

CHAPTER 6

Proclaiming Christ in All His Offices: Priest, Prophet, and Potentate

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Introduction

It was a bold step in the early 1980s to incorporate a working group on evangelism into the Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. At that time, evangelism, albeit a missional and programmatic emphasis of the church, was still a fledgling discipline of practical theology, acknowledged to some extent by missiologists, but by and large disdained by the established guilds of the religious academy.¹ The progress that has been made in the past ten years, at least from a Methodist perspective, is due in no small measure to these Institutes, which have exemplified a theological diversity and collegiality all too rare in the field of evangelistic studies, and therefore all the more welcome and vital. For this, a profound word of gratitude is owed to the steering committees who have shaped these agendas, and especially the chair persons: Brian E. Beck and M. Douglas Meeks, who represent the transatlantic taproots of our Methodist traditions; and Nora Q. Boots and Bishop Emilio J. M. de Carvalho, who represent the family of Methodism worldwide, a family now very much extended.

The decision to give evangelism a distinctive role in these Institutes was not only bold, but initially quite controversial. At best, it was argued, a focus on mission, and world mission at that, would be more appropriate. Yet the particularity of evangelism has proved at each Institute to have fostered at once an inclusive and a concrete agenda, complementing the theoretical investigations of the more academic disciplines.²

The Role of Evangelistic Studies

There are three additional and pressing reasons for having evangelism as a component of these Institutes.

Theological

The first is that the evangelistic outreach of the church requires serious theological reflection in order to sustain its faithfulness and authenticity. A good illustration of this was provided by the recent General Conference of The United Methodist Church. In one of the legislative committees there was a petition to be considered, advocating the right of military chaplains to carry firearms.³ The petition was rejected, and the policy of the church unanimously affirmed, namely, that chaplains functioning as clergy should not be armed. One observer at the back of the room feigned disappointment at the outcome. "How unfortunate," he remarked. "I was just beginning to see the possibilities for a whole new method of evangelism with side-arms as a last resort!"

The observer was joking, of course. And we might share in the joke, were it not for the fact that the year was 1992, and that sidearms, to say nothing of other manifestations of military force, were by no means a last resort in evangelizing much of the so-called "New World." There were exceptions, as Justo González has reminded us in a poignant and timely article.⁴ But by and large, Christian evangelism in Latin America, and indeed worldwide across the centuries, has relied on every imaginable method of coercion in order to further the kingdom of God and, as often as not, to aggrandize the church. Moreover, it is a much smaller step than it might seem to move from such blatant coercions to the more subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, persuasions and communication techniques of our own day and age. For in either instance, the evangelistic error is weighty: an unwillingness to trust in the power of the gospel to further God's work of salvation in God's own way and, of particular significance for us in an age of instant gratification, in God's own time.

Besides which, and ultimately of far greater importance, whenever human objectives and human strategies substitute for faithful discipleship in implementing the mission of God, be it through evangelism or any other ministry, be it with a view to changing persons or systems, the first and greatest casualty is always the grace of God, the supreme irony being that the very grace of God permits

these aberrations in the first place.⁵ However concerned we might be for the homecoming of the family of God, however energized we might be for the fulfillment of the reign of God, unless we undertake rigorous and ongoing theological reflection as a necessary concomitant of evangelistic outreach, we are likely to get it terribly, terribly wrong.

Historiographical

The second pressing reason for having evangelism as an integral feature of the Oxford Institutes is historiographical. These are gatherings devoted to Methodist theological studies; and historically Methodism has been nothing if not an evangelistic movement and, though more arguably, an evangelistic church. At the 1987 Institute, the working group on evangelism made at least a token visit to some neighboring outreach ministries, so as not to be closeted in an Oxford college for the entire ten days—something that the early Methodists would have found both curious and incongruous: curious, in that a concentration of knowledge and vital piety such as this would have struck them as bound to overflow with good news to share with someone, somehow, some of the time; incongruous, in that the nickname “Methodist” stuck with these Oxford men and their spiritual progeny precisely because their lifestyle ran counter to much of the contemporary Oxford scene, rather than the mixture of awe and enchantment that tends to mark our collective sojourn in Oxford. Historiographical links with our forebears might well remind us, most especially, when our attentions are focused on the poor, that Methodist theological studies, properly so-called, can never be purely, nor even primarily, an academic exercise.

Contextual

The third reason is more contextual. It is generally agreed that we are at a critical moment in human history, occasioned in part by the warfare and genocide of this century, in part by the present political uncertainty and economic disparity of the planet, but also, in larger measure than has yet been acknowledged, by the quantum leap in self-awareness galvanized by the vista of an unexplored universe and the photographed modesty of our place in it. The question is, will the church recognize this as one of God’s *kairoi*—what George Hunter has described as “a rising opportunity more vast than anything the Church dared pray for”?⁶

Inasmuch as the gospel is the distinctive face we present to the world, it will be the substance and the form of our evangelism that determines the answer to this question. For the church has no monopoly on goodness, no monopoly on justice, no monopoly on faith, hope, or love, and most assuredly no monopoly on grace. The only thing unique about the church is the gospel. We alone can announce to the world with assurance and authority that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. As for the rest of our life and mission, we would do well to accept with global good manners that God has many other servants, and that we accordingly have many other colleagues whose expectations are likewise those of God's *shalom*. Our particular privilege is to know the One who will preside over this universal reign of justice, love, and peace. Our particular responsibility is to let the world know, as clearly and as often as we can, what is God's ultimate design for this corner of creation. As M. Douglas Meeks has reminded us:

Things are changing in the Methodist household. . . . In the midst of the change we should be aware that God is a strange housebuilder of a strange house. It is a resurrection household that God is struggling to build, a household in which we shall all be able to dance, without our inhibitions and our stiff joints. But God will call the tune. In the resurrection household all the household rules get changed.⁷

The Methodist traditions offer us distinct advantages in forging such an evangelism. In the first place, John Wesley himself was an evangelist *par excellence*, not only in his understanding of God's universal grace, not only in his driving concern to reach as many as possible with the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, but also in his meticulous grounding of the gospel in the scriptures and teachings of the church. Then there are the countless men and women through whom Methodism impacted both sides of the Atlantic, not so much in Wesley's lifetime as in the nineteenth century, when ecclesial identity brought numerical growth, and resultant evangelistic tensions from which we still have much to learn. Added to which there is now the world Methodist family of churches, whose urgent task in the coming years must be to watch over their parent churches in love.

Preliminary Disencumbrances

Before proceeding to the substance of this evangelism, however, it will be important to relieve the word of a number of theological and ecclesial encumbrances which for long enough have handicapped its function as a ministry of the church.

Evangelism and Church Membership

First, it is imperative that we distinguish clearly between evangelism and church membership recruitment. We are now beyond the stage of conceptual or semantic argument; the issues are profoundly soteriological and eschatological.⁸ The false triumphalisms and unnecessary defeatisms that result when this distinction is not made are a major pastoral and missional impediment, yet this is how we continue to evaluate much of our evangelism. Significantly, laity are much less inclined than clergy to adopt such an inappropriate criterion for the life and mission of their congregations.

This is not to deny the importance of church membership in relation to evangelism. Indeed, in non-Christian cultures it is the immediate corollary of evangelism, and in the post-Christendom cultures of the Western world, membership recruitment remains a vital and distinctive ministry of the church in its own right. Moreover, as William J. Abraham has cogently argued, not to link evangelism with the nurture and instruction of Christian catechesis is tantamount to soteriological and eschatological irresponsibility.⁹ The point, however, is not the ordering of priorities, but distinction and clarity of purpose. For when the ministry of evangelism is not sufficiently distinguished from issues of church membership, the outcome is not only pastoral ecclesiocentrism, but the neglect of much evangelism that is scripturally mandated.

Evangelism and Evangelicalism

Another present encumbrance is that evangelism carries more than its fair share of the polemics associated with what has broadly come to be known as the evangelical agenda of the church. This is not the place to rehearse longstanding theological disputes, not least because few of the old labels remain serviceable. Liberalism, mainline Protestantism, fundamentalism, and even evangelicalism, have become far more diverse than their original connotations, to say nothing of the wealth of liberation and contextual theologies now

enriching the world church.¹⁰ Yet the basic issues between evangelicals and non-evangelicals are still deep. They concern a wide range of theological, biblical, historical, ethical, and pastoral faith and practice. Even if they are rarely made explicit, they are quickly apparent at any representative ecclesial gathering.¹¹

It is in the area of evangelism, however, that they presently seem to be focused, indeed, one might go so far as to say unloaded. The result is that, in much of the Methodist family of churches, evangelism has become a partisan ministry. While not denying the relevance and necessity of working through these theological issues, it is time to spread the load more fairly, and not to identify them so heavily with this particular ministry. If we are to forge an evangelism that is responsive to God's *kairos*, those who lead us in its practice must allow God's Spirit to move freely through honest and collegial Christian dialogue without drawing sectarian lines of defense around particular ecclesiologies, particular eschatologies, particular soteriologies, and above all, particular spiritual gifts and faith experiences.

The Cart Before the Horse

Most especially is this collegiality important in that the pressing need today in evangelism is for a reclarification of the gospel; and this means taking the time for full and weighty biblical and theological reflection. Contextual resources we have in abundance. Indeed, therein lies a major problem: it is a perennial failing of evangelists to put the cart before the horse. Instead of focusing on the pristine task of telling the world what we have been told, we seek to actualize predetermined results. The New Testament is very clear that while there is a sense in which fields can be "ripe for harvesting" (John 4:35), there is also a sense in which premature harvesting is eschatologically presumptuous and soteriologically disruptive (Matt 13:24-30). Yet the premise of so many of our evangelistic models and strategies is to begin with the desired results, and then work backwards to find the most effective methods for their realization. At a personal level, the objective is usually conversion, with a signal disregard of the scriptural admonitions concerning the divine prerogatives of grace. At a systemic level, the mysteries of God's long, slow victory in Christ are often subsumed by perceived exigencies of quickened social change.

The Offices of Christ

So to the title of this essay, which is borrowed in part from an essay by Douglas W. Waruta in a very stimulating volume, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*.¹² The writers in this collection look at Jesus from various African perspectives, thereby reminding us, especially those of us in the West, that the multiple countenance of Jesus is at once the universality and particularity of an incarnational gospel. The essays view him as healer, as master of initiation, as liberator, chief, ancestor, and elder brother. Six women find in him their strength, their protector from evil, the revealer of their true identity, their model, helper, and teacher, their closest friend, and the core of their life. The essays are grace-filled and vibrant. As Waruta puts it:

Other people may say a thousand things as to who Jesus is; it will never suffice, however, for the disciples of Christ to mimic the confessions of others, no matter how valid.¹³

Even so, the threefold designation of priest, prophet, and potentate will be well known to all who are versed in Christian tradition, save perhaps the title of "potentate" which, with an African sense of humor as well as context, Douglas Waruta takes from the King James version of 1 Timothy 6:15. The NRSV places us on more familiar ground: "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords."

The Work of Christ

Waruta argues on the one hand that these Christological designations sit well with African history and culture, but on the other hand that "the Western wing of the church, while acknowledging the threefold office, has also tended to dwell too much on the person of Christ rather than the work of Christ."¹⁴ This is of course something our colleagues from Latin America have been telling us for quite some time, but which evangelists in the Western church have been very slow to grasp. Indeed, rather than focus on the work of Christ as the necessary complement to his person, we have tended to consign this aspect of the gospel to our pastoral colleagues, thus causing a persistent divide between evangelism and much of the servant work of the church, to the mutual impoverishment of a great many ministries. As Mortimer Arias has recently argued, at the center of our mission is an incarnational Christology, involving both the

person and the work of Jesus.¹⁵ Both are evangelistic no less than pastoral imperatives, and a proper tension between the two must be at the heart of any theological quest to tradition the gospel for our time.

Law and Grace: Faith and Works

Significantly, this is also the emphasis in a series of sermons by John Wesley where we find the same three-fold designation for Jesus. The sermons were published in the early 1750s, and focus on the relatedness of law and grace, of faith and works.¹⁶ The law may seem an unusual *locus* for an evangelistic investigation, but in fact these sermons point us in precisely the direction we need to take today. The tension between faith and works had become an issue for Wesley very soon after Aldersgate Street, and while his concern to preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone remained central, and while, as Albert Outler notes, "the most patent danger in Wesley's delicate balancing of faith alone and holy living was its possible tilt towards moralism," by the time he penned these essays, "the opposite extreme, antinomianism, was already a clear and present danger among Methodists."¹⁷ The key passage comes in the third sermon, "The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse II":

It is our part thus to 'preach Christ' by preaching all things whatsoever he hath revealed. We may indeed, without blame, yea, and with a particular blessing from God, declare the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may speak in a more especial manner of 'the Lord our righteousness'. We may expatiate upon the grace 'of God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself'. We may, at proper opportunities, dwell upon his praise, as bearing 'the iniquities of us all', as 'wounded for our transgressions' and 'bruised for our iniquities', that 'by his stripes we might be healed'. But still we should not 'preach Christ' according to his word if we were wholly to confine ourselves to this. We are not ourselves clear before God unless we proclaim him in all his offices . . . not only as our great 'High Priest' . . . reconciling us to God by his blood', and 'ever living to make intercession for us'; but likewise as the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom', who . . . 'is with us always, guiding us into all truth'; yea, and as remaining a King for ever, as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood . . . until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and 'brought in everlasting righteousness.'¹⁸

Christ as Priest Only

The evangelistic significance of this passage, and of the three sermons as a whole, is that in the prevailing mode of our evangelism today we do not proclaim Christ in all his offices, but predominantly, indeed, often exclusively, as priest. Thus, as we have noted, the prophetic and sovereign offices are viewed as belonging to other areas of mission and ministry—areas that can always be taken care of later once a person has been brought to repentance and conversion. This, however, is a very questionable assumption. To proclaim Christ only as priest is to adopt a very truncated gospel; and the danger of evangelizing with a truncated gospel is that the Christ who is presented evangelistically is very likely to be the Christ who shapes the remainder of a person's Christian life. First impressions count for a very great deal, and when persons are introduced to Christian discipleship primarily through its benefits, it is difficult, markedly difficult, to introduce them to its obligations at a later date.

The "Main Pillar" of Antinomianism

The word for this has a long history in the church, and Wesley confronts it directly in these sermons. Arguing against the concept that faith supersedes holiness,¹⁹ he identifies the "main pillar" of antinomianism:

Nay, but does not St. Paul expressly say, "Unto him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"? And does it not follow from hence that faith is to a believer in the room, in the place, of righteousness? But if faith is in the room of righteousness or holiness, what need is there of this too?²⁰

We allow, answers Wesley, that God justifies the ungodly by faith alone, without any goodness or righteousness preceding, and that their faith is counted for righteousness. However, this is for *preceding* righteousness, not *subsequent* righteousness. The teaching of Paul is that there is no righteousness *before* faith, but not that there is no righteousness *after* it. "He does assert holiness cannot *precede* purification; but not that it need not *follow* it."²¹ Wesley proceeds to make the point even more succinctly: "Shall we be less obedient to God from filial love than we were from servile fear?"²² "Is love a less powerful motive than fear? If not, let it be an invariable rule, 'I will

do nothing now I am *under grace* which I durst not have done when *under the law.*' "23

Antinomianism Alive and Well

The issue is not whether we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. That remains the cornerstone of the gospel. Wesley's question rather is, What kind of faith? If, in our evangelism, we present a message only of forgiveness and reconciliation, we plant the seeds of antinomianism; and today, in so much of the Western church, the seeds have proved to be of a very resilient strain. Of course, we disguise it with a multiplicity of churchly programs and ministries, but it certainly is alive and well. In its most popular form, it propagates the Christian life as a relationship with God, accomplished for us by a Christ who suffered and died at a conveniently remote time and place in history; a relationship so secure and yet so free that discipleship becomes merely a matter of following one's instincts, pursuing one's preferences and, in response to the occasional twinge of conscience, indulging in minor generosityes out of major resources. Discipleship becomes the exercise of personal options that can be worked out with Jesus on a purely individual basis, in short, a Christian lifestyle fraught with the multifarious ingenuities of self-deception.

Which Jesus?

So the questions persists: Which Jesus? Jesus the priest, who atones for our sins and those of the world (Rom 5:8-11; Heb 6:20)? Or Jesus the prophet, in the tradition of Isaiah (Luke 2:76-79; 4:18-19)? Or Jesus the potentate, outraged by the persistent neglect of his little ones (Matt 25:31-46)? This is especially the question for those of us in the relatively affluent parts of the world. For when we proclaim Christ as priest to the neglect of his prophetic and sovereign offices, we devalue even his priestly work. To suggest that Christ died for character flaws that can be addressed by any competent counselor is an obscenity. 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. Horrendous though the Los Angeles riots might have been, while

some fifty lives were lost in one North American city, fifty thousand continued to die each day throughout the world from hunger or hunger-related diseases.

As long as evangelism presents a gospel centered on the need for personal salvation, individuals will acquire a faith that focuses on maximum benefits with minimal obligations, and we will change the costly work of Christ's atonement into the pragmatic transaction of a salvific contract. The scandal of this kind of evangelism is our blindness to the extent to which it has been incorporated into Western individualism, narcissism, consumerism, and hedonism.

History and Incarnation

Emilio Castro states the issue well:

In the infancy narratives we rejoice in the celebration of the coming of the Son of God, but we forget that the soldiers sent by Herod into Bethlehem are there to remind us of the brutality of the world in which we live. Jesus Christ died for us, but we forget that before he died, many children died for him. That is the interplay between the historical and the incarnational. So he took the road to Egypt as a political refugee. This historical dimension has come as a cry, challenging us to recognize that we have tamed Christ. By concentrating on the individual, the personal problem of sin, we have forgotten the actual historical struggle of Christ with historical sin and death manifested in the oppression of the poor and downtrodden of the earth.²⁴

President Jimmy Carter made the same point incisively in an address he gave to the Academy for Evangelism in 1987:

I will have a group of men my age in a Sunday School class and see them sit around, fervent Christians, dedicated Christians, enjoying the harmony and the fellowship of a community of various similar souls. Thanksgiving rolls around, and they say, Why don't we do something of a generous nature? Let us take up a collection and we will buy food, turkeys, etc. We will take this to some poor families and help them have a nice Thanksgiving. The next question is, who knows a poor family? Generally the answer is, nobody in this class knows a poor family. . . . I think ministers ought to demand as a measure of character and achievement and status from their congregation, an active reaching out.²⁵

Christ in Full Regalia

This would be much less a problem if the Christ we presented in our evangelism was in full regalia, so to speak, and if the salvation offered in our gospel came with the conditions that Jesus clearly attached to it: not pre-conditions, but *post*-conditions. As Wesley stipulated in the General Rules of 1743, "the only condition previously required" in those who wished to be Methodists was "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins."²⁶ But for those who wished to remain as members, it was expected that they should "continue to evidence their desire of salvation"²⁷ by practicing some very specific and straightforward rules, rules which, tellingly, are often resisted vigorously today by those who have strong faith in their savior, but a personalized and spiritualized discipleship.

Christ as Prophet

When we turn to Christ as prophet, we come to what in many ways is the cutting edge of evangelism today. Wesley describes Christ in this office as "the Prophet of the Lord, 'who of God is made unto us wisdom', who by his word and his Spirit 'is with us always', 'guiding us unto all truth.'"²⁸ This links us meaningfully to the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament where, as Bruce Birch has explained, the message was "always centered in the character and will of God. . . . The prophets did not speak their own word to Israel, but spoke as the representatives of Yahweh, mediating a divine word to Israel."²⁹ Moreover, precisely because their message was directed to the people of God, it was "closely related to the time in which it was proclaimed and for which it was intended."³⁰

A Personalized Christ

It is here that the form and the substance of our evangelism require a whole new dimension. We have a wealth of contextual studies that give us insights into cultures throughout the world, into social and anthropological sensitivities, but which by and large do not ask the same questions of the message we proclaim.³¹ All too often the Christ of our gospel remains personalized: intimate with some, but uninvolved in the ongoing and unfolding work of God's salvation elsewhere. And when this happens, the Holy Spirit is likewise

domesticated, available with special gifts on application from those who have made the right choice and exercised their salvific option. Little wonder that the awesome working of God in human history in recent years has left much of the church bemused on the sidelines.

The prophetic office of Jesus Christ is critical to the gospel, and by neglecting to give it equal emphasis with his priestly and sovereign work, not only does a great deal of our evangelism remain unattended, but the evangelism we do undertake is restricted to those who can be reached in a personal way. Once again Douglas Waruta speaks to the issue:

[In Africa] prophets are special persons in that they are the leaders of their communities in matters both political and religious. . . . [Their role is] not restricted to the religious aspects of the community but also involves its social and political dimensions.³²

The Universal Christ

In other words, to proclaim Christ in all his offices requires an *evangel* that does not merely offer forgiveness and reconciliation, but also includes the prophetic word that Christ has for us today; not only for us as persons, but for our communities, our cities, our nations, and indeed for the whole world. This does not mean changing the person of Christ, but simply declaring who he really is. It does not mean reducing him to historical particularities, but rather ascribing to him characteristics that are properly incarnational. It is essentially a question of truth in advertising.

Not that this dimension of evangelism has been neglected. On the contrary, there has been a succession of authors pointing us in this direction.³³ But they have yet to impact the average Western congregation, and many congregations worldwide, primarily because the field of evangelistic studies has yet to forge the models and strategies to equip church members for this task. Volumes abound in how to witness to Christ and how to share one's faith, but there is a dearth of resources in how to declare the prophetic word of Christ as an integral component of evangelistic outreach. The result is that the powers and principalities of this world do not tremble when the church declares the good news of Jesus Christ. To the contrary, the church is often used as a means of political management. One of the most cynical examples in recent times is the way in which the national administrations of the United States of America in the 1980s

called on the church to take up the social slack of welfare services that are the minimum responsibility of any civilized society, but which these administrations systematically dismantled.

It is not that we are lacking in role models for challenging the powers and principalities. As any number of representatives at this Institute will readily testify, to proclaim Christ as prophet no less than priest is still to risk life and limb in many countries, including the United States of America.³⁴ The question is the extent to which this office of Christ is made explicit in our evangelism, a sobering and often frightening prospect for many of us in the relative safety of Western congregational life and work.

The Agenda of Christ

Yet the evangelistic imperative is clear. One of the first things a person must learn about Jesus Christ is his immediate agenda; and today, no less than in his announcement in the synagogue at Nazareth, the poor are at the top of his list (Luke 4:18-19). Which means that, while the ghettos and barrios of a country such as the United States are an ever-present challenge for the evangelist, so are the places of secular power. The poor need help, not only now, but also in the long term. They need not only compassion, but also justice.

Put differently, the good news of salvation is not merely for persons, but for institutions, for systems, and for cities and nations. The healing that comes from God in Christ is for every dimension of humanity, and this will not come by individual conversions alone. History makes that clear, as do the scriptures. The prophets, including Jesus of Nazareth, called on cities and nations to repent as well as persons (Amos 5:14-17; Jonah 3:1-10; Micah 14:1-9; Matt 11:18-24).

A Prophetic Pitfall

Yet herein lies a pitfall for the prophetic evangelist, one which those of us in evangelistic studies could do much to forestall if the prophetic Christ were to be firmly on our agenda. It is what Jürgen Moltmann early identified in his work as presumptive utopianism, the desire to assist with the present agenda of Jesus Christ to the extent that we forget whose agenda it is.³⁵ The pitfall is subtle and seductive primarily because the most difficult aspect of Christian discipleship is to sustain a personal relationship with Christ. Ironi-

cally, in view of what we have just argued, it is much, much easier to work for Christ than to talk with him. It is much more congenial to participate in Christian community than to wrestle with Christ one-on-one. The saints who spend whole nights in prayer are not exercising a discipline nearly so much as experiencing the importunity of a priestly prophet who will not take no for an answer. The whole point of discipleship, as Frederick Herzog has explained, is to *walk with Christ*, not to avoid him.³⁶

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. The penetrating stare of Jesus Christ in the empty eyes of the starving and the downtrodden calls us to personal no less than corporate repentance.

God's Election of the Poor

One thing, however, must be said: the poor themselves manage to avoid this pitfall. In fact, they understand its seductiveness far more than those of us who attempt to theologize on their behalf, for the simple reason that the gospel raises their consciousness more keenly than any of us who attempt to raise it for them. So it was in Wesley's day, and so it is today.³⁷ The good news of Christ as priest is welcomed by the poor, for they are only too aware of their sin and their need for forgiveness and reconciliation. The good news of Christ as prophet is likewise readily accepted, inasmuch as they know the sufferings of the world first hand, and are more than willing to help with Christ's unfinished task. When we talk about God's preferential option for the poor, therefore, it is not so much a declaration of missional or evangelistic priority, as of divine election.

The truth of the matter is that God's deepest truths *are* grasped most readily by the poor, because they are the ones whose eyes God chooses to open. They are the ones who, lacking most worldly riches, are blessed with spiritual wealth.³⁸ The fact that political and religious leaders have counted on this for centuries to exercise social manipulation ultimately does nothing to lessen it—a double paradox that social historians, and especially students of the Halévy thesis, usually fail to take into account.³⁹ Those who work and live with the poor

understand it, however, for there indeed the fields are white unto harvest.⁴⁰

Christ as Potentate

Last, we come to Christ as potentate. Prior to the King James, or Authorized, version of the Bible, William Tyndale's translation had read "blessed and mighty," and the Geneva Bible "blessed and prince onely." Given our heightened sensitivities today, however, symbols of royalty, and masculine royalty at that, tend to be semantically impedimental and symbolically oppressive. Not to beat about the bush, none of us likes to be told what to do these days, be it by those with political power, or by those with religious authority, be they pastors, superintendents, or bishops. This is why, of course, a personalized discipleship, negotiated in convenient seclusion with Jesus, is so attractive. It allows us maximum flexibility. We should remember, therefore, that power and majesty are not only the due of Jesus Christ, but can be ascribed with total confidence to a God who exercises them with the safeguard of trinitarian collegiality.

Patriarchal Evangelism

Perhaps the chief reason why the issue of power becomes problematic for evangelism is that the field is overwhelmingly male-dominated; and while this should not constitute a problem *per se*, it does raise the interesting question of why so few women emerge today as evangelistic leaders. After all, one of the marks of early Methodism was the leadership role taken by women, first as class leaders, and then as preachers, with a brisk pace set by Susanna Wesley herself. Does their absence by and large today cause our evangelism to have a slanting of theological perspective and pastoral strategy?

Some years ago Virginia Ramey Mollenkott presented a paper at a symposium held at Perkins School of Theology in which she argued that this was precisely the state of affairs.⁴¹ It was a foundational statement, and it remains remarkably pertinent to our thinking today. She suggested that evangelism in the North American church was in fact patently patriarchal, and offered five criteria by which it is normatively measured, criteria, we should note, that are very difficult to find in the scriptures. First, the idea that bigger is better;

that the size of a congregation is a sign of God's blessing, or at least its evangelistic effectiveness. Second, that competition is inevitable, and that as evangelists we are therefore in a win-lose situation, if not with the world, then certainly with other churches. Third, that human fulfillment stems from measurable achievements, as opposed to God's love, which is altogether unconditional. God's love affirms the dignity of every human being, regardless of accomplishments. Fourth, patriarchal evangelism implies that ordinary human living must be transcended in order to meet the standards of the gospel; which is, of course, fundamentally to misunderstand the nature of grace and conversion. While there is much about human life that most assuredly is changed by the grace of *metanoia*, the doctrine of justification declares that God accepts us just as we are, and invites us thereafter to share in a transforming friendship. Lastly, patriarchal evangelism implies that some people have more standing in God's sight than others, whereas the gospel clearly declares God's love for all. If there is preferential treatment, it is for the child who is hungry, for the prisoner who suffers, for the lonely and the abandoned. God has no other distinctions; none whatsoever.

A Limited View of Grace

Yet distinctions abound in our evangelism: the "saved" and the "unsaved," the "lost" and the "found," the "churched" and the "unchurched." We have become so caught up in the dynamics of a personal evangelism, that we have not examined the anomaly of proclaiming on the one hand that God loves the whole world, but reserving as our trump card, so to speak, the threat that God will consign to eternal perdition those who refuse to accept what we tell them. Never mind that this is a card we hope we will not have to use; never mind that we disapprove of the methods of many who do use it. The danger lies in the mindset it fosters: a thoroughly inadequate view of grace.

The criticism levelled at Mollenkott, and at some others who affirm a doctrine of universal grace, is that they are propagating universalism, a word about which a great deal is said by a great many people on the basis of very little reading. But if we subscribe to a doctrine of universal grace, something that Wesley affirmed at an early date in his field preaching,⁴² then the real danger is not universalism, but rather the presumption to restrict God's grace. Of course

God's judgments remain in place for all eternity, for the Christian no less than the pagan, for the righteous no less than the sinners. But a grace that is truly universal must be proclaimed without any human qualification at all—and that means scrupulously avoiding discriminatory language or concepts that even remotely imply who is "saved" or "unsaved." Those are God's words, and God's alone. They must therefore be excised from our evangelistic vocabulary.

The Visionary Wesley

What do we put in their place? Well, we might begin with Wesley's assignation of Christ "as remaining a King for ever; as giving laws to all whom he has bought with his blood; as restoring those to the image of God whom he had first reinstated in his favor; as reigning in all believing hearts until he has 'subdued all things to himself'; until he hath utterly cast out all sin, and 'brought in everlasting righteousness.'" ⁴³ Or we might turn to a visionary passage from the sermon he preached before Oxford University in 1744:

But shall we not see greater things than these? Yea, greater than have been yet from the beginning of the world? Can Satan cause the truth of God to fail? Or his promises to be of none effect? . . . Suppose now the fullness of time to be come, and the prophecies to be accomplished—what a prospect is this! . . . Here is no din of arms, no 'confused noise', no 'garments rolled in blood'. 'Destructions are come to a perpetual end: wars are ceased from the earth. . . . Civil discord is at an end for evermore, and none is left either to destroy or hurt his neighbour'. Here is no oppression to 'make even the wise man mad'; no extortion to 'grind the face of the poor'; no robbery or wrong; no rapine or injustice; for all are 'content with such things as they possess'. Thus 'righteousness and peace have kissed each other'; they have 'taken root and filled the land'; righteousness flourishing out of the earth, and 'peace looking down from heaven'. ⁴⁴

It is late in his ministry, however, that we find Wesley at his most eschatologically eloquent, universal in his hope, and seasoned in his pastoral perspective. ⁴⁵ Take, for example, his sermon, "The General Spread of the Gospel":

And in every nation under heaven we may reasonably believe God will observe the same order which he hath done from the beginning of Christianity. 'They shall all know *me*,' saith the Lord, not from the greatest to the least (this is the wisdom of the world which is

foolishness with God) but 'from the least to the greatest,' that the praise may not be of men, but of God. Before the end even the rich shall enter the kingdom of God. Together with them will enter in the great, the noble, the honourable; yea, the rulers, the princes, the kings of the earth. Last of all the wise and learned, the men of genius, the philosophers, will be convinced that they are fools; will 'be converted and become as little children, and enter into the kingdom of God'.⁴⁶

We must of course take note of the famous injunction that his preachers had "nothing to do but to save souls."⁴⁷ But this was in the context of a warning not to be distracted by organizational goals and objectives. It does not obviate the larger context of God's universal salvation. As Theodore Runyon has observed, the note of eschatological fulfillment in Wesley's Oxford sermon of 1744 is amplified in this 1783 sermon and others in the Second Series.⁴⁸ Moreover, Runyon suggests, it is significant that Wesley himself never used the term *ordo salutis*, and these later sermons may give us a clue as to why this was the case. For they reveal that the decisive event of conversion and the process of sanctification cannot be properly understood in a purely individualistic context. They must be seen in their organic relation to creation and kingdom. To interpret them in a more narrow way is to deprive them of their intended significance.⁴⁹

Matriarchal Possibilities

It is this universal perspective on God's salvation that a matriarchal evangelism might help us to forge in response to God's present *kairos*. Fatherhood is all too often selective, as the biblical narratives amply illustrate; and well has it been said of the male seed that many are called, but few are chosen. By contrast, there is an inevitability to motherhood, an acceptance of the family as it is, a willingness to work with the wayward child for as long as it takes. The evangelistic question might then become, not "How many?" but "How long?" The energy of our evangelism might then be channelled, not only into persuading people to accept an invitation to the heavenly feast, but also to convincing them of the necessity of table manners.

Christ's True Power: Perseverance

For the true power of our particular potentate is in fact perseverance. God does not act irresistibly with us, explains Wesley; not "with

the same ease as when 'God said, Let there be light; and there was light.'"⁵⁰ God does not take away our understanding, but enlightens and strengthens it. God does not destroy our affections, but makes them more vigorous. Least of all does God take away our liberty. Rather, assisted by God's grace, we choose, like Mary, the better part. "And in the same manner as God has converted so many to himself without destroying their liberty, he can undoubtedly convert whole nations, or the whole world. And it is as easy to him to convert a world as one individual soul."⁵¹

In her address to the Eighth Oxford Institute in 1987, Mercy Amba Oduyoye spoke about this kind of power:

If I wanted to ask for the authority figure among a group of people, I would ask for the "one who looks after them." The manner of such a person would be described as confident and fearless. . . authority is assigned to or acquired by those who possess knowledge and the wisdom of experience and who speak the mind of the people. In such a situation, power and authority would have the same meaning. God in the Lord's Prayer is described as being the owner of *tumi* (power), and *Otumfo* translates to "Almighty" in Christian prayers. . . . Legitimate *tumi* is authorized. The authorization comes from the group which recognizes in the person what is needed for its well-being. Performing as an *Otumfo* would have no connotation of domination. . . . Authority flows from a sense of responsibility as is evidenced in parenting and therefore nurtures toward maturity and self-determination.⁵²

The Wrath and the Love of God

Here lies the bedrock of our gospel. Yes, we have faith in Christ our High Priest; and yes, we have hope in Christ our Prophet. But greater than these is the love of Christ, the One who reveals to us the power of God's parenthood. Thus, if there is to be a word of warning in our evangelism, a word of censure and judgment, let it be this: That there will indeed be a *dies irae*, a day when the pent-up anger of a God whose patience and good manners seem limitless will finally be unleashed (Rom 2:5). The little ones of this world, the downtrodden, the poor, will not be left unvindicated. The tares still grow with the wheat, but not forever (Matt 13:24-30).

Our evangelistic word of warning, therefore, is not so much the priestly admonition to repent of sin, personal and social, important though that may be, nor yet the prophetic exhortation to do justice,

love kindness, and walk humbly with God, important though that may be also, but above all the royal summons to prepare for audience with a wrathful parental potentate whose children have been neglected and starved and beaten and slaughtered for millennia. On that day of God's anger, we shall all tremble for a long, long time.

Yet even with this, there is still good news. "For I am convinced," wrote Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39). To which we might add, not even an evangelistically lethargic and incompetent church.

22. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

23. *Works (J)* 6:231–40.

24. Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed are the Poor? Women's Poverty, Family Policy, and Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991); and M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

25. I want to utilize what is called poststructuralist theory to analyze the historical structuring of forms of life. Poststructuralism, in the best sense, allows the critic to identify that which must be transformed, not merely corrected. For a good introduction of poststructuralism and its use in feminist practice see Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). For the use of poststructuralism in theology see Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, and God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

26. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

27. *Ibid.*, 68.

28. *Ibid.*, 69.

29. *Ibid.*, 70.

30. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*.

31. I am suggesting the need to reflect more on the popular expressions of art, poetry, literature that arise in prophetic movements and to use these as appropriate expressions of spirituality and hope.

32. Johannes Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, tr. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

33. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 236–256.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. See William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 5ff.

2. Indeed, the two ecumenical observers at the Eighth Institute decided to stay with the evangelism working group throughout, rather than circulate among the other groups. In their report, Gillian Evans and Michael Jackson explained that their interest had been held by the way in which the very specificity of evangelistic studies had brought together a wide range of theological interests combined with pastoral and practical application. Gillian R. Evans and Michael Jackson, in "Report on Working Group V: Methodist Evangelism and Doctrine," by David Lowes Watson, *OxfordNotes* 2/3 (Fall, 1988), 11.

3. Petition No. HE-11093-3000-R, *Daily Christian Advocate* (1992), Advance Edition, Vol. 2, p. 1234. The General Conference met in Louisville, Kentucky, May 5–15, 1992.

4. Justo L. González, "Voices of Compassion," *Missiology* 20/2 (April 1992), 163–173. This expanded issue of *Missiology*, guest edited by Stephen Bevans and Ana Maria Pineda, is devoted to the theme "Columbus and the New World: Evangelization or Invasion?"

5. This aspect of the doctrine of prevenient grace, imbibed by Wesley from seventeenth-century Anglicanism, is often overlooked. See John W. Packer, *The Transformation of Anglicanism 1643–1660, with Special Reference to Henry Hammond* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 55ff. See also "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *Works* 3:206–7.

6. George G. Hunter III, *How To Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 37.

7. M. Douglas Meeks, "Reflections and Open Tasks," in M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *What Should Methodists Teach? Wesleyan Tradition and Modern Diversity* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), 139. For a definitive theological treatment of this theme, see Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

8. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 381ff., 397ff. See also Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate: Mission Beyond Christendom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 43ff.

9. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, 101ff.

10. For a helpful overview of these perspectives, see James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans, eds., *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization 1: Basic Documents 1974–1991* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992). For a sampling of contextual and liberation theologies, see William Jenkinson and Helene O'Sullivan, eds., *Trends in Mission: Toward the Third Millennium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). See also Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Evangelization from a Liberation Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

11. See, for example, Alan Neely and James A. Scherer, "San Antonio and Manila 1989: '... like ships in the night?'" *Missiology* 18/2 (April 1990), 139–148.

12. Robert J. Schreiter, ed., *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

13. *Ibid.*, 52.

14. *Ibid.*, 54.

15. Mortimer Arias and Alan Johnson, *The Great Commission: Biblical Models for Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 78ff.

16. "The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," and "The Law Established Through Faith, Discourse I & II," *Works* 2:39–70.

17. Outler's "Introductory Comment," *Works* 2:1.

18. *Works* 2:37–38.

19. For a discussion of this issue with regard to Wesley's Anglican heritage, see David Lowes Watson, "Aldersgate Street and the General Rules: The Form and the Power of Methodist Discipleship," in Randy L.

Maddox, ed., *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), 33–47.

20. *Works* 2:28.

21. *Works* 2:28.

22. *Works* 2:30.

23. *Works* 2:31.

24. Emilio Castro, "The World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism," in *Trends in Mission*, ed. Jenkinson and O'Sullivan, 296.

25. Jimmy Carter, "The Task of Evangelism," *Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education*, Vol. 3 (1987–1988), 7.

26. *Works* 9:70.

27. *Works* 9:70.

28. *Works* 2:39.

29. Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 240ff.

30. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 11.

31. See H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris, *Let the Redeemed of the Lord Say So!* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 107ff., where some of these questions are directly confronted.

32. Schreiter, ed., *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, 57–58.

33. For example, Hans Jochen Margull, *Hope in Action: The Church's Task in the World* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962); Alfred C. Krass, *Five Lanterns at Sundown: Evangelism in a Chastened Mood* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1978); James Armstrong, *From the Underside: Evangelism from a Third World Vantage Point* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981); and Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

34. For example, James R. Brockman, *The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982); John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986); Cornel West, *Prophetic Fragments* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, and Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1988).

35. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 34.

36. Frederick Herzog, *God-Walk: Liberation Shaping Dogmatics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

37. See Elsa Tamez, "Wesley as Read by the Poor," in M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 67–84.

38. See Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Theological Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 48ff. See also Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, tr.

John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 30ff. Cf. "Good News to the Poor," in *The Violence of Love: The Pastoral Wisdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero*, tr. & comp. James R. Brockman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 219ff.

39. It is one of the important contributions of Theodore Jennings to have reopened this discussion in *Good News to the Poor* (see 140ff.). Cf. Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, 43ff., and Robert Moore, *Pitmen, Preachers, and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 3–27.

40. See Guillermo Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 69–85.

41. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "New Age Evangelism," *International Review of Mission* 285 (January, 1983), 32–40.

42. *Works* 19:51ff. See also his sermon, "Free Grace," *Works* 3:542–563.

43. *Works* 2:38.

44. *Works* 1:169–171.

45. As in his sermon "The More Excellent Way," *Works* 3:262–277.

46. *Works* 2:494.

47. "The Large Minutes," *Works (J)* 8:310. Cf. Robert E. Coleman, *"Nothing To Do But Save Souls": John Wesley's Charge to His Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor Press, 1990).

48. See especially the sermons "On Eternity," "God's Love to Fallen Man," "The General Deliverance," "The End of Christ's Coming," "The General Spread of the Gospel," and "The New Creation," in *Works* volume 2, *passim*.

49. Theodore Runyon, "What is Methodism's Theological Contribution Today?" in Theodore Runyon, ed., *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 11.

50. *Works* 2:488.

51. *Works* 2:490.

52. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Teaching Authoritatively Amidst Christian Pluralism in Africa," in Meeks, ed., *What Should Methodists Teach?* 71–72.

Notes to Chapter 7

1. Xabier Gorostiaga, "Ya comenzó el Siglo XXI: el Norte contra el Sur," in *Educación teológica en situaciones de sobrevivencia* (San José: Seminario Bíblico/Programa de Educación Teológica-WCC, 1991), 80.

2. *Ibid.*, 89–91.

3. Cf. Victorio Araya, "Samaritan Servanthood: An Option for Life," *North-South Dialogue*, 2/1 (Summer, 1987), 3.

4. Jung Mo Sung, *La idolatría del capital y la muerte de los pobres* (San José: DEI, 1991), 17–18.