

Walter Horton puts the matter even more strongly:

It is a great mistake, from the point of view of strategy, to allow the straight preaching of the Gospel to bulk too large in any well-rounded programme of missions ... In terms of methods, evangelism often comes last, following modestly in the train of education and medicine. Deeds have to come ahead of words. The healing of sick bodies, the liberation of minds from the curse of illiteracy, the setting up of a new economic standard of living through scientific agriculture or new social mores giving women and children a fair chance for the first time, all convey the love of Christ far more effectively than words.⁸

The foregoing quotation from Horton introduces us to certain words and phrases which have attained great importance in the ecumenical vocabulary. Such terms as 'education', 'medicine', 'literacy', 'economic progress' and 'enhanced opportunities for women and children' all find a place in the linguistic analysis which is an important part of contemporary ecumenical methodology. Some examples may illustrate the method to which we refer.

The first example is the German term 'Heil'. Regarding the English term 'salvation' as having been "accentuated in the direction of rescue and redemption", Hendrik Kraemer draws attention to the word 'Heil' which, in his opinion, better expresses the content of the biblical idea.⁹ 'Heil' "presupposes that which is broken and then restored to wholeness, to full integrity" and finds equivalents in the sanskrit 'sarva' (whole); Greek *holos*; Latin 'solus' which is 'totum'. These terms, according to Kraemer, point to the meaning bound up in the Latin 'salvus' meaning 'without fail', 'whole', 'healthy' and 'healing'.¹⁰ The matter is enlarged a little further thus:

Basic to the witness of both the Old and the New Testaments is the conviction that God has taken a direct hand in earthly human affairs, particularly in a specific chain of events by which the total welfare of mankind, its salvation (German 'Heil') is being prepared for and revealed to the world.¹¹

The second term to which we must give attention is the world *shalom*. Precisely the same content as is given to Heil is attributed to the Hebrew term shalom. Acknowledging his indebtedness to Johannes Pedersen who has "so ably demonstrated" the significance of this Old Testament concept, Kraemer stresses that the adequate translation of shalom is not simply 'peace' but 'wholeness', 'integrity', 'heil', 'the state of complete integration of a community, its God-willed design'.¹² Professor Dr. H.J. Margull's definition is precise: "Shalom is, in fact, the Old Testament term for peace and wholeness".¹³ Dr. Hans Hoekendijk has paid particular attention to this aspect of the matter and has defined shalom as:

A secularized concept taken out of the religious sphere (salvation to those who have strictly performed the prescribed rites) and commonly used to

indicate all aspects of the restored and cured human condition: righteousness, truth, fellowship, communication, peace etc. (Cf. Psalm 85).¹⁴

Margull, of Hamburg University, sees Hoekendijk's definition and use of the term shalom as an attempt to concretize the concept of the Kingdom of God which suggests that both he and Hoekendijk would subscribe to Linnenbrink's idea that one of the two misconceptions upon which the restriction of salvation to personal conversion is based is that which he denominates 'spiritualistic' i.e. reducing it to the spiritual life of man. According to Linnenbrink,

The conversion of the individual, the creation of the new heart, the spiritual dimension of individual lives, do not comprise the whole Kingdom of God towards whose consummation we are moving in hope.¹⁵

He is insistent that Mission can no longer be equated with individual salvation. The latter is identified as part of the pietistic tradition and is contrasted by Linnenbrink with 'church-centred' missions. Such missions "do not see the real purpose of their work as personal conversion but rather as the founding and extension of the Church, the gathering of the new people of God".¹⁶

According to the same writer, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the dawn and inauguration of the promised Kingdom of God and the atonement offered by Jesus was universal in its scope so that it is a species of reductionism to emphasise personal salvation. God's kingdom, he says, cannot be reduced to a conviction of personal salvation in view of the cosmic scope of the work of Christ. An over-emphasis upon individual conversion belittles the significance of the resurrection of Christ Who came to reconcile the world.¹⁷

The aim of Missions, therefore, must go beyond the personal conversion of the individual because the social aspect of human life, man's social dimension, is also affected.¹⁸

This emphasis upon shalom as a concrete term is undergirded by Hoekendijk's definition of shalom as "a social happening, an event in inter-human relations".¹⁹ In this we are reminded of Karl Barth's argument that God's method of effecting this heal or shalom was by entering into concrete human existence in Christ in whom all things will be gathered in one. Kraemer, indeed, refers to Barth and says, "In Jesus' 'state of being with man', in His 'being there for man', it became manifest that 'the togetherness of man' is the natural fundament of human life".²⁰

Shalom as a social happening is emphasised in precisely these terms in the Draft Document for Section II at Uppsala 1968. Arguing that the term is used to gather up into one a number of other biblical ideas such as righteousness, truth, fellowship and peace, the Document goes on to state that the single word shalom "summarises all the gifts of the messianic age". It points to the fact that both Old and New Testaments refer to Messiah as Shalom (Micah 5:5; Ephesians 2:14) whilst the Gospel which is a Gospel of shalom (Ephesians 6:15) proclaims the God of Shalom.

Shalom is a social happening, an event in inter-personal relations. It can, therefore, never be reduced to a single formula; it has to be discovered as God's gift in actual situations.²¹

When, therefore, we look for 'signs of shalom' we must look for humanization and reconciliation at the human level. As Professor J.G. Davies says:

Mission is concerned with the overcoming of industrial disputes, with the surmounting of class divisions, with the eradication of racial discrimination ... we are to enter into partnership with God in history to renew society.²² The emphasis upon the concretisation of shalom found expression in Section Report **Renewal in Mission** presented at Uppsala in 1968. In that report it was recognised that the message and ministry with which the Church has been charged transcend the material and yet it stresses that the physical and social needs of people can never be treated as secondary to the needs of the spirit.²³ 'Signs of shalom' must, therefore, be recognised in the face of the concrete situation which includes world hunger, revolution and racism.²⁴

Another word that is included in the biblical idea of salvation, according to the ecumenical theologians, is **Liberation**. Professor Jose Miguez-Bonino of Buenos Aires argues that liberation from oppression and slavery — a costly business — is one of the concrete tasks in which we may see salvation. He continues:

Christian faith and consequently Christian mission are never mere declaration. They are to be sought in God's action. To become witnesses of Jesus Christ, the liberator, in the struggle for the liberation of man and the transformation of society is to be called to concrete tasks. We have the task of thinking together about the road to liberation.²⁵

According to this type of thinking, liberation will be effected when the Church calls upon centres of power such as government, business, industry, military establishments, labour and the churches to account for their uses of power. **Christian involvement in revolution cannot be ruled out** especially "where the maintenance of order is an obstacle to a just order".²⁶ This involves a struggle "for a just society without which the new humanity cannot fully come".²⁷

Dr. Hans-Ruedi Weber has expounded Luke 4:18,19 in a liberation context. He links the passage in Luke with Leviticus 25 vv.8ff., which deals with the Year of Jubilee. He notes that four notable events took place during that Year, land reform, economic reform, release of slaves and a year of rest. These four elements, taken together, are, according to Weber, to be equated with liberation and thus with salvation.²⁸ Professor Bonino likewise refers to the Lukan passage and interprets the Gospel in terms of social action though he prefers to speak of "struggle for justice".²⁹ The practical outworking of this thinking is seen in the establishment in 1969 by the World Council of Churches of its **Programme to Combat Racism**.³⁰

The final word to engage our attention here is **Dialogue**. Certainly it was not a new idea in the decade of the sixties but during that time it may be said to have assumed an even greater degree of importance for ecumenists. Instead of limiting the idea to dialogue between Christians of various traditions, the word is now applied to contacts between Christians and men of other faiths.³¹

Once again, there is in this concept, an expressed desire to abandon a narrow understanding of salvation and to embrace the cosmic scope of the work of

Christ. All mankind, no matter to what century, country or creed they belong, are, according to this dialogical emphasis, the objects of God's love and salvation. A greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the corporate character of salvation as also upon the fact that it "embraces all aspects of man's existence".³²

At the consultation on dialogue with men of other faiths held at Kandy, Ceylon, from February 27th to March 6th 1967, the participants drew attention to the Vatican Council's **Dogmatic Constitution of the Church** in which the Council stated that:

Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.³³

With this position the Consultation was in agreement. As far as it was concerned the Church is an open fellowship which simply cannot be regarded as co-terminous with the historical community that bears God's name.³⁴ The solidarity of the human race is emphasised, the oneness and universality of history is underlined and the common tasks and hopes of men are presented in order to provide the basis for the Christian approach to men of other faiths.³⁵

Respecting the religious faith of the other as part of his culture and humanity, the Christian must, says the Consultation, be prepared to listen and learn as well as to proclaim and teach. "Dialogue implies a readiness to be changed as well as to influence others".³⁶ Indeed, the spirit of dialogue will prevent the Christian from expecting too much from people in other faiths who embrace Christian discipleship. Whilst baptism and church membership normally follow conversion it may be inappropriate for some to follow this course and they should be free to decide for themselves whether or not to do so.³⁷

The Consultation candidly admitted that its members were not agreed among themselves about the question concerning God's purpose in redemption "to bring about an increasing manifestation of the Saviour within other systems of belief as such".³⁸ It recognised the need for the further study of many questions in this field but resolved the matter into the fluid nature of an ongoing and dynamic dialogue.³⁹

The rather affirmative tone of the foregoing outline must not be interpreted to mean that, within the ecumenical movement, the whole question of 'Mission' has been settled and that a consensus of opinion has been reached whereby a 'missiological canon' can now be recognised. Ecumenists have found it easier to dispense with 'outmoded' ideas than to replace them with concepts upon which they are all agreed. We may look, for example, at the International Missionary Council's meeting at Willingen in 1952 when the enlarged meeting of the Committee issued a statement on **The Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity** which contained the following celebrated words on the scandal of disunity: "Division in the Church distorts its witness, frustrates its mission and contradicts its own nature".⁴⁰ That conference, however, left a number of problems unsolved among which Dr. Norman Goodall identified the problems of mission and eschatology. The question at the heart of the matter is, "With

what hope and to what end do the missions carry on their educational, medical and evangelistic work and found churches?"⁴¹

Those unsolved problems reflect the fact that radical changes were taking place in missiological thinking. Indeed, so distinct had been the shift in theological emphasis with regard to missiology that Professor Dr. Walter Freytag of Hamburg could write, "Formerly Mission had problems: today it has itself become a problem".⁴²

The situation had not changed appreciably in the decade of the sixties. Writing after the Uppsala Conference (1968) two ecumenists stated their conviction that the missionary enterprise had undergone more radical change in the previous fifteen years than in the previous century.⁴³ Yet, whilst 1968 was in itself "a decisive year", the period was "a decade of dilemma".⁴⁴ Barry Till, writing about Uppsala 1968, says:

Another debate which ended in compromise was that of the mission of the Church. For a decade ... the issues of mission and unity had been wedded but there remained fundamental uncertainties as to what actually is the mission of the Church — uncertainties which inevitably inhibited the actual plans made to pursue that mission.⁴⁵

The fluidity of ecumenical thinking during the period under review may be seen in a report from Professor Dr. H.J. Margull on a seminar on Mission held at Hamburg University where he held the Chair of Missions. With regard to the fundamentally important matter of conversion Professor Margull reported that the question remained unanswered "for several old and familiar reasons but also because of some new considerations which have to be accepted".⁴⁶

Thus, little progress appears to have been made between 1963 and 1970 when Professor Margull first produced his paper. In 1963 the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (formed as a result of the 1961 merger of the International Missionary Council with the World Council of Churches) had its first full meeting in Mexico City. Under the general theme **Witness in Six Continents** the question of the form and content of the salvation which Christ offers men in the secular world was raised. The Conference "acknowledged its inability to give a satisfactory answer".⁴⁷

Nevertheless, whilst it was found impossible to arrive at decisive answers to specific questions, the ecumenical movement proceeded during this period to abandon some of the older concepts of mission such as individual conversion and church planting. Aagaard puts the matter in the following manner:

The 'Crisis in Mission' first became explicit concerning the motivation for mission. The spirit of crusading for Christ and the plantatio ecclesiae among the heathen became impossible notions in a world in which the name of Jesus is loved and respected among millions of people who do not belong to the Church and in a world in which the Church is already present but often in forms which contradict the very nature of the Gospel.⁴⁸

During the sixties it became fashionable in ecumenical circles to question everything. Questions were posed which would not have occurred to missionary stalwarts of a former generation — questions such as, "Is there a

missionary message?"; "What is the Christian Message?" and "What is Mission Today?".⁴⁹ The report entitled **The Church for Others** put the matter like this:

Questioning has become the 'piety' of thinking. Nothing remains outside the act of questioning. Even the fundamental datum and presupposition of our theology, God, is no longer self-evident and certainly no longer taken for granted.⁵⁰

Though the word 'confusion' is placed within inverted commas in the same report, it is, nevertheless, the term that is employed to describe the situation in which theologians, among others, found themselves at that time with regard to the whole question of mission.⁵¹

The new missiology, whilst seeking to answer the problems it identified with the older, classic concepts of mission, could not avoid raising problems of its own. These have been described as leaving us with a "natural and necessary uncertainty" and yet they have contributed substantially towards making "the decade of dilemma" also "a decade of polarisation".⁵²

Dr. Robert Rodgers, MA, MTh, is a former Baptist minister now working in Northern Ireland and is associated with the International Christian Network.

References

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2. Crane, op.cit., pp.141ff.
3. A. Richardson, (Ed) A DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY, art., 'Mission', London, S.C.M., 1969, pp.217-220.
4. Lesslie Newbigin, THE RELEVANCE OF TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE FOR TODAY'S MISSION, London, Edinburgh House, 1963, passim. Cf. I.R.M., January 1971, p.23.
5. G. Hoffmann, Considerations on Integration of Church and Mission, I.R.M., Vol.LVIII, No.231, July 1969, pp.283,284. Cf. Rodger C. Bassham, Seeking a Deeper Theological Basis for Missions, I.R.M., July 1978, p.332; Georg Vicedom, THE MISSION OF GOD, St. Louis, Concordia, 1965, passim.
6. Hoffmann, op.cit., p.284. Cf. UPPSALA 68: DRAFTS FOR SECTIONS, Section II, Geneva, W.C.C., 1968, p.33; WORLD CONFERENCE ON CHURCH AND SOCIETY, Geneva, W.C.C., 1967, p.208, paragraph 6.
7. Martin Achard, quoted in J. Blauw, THE MISSIONARY NATURE OF THE CHURCH, New York, McGraw Hill, 1962, p.43.
8. W.M. Horton, OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH, Boston, Pilgrim Press, 1947, quoted in A. Glasser, "Mission and the Church's Message" in H. Lindell, (Ed) THE CHURCH'S WORLDWIDE MISSION, Waco, Word Books, 1966, pp.39-51. The quotation is on page 40.
9. H. Kraemer, THE COMMUNICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, London, The Lutterworth Press, 1957, p.20.
10. Loc.cit.
11. A.J. Ehlen, "Old Testament Theology as Heilsgeschichte", CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, xxxv, October 1964, p.517.
12. Kraemer, op.cit., p.20. Cf. T. Paul Verghese, 'Salvation', I.R.M., October 1968, p.403, where he translates the world shalom as 'welfare' in Psalm 72:3 and pp.405 and 416 where 'welfare' is said to be "the central content of salvation".
13. H.J. Margull, "Mission 70. More a Venture Than Ever", MISSION TRENDS I, p.51. Cf. DRAFTS FOR SECTIONS, p.43.
14. Quoted by Margull, loc.cit.

15. G. Linnenbrink, "Witness and Service in Mission", I.R.M., Vol.LIV, No.216, October 1965, p.431.
16. *Ibid.*, p.430.
17. *Loc.cit.* Cf. Crane, *op.cit.*, p.141 and report of Adam Taft in The Miami Herald, November 17th 1965: "Dr. E. Edmund Perry, Professor of History and Religion at Northwestern University, told the Methodist Council of Evangelism that seeking to save an individual's soul is not evangelism and is no longer even Christian. 'I abhor the notion of individual salvation. Christianity is a societal term', he said." Quoted in C.F.H. Henry, *EVANGELICALS AT THE BRINK OF CRISIS*, Waco, Word Books, 1968, p.74.
18. Linnenbrink, *op.cit.*, p.431. Cf. *THE OFFICIAL REPORT* of the World Conference on Church and Society, (1966), Geneva, W.C.C., 1967: "Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time".
19. Quoted by Margull, *op.cit.*, p.51.
20. Karl Barth, *CHURCH DOGMATICS*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1971, III, 2 and Kraemer, *op.cit.*, p.21.
21. *DRAFTS FOR SECTIONS: UPPSALA 68*, p.34. Cf. *MISSION TRENDS I*, p.51 and *THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS*, Geneva, W.C.C., 1968, p.14.
22. J.G. Davies, quoted in J.R.W. Stott, *THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE IN THE MODERN WORLD*, p.19. Cf. *THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS*, p.15 and *The World Conference on Church and Society's OFFICIAL REPORT*, p.208.
23. *UPPSALA 68 SPEAKS*, Geneva, W.C.C. and New York, Friendship Press, 1968, p.28 and *W.C.C.S. OFFICIAL REPORT*, p.207 where 'words' and 'acts' are conjoined.
24. H.J. Margull, *op.cit.*, p.52; *DRAFTS FOR SECTIONS*, Sect II, p.43 and *W.C.C.S. OFFICIAL REPORT*, p.49.
25. Jose Miguez-Bonino, "The Present Crisis in Mission", *MISSION TRENDS I*, pp.45,46.
26. *UPPSALA SPEAKS*, pp.30,31 (emphasis mine). Cf. Aagaard, "Trends in Missiological Thinking in the Sixties", I.R.M., January 1973, pp.23-25. At the W.C.C.S., one of the speakers was Mr. Eduardo Mondlane, leader of the Mozambique Liberation Front. Cf. *OFFICIAL REPORT*, p.16.
27. *UPPSALA 68 SPEAKS*, p.31. Cf. Aagaard, *OP.CIT.*, p.24f., and Darrill Hudson, *THE W.C.C. IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS*, Leighton Buzzard, 1977, pp.106,115-117,123, 124,140,141,285.
28. H.R. Weber, exposition at Bangkok '73 on the theme 'Salvation Today'. Cf. *THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS*, pp.77, 78; I.R.M., April 1973, p.199; *MISSION TRENDS I*, p.41. *Salvation here is seen to operate in four social dimensions:*
 - i) In the struggle for economic justice against the exploitation of people by people.
 - ii) In the struggle for human dignity against political oppression by their fellow-man.
 - iii) In the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person.
 - iv) In the struggle for hope against despair in personal life.
- I.R.M., April 1973, p.200.
29. J. Miguez-Bonino, *op.cit.*, p.41.
30. Hudson, *op.cit.*, p.106.
31. Cf. I.R.M., Vol.LIX, No.236, October 1970 entitled 'Faithful Dialogue', particularly the article entitled "Christians in Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths", pp.382-391; I.R.M., Vol.LVI, No.223, July 1967, pp.338-343; Carl F. Hallencreutz, *NEW APPROACHES TO MEN OF OTHER FAITHS*, Geneva, W.C.C., 1970, *passim*. This is the W.C.C. research Pamphlet No.18.
32. Statement by P.O.C.C., I.R.M., July 1967, p.338.
33. *Loc.cit.*
34. *Loc.cit.*
35. *Ibid.*, p.339.
36. *Ibid.*, pp.339, 340. Cf. David Jenkins, "Commitment and Openness", I.R.M., October 1970.
37. I.R.M., July 1967, pp.342, 343. Cf. The discussion between Lesslie Newbigin and M.M. Thomas on the question, 'What is a Hindu?', *MISSION TRENDS I*, p.228.
38. I.R.M., July 1967, pp.342, 343; S.J. Samartha, "Quest for Salvation and Dialogue Between Religions", I.R.M., October 1968, p.431.
39. I.R.M., July 1967, p.343.

40. DOCUMENTS ON CHRISTIAN UNITY, edited by G.K.A. Bell, iv series, 1948-57, O.U.P., 1955.
41. Cited from W. Andersen, TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF MISSION, London, S.C.M., 1956, pp.45,46. The reference is to Goodall's introduction to the volume MISSIONS UNDER THE CROSS, and the four problematic areas to which reference is made are:
- i) The relation between history and salvation-history.
 - ii) Missions and Eschatology.
 - iii) The bearing of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit on the nature of the Church and the Christian ministry.
 - iv) The theological distinction between foreign missions and missionary responsibility in general.
42. Quoted by W.B. Frazier, "Guidelines for a New Theology of Mission", MISSION TRENDS I, p.23. Cf. A.D. Falconer, "The Churches and Social Action", DOCTRINE AND LIFE, November 1978, pp.557ff.; "Mission and Vatican II", I.R.M., July 1967, p.294 where Walter Freytag is quoted thus: "The traditional concepts of what Mission is all about are now in doubt". Cf. S. Neill, A HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS, pp.454,455.
43. G.H. Anderson and T.F. Stransky, MISSION TRENDS I, Foreword, p.1.
44. Cf. MISSION TRENDS I, p.13 and Aagaard, op.cit., p.9.
45. Barry Till, THE CHURCHES SEARCH FOR UNITY, London, Penguin, 1971, p.265. The emphasis is Till's.
46. Margull, op.cit., p.55.
47. J.R.W. Stott, op.cit., p.88; Cf. Verghese, op.cit., p.399.
48. J. Aagaard, op.cit., pp.10,11,19.
49. MISSION TRENDS I, pp.5ff.
50. THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS, p.91.
51. Loc.cit.
52. Aagaard, op.cit., pp.15 and 9.

"... the engrafted word ..." James 1:21

Meekness toward God is the quiet submission of the soul to His whole will, according as He is pleased to make it known, whether by His Word, or by His providence. It is the silent submission of the soul to the Word of God — the understanding bowed to every divine truth, and the will to every divine precept — and both without murmuring or disputing. The Word is then an "engrafted Word", when it is received with meekness, that is, with a sincere willingness to be taught, and desire to learn. Meekness is a grace that cleaves the stock and holds it open, that the Word as a shoot, may be grafted in; it breaks up the fallow ground, and makes it fit to receive the seed; it captivates high thoughts and lays the soul like white paper under God's pen ... It opens the hearts, as Lydia's was opened, and sets us down with Mary at the feet of Christ — the learner's place and posture ...

Matthew Henry, Discourse on Meekness