
Holistic Mission

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Some years ago a small town called Moyobamba and some surrounding villages on the edge of the Amazon rain forest in Peru were shaken by an earthquake. About 20 people lost their lives – a small number by earthquake standards – but there was extensive destruction of property, plunging many poor people into utter destitution. The churches lacked resources to help, but felt something had to be done.

About that time one of our sons, employed as an economist with BP, was feeling strongly that God was calling him to leave his comfortable, well-paid job, and offer himself in service to the needy in Christ's name. The upshot was that he joined forces with a small Peruvian mission to head up a programme of house building for earthquake victims in Moyobamba. The name of the mission was Misión Integral Urbano-Rural, known by its initials as MISIUR. I suppose you can hardly get anything wider than Integral Urban-Rural Mission – many and varied are the activities that can be covered by that umbrella. In actual fact its projects range from teaching people living in deplorably cramped conditions in shanty towns how to grow small vegetables in containers not much bigger than shoe-boxes, to cattle breeding programmes in the jungle, to training courses in basic Christian doctrine for untrained lay pastors, to the provision of simple housing for pastors living in mere shacks without even the basic amenities.

The housing project received help from various relief agencies and churches. Within two years, 130 families were housed, most of them recommended by a committee of local pastors. Meanwhile, a Peruvian doctor, an elder in the Presbyterian church, had left his Government post and was heading up a successful community health programme, the Luke Society. He invited our son to join his team to assist in meeting obvious needs expressed by local churches, especially in the areas of theological and organisational training for church leaders. A Christian bookshop was also established to serve local churches and contribute to evangelistic outreach.

I have recounted all of this to illustrate what is in view when we talk of **holistic** mission. The term “integral” or “integrated” mission is one I would prefer to “holistic”, a word stemming from the philosophical theory, “holism”, which teaches that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

For our purpose, it is the belief that “authentic mission is a comprehensive activity which embraces evangelism and social action and refuses to let them be divorced.” (John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*).

We do, however, need to define what we mean by the word “church” in our title. No-one here would deny that individual Christians, members of the church of Christ, are called to love their neighbours as themselves, and that this expresses itself in an endless variety of practical ways. But the question which I presume is being asked is this: Should the church as an organized body, whether local or regional, under the direction of its duly appointed officers, engage in holistic mission, either directly, or indirectly through a mission agency? Or should the church, *qua* church, limit itself to preaching the message of the gospel and to the planting and teaching of new churches,

leaving social activities, for example, education, health, agriculture or human rights to the efforts of individual Christians who are not called to be preachers of the Word?

Priorities in Mission

When our Lord sent his disciples out as missionaries to the world, they were charged to preach the gospel to every creature. He also directed them to baptize all new disciples and to teach them to observe everything he had commanded them. Obedience to their Lord would mean wholehearted commitment to every aspect of that great commission, without downgrading any part of it. Yet years later, the Apostle Paul could state categorically:

“Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 1:17). Baptism was not unimportant to Paul, but it had a lower priority than preaching the gospel.

Most telling of all is our Lord’s question: “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26) Face to face with eternity, with the realities of heaven and hell, it is not enough for a man that medical missionaries have increased his life expectancy or that agricultural missionaries have improved his crop yields. Most of all he needs to ask the question, “What must I do to be saved?” and hear the answer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”

I intend to argue in favour of the church engaging in holistic mission, but never at the expense of diluting or sidelining the preaching of the gospel. There is a clear priority and it must be observed.

There are some who advocate, from an Evangelical and indeed a Reformed standpoint, a much greater involvement of the church in social concerns, who are unhappy with this talk of priorities. Timothy Keller, for example, in *Ministries of Mercy* says: “It is common to speak of ‘the priority of the spiritual’, but is that a biblical idea?” He speaks of God as the creator of both material and immaterial, and of God’s intention to redeem both our bodies and our spirits. “How then”, he asks, “can we speak about the ‘physical’ as being less important than the ‘spiritual’?” I agree wholeheartedly with Keller’s insistence that “word and deed are inextricably united and inseparable” and that “our goal ... is the bringing of all life and creation under the lordship of Christ.” But while the verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation must never be divorced from the church’s important and divinely commanded ministries of mercy, yet the primacy of preaching and evangelising dare not be lost sight of.

It seems to me that by employing a different terminology, Keller goes on to concede this point, while fighting shy of the idea of priorities. He says:

We must nonetheless recognise that, from one perspective, the ministry of the Word is the most radical ministry ... Our alienation from God, our condition of being in a state of condemnation, is the root from which all our miseries flow. Psychological brokenness, social injustice and even physical disintegration are due to and flow out of our warfare with God. Thus, the more radical ministry to the condition of man is to proclaim the word of faith. There is no more fundamental means to cut the root of sin and death than the verbal proclamation of the Gospel.

So call it what you will – our priority, our most radical ministry, “our chief concern” (Manila Manifesto 1989 LCWE) – the preaching of the gospel must be the primary component of all mission. Advocates of holistic mission should expect to be weighed

in the balance and found wanting, if this is not true of all the varied activities they undertake.

Biblical Evidence for Holistic Mission

(a) Old Testament

It is true that, as the Westminster Confession says, God gave Israel, “as a body politic, sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.” But it is precisely the spirit of this “general equity”, expressed in Mosaic laws and constantly appealed to by psalmists and prophets, that gives us a picture of the kind of society God wants, and how his people ought to live, both as individuals and as a corporate body.

And what picture are we given? We see the eternal and the temporal intermingling, the spiritual and the material moving side by side without any sense of contradiction or incongruity. Late payment of wages and discrimination against the handicapped are condemned equally with profaning the name of the Lord, not observing the sabbath or not reverencing God’s sanctuary (Lev. 19). A host of laws on behalf of the poor and needy, widows, orphans and foreigners insist that to fail to love them in practical ways is to “show contempt to their Maker” (Prov. 17:5).

Of course, we all agree that such a spirit should characterise every believer, but the laws, the exhortations and the rebukes of the Old Testament are not just addressed to individual believers, but to the church of God, albeit the church under a different external administration. It is to the church of his day that Isaiah speaks, a church meticulously observing its religious duties:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rearguard (Isa. 58:6-8).

No dichotomy is allowed between spiritual and material. This is the church being called by God to engage in holistic mission.

(b) The Life and Teaching of Jesus

We are all acutely aware of how difficult it can be to find the right balance in our church’s witness in the community or country. Here, for example, is a church which opens its hall to provide crèche facilities, but finds as the years pass that all it seems to be doing is serve as a dumping ground for neglected children, depriving it of time and personnel for its main task of preaching the gospel. On the other hand, here is a church situated near a dangerous road junction where local children have been injured, but which refuses to be involved in petitions from local residents to the council because it doesn’t consider agitating for road safety to be any part of its biblical remit. As a result it loses all credibility in the community as a caring body of people.

Where is balance to be found? None can deny that in the Lord Jesus Christ there is perfect balance between word and deed, combining as he did the infallible wisdom of

God with personal experience of human need. Mark tells us that “he went around teaching” (Mk 6:6), while Luke states that “he went around doing good and healing” (Acts 10:38). In his teaching he made abundantly clear what is primary and what is secondary – “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” But at the same time, it was when he was teaching a man about eternal life that he challenged him through the parable of the Good Samaritan to face up to his social responsibility.

With regard to Jesus’ deeds, it is important to remember that his miracles were signs, pointing to something far greater than feeding multitudes or calming storms. Jesus, in fact, criticises those whose only concern was with the loaves and fishes. But it is also true that they were expressions of his compassion – we read of his heart going out to the widow of Nain, and of his being moved by the plight of the tired, hungry crowds. In all of this he has left us an example that we should follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:23), a clear call to holistic mission.

(c) The New Testament Church

Of crucial importance in this context is the institution of the diaconate in Acts 6. On the one hand, the priority of “prayer and the ministry of the Word” is clearly established, but on the other hand, not only is the importance of food distribution recognised: it is recognised as a ministry of the church, and decisions, appointments and organisation are all in the hands of the church. The men chosen are to be as godly as the apostles, “full of the Spirit and wisdom” – secondary duties are not to be committed to second-rate Christians. If this is not the church engaging in holistic mission, what is?

Other New Testament references flesh out this picture. In Acts 10 the famine relief sent from Antioch to Jerusalem was provided by individual disciples, “each according to his ability”, but the whole business was inspired and carried out by the church, through its appointed prophets, apostles and elders. Paul gives Timothy advice about those who should and should not be put on the church list of widows, “so that the church can help those widows who are really in need” (1 Tim. 5). And while John’s reference to having material possessions and seeing our brother in need, yet having no pity on him, should prick our individual consciences, it is very much within the corporate context of the church family that John lays down his challenges. Therefore, he says, “let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

Reasons for Holistic Mission

So far I have only looked at factual examples of holistic mission in the Scriptures. I would like now to consider some fundamental Christian teachings and suggest that they necessarily imply a wide view of what the church’s mission is.

(a) The nature of man

(i) Man is a unity of body and soul

It is true that our bodies have been formed from the dust, and will at death crumble again to dust. In that respect the welfare of our never-dying souls is infinitely more important, and only the gospel of grace can meet the needs of our souls. But God has

deigned to breathe into these bodies his breath of life, the Son of God took to himself a human body, and one day God will reconstitute our decomposed bodies into glorified bodies of which our Lord's is the pattern and the guarantee.

We are not disembodied souls, nor should we deal with other people as though they were. As we preach the gospel we must be acutely aware of the physical, mental and emotional dimensions of our hearers, so as not to present spiritual truth in a vacuum. This is put starkly by James when he asks: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed', but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (James 2:15-16) It seems illogical to me that we should urge Christians as individuals to get involved with feeding the hungry or housing the homeless, but draw back from urging these same Christians when they come together as the church to get involved on a wider scale in these same activities.

At this point let me interject some possibly subjective observations. We who have been brought up in post-Second World War Britain are the social products of the Welfare State. Things are changing, but when I was young in the late forties and fifties, the church's role in social welfare largely disappeared. We didn't need to care for widows and orphans in the way the Bible describes, since the State cared for them. Congregational benevolent funds fell into disuse, educational bursaries were no longer required, medical missions gave way to the NHS. Indeed, the church's involvement in such things was often seen as interference by the Welfare State. There was much that was positive in all of this, as grinding poverty was gradually eliminated from our land, and as opportunities were made available to the many which had formerly been the preserve of the few. But it meant that we became less familiar with the kind of situation that in most countries of the world and in most periods of history faces the Christian church – poverty, ill health, inequality, the abuse of human rights. There were exceptions, of course, but the general picture is, I think, accurate.

After my childhood and youth spent under the Welfare State, I lived for over 20 years in a country with none of these social benefits. As Peru's population exploded and its social infrastructure crumbled, the terrible realities of poverty stared us in the face every single day. Clearly you helped when you could as an individual, but in the church you were also made aware of how James's or Amos's or Isaiah's words screamed at you every time you preached or listened to the gospel. Holistic mission was not an option but an imperative, and churches found themselves combining their worship and preaching with using their premises for free or subsidised medical services, employment agencies, training workshops or feeding centres. Fractured people needed to be made whole, and part of the answer lay in the church's taking seriously the biblical call to holistic mission.

This may well bring us into messy and complicated areas, as we listen to the denunciations levelled by an Isaiah or an Amos against oppressive rulers and twisted judges. Denunciation on our part may prove to be insufficient; relief for the victims may only be available in the short term. Should the church not do something more so that the oppressors do not oppress?

Tim Chester in *Awakening to a World of Need* quotes an African example that perfectly illustrates the point. A church became concerned about injured workers from a nearby factory for whom no suitable transport was available to take them to hospital.

The church bought an ambulance and provided a very valuable humanitarian service as part of its Christian witness. As time went on, however, the church began to ask why so many factory workers were being injured. This led them to report the matter to the relevant government department, and push for safety inspectors to be sent in. This was done, forcing the employers to take better care of their workers. As a result the number of injured workers dwindled to a trickle, the church sold the ambulance and funds were made available to meet other needs. Taking the Word of God seriously was what led the church into the field of human rights and political pressure.

(ii) God has endowed us with different abilities for different tasks

Among the gifts distributed by the ascended Christ to enable the church to carry out her mission are some which are clearly supernatural or miraculous, eg, speaking in tongues or healings. Others seem to be ordinary abilities, harnessed for divine service through the ministry of the Holy Spirit – serving, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others, helping or administering (Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12). Within the church there ought to be scope for the exercise of these and many other gifts, as the church ministers to the bewildering variety of human needs and reaches out in evangelism to a lost world. This is not to devalue the ministry of the Word or to deny that some are specifically called by God and set apart by the church to be preachers and evangelists. But it is to recognise that the church’s mission is wider than the verbal proclamation of the good news – crucial though that is. “As the Father has sent me, even so send I you”, was Christ’s charge to his disciples, and his ministry was one of both word and deed. His disciples – all of them to the end of time – were commanded to teach new converts everything he had commanded them, including the command of the Jericho road, “Go and do likewise”. This gives the biblical picture of the church as a body, every member actively using his or her God-given gifts, ministering differently but harmoniously. All are sent, all are empowered.

(b) The nature of the earth

When God created the world, he pronounced it all to be very good. He gave man rule over the earth, and placed him in Eden “to work it and care for it”. Man sinned and the earth was cursed but did not thereby pass out of God’s control. It is still the case that “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live therein” (Ps. 24:1) The God of creation is also the God of providence, and expects us to have the same concerned attitude to his handiwork that he has. The earth is not what it was originally intended to be, indeed “the creation has been subjected to frustration” and groans with the pain of that subjection, but one day “it will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-23). True, “the earth and everything in it will be burned up”, but out of the ashes God will create “new heavens and a new earth”.

All this means that the church must have a concern for the well-being of the earth as well as all its inhabitants. Not in the spirit of New Ageism or of a materialistic ecology, but yes with the conviction that there is nothing incongruous in preaching the Gospel of eternal salvation and at the same time doing everything we can to promote the proper care of the world we live in and the many needy people who inhabit it.

On a simple level this could mean that a local church, as part of its witness to the community, could decide to beautify and care for a waste plot near its building, given that the council, strapped for cash, neglects it. On a wider scale, it could mean, that a group of churches in the Brazilian rain forest, appalled by the destruction of the environment and of local tribes' ancestral ways of life by unscrupulous loggers and gold prospectors, not only speaks up but enters the fray in the field of human rights and political action. At the same time it will preach the gospel fervently to Indians, loggers, gold diggers, civil rights activists and politicians alike.

(c) The nature of God

(i) Sovereignty

The world and everyone and everything in it lies under the curse of God. No amount of human effort, even by redeemed men and women, will free the world or humanity from their bondage to sin. Satan, in fact, is the prince of this world with wide-ranging powers.

But none of that means that God has abdicated control over the world he has made. "He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth" (Dan. 4:35), and he has taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as in heaven." The church cannot usher in the Kingdom of God, where God's undisputed rule holds sway in a world of righteousness and peace, but the church does have the right to plant the banner of the Cross in every square inch of alien territory and declare, "This is God's". The King has come, he has made clear the laws of his kingdom and his subjects must obey them and urge others to do so too. That kingdom is not co-extensive with the church, for God's sovereign rule is not limited to a community of people, even redeemed people. "The miraculous signs that attested Jesus' deity and authenticated the witness of those who transmitted the gospel to the church are not continued, for their purpose is fulfilled. But the pattern of the kingdom that was revealed through those signs must continue in the church ... Kingdom evangelism is therefore holistic as it transmits by word and deed the promise of Christ for soul and body as well as the demand of Christ for body and soul." (E Clowney in *The Pastor-Evangelist*, ed. Roger Greenway)

(ii) Compassion

Our Lord knew, none better, the awful pain of eternal separation from God. Therefore his compassion went out to those who continued in spiritual bondage, even as his anger blazed simultaneously against those who kept them there. The religious leaders who refused to enter heaven and wouldn't let anyone else enter either, who caused little ones to stumble on the way to God – these he denounced with the severest of woes and the heaviest of millstones.

But God's compassion must never be spiritualised away when the Scriptures show it directed to the victims of physical and social abuse. The afflicted, the needy and the oppressed in Psalm 72; the hungry, the oppressed, the prisoners, the blind, the bowed down, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows in Psalm 146; they are all real people with palpable needs in the here and now, and our necessary concern for their souls must be matched by the kind of compassion God has for their bodies and other needs.

Dangers in Holistic Mission

That there are very real dangers in holistic mission is undeniable, with respect both to those who undertake it and those who benefit from it.

(a) Wrong Priorities

For the church, the danger is that of sidelining and eventually even replacing the gospel. This may happen from the best of motives. A church or missionary team may find itself surrounded by the kind of people James describes, “without clothes and daily food”. They are too preoccupied with the struggle for existence to listen to talk of the bread of life, and so the missionaries get involved, rightly, in emergency food and shelter relief. But then they realise that this is only a short-term solution, and the people need to be taught how to provide for their own needs. Thus involvement in relief leads on to involvement in a variety of development programmes. In carrying these out, however, they run up against the vested interests of the rich and powerful, and find themselves forced into the political sphere as they denounce injustice and oppressive structures.

It can happen that a church which in all these activities has been seeking to act in obedience to God’s Word and actuated by the love of Christ gradually reaches the point where the preaching of the gospel and the concern for souls occupies less and less of its time, its energy and its budget. The best has been nudged out by the good.

But something more sinister can also happen. In its concern to meet physical needs, the church begins to wonder whether spiritual needs are so important after all. Are people really bound by sin and Satan? Aren’t the chains that need to be broken those of bondage to poverty and unemployment and discrimination and a host of other very tangible ills? Lack of confidence in the preaching of the Word becomes a failure to accept the message of the Word and even hostility to its basic tenets. Salvation becomes an earthly shalom; liberation is transmuted into the overthrow of oppressive political and economic structures.

Faced by such a betrayal of the gospel, it is very easy to sweep aside all social involvement, and concentrate our endeavours, as the church, on the fundamental task of preaching the gospel of grace. Others won’t or don’t, so we must. But I believe that such a response is deeply flawed. It falls into the trap, evident in many other areas of Christian belief and practice, of avoiding one extreme by embracing the other. The church that over-emphasises diaconal work to the neglect of people’s spiritual needs should not react by eliminating the diaconate. Elders for prayer and the ministry of the Word and deacons for ministries of mercy are both divinely ordained and expected to operate harmoniously within the structures of every church.

(b) Wrong Appetites

For those to whom the church ministers holistically, the danger is that they seek the material benefits and reject the spiritual ones. “Rice Christians” may fill the pews of churches set up by mission hospitals and schools. But, of course, the danger of rice Christians is not new. To the crowds who thronged him after he had fed the 5,000, Jesus said: “You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.” He condemned their attitude, urging them: “Do not

work for the food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life.” (John 6:26-27) He did not give up, however, on doing them good, since that miracle was followed by an extensive programme of healings and, significantly, by another spectacular provision of the food that spoils, when he fed the 4,000.

The command of God demands holistic mission. The love of Christ in our hearts demands holistic mission. The need of suffering humanity demands holistic mission. Of course, there are risks involved, and we must seek to minimise them. Those who want only the loaves and fishes must be made aware that loaves and fishes are not enough. We must also sternly reject the slightest suggestion that material benefits could serve as inducements to conversion or church membership. We must furthermore harness wisely our limited resources, and that may well mean refusing to undertake some social service programmes. We must be ready to give up social activities when it is clear they are no longer required or are an obstacle to the gospel, however much kudos the church may have gained in the community because of them. But the church must never cease to follow in the steps of her Master who went about preaching and doing good.

Examples of Church Related Holistic Mission

I doubt if the reformed church in these islands has ever combined more successfully the diaconal and evangelistic aspects of its ministry than in the early decades of the Free Church of Scotland, founded in 1843. Actually we need to look earlier than 1843, to the work and vision of Thomas Chalmers. No-one who has read, for example, *The St Andrew's Seven*, can doubt the fervour of Chalmers' evangelistic and missionary zeal. As Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of St Andrews, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the evangelisation of all classes of people in the town, and was also the mentor and inspirer of godly young men who went out in sacrificial missionary service to India, notable among them Dr Alexander Duff.

But it was this same Chalmers who in Glasgow, while preaching to packed churches, initiated what has come to be called the “**St John's Experiment**”. Appalled by the squalid poverty in which many of his parishioners lived, he organised teams of church workers to visit them, assess their needs, establish networks of self-help, provide material benefits where necessary, while at the same time pushing ahead with the building of churches in the poorer districts, more accessible to the people.

After the Disruption, in spite of his massive responsibilities in leading the fledgling denomination and as Principal of the theological college, Chalmers looked around for some other area of home mission. He chose the West Port, notorious for vice, drunkenness and prostitution: it was, in fact, the territory of the infamous body-snatchers, Burke and Hare. Dividing the area into 20 districts, Chalmers organised volunteer church workers to visit, offering free schooling to the children and prayer and Scripture reading with the families. Many were the rebuffs, but Chalmers, aged 65, persevered. Every Saturday morning he met with the workers for reports and prayer. Eventually they felt they could hold their first service, in a hay loft. Chalmers preached to a few children and old women, but refused to be discouraged. Holistic mission continued, though with the gospel in the forefront. In less than three years a church was built, and in February 1847 Chalmers wrote to a friend in New York: “I wish to communicate what is to me the most joyful event of my life ... last Sabbath. I

conducted the first communion service in the new West Port church. 132 people took part in the Lord's Supper, 100 of them West Port residents." Three months later Chalmers passed in his sleep into the presence of the Lord.

Chalmers may be the best-known of the early Free Church leaders, but a host of others demonstrate the same conviction that the ministry of word and deed go hand in hand. Do any of you bank with the Trustee Savings Bank? Did you know that it was founded by a Church of Scotland, later Free Church, minister? Dr Henry Duncan of Ruthwell in south-west Scotland used to encourage his flock, many of them poor, to save for times of illness and unemployment. But their income was so low and their needs so great that money stored in a tin on the mantelpiece or in a box under the bed never remained there for long. Duncan instituted a savings bank for people whose meagre income was scoffed at by ordinary banks, teaching them how even tiny sums mounted up, and how if they left their money long enough, wonder of wonders, it would gain them interest. The minister himself was banker, secretary, accountant and publicist rolled into one, at the same time as he faithfully preached the gospel, wrote tracts and strongly supported the infant Bible Societies. So successful was the bank that others were formed all over the country, and Duncan's promotion of the scheme among philanthropists and parliamentarians in London led to the first Act of Parliament to encourage, facilitate and regulate such banks. Duncan pioneered many other social welfare schemes, but he was no advocate of a social gospel. His death came suddenly as he was fervently leading a prayer meeting in the house of one of his elders.

An interesting example of what was called in those days, "the twofold ministry of the church" occurred in 1846. Throughout Scotland many people had left the Established Church, but their new congregations often lacked ministerial oversight. Remote areas were hard hit, so the Free Church commissioned a schooner, the **Breadalbane**, to take ministers for several weeks at a time to the isolated west highlands and islands. This was the "spiritual" ministry, but soon the "temporal" forced itself on the Church's notice. 1846 was the year of the great potato famine when thousands died in Ireland and tens of thousands were forced to emigrate to America. When news of the famine in rural Scotland reached the Free Church leaders in Edinburgh, they immediately set in train a public collection which raised almost at once the extraordinary sum of £15,000 (perhaps £225,000 today). But they did more. Word was sent to the ministers on the Breadalbane to assess the needs of the people. As soon as the results were known, food supplies were distributed by the ship. To quote a contemporary source: "Many a day the sight of the Breadalbane had been a cordial to the hearts of the poor people hungering for the bread that perisheth as well as for that which endureth unto everlasting life." As a result of these efforts it is reckoned that not one person died in Scotland through the famine – the contrast with Ireland could not be more melancholy.

Finally let me refer to Dr Thomas Guthrie. Recently arrived in Edinburgh from a pleasant country parish, he stood despondently one day looking down at the **Cowgate** with its dingy tenements, "its windows innocent of glass, or stuffed with old hats or dirty rags", its squalid inhabitants "standing sullen and silent, with hunger and ill-usage in their saddened looks." Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned round and saw Dr Chalmers, who, Guthrie tells us, with his broad Luther-like face glowing

with enthusiasm waved his arm to exclaim: “A beautiful field, sir; a very fine field of operation.”

Guthrie accepted the challenge and threw himself into the work of church extension in the poorest parts of Edinburgh. He soon realised that along with the preaching of the gospel, there had to be a concerted attack on ignorance and poverty. The result was the establishment of ragged schools for what we now call street children, all of them church-related and operating in times of spiritual revival.

Two moving incidents in Guthrie’s life show how he held in balance what they called the spiritual and the temporal, or what we would describe as holistic mission. The first stems from the tense days of the Ten Year Conflict between Church and State before the Disruption. Guthrie had gone to preach in a parish church in Strathbogie (NE Scotland), when he was handed an interdict from the Court of Session forbidding him to do so. To quote Guthrie: “The interdict forbade me, under penalty of the Calton Jail, to preach in the parish churches of Strathbogie. I said, ‘The parish churches are stone and lime and belong to the State; I will not intrude there’. It forbade me to preach the Gospel in the schoolhouses. I said, ‘The schoolhouses are stone and lime and belong to the State; I will not intrude there’. It forbade me to preach in the churchyard. I said, ‘The dust of the dead is the State’s; I will not intrude there’. But when the Lords of Session forbade me to preach my Master’s blessed Gospel and offer salvation to sinners anywhere in that district under the arch of heaven I put the interdict under my feet, and I preached the Gospel.”

The other incident occurred many years later in Edinburgh. Guthrie’s heart was torn by the suffering of hungry, uneducated and often ill-treated children, and he would often be found visiting them and trying to persuade them to attend the church’s ragged schools. On one occasion he asked some boys, “Would you go to school if, besides your learning, you were to get breakfast, dinner and supper there?” It would have done any man’s heart good to have seen the flash of joy that broke from the eyes of one of them, the flush of pleasure on his cheek as, on hearing of three sure meals a day, the boy leapt to his feet and exclaimed, “Ay, will I, sir, and bring the hail land too” and then as if afraid I might withdraw so large and munificent an offer he exclaimed, “I’ll come but for my dinner, sir!”

When the Edinburgh city fathers, on Guthrie’s death, set up a statue in his honour in Princes Street Gardens with a ragged child in his embrace, they were doubtless acknowledging much more his humanitarian efforts than his fervent and eloquent preaching of the gospel. It was true that the world may misunderstand, lauding our humanitarian efforts while rejecting the gospel we preach; fellow-Christians may be fearful of the temporal elbowing out the spiritual, but Duncan and Chalmers, James and John, Amos and Micah, and supremely our Lord himself set the pattern of word and deed as essential components of a gospel witness. The church must engage in holistic mission in obedience to the command of her great Head: “Love the Lord your God ... and your neighbour as yourself.” And “what God has joined together, let man not separate”.

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