

Chapter 4

Theological/Ethical Perspective of Mission

A. Diagnosis of the Church Mission (P. 127-138)

- 1) Critique/Diagnosis of the Church Mission
- 2) Morality and Ethics
 - a) Federal Budget Policy Is a Moral Issue
 - b) Tax Policy Is a Moral Issue
 - c) Racism Is a Moral Issue
 - d) Corporation That Rules and Enslaves Our Lives Is a Moral Issue
 - e) Consumerism Is a Moral Issue

B. Treatment Prescription for the Church's Mission (P. 139-161)

1) Restoration of the Theology of Mission (139-151)

- a) Definition
- b) Purpose
- c) Essence/Content

2) Treatment Prescription for Mission (152-159)

- a) McNeal's Prescription
- b) Hilfiker's Prescription
- c) Korten's Prescription
- d) Johnson's Prescription
- e) The Prescription of the Rich
- f) Hall's Prescription
- g) Harper's Prescription

3) Prognosis of Mission (160-161)

A. Diagnosis of the Church's Mission

Introduction:

I was privileged to be on a six year speaking tour in 31 states on the issue of homelessness in 1998-2004. I had heard of and or actually visited several hundred church-based/sponsored missions for homeless people. Most secular programs I visited reported that they were getting monetary or material donations as well as volunteer services from the Christian Church. Most Christian Churches do something for the poor/homeless.¹

As Generous Giving, Inc. reports, total giving by all Americans is estimated at \$212 billion in 2001. Statistically the people who give the most to charities are those between ages 50 and 64. Those over 65 give 25% more than the average giver. In 2000, 78 percent of Americans gave some money to one church or nonprofit group. About 59 million Americans did volunteer work at some point from September 2001 to September 2002. This represents slightly more than one in four people age 16 and over.²

More than half of those who earn less than \$10,000 a year participate in giving something for the poor. Low income people give 11% of their income for charity while the rich give 3.5%. According to America's Second Harvest, an umbrella organization for most of the nation's food banks helping to supply 26,284 local pantries, 5,721 soup kitchens and 4,120 emergency shelters, approximately three-fourths of the pantries and soup kitchens are faith-based. This network of food bank and local agencies served an estimated 2.3 million people in emergency situations through pantries, kitchens and shelters in 2001.³

1) Critique/Diagnosis of the Church Mission

However, there have been many critical voices on the Church's tendency to limit their help to the charity for poor and homeless people without raising much question of the root causes of poverty and homelessness in the United States and not paying enough attention to public policy advocacy. These voices are expressing that while they appreciate the impressive and faithful charity giving by the Church which is necessary for emergency intervention, the Christian Church tends to focus on an individual's inner spiritual salvation without paying enough attention to outer social injustice that produces, maintains and perpetuates poverty and homelessness in our affluent country. Therefore, this chapter dares to present a diagnosis of and treatment prescription for the Christian Church mission on the basis of the critical voices of many concerned scholars.

Diagnosis starts with the description of the background of where the Church began to enjoy complacency:

In the "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, why the church was seduced by this honor. But it was also an accommodation that had tragic circumstances right down to the present moment. The "established" church quickly succumbed to an idolatry of power. As it acquired wealth and property and created

¹ Jean Kim, *Jubilee Manual* (Louisville: Presbyterian Church (USA), 2000), and the Report on Speaking Tour, Appendix of this dissertation. www.jeankimhome.com

² Generous Giving, Inc.

³ Americas Second Harvest (www.americassecondharvest.org)

a *clergy-class* of ecclesiastical authorities, the church forgot its calling and mission. 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 is 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.⁴

Moltmann concurs that "it was only with the Constantinian imperial church that there came to be an increasing tendency to spiritualize poverty, because the church had to leave "welfare" to the emperor, and was forced to confine itself to the salvation of souls."⁵

Shenk joins Henderson and Moltmann, "The Church began to own political power and wealth and lost the essence of its identity and mission: From being a marginal, socially inferior, and economically weak group, the Church became one of the dominant institutions in society. From being an oppressed minority, the church now became an oppressor."⁶

The Augsburg Confession (1530), Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion on the Church, Heidelberg Catechism (1563) all of which emphasized the *being* rather than the *function* of the Church. These authoritative declarations do little to help the Church realize its calling to be the instrument of the Messiah's continuing mission to the world. The focus is decidedly inward.⁷ "In modern days, the state collaborated with the Church in maintaining this so-called Christian society. . . . One implication of this religio-political arrangement was that there was no place for mission to the West, for the whole society was 'Christian' by fiat. The Church as a missionary presence in society was unthinkable, an anomaly to a corpus Christianum. Thus the Church of Christendom was a church stripped of its missionary consciousness, prostituted by connivance between state and church hierarchy."⁸

Rosemary Radford Ruether offers the critique that too often churches become an occasion of sin, places where the poor are ignored, women belittled and humiliated, and the hegemonic practices receive religious reification.⁹

Miller's voice, "Social ministry generally not been emphasized as an integral part of pastoral tradition. Thus, many pastors have been relatively unaware of this dimension of their responsibility. Others have found it convenient and expedient to disregard it. In

⁴ Henderson, *Subversive Jesus*, 145-146.

⁵ Moltmann, *The Way*, 103-104.

⁶ Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Relevance of Messianic Missiology for Mission Today," in *The Transfiguration of Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 19.

⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Relevance of Messianic Missiology for Mission Today," in *The Transfiguration of Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 23.

⁸ Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Relevance of Messianic Missiology for Mission Today," in *The Transfiguration of Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 22.

⁹ Rebecca S. Chopp, "Anointed to Preach: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace," in *Portion of the Poor*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 101.

either case, social ministry has often been limited to dispensing tokens of paternalistic aid. Few pastors have been committed to passionate advocacy of social change to improve the lot of the needy or correct conditions of injustice.”¹⁰

Bishop Robert Morgan of the Mississippi Area has declared that we have not only found it easier in North America to build new sanctuaries than to form Christian disciples, not only more palatable to study the Bible than to live it out, but also more appealing to engage in social action than to confront people with the challenge of Jesus Christ.¹¹

Churches seem to look for an excuse to ignore the poor heavily relying on the text, “You will always have poor with you (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7),” which has been the most misused text in Christian circles. Many Christians take it as Jesus’ approval for us to have the poor. People often say, we can’t do anything about the poor because Jesus said, “We will always have the poor.”

All four Gospels report the story of the woman pouring expensive perfume on Jesus. (Matt. 26:11; Mark 14:7; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8) All writers (except Luke) report that the onlookers condemned this waste of a year’s wages worth of perfume. They wondered aloud why the perfume wasn’t sold and the money given to the poor. In response, Jesus said, “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me” (Matt. 26:11). Jesus quotes directly from Deut. 15:11, the chapter with Jubilee and sabbatical instructions. “There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the LORD is sure to bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, *if only you will obey the LORD your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today*” (Deut. 15:4-6). [Emphasis mine]

Earlier in the passage God tells the Hebrews that *if they’re obedient* there will be no poor in the land. However, *if they harden their hearts*, there will be poor. As long as greed and selfishness continue, the poor will be among them. This doesn’t justify a callous neglect of the poor. “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land’” (Deut. 15:11). [Emphasis mine]

Kraybill asserts that in light of his continual plea on behalf of the poor, it’s hardly conceivable that Jesus now contradicts himself by telling us to neglect the poor. He’s likely suggesting that as long as greed and ambition govern the lives of people, there will always be poor. His observation of this fact *does not* justify its perpetuation. Rather than excusing us from social obligation, Jesus is reminding us that the alleviation of poverty is a never-ending struggle because of human greed.¹²

This interpretation will go with the opinion that as long as we perpetuate our current economic policy with tax cuts for the rich and slashing federal funds for the poor we will always have the poor in this land. This doesn’t condone having the poor but rather condemns such policies to be unethical and immoral.

¹⁰ Haskell M. Miller, *Social Ministry* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2000), 13.

¹¹ Watson, *Proclaiming Christ*, 127.

¹² Kraybill, *Upside-Down*, 124-125.

As the church has moved farther and farther from its roots in Jesus, the content, the methods, and goal of evangelization has moved from the creation of Jesus' likeness in his followers to the formation of orthodox believers who receive the appropriate sacraments and assent to correct doctrines. A more serious consequence is the tendency to privatize salvation, accompanied by an almost exclusively individualistic evangelistic practice.¹³

According to Shenk, "The modern mission is being criticized by two groups: The first group asserts that the church in the West, including Western missions, has compromised the Christian message by an uncritical hand-in-glove alliance with Western political, economic, and military power. The other class of critics scores missions for cultural and religious imperialism. In this regard missions, lacking critical distance from their sending cultures, were only continuing to play the role assigned by Christendom."¹⁴

Part of the censure [criticism] of modern mission is that they, at worst, were confused as to which authority they were representing, or at the least, left people around them confused. Did not they uncritically follow the flag of empire while protesting their allegiance to the cross?¹⁵

Maynard-Reid concurs that many evangelical Christians seem to limit evangelism to "soul-winning," converting persons to make them members of a church, church planting, "witness," verbally sharing one's personal faith in Jesus in a fairly narrow spiritual sense, public proclamation of the gospel in traditional categories, and personal discipleship, mostly in the sense of abstaining from a selected list of sins.¹⁶

Therefore, McNeal describes distorted spirituality: "The church in North America has reduced its understanding of spirituality to numbers that can be reported (the triumph of materialism over spirit). A church is doing well if membership, giving, and facility square footage are all increasing."¹⁷

It has been mentioned above that most Christians limit Christian spirituality to an inner spiritual dimension and think Christian spirituality has nothing to do with our social world. According to Maria Harris *spirituality* must integrate a response to the sacred with ethical behavior as described in Mich. 6:8, "What does God require of us but *to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God?*"¹⁸

Lebacqz and Driskill comment on how such a distorted spirituality can harm people:

Good spiritual care demands we not ignore the cultural myths, stereotypes, and prejudices that perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression in our society. Good spiritual care of congregations does not happen simply by attending to *personal* issues presented in individual pastoral counseling. It demands a larger *social critique* that focuses on societal levels of injustice that cause suffering for many and distort the perspectives and lives of all.

¹³ Driver, *The Kingdom*, 199-200.

¹⁴ Shenk, *The Relevance*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*, 124.

¹⁷ McNeal, *Present Future*, 54.

¹⁸ Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 32.

A failure to lift up social justice issues might be a form of spiritual neglect. Therefore, neglect of the political dimensions of spirituality does indeed do harm. Neglect is not *simply* a matter of failing to do good; it is a matter of harming.”¹⁹

John Driver supports, “In its ‘other worldliness’ the church is tempted to flee from the real world, which God loved, into an unreal and spiritualized sphere. Instead of offering a message of hope for the present, the church tends to limit its offer of hope to the future. But this is to deprive the church of kingdom blessedness here and now.”²⁰

During my speaking tour, I have observed the churches practicing spirituality in the following three models: 1) *The Country Club Model* that tends to be exclusive, other worldly, focused on spiritual or personal salvation and blessings, and locks up the church to keep “the homeless” away; 2) *The Send a Check Model* that tends to repeat what the country club model does but sends checks to charity programs. Although we need checks to do missions, they too are removed from homeless scenes. These two groups tend to share the FEAR of relating to and the BLAMING of homeless people and focus on their own care as an insulated community. However, 3) the *Christ Model* was inclusive, welcoming and loving by opening up rooms in their church or temple facilities to invite the homeless in and offer shelters, transitional homes, day centers, soup kitchen in church.²¹

McNeal’s Diagnoses of the Modern Christian Church

The current church in North America is *on life support*. It is living off the work, money, and energy of the previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled either when the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from people aged fifty-five and older) or when the remaining three-fourths of a generation who are institutional loyalists die off or both. The North American churches suffer from severe *mission amnesia*. It has forgotten why it exists. The church was created to be the people of God to join him in his redemptive mission in the world. The church was never intended to exist for itself. It was and is the chosen instrument of God to expand his kingdom. In its institutional preoccupation the church has abandoned its real identity and reason for existence. The North American church has lost its influence because it has lost its identity. It has lost its identity because it has lost its mission. Trouble is, the church is sleeping on the job.²² [*Emphasis mine*]

The church of Jesus is moving into the postmodern world. The world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century. The North American church largely has responded with heavy infusions of denial. This denial shows up in many ways. Many churches have withdrawn from the community. An alternative form of denial has been the attempt to fix the culture by flexing political and economic muscle. Still another form of denial shows up in the church’s obsession with internal theological-methodological debates designed to determine who the true believers are while the world is “headed to hell in a hand basket.”²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 101-105.

²⁰ Driver, *The Kingdom*, 97.

²¹ Kim, *Jubilee Manual*, 21.

²² McNeal, *Present Future*, 1, 16, 18-19.

²³ Ibid., 2.

Growing numbers of people are leaving the institutional Church for a new reason. They are not leaving because they lost faith. They are leaving the Church to preserve their faith. The number of “post-congregational” Christians is growing. People may be turned off to the church, but they are not turned off to Jesus. People outside the Church think church is for church people, not for them. It will do little to expand the kingdom of God. The need of the North American Church is not a methodological fix. The Church needs a mission fix. People in the nonchurch culture don’t associate Jesus with the Church. In their minds, the Church is a club for religious people where club members can celebrate their traditions and hang out with others who share common thinking and lifestyles. They do not automatically think of the church as championing the cause of poor people or healing the sick or serving people. These are things they associate with Jesus.²⁴

Hall joins McNeal with his diagnosis of the world we live in:

To see the modern world from the point of view of a parent is to see it in the worst possible light. This perspective unmistakably reveals the unwholesomeness of our way of life: our obsession with sex, violence, and the pornography of “making it”; our addictive dependence on drugs, “entertainment,” and the evening news; our impatience with anything that limits our sovereign freedom of choice, especially with the constraints of marital and familial ties; our preference for “nonbinding commitment”; our third-rate educational system; our third-rate morality; our refusal to draw a distinction between right and wrong, lest we “impose” our morality on others; our reluctance to judge or be judged; our indifference to the needs of future generations, as evidenced by our willingness to saddle them with a huge national debt, and overgrown arsenal of destruction, and a deteriorating environment; our unstated assumption, which underlies so much of the propaganda for unlimited abortion, that only those children born for success ought to be allowed to be born at all.²⁵

2) Morality and Ethics:

During the 2004 Presidential election, the issue of morality came up for many Christians as one criterion to help choose whom to vote for. Many Christians allegedly voted for Bush, thinking he is a more moral person because he opposes abortion, same sex marriage, is a faithful church goer. Popular lamentation was that many Christians seem to have a tunnel vision about morality. The lamenting group was outraged and named “the war in Iraq,” “killing many innocent people and children in the U.S.-lead wars,” “cutting funds for the poor and children of need,” “no medical insurance for millions of needy people,” and “a lack of housing for the poor,” all of which fall under the Bush’s policy as serious moral issues.”

The Church has forsaken its role of teaching and guiding society on morality and ethics. What then does morality means? Moe-Lobeda defines it:

“Morality” and “ethics” often are used synonymously. While this is understandable—“ethics” comes from the Greek, and “morality” comes from the word used by Cicero to translate the Greek to Latin—there is an important distinction. Morality is a dimension of

²⁴ Ibid., 10,12.

²⁵ Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 58.

life, not a separate pursuit, but a dimension of any pursuit. It is the dimension that asks, consciously or not, whether a way of doing or being is good, right, and fitting in a given circumstance. Moral consciousness is the awareness of the distinction between “what is” and “what ought and could be.” Ethics refers to the disciplined inquiry into morality. One could say ethics is the art-science of bringing self-consciousness, method, intentionality, and sensitivity to the tasks of (1) discerning what is good and right for any given situation and context, (2) finding the moral-spiritual power to act on that discernment, and (3) discovering what forms individuals and society toward the good and what malforms them away from it.²⁶

She continues, “Moral agency is the power to live toward the flourishing of the *oikos* (the entirety of God’s created household). To do so is to live in ways that promote social and ecological well-being, prioritizing the concerns of the most vulnerable and the Earth’s regenerative health. It is to move toward lifestyles, relationships, policies, and structures that build communities characterized by compassion, social justice, and ecological sustainability. Moral agency, then, is the power to live in ways that serve not only the needs of self and family, but also the ongoing well-being of the larger Earth community, and in ways that do not contribute to unnecessary suffering and do not threaten Earth’s capacity to sustain life for generations to come.”²⁷

Christian ethics is a response to the grace of God that we have received in Jesus Christ. What is the nature and content of our ethical response? “We love, because God loved us,” states 1 John 4:19. Once more we see the pattern of grace preceding our ethical action. Our action is grounded in God’s action: our ability to love is preceded by our reception of God’s love. God loved us and sent the Son as the expiation for our sins. “We *love* because God *loved* us.” The content, the nature of God’s grace determines the content and nature of our acts. Our response is love because God’s grace is manifest as love. Karl Barth writes that we are to do what we do in response to God’s grace.²⁸

Writes Moe-Lobeda,

The citizenship of the U.S. on the whole, is increasingly oriented more around the private good (the good for me and those close to me) than the public good. The morality of individual lives garners more serious scrutiny than the moral condition of society. The turn is toward a “privatized view of the good life,” and toward privatized morality itself. This ‘eclipse of the common good’ betrays the understanding of morality stemming from Aristotle and from commonly accepted historical Christian teaching. To secure the good for the people in common, Aristotle asserts, ‘is nobler and more divine’ than to attain it for oneself.” “One of Aristotle’s most significant contributions,” notes Jesuit ethicist David Hollenbach, “was that a good life is oriented to goods shared with others, the common good of the larger society.”²⁹

a) Federal Budget Policy Is a Moral Issue:

While many Christians seem to limit morality only to issues of sexuality (gay/lesbian marriage and abortion etc), the federal budget is a moral issue. What’s happening in the streets of America is connected to what’s happening in the hearts of Americans. The greatest moral question in American politics today is, “What is our prosperity for?” Will

²⁶ Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*, 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁸ Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 28.

²⁹ Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*, 11-12.

it serve as an excuse to forget those left behind? Or will it include those who have fallen through the cracks in our society, including almost thirteen million children? The biblical prophets say that a society's integrity is judged, not by its wealth and power, but by how it treats its most vulnerable members.³⁰

Poverty and Budget Are Moral Issues: Budgets are moral documents. A budget shows what we most care about and how that compares to other things we care about. So when politicians present their budget, they are really presenting their priorities.³¹

Here is an excerpt from a letter to the Congress of the U. S. from ecumenical leaders: As leaders of our respective denominations, we have long sought an end to the injustices inherent in poverty. We have never seen these injustices born out so vividly in our own country as in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The devastation wrought by Katrina has exposed the anguished faces of the poor in the wealthiest nation on the planet. We believe our federal budget is a concrete expression of our shared moral values and priorities. We commit ourselves to working for economic policies infused with the spirit of the One who began his public ministry almost 2,000 years ago by proclaiming that God had anointed him "to bring good news to the poor."³²

Kawachi and Kennedy conclude that the kind of society we live in is the product of the political process, including the well-being of its citizens. Politics determine what sorts of policies are pursued by democratic government, for instance, the choice between policies that give priority to promoting economic growth versus those that emphasize a more egalitarian distribution of national income. Or the choice between more or less government involvement in the economy. Or choice over the size of the welfare state and the level of social spending to assure basic human security in areas such as education, health, and social safety nets.³³

House Passes Immoral Budget Bill: "Last night's action in the US House of Representatives was bad news for the poor and vulnerable in this nation. It is good news for the millionaires and billionaires. Following on the heels of cutting \$50 billion of services for children, youth, students, the poor, sick and elderly, the House will take up a massive tax cut bill that will provide \$70 billion in tax cuts for the wealthiest of Americans. These actions by our elected representatives are immoral."³⁴

³⁰ Wallis, *God's Politics*, 236.

³¹ Ibid., 241. Here is a good example of immoral budgeting: "Republicans began targeting key programs for budget cuts yesterday, from student loans and health care to food stamps and foster care. But the tough measures immediately drew staunch opposition from anti-poverty groups, businesses and moderate Republicans." Jonathan Weisman, Washington Post Staff Writer, Wednesday, October 26, 2005; A05. Another quote: "It was unfortunate political timing for House Republicans: On Friday, as the Agriculture Committee was drafting budget-cutting legislation that could knock 295,000 people off food stamps, the Agriculture Department released findings that 529,000 more Americans went hungry last year than in 2003. The Senate took up far-reaching legislation yesterday that would slice \$39 billion over the next five years from a slew of entitlement programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, student loans and agriculture subsidies, while raising revenue by opening Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. A final vote is due Thursday." Jonathan Weisman, Washington Post, Tuesday, November 1, 2005; A23

³² Presbyterian Washington Office. Letter to the Congress by ecumenical leaders on September 13, 2005.

³³ Kawachi and Kennedy, *The Health*, 161.

³⁴ The Washington Association of Churches, November 18, 2005. Alice Woldt woldt@thewac.org

The New York Times article of 11/18/05 referring to the same immoral budget bill: Democrats said it was unfair to reduce spending on programs like food stamps and health care for the poor to offset the costs of the hurricanes. "This is the cruelest lie of all," said Representative Gene Taylor, a Mississippi Democrat who lost his home to Hurricane Katrina, "that the only way you can help people who have lost everything is by hurting somebody else." "This is the day when the price of Republican tax cuts for the wealthy becomes quite clear," said Representative David R. Obey of Wisconsin, senior Democrat on the Appropriations Committee.³⁵

Cutting taxes for the wealthy and cutting program money for the poor to help Katrina victims. To help victims by exploiting other victims is immoral.

Another response by Jim Wallis on the immoral budget just passed:

The prophet Isaiah said, 'Woe to you legislators of infamous laws . . . who refuse justice to the unfortunate, who cheat the poor among my people of their rights, who make widows their prey and rob the orphan.' Today, I repeat those words. When our legislators put ideology over principle, it is time to sound the trumpets of justice and tell the truth. It is a moral disgrace to take food from the mouths of hungry children to increase the luxuries of those feasting at a table overflowing with plenty. This is not what America is about, not what the season of Thanksgiving is about, not what loving our neighbor is about, and not what family values are about. There is no moral path our legislators can take to defend a reckless, mean-spirited budget reconciliation bill that diminishes our compassion, as Jesus said, "for the least of these." It is morally unconscionable to hide behind arguments for fiscal responsibility and government efficiency. It is dishonest to stake proud claims to deficit reduction when tax cuts for the wealthy that increase the deficit are the next order of business. It is one more example of an absence of morality in our current political leadership.

The article further states:

It is a blatant reversal of biblical values and symbolizes the death of compassionate conservatism. The faith community is outraged and is drawing a line in the sand against immoral national priorities. It is time to draw that line more forcefully and more visibly. I applaud those House members who have stood up for better budget priorities and fought hard all year to keep issues of basic fairness at the forefront of this debate. And I thank those on both sides of the aisle who stood up and did the right thing in voting against this bill, despite pressure from the House leadership. These strong voices provide some hope for getting beyond an ideology that disregards the role of government for the common good.³⁶

b) Tax Policy is a Moral Issue:

Wallis introduces an extensive story of Susan Pace Hamill, a University of Alabama tax law professor, wrote her thesis on "An Argument for Tax Reform Based on Judeo-Christian Ethics." That story also includes the struggle of Alabama legislatures and governor to raise taxes for the wealthy and reduce them for the poor. He emphasizes that

³⁵ New York Times, November 18, 2005

³⁶ A copy of an article written by Jim Wallis, Friday, November 18, 2005, publicized through internet by the Presbyterian Washington Office. Wallis is the founder of *Sojourners* and Convener of Call to Renewal, Washington, D.C.

unfair tax policies—the rich pay less and the poor pay more—is a faith and a moral issue.³⁷

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed a five-year, \$14 trillion budget resolution to guide spending for fiscal year 2006. According to the Washington Post, the budget resolution includes significant cuts in domestic programs, including \$35 billion in entitlement cuts and \$212 billion in domestic discretionary program cuts over five years, while making room for substantial tax cuts that are likely to benefit wealthy households primarily.³⁸ This is a serious moral issue.

The decisions to drop child tax credit for America's poorest families and children in favor of further tax cuts for the rich is morally offensive. It is blatant disregard for the poor and an outrageous bias toward the rich. In religious terms, the exclusion of any benefits for poor children in a new tax bill should have been named a "political sin." Those politicians who utter the words of religion and faith, yet who supported this exclusion of the poor, deserve to be called "hypocrites."³⁹

c) Racism Is a Moral Issue:

An Executive Summary by the Metropolitan Policy Program, of the Brookings Institution states:

Hurricane Katrina's assault on New Orleans' most vulnerable residents and neighborhoods has reinvigorated a dialogue on race and class in America. . . . The conversation should focus special attention on alleviating concentrated urban poverty—the segregation of poor families into extremely distressed neighborhoods. Overall, nearly 50,000 poor New Orleanians lived in neighborhoods where the poverty rate exceeded 40 percent. New Orleans ranked second among the nation's 50 largest cities on the degree to which its poor families, mostly African American, were clustered in extremely poor neighborhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward. Areas of concentrated poverty are not confined to New Orleans. Despite improvements in the 1990s, nearly every major American city still contains a collection of extremely poor, racially segregated neighborhoods. These neighborhoods did not appear by accident. They emerged in part due to decades of policies that confined poor households, especially poor black ones, to these economically isolated areas. The federal government concentrated public housing in segregated inner-city neighborhoods, subsidized metropolitan sprawl, and failed to create affordable housing for low-income families and minorities in rapidly developing suburbs, cutting them off from decent housing, educational, and economic opportunities.⁴⁰

Racism and poverty in America go hand in hand—a serious moral issue. Korten explains how we got here:

Our relentless pursuit of economic growth is accelerating the break down of the planet's life support systems, intensifying resource competition, widening the gap between rich and

³⁷ Wallis, *God's Politics*, 244.

³⁸ Source: Washington Post, April 28, 2005.

³⁹ Wallis, *God's Politics*, 248.

⁴⁰ Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 797-6139; Fax (202)797-2965.

poor, and undermining the values and relationship of family and community. The growing concentration of power in global corporations and financial institutions is stripping governments of their ability to set economic, social, and environmental priorities in the larger common interest. Driven by a single-minded dedication to generating ever greater profits for the benefit of their investors, global corporations and financial institutions have turned their economic power into political power. They now dominate the decision process of governments and are rewriting the rules of world commerce through international trade and investment agreements to allow the selves to expand their profits without regard to the social and environmental consequences borne by the larger society. Continuing with business as usual will almost certainly lead to economic, social, and environmental collapse. To a considerable extent the problem originates with the United States.⁴¹

Such an economic policy came home and created a “third world” in our own cities.

New Orleans is a good example and it is a tip of iceberg of poverty in our own cities. Korten refers capitalism to cancer: “Capitalism, which is to a healthy market economy what cancer is to a healthy body. Cancer occurs when genetic damage causes a cell to forget that it is part of a larger body, the healthy function of which is essential to its own survival. The cell begins to seek its own growth without regard to the consequence for the whole, and ultimately destroys the body that feeds it.”⁴²

d) Corporation That Rules and Enslaves Our Lives Is a Moral Issue:

Henderson indicts corporations: “The sterile, impersonal everywhere-ness 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, profit. Churches abrogate 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) 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.”⁴³

e) Consumerism Is a Moral Issue:

According to Sider, possessions are the most common idol for rich Christians today. Affluence is the god of twentieth-century North Americas, and the adman is his prophet. The showers of luxuries has almost suffocated our Christian compassion.⁴⁴ Meeks too indicts the attempt to acquire more than is necessary, and especially the consumption of surplus, as robbery. Thus consumption or needless expense is the robbery of the poor.⁴⁵

Kawachi and Kennedy conclude, “No matter what the level of material comfort or

⁴¹ David C. Korten, *The Post Corporate World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ Henderson, *Subversive Jesus*, 56- 57.

⁴⁴ Sider. *Rich Christians*, 191.

⁴⁵ Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., “Wesley and the Poor” in *The Portion of the Poor*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1995), 23.

standard of living, Americans want more. We want to shop more and spend more to acquire an ever-expanding list of necessities and ‘must-have’ items.’⁴⁶ Our new disease is ‘shopping disorder,’ a form of addiction includes compulsive shopping, competitive shopping, and revenge shopping.”⁴⁷

Wallis concludes, “Our public life reflects our moral values, one way or the other. We’ve all seen how politics can reflect our worst values of selfishness, greed, divisiveness, fear, and power. Yet we long to see how politics could reflect our best values of compassion, community, diversity, hope, and service. Reconnecting politics to our best values is now the most important task of political life. The old political morality has left us paralyzed. Our times cry out for a new political morality, one that will provide the ground for new possibilities.”⁴⁸

It seems obvious that the Christian Church today is drowned in the materialistic culture and is facing an identity crisis, mission amnesia and anemia. The Christian Church appears lost. The Church must come home to Jesus Christ first to bring all other homeless home.

B. Treatment and Prescription for the Church’s Mission

Introduction

Many scholars unanimously agree that the Christian Church currently is not to be found in the house of our LORD Jesus Christ. The Christian Church, her mission in particular, is sick and lost. Treatment plan would include 1) the restoration of the theology of mission of Jesus Christ for the poor and homeless people, as he taught us and requires of us (see Chapter 3) and 2) accept and cooperate with treatment prescriptions offered by the several scholars mentioned below and then the prognosis will look positive and bright. Then the Christian Church can come back home in Jesus Christ, our LORD and Savior.

1) Restoration of the Theology of Mission

a) Definition of Christian Mission

Mission denotes action: Being sent with a commission to perform a certain task, acting in the name of a superior, carrying out an important mandate, serving as ambassador on behalf of one’s leader. It is not a specifically religious term. It is used by military, government, business, and many other secular groups. However, missiology is the formal study of Christian mission, including the biblical and theological foundation of mission; the history of the course taken by the missionaries; analysis of the contemporary context; and a discernment of the social, political, economic, and religious trends that will influence the direction of mission in the future.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Kawachi and Kennedy, *Health of Nations*, 191.

⁴⁷ Ibid.78.

⁴⁸ Wallis, *The Souls*, 18.

⁴⁹ Shenk, *The Relevance*, 18.

Kwok Pui-Lan suggests, “Mission is carrying out God’s work among people who are struggling to live with dignity and wholeness and in harmony with nature. Mission is to proclaim the good news that God affirms life over death and that God acts among the poor. Mission is forming partnership, building bridges and coalitions, and strengthening grassroots movement to struggle for life and work for justice for all people.”⁵⁰

b) Purpose of Christian Mission:

Many Christians would say, “The purpose of the Christian mission is to save souls.” Many others say that the whole purpose of mission is to liberate people; the central act of God in the Old Testament is the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian bondage; the decisive act of the N. T. is the divine intervention of God into human history to liberate God’s people from all forms of oppression and slavery. In both cases the deliverance is not just *from* something but *to* something, to the Promised Land and to abundant life.⁵¹

Pui-Lan suggests that in twentieth-century ecumenical theology there has been shift to an understanding of mission as an attribute and activity of a Trinitarian God. Participation in God’s saving activity, or *Missio Dei*, is understood as a witness to God’s love toward all people and work for the promise of God’s reign.⁵²

Buchanan along with Brunner declares, “Mission is why we are here and the church exists for the world. The church is called to be in the world, in the city, and that means intentionally, imaginatively, creatively, and aggressively in the city, living in and for the human community in order to be faithful to God. Emil Brunner said, ‘The church exists for mission as fire exists for burning.’”⁵³

For Hall, the whole purpose of the mission of Christ’s church is:

To participate in Christ’s suffering in the world. Christ suffered our suffering; with us he is caused to experience loneliness (for him, forsakenness); he laid down *his* life for us. Now we are invited to participate in his suffering, the suffering of the world, because there is still suffering in God’s beloved world, and God would still be involved in it. God’s involvement in the world’s suffering is not a once-for-all matter. It preceded the advent of the Son (There was a cross in the heart of God long before a cross appeared on Calvary), and it is succeeds his ascension. We are part of the response of God to the massive suffering of God’s world. The whole purpose of the church’s suffering is to identify with the suffering that is already there in this world, to let the church be led by the love of Christ into solidarity with those who suffer, and to accept the consequence of this solidarity in the belief—the *joyful* belief—that in this way God is still at work in the world, making a conquest of its sin and suffering from within.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Kwok Pui-Lan, “Mission,” in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty. M. Russell & J. Shannon Clarkson, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 185-186. Pui-Lan claims that it has been understood as the sending of missionaries to make disciples according to the so-called Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20). A church-centered understanding of mission as planting churches and saving souls has been criticized as reinforcing the cultural supremacy of the West and is closely intertwined with colonial expansion.

⁵¹ McNeal, *Present Future*, 12-13.

⁵² Kwok Pui-Lan, *Definition*, 185-196.

⁵³ John Buchanan, “Becoming the Salt and the Light,” in *Renewing the Vision*, ed. Cynthia M. Campbell (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2000), 88.

⁵⁴ Hall, *Suffering*, 131, 141, 145.

Where Does Christian Mission Begin?

In the N. T., the saving power of the gospel comes to us from below, rather than from above. The Messianic movement described in the N. T. was a minority movement which originated on the periphery of Judaism.⁵⁵ Wesley said, “If religion is to be the response to the action of God, it must begin where God begins, among the poor, the despised, the oppressed, and the marginalized.”⁵⁶

c) The Essence/Content of the Christian Mission:

Defending the Poor (End Poverty and Homelessness)

The whole mission of Jesus Christ is defending the poor. The way of Jesus for the poor isn’t just a welfare program; it calls for a change of heart, a revolution of the spirit, a transformation of consciousness and ending poverty and homelessness.⁵⁷

Meeks presents John Wesley’s model of contextually relevant mission, “Wesley’s ministry with the poor included feeding, clothing, housing the poor; preparing the unemployed for work and finding them employment; visiting the poor sick and prisoners; devising new forms of health care education and delivery for the indigent; distributing books to the needy; and raising structural questions about an economy that produces poverty. To be in Christ, for him, meant to take the form of Christ’s own life for and with the poor.”⁵⁸ Francis of Assisi took that step himself. Eventually he founded a religious order dedicated to caring for the poor and sick. In the growing cities of Italy, Francis shared the gospel with ordinary people, even as he shared their poverty.⁵⁹

Doing Evangelism

Many churches will claim that evangelism is their core mission. However, they seem to focus on saving souls and emphasize one commissioning statement of Matt. 28:19-20 and limit their mission to overseas evangelism. Therefore, several commissioning statements must be looked at:

Matthew 28:19-20 “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, and *teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you*. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 1:8: “You will be my *witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

Luke 24:47: “*Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*” [*Emphasis mine.*]

⁵⁵ Driver, *The Kingdom*, 200, 204.

⁵⁶ Jennings, *Wesley*, 20.

⁵⁷ Wallis, *The Souls*, 178, 181.

⁵⁸ M. Douglas Meeks, “On Reading Wesley with the Poor,” in *the Portion of the Poor*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 9, 10, 14.

⁵⁹ Schlabach, *Neighbor*, 46.

Many churches interpret “make disciples,” “witness” or “repentance” only spiritually and offer discipleship training to achieve spiritual salvation of personal souls. Many churches just focus on *to the end of the earth* and send missionaries and funds to overseas and ignore the local poor. The above three commissioning statements: to “witness, repentance, forgiveness, disciples, teaching Jesus’ command,” all involve more than just the personal salvation of souls. “Beginning from Jerusalem, through Judea and Samaria,” clearly advises where the mission begins, begin locally and spread to the end of the earth. The commissioning statements are not advising to jump over our own cities and go to overseas ignoring local needs for food, housing and gospel.

Many Christians also seem to be confused as if evangelism and mission are two different things. Evangelism is saving souls and we must do it but mission is a worldly affair; social service or political actions that have nothing to do with the church or, at least, shouldn’t be the priority of the Church mission. However, many scholars challenge such a notion. Maynard Reid is one of them:

The Greek words behind this concept of evangelism are derived from the noun *evangelion* (good news, gospel) and its verbal cognate, *evangelizo/evangelizomai* (I proclaim good news). These terms occur twenty-five times in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), with the basic meaning of carrying or bringing good news. In the New Testament, these words are used over 130 times. The verb forms used in the Gospels refer to the earthly ministry and activity of Jesus, proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom. This is unique to the pre-resurrection ministry of Jesus.⁶⁰

Bakke understands that evangelism is the good news of the gospel about Jesus, which we proclaim by our words and our actions. The content of evangelism is who Jesus is, what he did, and what he continues to do.⁶¹

Luke’s wholistic evangelism affirms, embraces, and gives hope to the weak and lowly; the poor, slaves, lepers, women, and children, Gentiles, Samaritans and the toll-collectors who are empowered to see themselves in a new light. After their encounter with Jesus, they are transformed into people who know them to be God’s children.⁶²

It would be unthinkable that Jesus should have preached but not healed; or that he should have fed the multitude but given no indication of where the Bread of Life might be found. The two are inseparable. Jesus Christ never meant the evangelistic task to be only an inner personal matter without a social component. True reform movement throughout the Christian era has recognized that there is an intimate connection between the social and spiritual aspects of Christian outreach.⁶³

⁶⁰ Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*, 60.

⁶¹ Ray Bakke, *The Urban Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1987), 146. In the minds of Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin, European Christendom needed to be “reformed,” but not “evangelized.” Mission consciousness came later to Protestants and Evangelicals, and when the time came, mission was done in the Reformation heritage of *sola gratia and sola fide*. Mission and evangelization have essentially been understood to be a matter preaching the gospel. Neal Blough, “Messianic Mission and Ethics: Discipleship and Good News,” in *The Transfiguration of Mission*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 178.

⁶² Maynard-Reid, *Evangelism*, 79.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 63, 159.

Evangelism and mission have a companion: They must be accompanied by a struggle for justice and righteousness. God destroyed the Old Testament cities because they oppressed the poor and failed to protect widows and orphans. We must keep the urban poor high on our priorities. The poor are no less sinners than the rich, but they have also been sinned against. They are the victims of other people's sins and injustices. Evangelism and mission belong together like two blades of a pair of scissors or two wings of a bird. Christians who are still debating these priorities often miss the point that social action is not done in order to communicate the gospel but as a sign of evidence that the gospel has already been received and acted upon. Social ministry is the loving service of Christians set free by the risen LORD from sins and bondage.⁶⁴

For Wesley, "God justifies the ungodly by faith alone, without any goodness or righteousness preceding. The teaching of Paul means there is no righteousness *before* faith, but not that there is no righteousness *after* it. Holiness cannot *precede* purification; but not that it need not *follow* it."⁶⁵

"The aim or goal of justification is the production of justice; just person, just societies, a just earth. God does not speak of justification while leaving us in our sins or speak of resurrection of the dead that left us in our graves. We cannot become more like God by withdrawing ourselves from the world that God created, from the poor and despised whom God in Christ befriended."⁶⁶

Evangelism and mission are not two different things as much as our faith and action are not two separate things. They are one. Jesus did not separate the two. He did both. Therefore, inclusive evangelism must be the core of church mission.

While I was serving the homeless people I learned that letting go especially homeless women with young children into the streets after worship service meant that we were saying, "We fed you spiritually and so now you may go out to freeze or starve to death." I couldn't do it. I had to do both; spiritual and physical feeding and find housing for them.

It is understandable for someone to say "*I don't know how to do both*" but it is not acceptable when someone treats the social dimension of evangelism as an "*optional*."

Making Disciples

"Discipleship means journeying with Jesus, being on the road with him. It means to be an itinerant, a sojourner; to have nowhere to lay one's head, no permanent resting place. Discipleship means eating at his table and experiencing his banquet. That banquet is an inclusive banquet, including those we tend to exclude. It means being nourished by him and fed by him. Journeying with Jesus also means to become part of the alternative community of Jesus. Discipleship involves becoming compassionate into the likeness of Christ."⁶⁷

For Hall, "Discipleship is taking up our cross. It means to lose ourselves, to become sufficiently nonchalant about our personal condition to see the others with their needs,

⁶⁴ Bakke, *Urban Christian*, 75.

⁶⁵ Watson, *Proclaiming Christ*, 121.

⁶⁶ Jennings Jr., *Wesley*, 32-33.

⁶⁷ Borg, *Meeting Jesus*, 135-136.

our neighbors. It means participation in the suffering of Christ *for the world*. As Bonhoeffer instructed, it is costly. ‘When Christ calls a man,’ wrote Bonhoeffer, ‘he bids him come and die.’ This caused Luther to see Christ in the needy neighbor.”⁶⁸

The Catholic bishops have declared, “Following the way of Jesus and to be his disciples, means to put one’s feet in the footsteps of Jesus. Since peace and justice are among the most powerful signs of the reign of God present in this world, it belongs to the essential mission of the church to make these realities more visible in our time, so marked by oppression, violence, injustice, and threat of total destruction.” The bishops declared, “Peacemaking is not an optional commitment. It is a requirement of our faith.”⁶⁹

For McAfee Brown, “To know God is not (necessarily) to go to mass every Sunday. It is not (necessarily) to know the Apostle’s Creed or be able to make a perfect act of contrition. One can do all those things and still not know God. Rather, to know God is ‘to achieve justice for the poor.’ As Jose Miriranda, a Mexican biblical scholar puts it, ‘Yahweh is known only in the human act of achieving justice and compassion for the neighbor.’”⁷⁰

Moving from Grace to Action

Many Christians believe God’s grace is given to us freely to meet our selfish personal needs or to keep in our hearts. Blount stresses: “We want so badly for Christianity to make us feel good. Grace like syrup; we want it warm and gooey and sticky, so that it not only makes us feel good when we see it and feel it on the outside, it makes us feel spiritually good, in God’s good graces, on the inside. But to seek a Christianity that makes us feel good is to miss the powerful reality of what was happening to Jesus. And if we miss that, we also miss something special about ourselves. Jesus was hanging up there on that cross because his faith wasn’t feel-good faith but a do-good and a be-good faith.”⁷¹

Because God has been gracious to us, graciousness then is to characterize our relationships with others. We are to carry out with others the pattern of God’s action for us. Karl Barth states, “Grace demands that we do in our own circle that which God does by Christ.” Our circle includes intimate relationships and persons needing to hear of Christ’s redeeming love. Yet we cannot exclude our extended social and political relationships and responsibilities, including those social forces which so frequently oppress. We are to act out what God has done, in the context of our own lives. In the Law of Moses, (God’s policy) God’s act of grace in the deliverance from Egypt is frequently invoked as the basis for commands to do justice to socially and emotionally weak, “You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; remember that you were a slave in Egypt” (Deut. 24:17-18).⁷²

Overcoming Sin has been the essence of Christian mission because many Christians

⁶⁸ Hall, *Suffering*, 128-139.

⁶⁹ Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 77.

⁷⁰ McAfee Brown, *News*, 68

⁷¹ Blount, *Run the Risk*, 112

⁷² Mott, *Biblical Ethics*, 29-30.

interpret 'sin' spiritually only. But for Chopp, "Sin is both depravation, and the destruction of the basic conditions for life. A discourse of sin must lament the brokenness, the death, and the impoverishment of the human condition amidst present forms of oppression. But any discourse of sin must try to uncover the conditions, interests and forms of false knowledge and power that creates such destruction through systems of injustice. A discourse of sin is in itself a resistance to injustice."⁷³

Henderson names the systemic sins:

In the quest for progress, we have created cities without community, communities without neighborhoods, and 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. Victims of sin, not by their own choice, but by their helplessness of time and place and circumstance. These victims 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)⁷⁴

Christ died for our sins. Only a fraction of our sins are personal. By far the greater part are sins of neglect, sins of default, our social sin, our systemic sin, our economic sin. For these sins Christ died and continues to die. For these sins Christ atoned, and continues to atone.⁷⁵ Therefore, mission must include challenging personal as well as systemic sins.

Challenging Idolatry

must be an essence of Christian mission. Historically, Israel and many other nations were led to ruin due to their worship of idols: Gustavo Gutierrez states:

Idolatry is the acceptance of false gods and we have three practices of idolatry: Trust and submission to something not God, ranking that which is made with human hands above humans themselves, and demanding the sacrifice of human victims. Therefore, idolatry is the destruction of relations through seeking to secure and establish identity through practices that dehumanize and objectify other human beings, demanding their ongoing sacrifice to the false gods of sovereignty and consumption. Thus, overcoming idolatry is recovering our relationship with God and neighbors.⁷⁶

Henderson names American corporate idolatries: *nationalism*, *militarism*, *capitalism*, *sexism*, *racism*, and *classism*.⁷⁷ The American flag in the sanctuary along with a church flag would be an example of our nationalism we have brought into the sanctuary.

The biblical traditions make plain that all possessing has a proclivity toward idolatry. An idol is a possession we trust to give us life and power, something we authorize by our possession. It is possessed by us to do our bidding. The worship of an idol causes us to take on the character and attributes of the idol and in the end makes us do the bidding that has become reified in the idol. *The mystery of idolatry is that persons reflect what they*

⁷³ Chopp, *The Anointed*, 105.

⁷⁴ Henderson, *Subversive Jesus*, 56.

⁷⁵ Watson, *Proclaiming Christ*, 122.

⁷⁶ Chopp, *The Anointed*, 109.

⁷⁷ Henderson, *Subversive Jesus*, 57.

possess.⁷⁸[*Emphasis mine.*] Overcoming idolatry must become an essence of our mission in this day and age when we worship so many idols instead of God.

Reaching Out to the Postmodern Population.

Mission must embrace postmodern people who are alienated because the traditional approach of the Christian Church doesn't seem to reach them. Mainline churches are shrinking and we have lost too many of the postmodern population. Therefore, understanding and reaching out to them must be a significant part of our mission.

Postmodernity's roots begin in modernity. The modern age lasted exactly 200 years—from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Essentially, postmodernity is a reaction to modernity. The only agreed upon element is that postmodernism is a negation of modernism. Modernity once proudly boasted of changing the world and solving all human ills through technological advancement and human progress. Now that dream is seen to be all illusion. Technology and progress have not only failed to solve all human dilemmas but have actually contributed to human suffering as evidenced in such cases as the threat of nuclear annihilation and the destruction of the ozone.⁷⁹

Kenneth Gergen probes this postmodern dilemma in his book *The Saturated Self*, concluding that no one really knows who he or she is: therefore, assume any identity.⁸⁰ Postmodern times favor short-term commitment. “Instead of long term commitment, the postmodern self just moves onto the next game, to the next show, to the next relationship,” comment Middleton and Walsh. “This is the nomadic self, on the road with the carnival.”

In a postmodern society multiple standards of morality may apply and situation ethics prevail. Any challenge to certain moral issue like sexual infidelity, recreational drug use, coarse language, or the accumulation of personal wealth can be met with, “So what's the big deal?” Postmodern people are more likely to be spontaneous in their decision making, often ignoring the consequence of their choices; they won't hesitate to make a choice inconsistent with a prescribed set of values.⁸¹

Veith declares, “The modern economy sees people as producers. The postmodern economy sees them as consumers.” Postmodernity comes with a generation that has grown up in broken homes, been lied to by politicians, and deceived by the Church and community leaders. The church makes bold claims but rarely delivers on its own message of love, reconciliation, and compassion⁸²

In the postmodern minds, it is a spiritualism that starts with an affirmation of the basic goodness of humanity. Redemption in postmodernism is about loving others and serving others. Righteousness is getting relationships right with other people. A relationship with God is assumed (a real challenge to evangelism strategies that rely on convincing people

⁷⁸ Watson, *Proclaiming Christ*, 117.

⁷⁹ Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 26-27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 41-42.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 59, 55.

they are separated from God in order to begin a conversion). The cross is a symbol of brokenness. Brokenness is what unites people in the postmodern world. It is the common ground. The postmodern definition of sin is stunted life and stunted potential, a sense of corporate guilt that the world is not the loving place it should be. There is little tolerance for institutional-band religion that focuses more on its own support and survival than on helping people.⁸³

To many postmodern people *the church represents one of the largest and most self-serving institutions in the history of the world.* [Emphasis mine.] The Church's perceived self-preoccupation will be interpreted as a failure of the Christian faith. As local churches fail to overcome these suspicions, people will simply walk away. People are no longer confined to denominational boundaries, geographical distances, or even theological constraints in finding a place of worship to fit them. They'll go where they feel comfortable; loyalty is definitely a thing of the past.⁸⁴

G.K. Chesterton warned, "When people cease believing in God, it's not that they believe in nothing, but they'll believe in anything. Postmodernists are unwilling to allow the human intellect to serve as the sole determiner of what we should believe."⁸⁵

Postmodernism is at heart a spiritual movement (don't hear "Christian" movement). It is a search for meaning. It is the alternative to the nihilism that so many people predicted to be the next phase of Western thought. It intensely refuses a sacred-secular dichotomous view of life. Everything is sacred; nothing is sacred—both are expressed in postmodern thought. Many people outside the church are more spiritually passionate and enthusiastic about God than many church members. Paul learned that superior living and superior loving were the best approach to engaging the culture with the attractiveness of the gospel. Paul came to understand that a vibrant relationship with Jesus would be an attractive way to live and would intrigue people about how they could find the same kind of life.⁸⁶

Public Policy Advocacy must be included as an Essence of the Church Mission.

We hear quite often Christians say, "politics and the Gospel don't mix" or "faith has nothing to do with politics." Many also claim that politics is about secular matters, the ways of the world, and faith is about the sacred, the salvation of our souls. The church should stay out of politics because the two deal in different realms. Government welfare and poverty programs, for instance, are not the concern of the church. Our commitment to the poor should be expressed in deeds of private charity and through humanitarian groups.

Watkins states, "Politics is simply the way that people relate to one another in order to accomplish something. All of us know how to relate to others in order to get something done. There are politics in our families, school, neighborhoods, and church. Political skills are interpersonal skills. What most people call politics is really the public policy process. The public policy process places politics and power in the public arena. The public policy process is the way that society sets community norms, often through legislation."⁸⁷

⁸³ McNeal, *Present Future*, 58.

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Consider Jesus*, 37.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

⁸⁶ McNeal, *Present Future*, 60-61.

⁸⁷ Jim Watkins, *Making a Difference in the Public Arena* (Louisville: Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. 1993), 5.

To be political is to make decisions, to assign roles, and to distribute powers. Politics affirms a recognition that we deal with matters of power, of rank and of money, and of costly decisions. The difference between church and state or between a faithful and an unfaithful church is not that one is political and the other not, but that they are political in different ways.⁸⁸

Lutheran Public Policy Office of Washington State defines advocacy:

An advocate is one who pleads on another's behalf; one who argues for a cause; one summoned to give evidence. *Advocacy* is using what God has given us to help our neighbors in need. It includes direct actions of charity and justice as well as intentional activity which help builds a more just society. There is a sacramental connection that comes with the Latin root meaning of *ad-vocare* (*ad*-meaning-*to*, *vocare*-meaning-*call*). Another English word we get from this Latin root is *vocation* or our *calling* in life. An advocate is called just as a Christian is called by God.⁸⁹

Human need is often caused by injustice; charity becomes necessary because the public order leads to inequalities and exploitation. Poverty is, in part, a problem of social injustice, and if we change institutions that create or sustain it, we will remove much of the need for charity. For instance, the impersonal workings of the economic system cause undeserved deprivation that can be corrected through governmental policies; long-standing patterns of racial discrimination still leave us with institutional causes of poverty; deep cultural biases disparage minorities and women in ways that might be changed in part through concerted educational programs.⁹⁰

Howard Moody once said that a city is dying when it has an eye for real estate values but has lost its heart for personal value, when it has an understanding of traffic flow but little concern about the flow of human beings, when we have increasing competence in buildings, but less and less time for housing and ethical codes, when human values are absent at the heart of a city's decision making, planning and the execution of its plans in the process.

However, because many Christians believe that the church and state must be separated they are reluctant to participate in public policy advocacy. An African American and constitutional lawyer, who is also a Yale law professor, Stephen Carter, claims that "the American doctrine of the separation of church and state forbids the establishment of any religion *by the states* [*Emphasis mine.*] but not the influence of religious values in the public square." Along with others, such as historian Garry Willis, Carter suggests that "religious faith has always helped shape American politics and that such influence can serve very positive as well as terribly negative ends."⁹¹

Watkins clearly explains why the Church must be involved in public policy advocacy:

⁸⁸ John Howard Yoder, in Introduction, *Body Politics* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1992), ix.

⁸⁹ Brochure of the Washington Lutheran Public Policy Office.

⁹⁰ "Charity and Social Justice," in *Faith and Public Issues: Protestants for the Common Good* (Chicago, 1997), 2. Alexander E. Sharp, Executive Director. 77 West Washington St. Suite 1124, Chicago, IL. 60602. Tel: (312) 223-9544. Fax: (312) 223-9540. www.thecommongood.org

⁹¹ Wallis, *The Souls*, 38.

Persons of faith are involved in the public arena because politics has a place in: 1) Scripture, reformed theology and ministry. Scripture gives examples of persons of faith being involved in the public arena: Moses stood before Pharaoh asking that the public policy of Egypt be changed, so that the children of Israel would be free. Jesus gathered the nations and asked that their priorities be set so that the “least of these” would be cared for. 2) Reformed theology teaches that because a sovereign God is at work in all the world, the church and Christian citizens should be concerned about forming public policy. The state is a gift of God, given to ensure order, well-being, and peace. To Calvin, “Civil majesty is a calling not only holy and legitimate, but by far the most sacred and honorable in human life.” The ultimate allegiance of Christians and the Church is to God. If any government requires us to violate our obligation to God, Christians should remain loyal to God. 3) The practice of ministry leads us into the public arena. As we help people in need, we often find that social systems have to be changed. Social systems are changed through public policy decisions that lead to legislation that orders society.⁹²

The Common Good defines the purpose of political decisions, “It refers to the ways the community promotes the well-being of all individuals through protecting liberty and free association, producing and distributing economic benefits, offering education, enriching the cultural heritage, and providing for political participation. As Christians, we affirm that politics should seek to maximize the common good that is equally available to all. Laws and policies are just when they promote our common life as something that both enriches and is enriched by the flourishing of each individual.”⁹³

Miller introduces what socially responsible ministry involves, to be found in the report of a seminar held at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC, 1987:

1) Socially Responsible Ministry involves a “radical critique” of society, depending in part on careful listening to the oppressed. 2) Socially Responsible Ministry is a liberating ministry that emerges concretely out of the oppressed community. 3) Socially Responsible Ministry requires social analysis. It demands personal, institutional, and ecclesial self-critique. It is not the same focusing on social issues. 4) Socially Responsible Ministry features struggle for liberation of the oppressed. 5) Socially Responsible Ministry follows the logic of *missio dei*, the mission of God, in its wholeness, and participates in the unified mission of the church. 6) Socially Responsible Ministry is oriented to doing justice, making peace, and caring for creation. It requires walking with the oppressed in shared ministry and in working for social policy change. It affirms the communal nature of human existence and is expressed in all basic functions of the church. 7) Socially Responsible Ministry requires “solidarity” – loyalty to disregarded people, not ideological causes. It is rooted in spirituality and love, guided by the vision of shalom. It requires critical analysis and institutional reform.⁹⁴

Harper relates the socially responsible ministry to justice issue:

Changing policies, structures, and behaviors that are at the root of injustice is the focus of systemic justice. Efforts to change the large-scale systems that have great influence on the lives of persons and groups involve the conscious use of political and economic power. The emphasis is on distributive equity, and empowering groups of people to take charge of their

⁹² Watkins, *Making Difference*, 3-4.

⁹³ “The Common Good”, in *Faith and Public Issues: Protestants for the Common Good* (Chicago, 1997), 1.

⁹⁴ Miller, *Social Ministry*, 31.

own lives. At this level, consciousness shifts from being a victim to becoming a participant in shaping society in a more humane fashion. In a religious frame of reference, love operating as justice at the societal level helps to unveil the pretensions and social fictions by which injustice is maintained. Justice is understood to move beyond the purely personal realm into the institutional realm where people power can be mobilized over against entrenched institutional power. Therefore, social justice focuses on basic cause of oppression, inequity, and disenfranchisement. It seeks to change public policy and public priorities. It works to empower people to take initiatives in ways that are positive and constructive. Therefore, systemic justice by its nature involve political action, mobilizing voting power, creating common interest alliances, and building cooperative collations.⁹⁵

We can teach understanding and fairness. We can pay and demand decent wages. We can vote for economic policies that express ethical concern for the interests of all parties involved. We can stay aware and oppose unfair employment practices, wages, or discriminatory treatment of any kind. We can reject social class attitudes and cultivate attitudes of compassion and caring. Whenever possible, we can help poor people help themselves. We can say on guard against paternalism and seek ways of actively identifying with those who need our help. In short, we can be, and ought to be, advocates for the poor.⁹⁶ We are part of the problem and must be the part of the solution too.

Theology leads inevitably (if it is *true* theology—*vere theologia!*) to ethics, the gospel to the law, the indicative to the imperative. Encountering the crucified Christ (as Peter is supposed to have done on his way *out* of burning Rome!) must mean wrestling with decisions about the *actual* suffering we encounter in our world. What is to be accepted, what can and must be changed? Where is transformation possible? . . . The call of the gospel to its proclaimers consists in discerning the signs of the times in word and action so that people within the circumstances of their own lives may respond to the impetus of the Holy Spirit and move life in the direction of its glorious destiny in the kingdom of God.⁹⁷

“In the midst of our modern culture, it is important for those of us who would be faithful to Jesus to think and speak of a politics of compassion not only within the church but as a paradigm for shaping the political order. A politics of compassion as the paradigm for shaping our national life would produce a social system different in many ways from that generated by our recent history. A politics of compassion in our time clearly implies universal health care as an immediate goal.⁹⁸

The following is an excerpt of the News Release issued by the National Council of Churches USA on the poverty and racism in America:

As a nation, we must acknowledge that this crisis has only exposed what lies just beneath the surface of prosperity and progress in this country. In America, we have a past that haunts us on every level of our existence. We now see all too clearly that a person's race and class can often determine whether or not you are left behind in the Super Dome or escorted to safety. . . . As we look beyond the President's welcome candor, we must now

⁹⁵ Nile Harper, *Urban Churches* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 300-301.

⁹⁶ Miller, *Social Ministry*, 29.

⁹⁷ Hall, *Suffering*, 119, 120-121.

⁹⁸ Bog, *Meeting Jesus*, 60.

look to our government and to the private sector for a long-term change in behavior that recognizes and corrects the glaring inequities of American society in housing, jobs and wages, health care and education—the list is long and growing. Disaster relief and rescue must go beyond the flooded streets of New Orleans and reach into the desperate lives of the millions in poverty across our land, a disproportionate number of whom are African Americans.⁹⁹

2) Treatment Prescriptions for the Church Mission

The following scholars offer treatment and prescriptions for the Church mission on the basis of diagnosis presented by many scholars. Their diagnoses have to do with economic, political, military and spiritual issues all of which have become part of the root causes of poverty and homelessness that are on the rise on the U.S. soil. Not only have these scholars offered frightening diagnoses but also hopeful treatment prescriptions.

a) McNeal's Prescription—Mission to and in the Local Community

McNeal is very critical of the modern day institutional Church that operates on the modern economic model and exists for the purpose of self-serving, and he raises serious questions as to how can we transform our community. How can we hit the street with the gospel? He claims that we must go to them if they are not coming to us. He is suggesting shifting the target of ministry efforts from church activity to community transformation. He calls this “turning the church inside out.”¹⁰⁰

The church that wants to partner with God on his redemptive mission in the world has to have a very different target: the community. In the past if a church had any resources left over after staffing Sunday School, and so on, then it went to the community. In the future the church that “gets it” will staff to and spend its resources on strategies for community transformation. “Missional congregations follow Jesus out into the streets.” One congregation has launched a community ministry center called “He Cares, We Care.” Teams of volunteers distribute food, help people find employment, offer parenting classes. Another church, instead of selling their old property, they turned their vacated facility into a community services center.¹⁰¹

McNeal urges us to take the church to the streets, the only appropriate missional response to the collapse of the church culture; intentional 24/7 church presence in the community, not tied to church real estate but to office buildings, malls, school campuses, sports complexes, storefronts, homes, apartment buildings, and community centers. This will be the only way we get the gospel out to people who have no intention of coming to church for their spiritual pursuits. We need to go where people are already hanging out and be prepared to have conversations with them about the great love of our lives. This will require our shifting our efforts from growing churches into transforming communities. They are not coming to us. We’ve got to go to them.¹⁰² McNeal contends:

⁹⁹ National Council of Churches News, Leslie Tune, 202-544-2350, ltune@nccusa.org; and Philip E. Jenks, 212-870-2252, pjenks@nccusa.org

¹⁰⁰ McNeal, *Present Future*, 26.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 42. McNeal clarifies that “the death of the church culture as we know it will not be the death of the church. The church Jesus founded is good; it is right. The church established by Jesus will survive until he returns. It is the collapse of the unique culture in North America that has come to be called ‘church.’”

Kingdom theology will force us to reexamine our strategy for penetrating the culture with the presence of the church. In the church age, cultural presence has largely depended on church real estate. People had to come “inside the church” to participate in Christian worship, to observe Christian sacraments, to hear Scripture, to “join” the church. In the emerging future this “come and get it” approach will yield to another strategy. Jesus’ strategy was to go where people were already hanging out. This is why he went to weddings, parties, and religious feast day celebrations. Jesus loved being around people who were having fun. In fact, the Pharisees accused him of being a party animal.¹⁰³

Therefore, when the Church goes out to the street, there they will meet Jesus Christ who is in the midst of hungry homeless folks.

b) Hilfiker’s Prescription

Dr. Hilfiker, M.D. experienced in treating the poor and sick, in Washington D.C., makes proposals to end poverty. Ending poverty is a huge step toward ending homelessness. Here are a few prescriptions out of the many he suggests to knock out some of the root causes that lead people into homelessness.

Prevent or stop gentrification by keeping and building affordable housing so that the poor doesn’t have to be pushed out to worse neighborhoods. The property tax structure can be changed so that low-income homeowners aren’t forced out by climbing tax assessments. . . . Mending the Safety Net: his proposed new program is universal health coverage. People cannot move out of poverty unless health care is provided to all Americans. Health insurance in the United States is currently largely employer-based, although fewer and fewer employers now offer it and still fewer offer fully paid family coverage. With one out of six Americans currently uninsured and the trend away from employer-sponsored coverage, the only reasonable option seems to be some form of national health insurance. . . . The Earned Income Tax Credit, a well-accepted, successful program could be expanded so that no person working more than thirty hours a week would earn less than the poverty level for his or her family.¹⁰⁴

He has some other suggestions such as maintaining Supplemental Security Income for disabled, dismantle racism and ghettoism, mend the Safety Net and higher level of taxation for the rich as the cost of treatment for permanent healing of poverty and homelessness.

c) Korten’s Prescription

Korten’s prescription to make a better society is based on his criticism of capitalism, communism and socialism, “all of which are destructive of life, democracy, and ethical

This church culture has become confused with biblical Christianity, both inside the church and out. In reality, the church culture in North America is a vestige of the original movement, an institutional expression of religion that is in part a civil religion and in part a club where religious people can hang out with other people whose politics, worldview, and lifestyle match theirs.” Ibid. 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰⁴ Hilfiker, *Urban Injustice*, 118, 122-123, 124.

values, essential foundations of a civil or civilized society.”¹⁰⁵ He presents the reason of his critique of those ideologies:

Communism emphasizes community to the exclusion of the individual. Capitalism emphasizes individual to the exclusion of community. Both crucially embrace the materialistic values and measure their performance by material output. Capitalism easily has triumphed and communism has died. Capitalism stepped up its assault on life, equity, and democracy. The living democracy movement, capitalism’s new challenger, measures progress not by increases in the aggregate consumption of the few, but by the quality of life of everyone. It seeks not to capture state power, but rather to reduce and democratize it. It seeks not to eliminate the market, but to restore it. It is driven not by the love of money, but by a love of life. Its defining goal is a civil society.¹⁰⁶

His prescription is also based on his concept of a healthy society which provides all their members, present and future, with the essentials for a healthy, secure, productive, and fulfilling life. There is nothing wrong with additional rewards for those who contribute more, but only if everyone’s basic needs are met, the options of future generations are not impaired, and there are strict limits on the concentration of economic power. In healthy societies, sovereignty resides in people. The purpose of the human economy is to meet human needs—not the needs of money, or of corporations, or of governments.¹⁰⁷

Korten prescribes the following as the better world we can build:

To create such a society, the determined pioneers are creating new political parties and movements, strengthening their communities, deepening their spiritual practice, discovering the joyous liberation of voluntary simplicity, building networks of locally rooted businesses, certifying socially and environmentally responsible products, restoring forests and watersheds, promoting public transportation and defining urban growth boundaries, serving as peacemakers between hostile groups, advancing organic agriculture, practicing holistic health, directing their investments to socially responsible businesses, organizing recycling campaigns, and demanding that trade agreements protect the rights of people and the environment. . . . Our best hope for the future lies with locally owned and managed economies that rely predominantly on local resources to meet the livelihood needs of their members in ways that maintain a balance with the earth. Such a shift in institutional structure and priorities may open the way to eliminating deprivation and extreme inequality from the human experience, instituting true citizen democracy, and releasing presently unrealized potential for individual and collective growth and creativity.¹⁰⁸

Korten prescribes further that “Curing the capitalist cancer in order to restore democracy, the market, and our human rights and freedoms, will require virtually eliminating the institution of the limited-liability for-profit public corporations, as we know them, to create a post-corporate world through actions such as the following:

¹⁰⁵ Korten, *Corporations Rule*, 8-9

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 323.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁰⁸ Korten, *The Post Corporate World*, 3, 7.

- End the legal fiction that corporations are entitled to the rights of persons and exclude corporations from political participation;
- Implement serious political campaign reforms to reduce the influence of money on politics;
- Eliminate corporate welfare by eliminating direct subsidies and recovering other externalized costs through fees and taxes;
- Implement mechanisms to regulate international corporations and finance; and
- Use fiscal and regulatory policy to make financial speculation unprofitable and to give an economic advantage to human-scale, stakeholder-owned enterprises.¹⁰⁹

Korten suggests we wake up, itself a revolutionary act. Political and spiritual awareness are our best immunological defense against invasion by the capitalist cancer.¹¹⁰

d) **Johnson's Prescription**

Johnson responds to our pre-emptive attack on Iraq. He predicts our militarism and economic policies are going to result in four sorrows like every other empire in world history. In fact, the expense of the Iraq war, tax cut, national security, and unprecedented national deficit have resulted in ever-increasing poverty, hunger and homelessness on top of widows, fatherless, and many disabled people as the consequence of the war.

“The sorrows of empire may prove to be the inescapable consequence of the path our elites chose after September 11, 2001. Militarism and imperialism always bring with them sorrows. The ubiquitous symbol of the Christian religion, the cross, is perhaps the world’s most famous reminder of one sorrow that accompanied the Roman Empire. Roman imperial sorrows mounted up over hundreds of years. Ours are likely arriving with the speed of FedEx. If present trends continue, four sorrows are certain to be visited on the United States. . . . “

1) There will be a state of perpetual war, leading to more terrorism against Americans wherever they may be and growing reliance on weapons of mass destruction among smaller nations as they try to ward off the imperial juggernaut. 2) There will be a loss of democracy and constitutional rights as the presidency fully eclipses Congress and is itself transformed from an “executive branch” of government into something more like a Pantagonized presidency. 3) An already well-shredded principle of truthfulness will increasingly be replaced by a system of propaganda, disinformation, and glorification of war, power, and the military legions. 4) There will be bankruptcy, as we pour our economic resources into ever more grandiose military projects and short-change the education, health, and safety of our fellow citizens.¹¹¹

He offers prescription:

The future is as yet unmade. All these trends can be resisted and other—better—futures can certainly be imagined. But it is important to be as clear-eyed as possible about what the present choices and the present path of our imperial leaders portend. There is one development that could conceivably stop this process of overreaching: the people could

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹¹¹ Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, 284-285.

retake control of Congress, reform it along with the corrupt election laws that have made it into a forum for special interests, turn it into a genuine assembly of democratic representatives, and cut off the supply of money to the Pentagon and the secret intelligence agencies. We have a strong civil society that could, in theory, overcome the entrenched interests of the armed forces and the military-industrial complex. At this late date, however, it is difficult to imagine how Congress, much like Roman senate in the last days of the republic, could be brought back to life and cleansed of its endemic corruption. Failing such a reform, Nemesis, the goddess of retribution and vengeance, the punisher of pride and hubris, waits impatiently for her meeting with us.¹¹²

e) The Prescription of the Rich

The following is a rare, fascinating and very hopeful article about what the wealthy people in this country plan to do to end global poverty:

The Initiative for Global Development was founded in 2003 by leaders including Daniel Evans, a former U.S. Senator and governor; William Gates Sr., co-chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and Bill Clapp, chairman of Global Partnerships, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization working to alleviate global poverty through on-the-ground projects. The initiative is considered the advocacy arm of Global Partnerships. Its goal is to recruit business leaders in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and other cities across the country to urge national officials to make alleviating global poverty a high priority. Worldwide, some 1.2 billion people are living in extreme poverty. There are a lot of people who urge the end of poverty, Evans acknowledges. But “the one place that hasn’t been heard from is the business and professional” sector. Today, group leaders are going to Washington, D.C. to meet with officials to enlist their support. And on Feb. 6-7, 2006, the group will hold its first national summit there, chaired by former Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Madeline Albright. Group members will decide what specific actions to take in the next year beyond its four guiding principles: invest in people (through education, health care and economic opportunities); invest in the stability and infrastructure of countries; help make the global market work more equitably; and support private-sector practices that benefit the poor. The initiative began shortly after Sept. 11, 2001. Nothing breeds terrorism faster than absolute, unrelenting poverty where you cannot see way out.”¹¹³

The group appears to focus on global poverty but the model of soliciting business people and politicians can be applied to the solution to the national poverty issue also.

f) Hall’s Prescription

Hall contends that Christianity has arrived at the end of its sojourn as the official, or established, religion of the Western world. The churches resist coming to terms with this ending. But in Christian thinking, endings can also be beginnings. . . . The opportunity that comes to serious Christians at the very point where Christianity seems to be in decline is an opportunity that has seldom presented itself in Christian history, namely, the opportunity actually to become the salt, yeast, and light that the newer Testament speaks

¹¹² Ibid., 284-285, 312.

¹¹³ The Seattle Times, Sunday, November 13, 2005, B2. by Seattle Times staff. William Gates, Sr. is the father of Bill Gate, the wealthiest man in the world. William Gates, Sr. has been an advocate to abolish tax cuts policy.

of as the character of Christ's disciple community. To grasp this opportunity, however, we must relinquish our centuries-old ambition to be the official religion, the dominant religion, of the dominant culture. Ideationally, we must disengage ourselves from our society if we are going to reengage our society at the level of truth, justice, and love.¹¹⁴

Divine providence is offering us another possibility, a new form, indeed a new life. But we may accept this gift of the new only as we relinquish the old to which we are stubbornly clinging. We may reform ourselves according to the new form that is God's possibility for us only as we intentionally relinquish the social status that belongs to our past: the comfortable relationship with governments and ruling classes; the continuous confirmation of accepted social values and mores by means of which we sustain those relationships; the espousal of "charities" that ease our guilty conscience while allowing us to maintain neutrality with respect to the social structure that make such "charities" necessary; the silent acceptance of racial, sexual, gender, and economic injustices, or their trivialization through tokenism; the failure to prove the depths of human and creaturely pathos by confining sin to petty immorality or doctrinal refinements drawn from the past, and so on. . . . If we disengage *ourselves*; if with courage and trust we release our hold on what we have been conditioned to believe was our right, or an immutable form of the church; if, to use a newer Testamental image, we lose our life, ecclesiastically speaking, then we may in fact gain our life as Christ's living body. . . . Christian disengagement from the dominant culture is not to be confused with the abandonment of that culture. The end that we are to seek is the redemption of our world, the world that is truly ours and of which we are ourselves part. Our Lord's metaphors for his community of witness were all of them modest ones: a little salt, a little yeast, a little light. Christendom tried to be great, large, magnificent. It thought *itself* the object of God's expansive grace; it forgot the meaning of its election to *worldly* responsibility.¹¹⁵

g) Harper's Prescription

Harper asserts that urban churches are vital signs for the inner cities: "Vital signs are indicators of life in the body. Urban churches are a significant part of the body of Christ. In the past decades, there has been a redevelopment of strength and energy in a significant number of city-center congregations. While this is not true for majority of urban churches, it is true for a substantial, creative minority. Urban churches are being revitalized and reoriented to new ministries. Neighborhoods are being rebuilt; new housing is being constructed; businesses are being created; and new schools and community-based health care centers are being established. Communities are coming to new life and taking charge of their future."¹¹⁶

Churches located in the heart of many urban centers are one of the most important sources for this renewal of American inner cities. From within the churches, and especially within African-American churches, there has emerged a passionate vision and push for redevelopment of city neighborhoods that is deeply rooted in religious faith and practical wisdom. In many older city-center neighborhoods, the churches are the only local institutions remaining that have credibility and connection to the people living there. Many urban congregations have a history and tradition of compassionate social service ministries

¹¹⁴ Hall, *The Christendom*, 51, 49.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 42-43, 65-66.

¹¹⁶ Harper, *Urban Churches*, 1.

among the poor, the oppressed, and the homeless. The decline, decay, and the deterioration of urban neighborhoods, especially in industrial cities, together with changing economic, political, and cultural circumstances, have contributed to the necessity for this new development. The people most impacted by these changes are organizing to respond creatively.¹¹⁷

The consequence is that due to such an urban development in the city centers, now ninety-percent of the church members live within walking distance of the church. About eighty percent are African American and so is the leadership in the congregation. The people of the neighborhood are now the people of the church. And the church is everywhere present in the neighborhood.¹¹⁸

Harper urges the Church to move beyond charity:

From a Christian theological perspective, charity is rooted in sacrificial love as seen in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In its ultimate meaning, charity is the unconditional love that God freely gives to humankind, as expressed in Jesus Christ. Over the centuries the church has taught that charity is the greatest Christian virtue. However, there are significant limits to what charity can do. Ordinarily, charity deals with personal needs of an immediate nature, and does not deal with the root causes of injustice and human suffering. Sometimes charity can become a barrier to doing the more difficult work of justice. In some churches, there is pride in giving financial support to charitable organizations that serve poor people. Often this is done with little or no thought about its unintended consequences. It may be done without any intention of becoming involved with the people for whom the aid is intended. Sometimes charity is given as a means of intentionally avoiding involvement with people who are different from one's own group of people. Therefore, Harper urges the urban congregations to go beyond acts of charity: They must go beyond the need to feel good about giving. What is most valuable is active partnership between oppressed people seeking to change the conditions of injustice, and other people who are willing to join in a common effort so that equity can be established.¹¹⁹

While we need to do charity through specialized organizations, often there is a strong tendency toward establishing a permanent underclass of alienated, marginalized,

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 1-2. Harper indicated the following vital signs in urban churches: increasingly vigorous and creative worship life taking place in a growing number of city congregations; in city centers where congregations are vital and growing; church members and pastors engaging in community-building in the neighborhoods. Urban churches are places where people of all ages—children, youth, young adults, older adults—can experience acceptance, affirmation, and encouragement, rooted in the unconditional love of God: With this focus on community-building, many churches in city centers are taking leadership in creative ministries of redevelopment: As churches become more and more involved with social justice work, they have also become more politically aware and involved: Urban churches are working in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in much greater numbers with a new spirit of mutual respect and collaboration: Increased community and justice work has led urban congregations to seek out a variety of resources: Many urban church-sponsored community development corporations have been significantly supported in their work to create affordable housing and advance economic development by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation: At the forefront of all this activity is a rising, new generation of urban church pastors who are skilled in organizing, creating partnership, securing financial resources, and generating religious community: A growing number of mainline urban churches are being revitalized by new members from diverse racial or ethnic groups. 3-10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 146.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 298.

apathetic people. It must be acknowledged that social service helps millions of people cope with immediate emergencies, and provides helpful short-term assistance to people struggling with urgent problems. In a complex modern society a social safety net is a real necessity. Its major limitations are that it focuses on aiding people to adjust, adapt, and cope with the existing conditions. It does not challenge root causes of human misery and social injustice. It tends to create dependency and dehumanization and encourages the mentality of victimization. It becomes a central components in the welfare culture. It does not adequately emphasize a sense of responsibility for changing basic conditions.¹²⁰

3) **Prognosis is positive and hopeful**

1) The citizens of the United States are wonderful and caring people individually. 2) There are already many loving and caring Christians, people of other faiths and secular groups who are deeply involved in alleviating poverty and homelessness. 3) Once people realize their participation in public policy advocacy will make a huge difference in ending poverty they will be willing to act. 4) A positive prognosis is witnessed by the Seattle Times article above (The Prescription of the Rich) that reported that the American wealthy have begun to sort out what belongs to whom and return it to them [Brueggemann's term] to end global poverty which also can be a model for the local poverty as well. That is the Jubilee the rich can practice to accumulate treasure in heaven rather than here on earth.

The fruit of such sharing will be shalom. This shalom will represent the first perfect home God created in the book of Genesis and the last perfect home God hopes to restore in Rev. 21-22. "*Oikos* is an ecclesiological key for speaking of the church as the 'household of God,' existing for the sake of God's liberation of the *polis* and the *kosmos* through God's liberation of the poor, the oppressed, the sinners, and the dying. To be no longer 'strangers' but 'members of the household of God' (Eph. 2:19-22; cf. Heb. 10:21) means becoming a part of God's attempt to bring all of God's creatures into God's economy of life.¹²¹

Finally such a mission will bring positive prognosis of the true kingdom growth on earth as reported by the recent study of the Church Growth Strategy Team of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that revealed:

Growing churches share one common characteristic—a commitment to mission in the world. In spite of theological and liturgical diversity, growing mainline churches are extending their love and compassion and concern for justice into the neighborhoods and cities, the nation and the world. Mission is the key. Housing for the homeless, community feeding programs, day care for children—vital churches are in mission. Mission seems to be the healthy, life-giving ingredient. And the opposite is sadly obvious. Declining churches, for one reason or another, are not ordinarily extending themselves into the world but rather are absorbing all their spiritual, emotional, physical and monetary resources in the struggle to survive.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid. 300.

¹²¹ Meeks, *The Economist*, 36.

¹²² Buchanan, *Salt and Light*, 91.