Christian mission in Europe

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Our problem is, therefore, how to get in touch again with the masses of the 'unfaithful faithful'. Prof. Regin Prenter, Denmark

The life and death question for Europe is, then, whether it can rediscover its own specific mission. Dr W.A. Visser't Hooft

From Corpus Christianum to a New Europe

There was a time when 'Europe' and 'Christendom' were almost synonymous terms. The symbiosis of the two is summed up in H. Bellow's epigram, 'The faith is Europe, and Europe is the faith' (Will 1981:6). A contemporary of Martin Luther, the geographer Wachelus published in 1537 a woodcut map of Europe called 'The Queen Virgin'. It was to illustrate the unity and integrity of 'Christian Europe' as conceived by medieval Catholic totalitarianism. Wachelus' map shows Spain as the head of the virgin, Italy as the right arm and Denmark the left; Germany, France and Switzerland as the feet, Poland, Prussia, Bohemia and Hungary. Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and others are all identified on the virgin's illustrious gown.

Already at that time, however, the transition from the monolithic, religious 'Christendom' to the secular 'Europe' was in progress. Though the rise of Islam initially strengthened the idea of Christendom, the 15th-century Ottoman Islamic push westward almost broke it when some Christian powers, for selfish reasons, aligned with the enemy against other Christian nations. When Erasmus made his appeal for the crusade against the Turks, he did not appeal to the members of Christendom but, noticeably, to the 'nations of Europe'. The Reformation and the following developments only speeded up the process of transition. In the 17th and 18th centuries, science came into its own and the secular state established itself. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the industrial revolution and the birth of Marxist socialism completed the process of the disintegration of Corpus Christianum. The post-Enlightenment culture became a major European 'missionary problem' (Newbigin 1986).

The European map today is in a state of political and economic, as well as cultural and religious, flux. This chapter is written at a time of rapid changes and an intensive search for a 'new Europe'. Presently, Europe lives in the intensive period between 1989 and 1992, the year 1989 marking the beginning of the wholesale collapse of Communism and 1992 the beginning of a 'United States of Europe', initially a West European economic and political integration. The European Community's (EC) move toward a closer union has been accelerated recently in response to dramatic events in Eastern Europe. The demand for change in the East European countries has been promoted and strengthened by the political freedoms and economic success of Western Europe, which have acted as a magnet drawing the East toward the West.

Today, Europe seems to be fully alive and bursting with visions, programmes and activities which make it again 'the most important theatre of contemporary world events' (Burstein 1991:11). Western Europe is in the process of dismantling its frontiers and gearing itself for new economic and political integration. The European Community's (EC) move toward a closer union has been accelerated recently in response to dramatic events in Eastern Europe. The demand for change in the East European countries has been promoted and strengthened by the political freedoms and economic success of Western Europe, which have acted as a magnet drawing the East toward the West.

The spiritual crisis of Europe

In his introduction to a popular and largely pessimistic assessment of Europe's Christianity, a North American evangelical missiologist writes: 'Europe appears to be a continent on the verge of moral collapse... Decades of anaemic Christology and missiologic philosophies have eaten the spiritual interior of this continent and Europe now stands at crossroads. Can it be saved?' (Henley 1978:9). This sounds very similar to the question, 'Can the West be converted?' asked by Lesslie Newbigin (1987:2), an author known for his perceptive analysis of post-Enlightenment Western culture as a specific missionary challenge. A South African missiologist begins his survey 'The Church in Europe' with the sentence: 'There is a general agreement that the Church in Europe is in a poor state of health.' He collaborates this diagnosis with, among other things, the statistical statement that 'some 1.8 million people in Europe leave the Church each year' (Cotterell 1989:37). The late Bishop Stephen Neill, writing at the time when he was a professor of ecumenics and mission studies at the University of Hamburg, was equally pessimistic: 'Church attendance in Europe is everywhere declining; the lack of ordained ministers is grave in every country, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. The secularization of life became somewhat obsolete when the oil-shocked 1970s and the alarming growth of unemployment resulted in economic collapse along with political impotence.

Where did the new vision and will come from? Are there any analogies to be drawn and lessons to be learned due to a somewhat similar discouraging religious situation in Europe? Many diagnose the European churches as suffering from similar conditions of 'sclerosis' (stagnation) and 'pessimism' (loss of will and power to stem the tide of decline).

The turning point in the transition from the 'old' to the 'new' Europe was an almost 'spiritual' event. Jacques Delors, the incoming president of the European Community's executive commission, acted as a visionary prophet when in December 1984 he summoned other commissioners to Royaumont Abbey (outside Paris) for a crucial contemplative retreat. Delors analysed the crisis of Europe and the failed dream of a new, united Europe with analytic precision, brutal frankness and prophetic vision. He warned his fellow commissioners that if Europe did not recognize its kairos-time (this author's expression) and failed to seize the historic moment, it could anticipate a 21st century in which it would be little more than 'a Europe to be visited by American and Japanese tourists who like our cuisine and culture'.

'Europe's choice is between survival and decline' was the challenge of Delors as he called the EC to undertake a 'solemn commitment' to a strategic plan for recovery (Burstein 1991:36).

The facts of a structural crisis had been recognized for some time. The industrial and economic 'lack of spiritual vitality, denominational divisions, religious indifference and other Christian ills' allow the church to reconcile itself to a status quo position and thus incapacitate itself for its God-given mission in and on behalf of the new and spiritually revitalized Europe.
proceeds apace. We seem to be watching a steady diminution of the spiritual capital of Europe, the disappearance of the old synthesis of religion and culture, and a desiccation of the human spirit, as a result of which men not merely are not religious, but can see no reason why they should concern themselves beyond the world of the senses." In 1970 (2 April), TIME magazine reported of the progressive paralysis of European religious life and of 'a secular-minded public that feels that it has no need of the presence of God' (cf. Detzler 1979). Addressing the West European Consultation on Evangelism in 1977, Dr Visser't Hooft pointed out, 'European culture has become a debate between three forces: Christianity, scientific rationalism and neo-pagan vitalism' (1977:355). For a long time, the impression was created that scientific rationalism was victorious. Recent decades with the new results of church-civilization, nuclear threat and ecological devastation have, however, changed the picture and given rise to a growth of a new irationalism, Europe's neo-paganism. Visser't Hooft seems to agree with Gustav C. Jung, who claimed that the Christian message has neither reached nor transformed the soul of the European man and that Christianity in Europe is like a stone in the foundation of a church (Lk. 3:26). His conclusion: 'Now there is surely need for evangelism, revival and renewal. There are millions ofapsed Christians who need to hear anew what the Gospel has to offer them. But there are today in Europe even more millions who are not adequately described asapsed Christians, because they have in fact turned to another religion' (1977:350).

The real status and strength of the Christian faith in Europe today cannot be ascertained by review of its historical role nor by present-day statistics. Europe is far less 'Christian' than its history, religious institutions and statistical figures seem to indicate. There is now a growing realization among churches in Western Europe that a baptized person or a person who pays church taxes is not necessarily a Christian. Nominal Christians among the Protestants in central and northern Europe, the Catholics in France and southern Europe, as well as among the Orthodox in south-eastern Europe and the USSR, are increasingly seen, not only by evangelical mission activists from North America, but in many cases by their own concerned bishops, as 'unreached people groups' in need of evangelism. In that very context, the questions about the role of baptism in the context, the questions about the role of baptism in the process of secularization were increasingly pushing themselves onto the agenda of theological debates and ecclesiastical practices.

Any discussion of the future of Christian mission in Europe must take into account a growing indifference to anything religious such as is found in no other continent in the world. Bishop Hans Lilje (at the time the presiding bishop of Germany's Lutherans and president of the European Council of Churches), in his Christianity in a Divided Europe, distinguishes between three types of atheism: atheismus practicus (subtle or philosophical atheism of rationalistic intellectuals), and atheismus praetori (practical atheism). The last term is borrowed from the well-known biblical scholar, Johann Albrecht Bengel, who in his famous commentary, _Gnomon Novi Testamenti_, points out that the rich man in the Lord's parable (Lk. 16:19-31) was not condemned for wrong belief or heresy but because he lived by a certain _atheismus practicus_, ignoring God and eternity. Lilje is convinced that though this formula is more than 200 years old, it is an excellent description of the most difficult, spiritual phenomenon in the Western world today. For it suggests what it says: not an implicit and atheistic theory but the actual and practiced disregard of God. Here is no apostasy but weakness, not an open revolt but the silent paganism' (1965:32-33). This is a biblical picture of modern Europe which seems to see no need for God or any theistic concepts. This widespread phenomenon echoes the attitude expressed in Jean Paul Sartre's philosophy: 'What we need is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valediction of the existence of God' (1956:311). Whether God exists or not does not make any difference, for it seems to make no difference to the average European, who may be a culturally conditioned 'nominal Christian' but is actually a 'practising atheist'. By this European majorit, God is completely disregarded and the Christian church largely ignored.

For most West European Christians, faith does not make much difference in life. Sunday is not a day of worship any more (it still seems to be in North America) but only a welcome break between two working weeks. The process of secularization was the breeding ground of Christian nominalism, which was in turn followed by a marked shift from nominal Christianity to varying degrees of pragmatic atheism throughout Europe. As a result, the church is now largely deserted and seems to have no significant influence on individuals, families and public life. 'Despite the various degrees of influence presiding in different countries, at no point can it be said that Christian conviction - divorced from political tension - is giving decisive direction to the trends of events in Europe' (Herman 1953:198). There is a general lack of clarity about what Christianity stands for, and widespread ignorance of the most basic facts and values of Christian faith. The workshop on 'Nominalism Today' at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Manila estimated that 75-80 per cent of professing Christians - at least 1 billion - are nominal. The conclusion was that this is the largest religious group in need of evangelization today' (Douglas 1990:440). The workshop divided nominal Christians into four categories: 'ethnic-religious identity nominal, recent conversion nominal, ritualistic nominal and syncretistic nominal. The Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches in Europe are in themselves a complex mission field in which all four types of nominals exist and should become priority concern for intentional and comprehensive programmes of evangelization. Awakening the religiously indifferent and those who have found false security in a superficially sacramentalistic, cultural and yet only nominal Christianity is a very complex challenge. Evangelism in Europe must also take into account large numbers of those who have been 'disappointed by Christianity or have remained at a level of a merely psychological piety or legal morality' (Weber 1979:78).

In 1978, the Lutheran World Federation sponsored a Regional Consultation (for North America, the Nordic countries of Europe and Germany) on Mission and Evangelism. The consultation was a significant step beyond the traditional understanding that mission is something the churches and missionary organizations in Europe and North America, which are relatively rich in personnel and financial resources, do in the poorer countries of the southern hemisphere in the Third World, considering them as their sole mission fields. It concluded, as did other recent gatherings, that 'mission is indivisible', and began grappling seriously with the thesis that 'mission begins on our doorstep. And the task for the church in Europe is to give serious attention to the assurance of salvation as well as to the questions of the role of the church in the context of the process of secularization. It is a vital need for mission' (Lutheran World Federation 1979:vii). The West European churches need to take a hard look at themselves and face the realities of their spiritual crisis in order to realize that they themselves have become a mission field. Folk and state churches are conscious of the paradox of their empty churches on the one hand, and their solid church institutions on the other; the evidence of secularization; religious frustration; materialism with all its ramifications in western societies; the invasion of new religious and pseudo-religions; ...' (ibid.). These realities are descriptive not only of the more secularized Protestant West European countries but also of their Catholic counterparts, as evident from the recent Vatican encyclicals and repeated calls of Pope John Paul II for 're-evangelization' of Europe.

The challenges of a new Eastern Europe

Whatever is written about the future of Eastern Europe at this time must be written in pencil. All across Eastern Europe, and in the Soviet Union, monumental changes are taking place at a breathtaking speed and in most dramatic and unpredictable ways. The impact of _glasnost_ and _perestroika_ has put into reverse process the revolutionary events of 1917 and post-World War II European developments. The massive collapse of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989 and in the Soviet Union in August 1991 have removed from the European scene the most impressive competitor to Christian faith and its most powerful opponent.

It is a well-known fact that wherever Communists came to power, their long-term goal was not only a classless, but also a religionless, society. Christian faith was viewed as a superstitious, obscurantist, obsolete, pre-scientific and thus totally irrelevant competitor to Christian faith and its most powerful opponent.

For most West European Christians, faith does not make much difference in life. Sunday is not a day of worship any more (it still seems to be in North America) but only a welcome break between two working weeks. The process of secularization was the
control of selection and activity of church leaderships, etc. Policies and methods have differed from country to country and in different periods even within the same countries, depending on what was politically expedient during various historical periods and in different regions. Generalizations are impossible, for Eastern Europe has been totally monopolistic in the treatment of religion due to the complexity of its national, cultural, and religious history of different nations and depending on international relationships and considerations. At best, however, Christian faith was barely tolerated and Christians marginalized and discriminated against as ‘second-class citizens’, and at worst, they were brutally persecuted. In Albania, for example, all visible expressions of religion were totally eradicated from 1967 onwards, as that small country prided itself on becoming the ‘first atheistic state in the world’. The story of Christian persecution under Stalin in the Soviet Union and during the Khrouchtchev era is well known (Hill 1991:69ff.) and does not need to be retold.

With the collapse of communism, a new spirit of hope has filled the widened horizons of new freedom. Today we are witnesses of the historical fact of the title of the latest book by Michael Bourdeaux—The Gospel’s Triumph Over Communism (1991). This brings in the question of autonomy and the mission of religious dictatorship, followers of Christ all across Eastern Europe are aware that this is the work of the Lord of history who has seen their suffering and longing for freedom, answered their prayers and provided them with a special kairos period to call their nations back to God and to the spiritual foundation for a free and truly ‘new society’.

The general euphoria of East Europeans with a newly found freedom is, however, very quickly giving place to a sober encounter with the realities faced by the present process of free, peaceful and prosperous future society. Eastern Europe is presently going through a very difficult political transition, moving away from one-party totalitarian regimes toward some kind of multi-party parliamentary democracy. Mistakes are being made as the ABCs of democracy first have to be learned, and new institutions and traditions of democracy have yet to be established. The transition is equally painful economically as Eastern Europe moves away from the centrally planned ‘command’ economy toward some kind of a viable free-market economy. Economic recovery will be slow as the huge bureaucratic factories closed (causing potentially massive social unrests and thus an increased threat of inter-ethnic conflicts and wars) and ‘from rights to roots’ threaten the national and religious identity and unity of the nations. In these countries, belonging to the national church is the Communist system and for keeping alive certain endangered institutions and traditions of democracy there is an intense initiative, so important for the free-market economy, may take it. The major problem for the Christian church and its mission in these foundational facts of the universally valid truth, for truth is freedom and for trust. C. S. Lewis, in his The Screwtape Letters (1942), writes about the Christian is true (1970:10). Whether it is in the context of a Western relativity of all religions or in the encounter with the Marxist-type ‘scientific atheism’, it is necessary to remember William Temple’s dictum: ‘The Gospel is true for all, if it is true at all’ (1937-62). This gospel must be unashamedly proclaimed all across the lands of Europe as not only the truth about God and our own lost condition apart from Christ but also as ‘the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes’ (Rom. 1:16).

Secondly, we must renew the credibility of the Christian witness. Missions and evangelism are not primarily a question of methodology, money, management and numbers, but rather a question of authenticity, credibility and spiritual power. For a significant impact of the Christian gospel in Europe, both West and East, the question is, ‘How shall they see?’ The biblical logic demands for the Christian religion has a long and heavy historical ballast denied or largely ignored. All across Europe, the proclamation of the gospel has to become once again communication of knowledge of the foundational facts of Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and centred in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. ‘[I]f this gospel you are saved, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared’ (1 Cor. 15:3-5). The faithful, brave and creative proclamation of the gospel must be grounded in these foundational facts of the universally valid truth, for truth is freedom and for trust. C. S. Lewis, in his The Screwtape Letters (1942), writes about the Christian is true (1970:10). Whether it is in the context of a Western relativity of all religions or in the encounter with the Marxist-type ‘scientific atheism’, it is necessary to remember William Temple’s dictum: ‘The Gospel is true for all, if it is true at all’ (1937-62). This gospel must be unashamedly proclaimed all across the lands of Europe as not only the truth about God and our own lost condition apart from Christ but also as ‘the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes’ (Rom. 1:16).

The renewal of the credibility of the Christian witness goes hand in hand with the recovery of the whole gospel, which implies a joyful proclamation of the gospel. Or, as that small country prided itself on becoming the ‘first atheistic state in the world’. The story of Christian persecution under Stalin in the Soviet Union and during the Khrouchtchev era is well known (Hill 1991:69ff.) and does not need to be retold. The general euphoria of East Europeans with a newly found freedom is, however, very quickly giving place to a sober encounter with the realities faced by the present process of free, peaceful and prosperous future society. Eastern Europe is presently going through a very difficult political transition, moving away from one-party totalitarian regimes toward some kind of multi-party parliamentary democracy. Mistakes are being made as the ABCs of democracy first have to be learned, and new institutions and traditions of democracy have yet to be established. The transition is equally painful economically as Eastern Europe moves away from the centrally planned ‘command’ economy toward some kind of a viable free-market economy. Economic recovery will be slow as the huge bureaucratic factories closed (causing potentially massive social unrests and thus an increased threat of inter-ethnic conflicts and wars) and ‘from rights to roots’ threaten the national and religious identity and unity of the nations. In these countries, belonging to the national church is the Communist system and for keeping alive certain endangered institutions and traditions of democracy there is an intense initiative, so important for the free-market economy, may take it. The major problem for the Christian church and its mission in these foundational facts of the universally valid truth, for truth is freedom and for trust. C. S. Lewis, in his The Screwtape Letters (1942), writes about the Christian is true (1970:10). Whether it is in the context of a Western relativity of all religions or in the encounter with the Marxist-type ‘scientific atheism’, it is necessary to remember William Temple’s dictum: ‘The Gospel is true for all, if it is true at all’ (1937-62). This gospel must be unashamedly proclaimed all across the lands of Europe as not only the truth about God and our own lost condition apart from Christ but also as ‘the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes’ (Rom. 1:16).

The new Europe: what is to be done? The religious situation in Europe is a peculiarly complex one and generalizations are hardly possible since situations and status of the church(es) differ from country to country and there are significant variations between different parts of the same countries. Christian institutions are formally prominent and seem to be fairly secure, while in others they are virtually ignored. The following proposals are in no way exhaustive and need to be both expanded and further elaborated if the gospel is to make a significant impact in post-Christian Western and post-Communist Eastern Europe.

First, the church must reclaim the historical reliability and truthfulness of the Christian gospel. The spiritual crisis of Europe is also an intellectual crisis, a crisis of truth which is in the very centre of the ‘modern eclipse of God’. In our age of relativity, atheism, agnosticism and denial of all absolutes, when the very truth of any truth is under suspicion, the validity of the gospel truth is either outrightly denied or largely ignored. All across Europe, the proclamation of the gospel has to become once again communication of knowledge of the foundational facts of Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and centred in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. ‘[I]f this gospel you are saved, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared’ (1 Cor. 15:3-5). The faithful, brave and creative proclamation of the gospel must be grounded in these foundational facts of the universally valid truth, for truth is freedom and for trust. C. S. Lewis, in his The Screwtape Letters (1942), writes about the Christian is true (1970:10). Whether it is in the context of a Western relativity of all religions or in the encounter with the Marxist-type ‘scientific atheism’, it is necessary to remember William Temple’s dictum: ‘The Gospel is true for all, if it is true at all’ (1937-62). This gospel must be unashamedly proclaimed all across the lands of Europe as not only the truth about God and our own lost condition apart from Christ but also as ‘the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes’ (Rom. 1:16).
drive to dominate and more of the desire to develop' (Kuzmic 1990:201).

Thirdly, one of the central and most urgent tasks for both Western and Eastern European churches is to recover a practical missionary ecclesiology, the missionary character of the believing community (Newbigin 1989). European churches have to recognize that faith is not automatically inherited from generation to generation and that the main task of the church is not its institutional and mechanistically sacramental self-perpetuation. The church’s mission in the world should not be reduced to isolated political statements and goodwill gestures, as if the church were only a church-social or political agency. Neither should the ministry of the clergy be reduced to the serving of baptisms, weddings and funerals. The churches need to be internally renewed by the Holy Spirit in order to become recognizable as ‘the spontaneous overflow of a community of praise … the radiance of a supernatural reality … a place of joy, of praise, of singing, a place of laughter’ — a place of ‘endless surprises of heaven’ (Newbigin 1986:149). This will also require, as Newbigin puts it, ‘the energetic fostering of a decolonised lay theology’ (1986:142), the rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers along with the discovery of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the related idea of Christian stewardship. The recognition that the congregation is the proper agent for missionary and evangelistic activities and that the task should not be relegated to outside agencies, specialized ministries and zealots, evangelistically minded individuals is an imperative. The post-Reformation institutional divorce between church and mission which made the voluntary groups rather than the churches responsible for mission has not been overcome and, curiously, still prevails in both Eastern and Western Europe. In conjunction with this, one of the crucial questions to be studied is, ‘Are parish and congregational structures in Europe sufficiently flexible to be missionary congregations?’ (Senft 1978:96).

Fourthly, the recovery of historical reliability and truthfulness has to be accompanied by an effort to renew the intelligibility and relevance of the Christian faith for contemporary secularized and religiously indifferent Europeans. The gospel of Jesus Christ ‘is not sought for or made up’, for it was received by ‘revelation from Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 1:11-12). This is why the NT never uses the word ‘gospel’ in the plural. It is important to recognize, however, that Jesus and other NT evangelists portray considerable flexibility and creative freedom in adapting, translating and variously communicating the gospel in different political and cultural settings. While the basic content of the message is always recognizable and unchanging, the presentations are never the same. There are no pre-packaged, universally applicable formulations of the gospel given for either indoctrination or as if there was some magic power in the language itself. The missionary vocation of the church is to build bridges across the wide gap between the ancient world of the truth and power of the gospel and the modern secular and technological age which is biblically illiterate. Helmut Thielicke, that rare example of a German theologian who was also an effective preacher and creative communicator, reminds us that ‘the Gospel must be preached afresh and told in new ways to every generation, since every generation has its own unique questions. This is why the Gospel must be constantly forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of residence’ (1970:10). The potential recipients of the gospel in Europe, both East and West, have been ‘changing their address’ ideologically, philosophically and culturally in this century more frequently and drastically than in any other area of the world. The radical, ideologically inspired secularization of Eastern Europe and the similar cultural developments in the pluralist and materialistic West European countries have produced new generations of biblically illiterate Europeans. The message of the cross and salvation have very little meaning for the relativistic and pluralist, consumer-oriented Western societies and even less meaningful significance for those who grew up in a system which denied that Jesus even existed and ‘made up’, for it was realized that any belief in God and spiritual realities was superstition. The Soviet government, for example, claimed only a few years ago that one of the successes of its educational system and atheistic propaganda was evident in the fact that around 90 per cent of their young people aged 16-19 adhered to atheism as their world-view. Though these figures need to be further investigated and qualifications remain, yet they remain indicative of a major missionary challenge in the new Europe.

Missionary outreach to these spiritually impoverished and disoriented generations will require an ability to understand their beliefs and prejudices and to translate the gospel into their thought categories with intelligence, clarity and relevance. In this process of incarnating the gospel in the new European culture, the pitfalls of some of the Western Protestant ‘apostles of modernity’ must be avoided, for in their almost neurotic anxiety about the relevance of Christianity they have frequently amputated, rather than adapted, the biblical message and thus rendered it powerless. Transcendenceless ‘this-worldliness’, with a concern for relevance and modernity (a liberal Protestant and, to a lesser extent, a modern Catholic temptation), must be avoided. Equally, total theological and communicative rigidity and over-pious ‘other-worldliness’ in the name of historical faithfulness (the temptation of the Eastern Orthodox and evangelical fundamentalists) is not the way ahead for Christian mission in contemporary Europe. Both betray the gospel of Jesus Christ: the first, in its attempt to make it more attractive and palatable to secularized moderns renders it powerless, and the second renders it meaningless in its refusal to enter into dialogue with the world and its inability to translate contextually the message of salvation to its secularized contemporaries.

Fifthly, in spite of relative failures of the 20th-century ecumenical dreams and efforts, the quest for Christian unity remains an imperative in the light of both biblical and contemporary missionary requirements. Churches need to continue to ask themselves the painful question: ‘How can a sinful and divided church announce to the world the gospel of salvation and reconciliation?’ The mainstream Christian churches in Western Europe, but especially in Eastern Europe with the recent political openness and the ‘attractiveness’ of that ‘mission field’, will increasingly face competition from new groups and denominations, both the indigenous and the imported kind. The unco-ordinated and, at times, culturally and religiously ill-prepared and insensitive missionary activities from North America will create confusion, unnecessary duplication and growth of new denominations and independent groups with various theological emphases, ecclesiological models and missionary practices. Sects and cults will also flourish, taking full advantage of the spiritual void, political freedom and the abysmal ignorance of the basic tenets of the Christian faith by so many Europeans. In light of the cultural and ecclesiastical history of East European nations, the creation of a competitive, free religious market will not be without pain and conflict. If the question of biblical unity, co-operation, mutual trust and integrity — all under the biblical umbrella of the Lordship of Jesus Christ — are not properly addressed, this process can become counter-productive and result in discrediting the message and the mission of the church at the time of their greatest opportunity and need.

References cited


Anderson's volume joins the growing corpus of literature on the books of Samuel. The approach is that of a traditional commentary, involving textual and exegetical analysis combined with discussion of literary 'strata' allegedly discernible in the narrative. Anderson does not employ to any great extent the methods of the more recent discourse-oriented analyses which emphasize the artistry of the writer, although occasionally he does utilize insights derived from authors such as Fokkelman and Gunn.

Although Anderson questions the 'local text theory' of Frank M. Cross, accepted by both Klein (1 Samuel: WBC) and McCarter (1, 2 Samuel, 2 vols., AB), he quotes McCarter's observation that 'none of the ancient witnesses to the text of Samuel has a monopoly on primiti­ve readings' (p. xxiii). For this reason, Anderson concludes that each 'variant should be considered on its own merits' (p. xxiii). In general, he seems to propose fewer reconstructions of the text based on theoss material or theLXX than either Klein or McCarter, although he is ready to utilize these text traditions when there are good reasons for doing so. The sections on 'Translation' and 'Notes' are, in this reviewer's opinion, the greatest strength of the commentary.

On questions of authorship and composition, Anderson moves in the mainstream of contemporary scholarship. He accepts the general consensus that 2 Samuel is made up from four main blocks of material: 1. The History of David's Rise (HDR, 1 Sa. 16 (or 15)- 2 Sa. 5); 2. The Ark Narrative (1 Sa. 4-6 + 2 Sa. 6); 3. The Succession Narrative (SN, 2 Sa. 9-20 + 1 Ki. 1-2; 4. The Appendices (2 Sa. 21- 24).

early in the reign of David when questions concerning the legitimacy of his kingship were most acute (p. xxxi). He dates the SN to early in the reign of Solomon and views it as 'intended to show that David was not under a curse in spite of the past events, and that Solomon was the rightful heir contrary to popular expecta­tions (cf. 1 Ki. 2:15) and despite his youth and parentage' (p. xxxii). In Anderson's view, the 'succession narrative' was 'not written to answer the question, "Who of David's sons will be king?" [as Rost has argued], because by the time the SN was composed, the answer to this question was already an accomplished fact. It is far more likely that the question on the lips of many people was, "Is any of David's sons fit to sit on the throne of Israel?"' (p. xxxii). In addi­tion to this modification of the traditional understanding of the purpose of the SN, Anderson also suggests that it may begin as early as 1:1-16.

Anderson's commitment to the Deuteronomistic History theory affects many parts of his commentary and leads him not only to identify numerous 'Deuteronomistic' additions to earlier material, but also to find material that was reshaped at various stages in its tradition history. This, of course, affects the question of historicity and whether or not things really happened as they are reported in the narratives of 2 Samuel. Anderson of necessity concludes that we cannot assume that all the events and dialogues contained in the book happened just as the present text suggests.

This review is hardly the place to engage the questions of the date of Deuteronomy, the putative existence of the Deuteronomistic History and the Succession Narrative, but all of these issues need to be addressed in assessing Anderson's commentary, because they are not just theoretical but affect interpretation. These matters also raise the basic question of the methodology to be utilized in writing an 'evangelical' commentary. Anderson's method­ology seems to lie more in the mainstream of contemporary critical scholarship than in an approach governed by the constraints of an evangelical view of Scripture.

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