

SUBVERSIVE JESUS – RADICAL GRACE

Robert Thornton Henderson, *Subversive Jesus* (Colorado: NavPress, 2001),

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There is a new, “postmodern” generation with a vast, unmet spiritual hunger. They don’t know Jesus. In fact, they don’t even know much *about* Jesus. They need someone who can relate the truth of the gospel to them in terms they understand. But how does one communicate this transforming truth to a generation increasingly suspicious of religious words and cynical about religious claim? Robert Henderson invites you to look over his shoulder as he address the brutally honest question of faith posed by a young postmodern man named Chip. Chip’s question echo those of a spiritually hungry generation uncertain of where to look for answers – and totally unimpressed with what they se as powerless religion that offers no hope for change.

I disappointed about his usage of term “Subversive Jesus.” I expected something different. He stayed within the tradition, however, expanded it to include areas that are generally ignored by the traditional churches.

On the outset he explained what his term “**subversion**” means: He quoted the late French sociologist-theologian Jacques Ellul in his seminal book, “*Subversion of Christianity.*” *In it he (Ellul) explains that the rebellion of the creation against the Creator was, first all, a subversion of God’s design, and goes on to suggest that the work of Jesus was to **subvert the subversion!** Jesus came to inaugurate a whole New Creation, a new and radically different dominion, which he preached as the gospel of the kingdom of God.*

Henderson writes: “In this sense, and to sue contemporary political terms, Jesus came to engage in counterinsurgency.” Henderson adds, “so, that is my rationale for designating Jesus as a **subversive**” (Henderson P. 5). “*The work of Jesus was to subvert the subversion*” caught my attention. Keeping this point in mind, I read the whole book.

He also explained what he means by “**Radical.**” For him, it means getting to the **root** or the basic principle of a thing. For him to get down to the ultimate purpose of God’s grace and Jesus’ whole agenda in this world is **radical** work (Henderson P. 5).

Henderson has in mind the younger generation (who were born between 1964-1981 and between 1982-2000) who does not know God nor can relate to our traditional way of talking about God. . He describes a way to communicate with them about God and everything else. He seems to stay within Christian tradition but seems to uplift the areas ignored by traditional church. He also seems to put all aspect of God in the inclusive concept “Shalom” as God’s intention for the world and people. I like his including everything in “shalom” also.

CHAPTER ONE: JESUS IN A “YEAH, RIGHT” CULTURE

Chapter One roused my interest and curiosity with his case story of “Chip” who doesn’t know God at all and turned off by the sermon he heard for the first time. He could represent large segment of unbelieving population out there. What caught my attention was the concept of “promise” and “demand.” Usually churches dwell on promises by keep promising blessings but lack on demanding, perhaps modern Christians don’t want to hear about Jesus’ demand.

CHAPTER TWO: YOU BEGIN WITH GOD

Chapter two was boring because he was talking about the same old traditional theology just in different language, perhaps for younger generation. Good intention but boring. Henderson try to reach out and earn their heart with his way of explaining the truth about God. But it was boring experience to read it through, perhaps he appears to be very traditional and I expected him to be subversive from the traditional approach.

What caught my attention here is concept of “assumption.” It is sure thing that all different assumption can be people’s own theology. He is also honest about “unknowable dimension” of God. I like the way he begins with God’s creation of nature and human beings, especially human body anatomy (Henderson P. 30-32). This was exactly what I did with my dying atheist brother because he wouldn’t accept nor understand our traditional Christian language. I used God’s power as he and I were seeing in beautiful Creation of water and mountains and trees which were so prevalent in the state of Washington and human anatomy which is formed in miraculous way. It became a convincing power for him to accept Christian God before his death.

I also liked his emphasis on “shalom” and “human community. It was also impressive that he was relating 10 commandments to “good news” although the way he explained wasn’t very exciting.

CHAPTER THREE: WHICH BRINGS YOU STRAIGHTWAY TO SIN

His way of explaining the original sin was impressive that younger, contemporary generation can relate easily “don’t tell me what to do” and “ I am on my own” generation. I wasn’t impressed by his way of explaining “evil,” because I feel it is in us rather than something out there. This way of thinking makes people get away with their own responsibility for their action as if they have nothing to do with their evil action and somebody else out there (evil) did it.

But I was very impressed by his **inclusive notion of “sin.”** Most churches focus on personal especially spiritual sin but he included personal, interpersonal, system’s sin and also included “victims” by system’s sins (Henderson P. 54-58).

I would like add to his sin of” helplessness” which is often consequence of other’s abuse and exploitation – often comes from societal alienation of them. Poverty, homelessness, lack of housing, lack of health care all contribute to loss of hope for many marginalized people in our society and world.

Systemic Sin: Since I am deeply concerned about American inner cities I am going to note what he had to say about cities under “**systemic sin.**” **He asserts that “the systemic sin is apparent in development of American cities, which have developed into unbelievably impersonal environment In the quest for progress, we have created cities without community, communities without neighborhoods, neighborhoods without neighbors. We have communities without sidewalks, where one is totally captive without an automobile. Automobiles have become our private means of zooming from one location to another without any significant interpersonal contact (other than an occasional wave or obscene digital signal)” (Henderson P. 56).**

He didn’t mention the fact that the poor were left in inner cities to survive without much support because most funds and support were migrated to the suburbs with fleeing of better-off population. There are many downtown churches comprised of people from all over and have nothing to do needy neighborhoods or neighbors around the church. I admire some inner city churches that have never left the dying cities and keep welcoming poor needy city people and even open the sanctuary to welcome and offer beds to homeless people.

Another reality was pointed out by Henderson, which is “sterile, impersonal everywhere of shopping malls,” where strangers walk and mingle amid stores owned by corporations whose owners are headquartered half a continent away, and care only for the bottom line (I add “profit”). We are only customers. A person can be desperately lonely in the midst of five million people. Henderson indicts churches for abrogation of any responsibility to be the community of God’s New Creation in Jesus Christ. We accept the system without discernment. We become part of the systemic sin instead of seeking welfare of the city (Jer. 29:7) (Henderson P. 56-57).

I have seen many “country club model” of churches in the nation. They seemed to be spiritually focused, self-centered, exclusive and meeting their own needs.

I am glad that Henderson included **economic structure in systemic sin**. **Impersonal corporations appear to be ruled by a sophisticated greed, which has little sense of responsibility to individuals other than stockholders. Company policy becomes absolute. It can create wealthy executives with huge stock options, exploit workers, downsize and disrupt families, devastate the environment, and destabilize smaller countries and economies, all in the name of “economic health. Some corporations can ignore any sense of responsibility for the large community except that which enhances their own corporate image (and profit I should add) (Henderson P. 57).**

One executive in a documentary film, “Corporation,” filmed by Michael Moore, said there is no such a thing as “conscience” in corporation. All they want is “profit.”

He also mentioned about advertising industry. He indicts this industry exacerbates our greed and creates the very real religion of **consumerism**. Even churches can fall into the trap, becoming economic enterprises modeling their success after the corporate image. They can advertise their “success” at the expense of faithfulness, or any relation to the mission of God. Churches can become part of the *system!* (Henderson P. 57).

His statement on consumerism reminds me of the indictment made by Ron Sider in his book “Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger;” **Possessions are the most common idol for rich Christians today. Affluence is the god of twentieth-century North America, and the adman is his prophet. The showers of luxuries has almost suffocated our Christian compassion (Sider 1997 P. 191).**

Henderson also discloses **American corporate idolatries: nationalism, militarism, capitalism, sexism, racism, and classism (Henderson P. 57)**. Systemic sin is a Pandora’s box of dehumanizing and destructive patterns with which we have become so comfortable and captive that we hardly notice. This is the *world* from which we are called, and to which we are sent back, but also warned not to be conformed to. To come to Jesus is to be challenged, to be changed into a New Creation, and to be made into a **redemptive subversive in alien systems (Henderson P. 58)**. He is so right by saying all these but most churches in their evangelism would not include this dimension of the reality to come to Jesus. So we can say he is subversive to traditional Christian approach.

I appreciate he included victims of sin, not by their own choice, but by their helplessness of time and place and circumstance. He uses a term “virus” every contemporary generation is familiar with as a computer language to indicate something negative and bad and destructive. These victims, according to Henderson, are the trapped, the crushed, the dehumanized, the despairing, the ignored, the trivialized, the violated ... those for whom the Spirit anointed Jesus, and anointed us, to bring good news (Luke 4:18-19).

He witnesses that Jesus looked upon the needy multitude and had compassion and Jesus' working with the poor, hungry, naked, sick and imprisoned as his criteria of ministry (Henderson P. 60).

He is right to say that church tends focuses on personal sin and also ignore all those whom he mentioned above. I have seen all of them in the homeless population. What he just said above will be hope and encouragement for the poor, homeless and all sorts of victims but it is a big challenge to traditional churches that they don't want to hear. They surely can call Henderson "subversive." But he is saying the darn truth, though.

I think it is good illustration on "God's love for everyone" to use the story that God sends sun and rain on everyone. I experience though, even if this is true, those who had never experienced any love in their life wouldn't accept this truth. They must experience love from us, the church. But the church tends to avoid them and turn their face from them so that they continue to experience dislike, despise and hatred from the church.

About the judgment, I don't want to believe there is judgment for those who suffer SO MUCH in this world. Because they have been judged in this world and lived their hell on earth. They need to get free passes to the eternal life here and after life but then I want to believe there is a judgment for those of us who didn't live according to the will of God knowing what it is.

But then, there is another suspicion that what kind of God (loving parent) who loved people so much that this God sent God's only son to save us. If this compassionate and loving God put so many sinners in to fiery hell wouldn't it be like Noah's flood? Would loving God do that? But then, where our accountability lies.

Sometime ago I sent out e-mail to several pastors in my area asking them if they believe "our salvation by faith alone can be canceled at the judgment day" referring to Matt. 25: Very few, except a Methodist clergy, said yes to it. They tended to think that judgment won't be for Christians but nations that did not know God. It was amazing to hear their response. We, the Presbyterians, confess that we are saved by "faith alone." My question was then what happens at the judgment as described in Matt. 25; People in Universalist Uniterian Church don't believe the final judgment. They think the loving God would not put God's loving people into fire as we the human parents would never do that to our children no matter how serious crime they committed. We will rather forgive them. But then where is accountability on how we lived our life in the world. Henderson seems to believe everyone will stand before God for final judgment. I have never resolved this issue although as a Presbyterian we confess what we learned.

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance

Ps. 104:35: Let sinners be consumed from the earth.

Is. 66:24 And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Rom. 6:23: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matt. 25:41: Then he will say to those at his left hand, you that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;

Rev. 20:15: and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

2 Thess. 1:6-8. 6 For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 ~~in~~ flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (Henderson P. 65).

After reading the first three chapters, he gives me impression that Henderson can be traditional on God and Christology but radical in social justice area as Jim Wallis suggest in his book “God’s Politics “the alternative” the America need.”

The “[fourth option](#)” for American politics, which follows from the prophetic religious tradition can be [traditional or conservative on issues of family values, sexual integrity and personal responsibility](#), while being [very progressive, populist, or even radical on issues like poverty and racial justice](#). It affirms good stewardship of the earth and its resources, supports gender equality, and is more internationally minded than nationalist – looking first to peacemaking and conflict resolution when it come to foreign policy questions.

The people it appeals to are very strong on issue like marriage, raising kids, and individual ethics, but without being right-wing, reactionary, or mean-spirited or scapegoating against any group of people, such as homosexuals. They can be pro-life, pro-family, and pro-feminist, all at the same time. They think issues of “moral character” are very important, both in a politician’s personal life and in his or her policy choices. Yet they are decidedly pro-poor, for racial reconciliation, critical of purely military solutions, and defenders of the environment. At the heart of the fourth option is the integral link between personal ethics and social justice (Wallis. 2005 P. 74).

CHAPTER FOUR: LOSTNESS AN COMPASSION: FROM HELL TO HOPE

Henderson is right to say that Christian churches in North America lost to seek the lost and losing the mission-driven compassion that is at the heart of God (Henderson P. 75).

Under the Henderson's sub-title, "As the Father has Sent Me, Even do I send you,"

I want to pick up the notion of Jesus "Commissioning" of disciples. Usually churches pick up Jesus commissioning statement from Matt. 28: 18-19: Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 Then they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, *all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28: 16).

Our churches emphasize v. 18-19 and send missionaries overseas. Especially Korean churches send missionaries and mission dollars overseas first before any local mission. They also ignore to elaborate and interpret the message in v. 20 and emphasize evangelism of spiritual conversion. Henderson also points out the fact that "Jesus goes on to define what his commissioning involves and, along with baptism, is the telling piece that so often gets left out: 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'" (Henderson P. 6).

Here is another commissioning statement when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples "*And that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*" (Luke 24:47). Henderson indicated that in Luke's account of the Great Commission, he emphasizes that "repentance and the forgiveness of sins be preached in his name in every people – group. The word "repentance" carries with it the idea of total transformation of mind by which we forsake one of life and enter into another. It is the threshold of Jesus' invitation to leave the dominion of darkness and enter into the dominion of God's dear Son, and this totally by God's grace. God is willing to do what is necessary to make it happen despite what we may deserve (Henderson P. 6).

There is yet another commissioning statement in Acts 1:8 "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth* (Acts. 1:8).

Our churches seem to begin their mission overseas instead of in their neighborhood, their own cities and their own nation. The commissioning statement in Acts 1: says to start from Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria which is their own vicinity and then go to the end of the earth. Quite often churches, more of Korean churches, start their mission from the end of the world just passing through their own neighborhood and city.

Henderson is talking some more about lostness – religious lostness (P. 77), Metaphysical lostness (P. 77), Epistemological Lostness (p. 78) and Spiritual Lostness (P. 79). I relate these lostnesses to "homelessness."

We need to go where they are and bring them home. But most churches sit at home (church) and wait for them to come. They, who are very suspicious of church like Chip, would not come as they see the church as hypocrites.

CHAPTER FIVE: JESUS: THE RETURN OF SHALOM

Henderson claims that God comes to us to bring the Shalom, which he uses in terms of *salvation, redemption, Dominion of God, or New Creation*. He sees it as God's "peace which passes understanding" (Henderson P. 81). He describe "Shalom" rather in religious sense, not the way Walter Brueggemann would use, who refers it to "whole wellbeing" of human beings; very comprehensive form of peace.

I like his concept of **Personal and Public Dimension of the Good News of Jesus** because most churches relate "good news" to mostly spiritual dimension. He goes on to explain the personal side of Good News as an inner response of mind and will to what we know and understand of Christ and his message (Henderson P. 85). This is what most churches do. He also claims that this response brings us into relationship with the person of Jesus and to personal *Shalom*. We enter into Christ and he enters into us. Here we find *true home*(Henderson P.85). I used to call Jesus "our home," because in John 4: he said he is in us and we are in him. We reside in each other which means he is our home.

He goes on to claim that following Christ cannot be confined to our inner self and it has *outward* and *public* dimension that lives and obeys the gospel visibly in the *public square* of human events as Christ lives in and through us. This is to say that the gospel of Jesus is visible, controversial, often confrontative, and at times offensive. This public gospel is at the heart of what Jesus came to be and to do, especially in his teachings. In the New Testament documents, this public gospel goes under the rubric of the gospel of *the kingdom of God* (Henderson P. 85).

Two Interpretive Points (P. 86)

Jesus the Subversive

Henderson calls Jesus *subversive* and even *countersubversive*. The sheer *radicalness* of who Jesus is, the sheer *otherness* of what he taught, the sheer *unexpectedness* of what he did, these continue to be far too *subversive* (and controversial) for many, if not most, who hear them for the first time. This is so simply because they so alien to the principles of the context which have formed us. Consider, however, the rebellion against God by our human parents at the beginning of the biblical story was by any definition a *subversion* of God's *Shalom*. He further claims that the redemptive event of Jesus in human history was designed to *subvert the subversion* (Henderson P. 86). This can be Henderson's key argument.

Henderson also asserts that everything about Jesus is a head-on-collision with the human community who has left God out of the equation. To a generation obsessed with a hyperactive quest for some illusive goal of self-fulfillment, or some ambiguous spirituality, Jesus comes plainly announcing that the way to find it is through self-denial: Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Henderson P. 87). To those seeking *comfortable and inoffensive religion*, Jesus offers

the offense of the cross, he offers suffering, he offers himself as the Lamb of God by whose *blood* and *death* true peace is purchased.

Therefore, God's plan is subversive, of all humanly contrived authority structures, power structures, and all other human idolatries, whether political, economic, and religious, or cultural. At the same time it is wonderfully realistic and compassionate. *Radically gracious* (Henderson P. 87).

Jesus From the Margins

Jesus arrived on the scene and operated from the very *margin of society*. His coming avoided any semblance of power, splendor, grandiosity, pomp, or triumphalism (Henderson P. 87).

Jesus was the controversial child of peasant parents in an occupied nation, on the edge of the empire. The occasion of his birth was a political mandate to register for taxes by an oppressor nation, and his birth took place in a strange city without hospitality. His birth also precipitated a blood bath of genocide. Jesus' family escaped into exile and spent years as refugees in a foreign country. Upon their return, they took up the ordinary daily task of a working family in a small city. His itinerant ministry as an adult was primarily a rural affair. Is this Son of God? Jesus and his life and teachings just *don't make sense* to our *lost friends*. Yet it is this very *doesn't-make-sense-Jesus*, this *God-from-the-margins*, this subversive Jesus and his teachings, who rescues and who is the very door into true *Shalom* (Henderson P. 88).

JESUS: THE TRULY HUMAN ONE

KINGDOM OF GOD SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND PLAIN

Henderson claims that the answer to what is the kingdom of God is like lies in The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6) (Henderson P. 97). They reveal the heart and mind of God and are integral to the gospel we declare. They are a digest of what the kingdom looks like in personal and communal demonstration. The Messiah, the Servant of God, came to accomplish salvation, which included bringing the return of God's *Shalom*, God's compassion for the crushed and broken and helpless, as well as his intense desire for intimacy with his creatures, is so obvious. But one has only to look at these sermons to see that true blessedness, true human fulfillment, comes in strange ways. God's *Shalom* is upon those who are either poor (Luke), or those who identify with the poor (Matthew), upon those who weep, upon those who hunger physically (Luke) and those who hunger after *righteousness* (Matthew). So also with those who show mercy, who are quite willing to be peacemakers and to suffer for the causes of justice and righteousness (Henderson P. 97).

Donald Kraybill defines it “Upside-Down Kingdom.” Henderson asserts that Jesus *redefines everything*. The *joy* he offers is his own joy, which is experienced by accomplishing the Father’s will, and that included a cross: “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” The *peace* that Jesus offers is “not as the world offers” but comes from being at one with God in a relationship of intimacy and love. *Success*, in kingdom terms, is only faithfulness to God’s mission unto the very end, and in the midst of trials and chaos. *Wealth* is described in terms of true riches, *not* silver or gold, stocks and investments, but treasures laid up in heaven, namely faith and obedience to the teachings of Jesus. *Power* is defined in terms of weakness and servant hood, not in political collations and quests for the top spot, not in triumphalism, but in adherence to God’s design in the midst of human weakness. *Freedom*, in kingdom living, is in being formed by Jesus’ Word, by the Truth 그가 주는 기쁨은 십자가를 포함해서 아버지의 뜻을 이룰 때 체험되고 성취되는 그리스도 자신의 기쁨이다. 그가 주는 평화는 세상이 주는 것 과 다른 것인데 사랑으로 하나되는 하나님과의 관계에서 오는 것이다. 천국용어로 성공은 세상 끝날 까지 시험과 환란가운데서도 하나님의 선교에 충실할 때 얻어지는 것이다. 재물이나 부는 은이나 금이나 주식이나 투자가 아니라 예수님의 가르침을 믿고 충실히 행할 때 하늘에 쌓아지는 진정한 보화를 의미한다. 권력이란 정치적인 연합이나 최고자리의 추구에서오는 것이 아니라 연합함과 칭지기직 수행에서 오고, 승리감에서가 아니라 인간의 연합함가운데서도 하나님의 하늘나라 설계에 충실할 때 얻어지는 것이다. 하나님 나라 삶에서 자유란 예수그리스도의 말씀과 진리로 형성되는 것이다. (Henderson P. 97).

Henderson calls this is the flavor of the “upside-down kingdom.” This is the blue print of New Creation. This is what the unfaithful church and its truncated proclamation too often fails to comprehend. .. The kingdom is always in a head-on collision with the idols of contemporary life – the idols of economic power, political power, ethnic power, social power, even ecclesiastical power to which men and women sell their souls (Henderson P. 98).

According to Henderson, Jesus teaches us that our very first priority is to seek to be formed by his kingdom teaching: “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things shall be yours also.” His commission is not to go and offer a reduced message of safety, certainty, and enjoyment; not a message of health and wealth; not “cheap grace.” Rather it is to make disciple who observe “all that I have commanded you.” Paul makes this even more explicit when he says that God’s *predestined* purpose in calling us is to “conform us to the image of his Son.” This is exactly why the world *hates* Jesus and his followers, namely, because they (we) do not play by the world’s rules. This is why there is included in the Sermon on the Mount the blessing on those who are insulted and persecuted, falsely spoken against with all kinds of malice (Henderson P. 98).

Henderson's conclusion: It is our obedience to this gospel of the kingdom that is our visible witness to Jesus' mission to restore true *Shalom* in individual lives, in society, and in all of creation which groans in the birthing pains of God's redemption (Henderson P. 100).

Henderson himself seems to dig out and disclose all that were buried in the past although he stays in the traditional theology. He himself is subversive in that sense.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CROSS: VIOLENT LOVE

Henderson defines the Cross as far too *irrational* for the rational, and it is far too *irreligious* for the religious. The Cross really does not conform to any human categories. It is beyond that which any mind could ever even imagine, or even want to imagine. It is also far too radical and disruptive and subversive and controversial for sophisticated user-friendly church marketers. The Cross is an offense to *comfort-zone Christianity* (Henderson P. 102).

According to Henderson, the Cross is not a random, unprovoked, or disconnected act of violence on which God and the Christian community have contrived to put the best face. It is rather the consummation of Jesus' work of love in rescuing God's creation from its chaos, from its *missing-the-point*, from its deserved destruction, from God's displeasure and holy wrath. The Cross is the heart of restoring *Shalom* (Henderson P. 102).

THE BIRTH OF SAVIOR (P. 104).

Mary's Magnificat

The proud, the powerful, and the rich stand under God's judgment for contributing to the world's defilement and *chaos*. But the humble, the hungry, and the spiritual heirs of Abraham become recipients of mercy and blessings. This is quite the reverse of the ordinary sense of *haves* and *have-nots*, of wealth and poverty, of weakness and power. It has a revolutionary flavor all through it. And this is Jesus' mother talking (Henderson P. 105).

The Temptation of Jesus P. 105-106

Today Scripture is Fulfilled: Luke 4:18

The anointing was to bring *Shalom* to the margins of society, to the victims of economic distress, to those in prison for unpaid debts, to those helpless because of blindness. That's the good news, the *gospel*, which Jesus was anointed to proclaim and fulfill (Henderson P. 107).

The *kingdom* of God, the *salvation* of God, the gospel of *Shalom* were too alien for the hardened hearts of the popular religionist of Jesus' day. So he went to margins, to the ordinary folk in their burdened lives, and offered God's thrilling news of love and hope and newness (Henderson P. 107).

Stir In the Acceptable Solutions to the Jewish Dilemma (P. 108).

To attempt to understand the violence that led to the Cross, it is necessary to know who and what were the dominant influence of the Jewish society. Several political-religious parties on the scene sought control of the Jewish destiny. Now they live with an occupying army and a military government from the Roman Empire. What was the solution to this shame and to life's sordid reality for them? Here's how each of these parties tried to cope. Henderson thinks that each group has a contemporary counterpart (Henderson P. 108).

The Essenes:

These were the escapists: "Forsake this fallen and unholy scene and wait for God's intervention." So they built a monastery at Qumran and instituted a very disciplined life for themselves. They saw no hope apart from this isolation and discipline (Henderson P. 108).

The Zealots:

These were the political terrorists, or guerillas, of the Jewish people. Their plan was to disrupt, to assassinate, to bring down the Roman rule by any means necessary (Henderson P. 108).

The Pharisees: The Pharisees were the purists, the fundamentalists. Well-meaning individuals, they knew that the judgment of God had come upon the Jews in former days because of neglect in keeping the Torah. They were determined to never let that happen again, if they could help it. So they stacked up law upon law, laws to interpret laws, until it all became oppressive (Henderson P. 108).

The Sadducees: According to Henderson, the Sadducees may be likened to the official board of a lot of contemporary churches. They had a continual "wet finger in the wind" to be sure that nothing reflected negatively on the religious establishment that might be detrimental to the economy for which they were responsible (Henderson P. 109).

The Herodians: These were the political opportunists who were neither fish nor fowl. The Herodian lineage of kings were not properly Jews, but Edomites. But they moved into a vacuum and made an alliance between captive Israel and the Roman Empire (Henderson P. 109).

Priests and Levites: The "Temple Guard," as they have sometimes been sarcastically referred to, were essentially the *clergy*, the church professionals, the ecclesiastical elite (Henderson P. 109).

Rome and Other Religions: The Roman government was itself a religion. “Caesar is Lord!” Add to this the fact that the city of Caesarea Philippi was home of shrines of many gods even before Herod built a temple there in honor of the Emperor Augustus. The acceptance of multiplicity of religions and the outright worship of government was very much a part of the scene into which Jesus came (Henderson P. 109).

None of these parties accepted Jesus. They became his continual irritants. But it was more than mutual. Jesus termed some of the “white-washed tombs” and others “a bunch of snakes.” Certainly, this was not a calculated way to win friends and influence people. And it begins to explain the animosity which eventually produced violence (produced irrational anger) (Henderson P. 109).

Henderson explains the cause of Jesus’ death from socio-political reality of his day.

Henderson relates Jesus’ message to our contemporary world in the following way: If someone came from outside and preached that “The chairman of the Federal Reserve as a charlatan motivated only by greed, and captive to the interests of the rich and powerful; the popular clergy and television preachers as either preaching half-truth, or false gospel that have nothing to do with God’s purpose in human society; the United States government, from the president down, as being corrupt and alien to God’s design for the nation and the world; that the only way to have peace and order and justice is by responding to his invitation to newness”. Such a message of judgment is not at all unlike the message that Jesus preached. He came to expose counterfeits. He judged “the prince of this world” and declared current allegiances totally false and invalid. If such were to happen today, that person, Henderson thinks, would be journalistically crucified, if not worse. So we begin to see the Cross in a different light (Henderson P. 110).

Shalom Demonstrated (P. 110-111).

Jesus came as Light in the religious and social and personal Darkness of Palestine. He was the living demonstration of the very newness he taught, of true hope, of God’s love. He proclaimed the inbreaking reign of Yahweh. He heralded a New Creation, a salvation for which hearts yearned. But he was not just talk. There was in him an unimpeachable holiness, a transparency, a genuineness, a sensitive caring, a tangible love –all which he explained in his preaching (Henderson P. 110).

But at this point in his ministry, rejected by the leadership, Jesus resorted to parables, stories with moral truths, to convey his message: “The Kingdom of God is likeand he portrayed it as a farmer sowing seed, or a woman searching for a lost coin, or a landowner going to a far country and leaving stewards in charge. Then he lived what he taught in a life of humble servanthood, focusing his priority on those helpless and crushed by unjust systems, or those physically afflicted, or those longing for God’s reality, or those wearied by impossible burdens of life, not to mention those added by the religious leaders. Darkness and Light were now in full confrontation (Henderson P. 110).

The result was an **intensifying hostility**, even **fury**, among those who inhabited the places of influence in economy, church and state. Jesus turned his revealing light upon all that they stood for, and they didn't come off well at all.

He quoted from their own prophets, and they were exposed as the problem and not the solution. But worst of all, Jesus actually **identified himself as being one with Yahweh**, with God. He even called the Holy One of Israel: **"My Father"** (Henderson P. 111).

We need to realize how alien was his presence and teaching to their society and to ours: "Blessed are you poor, ... woe to you rich, blessed are you merciful, ... blessed are you makers of peace (*Shalom*), ... blessed are you who hunger and thirst after justice, ... blessed are you who are persecuted for the sake of what is right." Even his statements about who he understood himself to be provoked the rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, and spiritual forces of evil (Henderson P. 111).

When Jesus said, "I am the Light," he exposed the darkness in human hearts and the world.

When he said "I am the truth," he exposed all that was false.

When he said, "I am the Way," he exposed the false paths to God, the alien allegiances, and idolatries of the day.

When he said, "I am the Life," he exposed all that was part of the Death.

When he said, "I am the Bread of Life," he exposed the false shepherds who did not feed God's hungry sheep with true food.

When he said, "I am the Water of Life," he spoke to the incredible spiritual thirst that was not being assuaged by those who were ostensibly making God's promise real to the people. (Henderson P. 111).

Every self-claim of Jesus exposed the hollowness of its opposite in the community. Everything Jesus was and taught came with such force that the falseness and hollowness of all other claims were shown for the lies they were. The hatred of the civic and religious leaders grew so intense that they forsook all justice, all principles, all scruples, all of their tradition, and collaborated across their own animosities to rid the scene of this one who was *the truly human one*. "We will not have this man to be king over us ... we have no king but Caesar!" (Henderson P. 111).

Jesus was the Great Prophet of God, and prophets seldom fared well at the hands of God's disobedient and rebellious people. Why the Cross? Because of the hostility of Darkness to New Creation. **If we are to come after him, we also must take up the Cross and follow. As he exposed that which was destructive and dehumanizing and discouraging in human society, and in the system of society, so the ministry of his followers should be the same.** Life marked by the Cross is not some esoteric "spiritual" experience, as many faithful saints have found out the hard way! This is the most *uncomfortable* part of Jesus' message (which is usually left out of the trivialized gospel). This is to remind us of the nature of the Dominion of God, which always elicits reaction in this warfare between the Lamb of God and the Beast, between Light and darkness. **That's the human side of the Cross. Henderson finally concludes that Jesus was executed**

as a political, social, and religious troublemaker, and he was a threat to the system of his day. He was also the Prince of Shalom and that's where God's side of the Cross comes in (Henderson P. 112).

A "Deeper Magic" at Work on the Cross P. 116

Subversive Rising

Defeat is Ultimate Victory P. 117

Restoration of Shalom

The Cross: "How Wide and High and Deep is God's Love"

The Resurrection and the New World Order(P. 119)

Death of the death.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONVERSION INTO NEW CREATION

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE CHURCH: NEW CREATION IN FLESH AND BLOOD

The Bad News: Occasions When the Church Has Violated Its Own Calling

The official religion of the Roman Empire.

In the fourth century, the church was essentially co-opted by Emperor Constantine and established as the primary religion of the Roman Empire. With this "Constantinianization" of the church, it essentially became the chaplain to the empire in return for the cessation of persecution. It is quite understandable, given three centuries of persecution, to see why the church was seduced by this honor. But it was also an accommodation that had tragic circumstances right down to the present moment (Henderson P. 145).

As the "established" church, it quickly succumbed to the *chaos*, to an idolatry of power. As it required wealth and property and created a *clergy-class* of ecclesiastical authorities, the church forgot its calling and mission (Henderson P. 145).

The Crusades:

Later the church "blessed" the military crusades to punish the "infidels" who had taken possession of the Holy Land. In so doing, it demonized the Islamic peoples and made them the enemy rather than the objects of Christ's redemptive compassion. The tragedy of the crusades mars the church's perception of its missionary concern for the Islamic world to this day (Henderson P. 145).

The Inquisitions:

In its zeal to maintain its power over thought, life, and ostensibly its purity of doctrine, the church exercised temporal power by ruthlessly **suppressing** anyone who voiced a difference or espoused a teaching that was not approved by "headquarters." This resulted in the scandal of **bloodshed**, burning at the stake, and **injustices** which contradict biblical

teachings of how the church is to deal with those who forsake the message of New Creation (Henderson P. 146).

Anti-Semitism:

While it was always acknowledged that the Jewish leadership of Israel was in a real way the initiator of the crucifixion of Jesus and that these same leaders made life miserable for the early church, over the centuries this developed into a full-blown antagonism and hatred toward the Jewish people as “**Christ killers.**” This produced many forms of anti-Semitic persecutions, pogroms, and in the twentieth century, the Nazi holocaust. What a tragic contradiction of the church’s calling to inherit the promise made to Abraham, that in his (Jesus’) seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed! It contradicts Paul’s own passion that his people Israel be saved. **Anti-Semitism is a tragic violation of God’s *Shalom*** (Henderson P. 146).

Indifference to Injustice:

Whenever the church turns a blind eye to injustice, or a deaf ear to the cry of the crushed and marginalized of the world, it is a stark contradiction to the teachings of Jesus and the prophets. It means that the church has accommodated the *plausibility structures* of the society in which it lives. Whether this be indifference to slavery, to poverty and homelessness, economic discrimination in its many forms, or the rape of the environment, it is *all* a violation of God’s heart, which seeks the blessings of his creation (Henderson P. 146).

Ethnic cleansing and Tribal Hostilities

In recent years we have witnessed such atrocities in Northern Ireland, Sudan, Rwanda, the Balkans, and elsewhere. People who wear the names of Jesus brutally, atavistically, bitterly persecute and kill those who are not of their tribe or religion. In many cases, it is followers of Christ who are killing each other.

The Good News: Occasions When the Church is Salt and Light (P. 147) ***A People Known for Kingdom Qualities***

Literacy and Culture

Hospitality

Justice

Hope

The Church: What Should It Look Like, Smell Like, Behave Like? (P. 150).

According to Paul, the church is called to be God’s glory just as Jesus is. The Church is the **body of Christ**, the **physical presence of the reality of Christ** to each generation by its

word and behavior. The followers of Christ, who are the church, are to be **imitators** of Christ as dear children. The world is not to be bereft of that presence which exudes the aroma of Christ and reflects his light in the midst of this age of death (Henderson P. 150).

There are three dimensions or descriptions of the church that we need to explore:

1) the church as **the Community of Messiah**, of the **Dominion of God** in Christ; 2) the church as an **Alternative Community**, as **Redeemed Society**; and 3) the church as a **Mission Community**, as **God's Agent of Blessing the Nations** (Henderson P. 150).

The Community of Messiah

We must be consumed with the adoration of Jesus, the Lamb of God, so much so that it permeates our lives and behavior. We must be informed and formed by who Jesus is, what he has done in rescuing us for God, how he loves and thinks and how his heart beats when he looks upon *all* of his Father's world. The church must continually embrace the worship of Christ that the church has embraced from its beginning (Henderson P. 151).

The church that desires to *smell like Jesus* must always be beholding and reflecting the Lord's glory and so be continually transformed into his glory. Triune God
The church often makes its institutional life a thing-in-itself and fails to reflect the character of God in its own works (Henderson P. 152-153).

An Alternative Community, A New Humanity

Hope and Mission of God

CHAPTER NINE: THE BREATH OF GOD

EPILOGUE TEARS AND LAUGHTER BETWEEN THE AGES

We need to be reminded that unless we have preached: 1) the *data* of the gospel, 2) the *demand of the gospel*, and 3) the *promise* of the gospel, we have not preached the gospel (Henderson P. 172).

Christian community is an alternative way of thinking and living. It is a counterculture. It marches to a different drummer. It worships only one God, who is altogether holy and righteous and just and merciful. It lives as the community of Light. This is *evangelism*. As Peter said:

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though

they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge (I Peter 2:11-12) (Henderson P. 123).

Incarnation in an Alien Context

Jesus lived and ministered the mission of God in the midst of a religious and political context that had a totally different agenda than the one he was declaring. The Roman government; the Jewish establishment; the other world religions; the political, economic, and social powers found his teaching troublesome.

His execution was not because he loved and did good works. It is his teachings, so subversive to all they stood for, that perpetrated his Cross. The lesson for his followers is that his faithfulness to his mission became the triumph over the very powers that sought to destroy him. Jesus also trapped into a profoundly deeper spring of joy, which enabled him to endure. He was faithful even unto death. That also part of the evangelistic mandate (Henderson P. 176).

Cultural Collapse at the Beginning of a New Century P. 176-177

Over the past centuries there has been an accommodation with the world which is designated *Christendom*. In this accommodation the Christian community was given much privilege and freedom. Here at the beginning of the **twenty-first century Christendom is collapsing. So also is the whole cultural** structure of the Enlightenment that has been so much a part of our Western culture since the eighteenth century (Henderson P. 177).

The idols of North American individualism are producing bitter fruits as the environment is spoiled, as politics become captive to economic powers, as individual rights run rampant at the expense of responsibility to the larger community. Decadent Christianity (퇴폐한) devolves (넘어가다) into affinity (유사) to pagan spirituality. The antagonistic culture revolts against Christian hegemony in social institutions with bitterness and scorn. Militant “Christian” groups display a frightening biblical-Christian illiteracy and an indifference to major teachings of Jesus. This means that the context of our ministry of the gospel finds confusion without and within the church (Henderson P. 177).

TWO REAL AND PRESENT DOMINIONS P. 178

BACK TO THE SECOND CENTURY (P. 179).

Evangelism: The task before us is that of *making disciples* among all people-groups and in the **alien cultural context** of the world. Especially do we have in mind here our friend Chip and Generations X and Y (as well as the Millennial Generation, which comes along next). Communicating the indescribably good message of Jesus is going to be effective in such a culture **primarily by the demonstration of New Creation in the lives of the followers of Jesus more so than by the use of words** (Henderson P. 179).

It is typical of North Americans to put confidence in the use of words, in pulpit oratory, or in sales techniques to persuade people, and certainly the verbal declaration of Christ is an integral part of evangelistic faithfulness. **But it can be vacuous if not accompanied by the demonstration of transformed lives and transformed community.** Rapid paganization of North American culture has brought us back to the situation in which our second-century counterparts found themselves. Indeed, a document from that era, *the Letter to Diognetus*, is instructive for our purpose here:

“For Christians are not differentiated from other people by country, language, or customs; you see, they do not live in cities of their own, or speak some strange dialect, or have some peculiar lifestyle.

This teaching of theirs has not been contrived by the invention and speculation of inquisitive men; nor are they propagating mere human teaching as some people do. They live in both Greek and foreign cities, wherever chance has put them. They follow local customs in clothing, food, and aspects of life. But at the same time, they demonstrate to us the wonderful and certainly unusual form of their own citizenship.

They live in their native land, but as aliens; as citizens they share all things with others, but like aliens, suffer all things. Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country. They marry and have children like everyone else, but they do not kill unwanted babies. They offer a shared table, but not a shared bed. They are at present “in the flesh” but they do not live “according to the flesh.” They are passing their days on earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the appointed laws and go beyond the laws in their own lives. They love everyone, but are persecuted by all. they are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and gain life. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are dishonored and yet again glory through dishonor. Their names are blackened and yet they are cleared. They are mocked and bless in return. They are treated outrageously and behave respectfully to others. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice as if being given new life. They are attacked by Jews as aliens, and are persecuted by Greeks; yet those who hate them cannot give any reason for their hostility. To put it simply – the soul is to the body as Christians are to the world. The soul is spread through all part of the body and Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul is in the body but is not of the body; Christians are in the world but not of the world” (Henderson P. 180-181).

So it is that Jesus and the people of Jesus come into this rebellious and confusing creation as **God’s redemptively subversive New Creation.** Our confidence is in the unlimited and outrageously **radical grace** of the God whose world it is, and whose love for it surpasses knowledge. The New Testament gospel of the kingdom of God cannot be marketed as a success formula, nor can we hold out the promises that people want to hear. Rather, our faithfulness is to demonstrate a life that sees the humanly unbridgeable difference **between chaos and God’s Shalom** (Henderson P. 181).

TOO WILD AND FREE FOR THE TIMID P. 181

The cultural darkness and hostility – grows around us and the sense of lostness, personal darkness, and spiritual hungering in the emerging generation who has no hope of their own. The Holy Spirit of the Risen Lord is not passive in the midst of this dark confusion; the infinite love and the radical grace of our Redeemer God is irresistibly at work in and through us. In the midst of the most unspeakable agonies, Jesus walks with us in a way that surpass human understanding, and we share with him the deep rivers of God's meaning, and of God's love, and of God's hope. The darkness becomes light, and God gives to his own such songs and such laughter as those outside can never imagine. It is to this evangelistic pilgrimage that Jesus calls us to be faithful. It is in the midst of the realities of this twenty-first century, and this new generational culture, that God calls us to be voices of hope and of gospel (Henderson P. 182).