



THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY

Craig G. Bartholomew

PREFACE to 2022 edition.

This booklet was originally produced some thirty years ago. It was a keynote address at the 1989 Synod of the Church of England in South Africa (CESA), now renamed REACH SA. We are reproducing it in a new version for two main reasons. Firstly, there is fresh interest in it from black evangelicals in South Africa. Secondly, I continue to believe that the experience of evangelicals in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa has much to teach the global church.

Readers should note that I have left the text substantially intact, apart from very light editing to make it more readable. Of course, my thinking in this area has developed and continues to do so.

Craig G. Bartholomew, January 2022

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ORIGINAL PREFACE: FROM THE AUTHOR

This booklet was originally prepared as a paper for the CESA synod in 1989 in the Cape. 150 copies of the original have been distributed and we have now prepared a more polished production.

The Church in Society seems to be moving in circles beyond the confines of the CESA and it may therefore be helpful to give some perspective on this paper. The author is an ordained minister of the CESA, and as such is a committed evangelical. This paper arose out of a request by our presiding bishop for me to address our Synod on the subject of the church in society. Consequently it is very contextual in that it is written by a CESA man for the CESA.

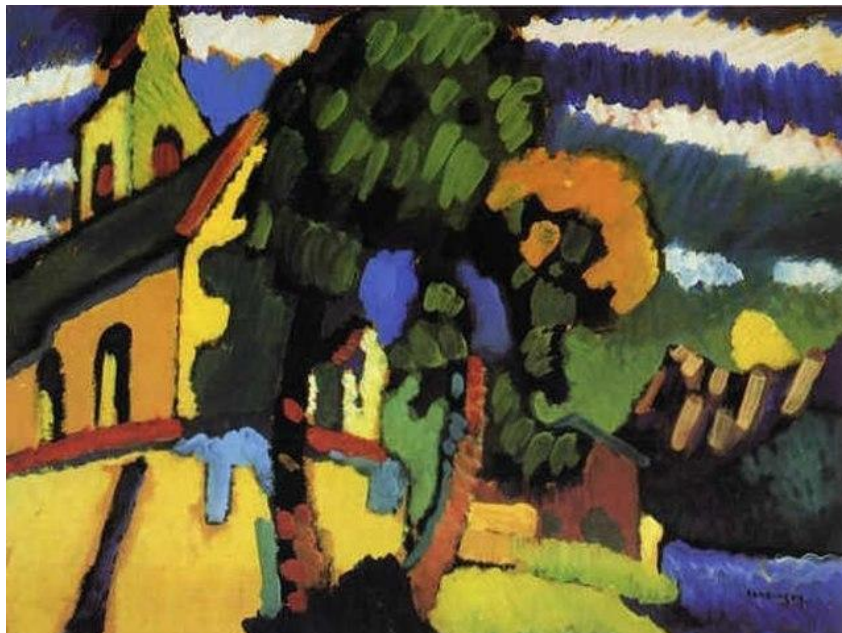
In no way does this paper aim to be a final word on the complex issue of the church in society. It is a call to face and wrestle with the complexities of what it means to be a Christian in South Africa today.

May we increasingly know God's mind on these issues and so function more effectively as salt and light in His world.

In Him

Craig Bartholomew (Rev)

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Wassily Kandinski, *Riegsee, The Village Church*

INTRODUCTION

In 1982 I worked at the Bible Institute (BI) in the capacity of a junior lecturer. Amongst other courses, I lectured the UNISA first course in mission and the Bible Institute course "Biblical Principles of Mission." Some of you attended that series of lectures. In many ways that represented a starting point for me in wrestling with this whole question of how the church is called by God to relate to society. Since then that wrestling process has not stood still and it is a privilege to be able to focus the results of my wrestling in a paper of this nature. I don't think that I have moved far away from my position that I held then but I have moved and my thinking has developed – all this will become apparent.

I am fully aware that this question of the relationship of the church to society is a controversial one, particularly in our South African context. We are at a critical point in the history of our country and tragically, the South African church is as divided as the country. This in itself is enough to make one cautious of tackling such a subject and yet I do not believe it can be avoided and nor should it be. If there is one key that may open a door of hope into the future for SA then I believe it to be the church. Consequently, for the sake of the glory of God, for the sake of SA and for the sake of the CESA I believe it to be very, very important that we wrestle with the relationship of the CESA to our South African context. Enough of an introductory nature. Allow me to outline the approach that I am going to take to this question and then to get on with the job. Our direction is as follows:

1. OUTLINING THE PROBLEM.
2. WHERE IS THE CESA?
3. WHERE IS THE WORLD EVANGELICAL DEBATE?
4. THIS PAPER IN RELATION TO THE WORLD DEBATE.
5. EVANGELISM AND SOCIO-POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT.
6. DISCIPLESHIP AND SOCIO-POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT.
7. WHERE TO FROM HERE?

1. OUTLINING THE PROBLEM

The church is obviously related to society. Each of us is a three-dimensional societal being and to escape from society is simply impossible. However, we live in a fallen, broken world in which much in society is contrary to God and his standards. Consequently, our relationship to the societies in which we find ourselves is complex and full of tension points. How are Christians and the church meant to relate to the fallen, broken societies of which we are part? All evangelicals are agreed that evangelism is at the heart of the church's relationship to society. What evangelicals are not quite so agreed about, and what all of us are not agreed about, is the role of socio-political involvement in the church's relationship to society. It is here that we shall focus our debate.

But what do we mean when we speak of *socio-political involvement*?

Politics may be given either a broad or a narrow definition: broadly speaking it refers to the life of the polis or city and the responsibilities of the citizens. In its narrow sense it is concerned with the formation of specific policies with a view to their being enshrined in legislation.

The Pocket Oxford Dictionary defines social as “concerned with the mutual relations of men and classes.” The point to note though is that however you define social and political, the two are really inseparable. I have heard it said that it is alright for Christians to get involved socially but they should not get involved politically. I don’t think one can separate social and political in this way. Even if “social” is taken to refer to aspects of our community life and “political” to the structures of society, the two are so closely related that it is unhelpful to distinguish them to any great extent. This is apparent from the way the Grand Rapids report distinguishes social service from social action (politics).

Social Service

Relieving human need

Philanthropic activity

Seeking to minister to individuals and families

Works of mercy

Social Action

Removing the causes of human need

Political and economic activity

Seeking to transform the structures of society

The quest for justice

Social issues are so inseparable from political issues that it seems to me best to simply speak of socio-political involvement.



Anthony Vasquez, *A Deep, Beautiful Storm Carries Hope*

Different Ways of Relating Evangelism to Socio-political Involvement

A lot of ink has been spilt over this issue of the relationship between evangelism and socio-political involvement. For the purpose of perspective let me outline as I see them the major views that are held.

1. The first approach sees socio-political involvement as a distraction from evangelism, or more seriously as a betrayal of evangelism. Evangelism is to be the way in which the church is to relate to the world and socio-political involvement is seen as altogether secondary, if not undesirable.

2. My second category is one in which socio-political involvement replaces evangelism as the mission of the church. This sort of approach is particularly associated with the WCC. In his book John Stott quotes Professor J. G. Davies who writes, "Hence mission is concerned with the overcoming of industrial disputes, with the surmounting of class divisions, with the eradication of racial discrimination" (Stott 1975, 18). This category is broad and would include liberation theology and so-called black theology, as well as what is often referred to as the social gospel.

This category is an enormous one on which many tomes have been written and are being written. I'm not qualified to deal with them in detail and don't wish to pursue them at this point. What I do want to do is to distance myself from any view which seeks to replace the role of evangelism in the church by importing a foreign ideology or anything of that sort. In his brief paper on the Kairos document Dr Broughton Knox critiques South African liberation theology in a way with which I am very happy.

3. My third category is one in which socio-political involvement is seen as a means to evangelism. We all know from practice that "An empty belly has no ears." Before you can preach the gospel to a starving person you need to feed him. This approach acknowledges the need to get socio-political involvement but only as a means to evangelism. You feed the man, therefore, only so that you can evangelise him.

4. A fourth approach is to see socio-political involvement as a manifestation of evangelism (Bavinck).

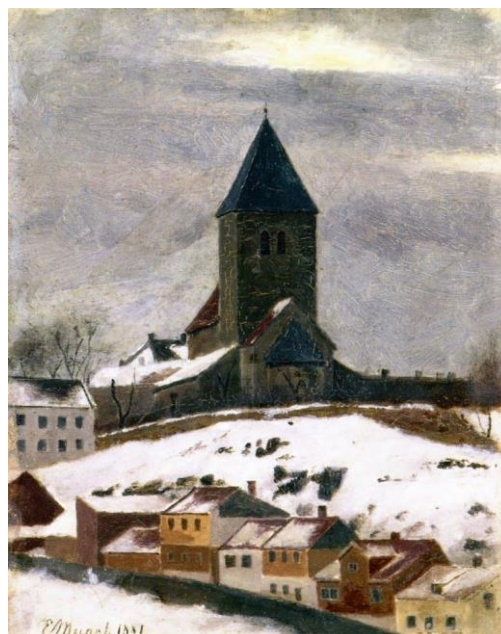
5. In Appendix A you will find a link to the Lausanne Covenant, the document that emerged from the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in 1974. The key theologian at Lausanne was John Stott who articulates the relationship between socio-political involvement and evangelism as a partnership. In *Christian Mission in the Modern World* he puts it as follows: "As partners the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love" (Stott 1975, 27). Do note though that Stott, with Lausanne, does maintain the primacy of evangelism. The Lausanne Covenant affirms that "... in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary." And Stott maintains that, "Anything which

undermines human dignity should be an offence to us. But is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel? And how can we seriously maintain that political and economic liberation is just as important as eternal salvation" (Stott 1975, 35).

6. The sixth way of relating evangelism to socio-political involvement is to see it as a consequence of evangelism. Arthur Johnston champions this view which sees changing people through evangelism as primary with socio-political involvement emerging from transformed lives as a consequence.

7. A seventh way of relating the two is to see socio-political involvement and evangelism as equally important but genuinely distinct aspects of the total mission of the church. In his paper on "A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary Perspectives" Tokunboh Adeyemo puts Ronald Sider, Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden, David Bosch and Jim Wallis under this category.

2. WHERE IS THE CESA?



Edvard Munch, *Gamle Aker Church*

It would be interesting to know where you would put the CESA in terms of the above categories. It seems to me that we fall very much within category 1. We have our social,

morals and ethics committee and our short statement on the State of the Nation, but it certainly seems to me that we regard socio-political involvement as at least a distraction from evangelism, and at worst a betrayal.

You may disagree with me but as I look at the State of the Nation report it is sufficiently vague to make it difficult to categorise; if I had to give it a go though, it seems to be saying that the answer to SA's problems is just evangelism and that we as a denomination need to avoid socio-political involvement.

You may disagree with me about the State of the Nation, but what I think we cannot disagree about is where we are in practice and where our laity and other denominations perceive us to be. The CESA is perceived as a denomination which avoids political involvement of any sort. It may get involved socially but certainly steers clear of politics. Our bishops may urge PW/FW to move away from the Group Areas but we have no formal commitment to such opposition. Certainly, we are not encouraging our people to get involved at a socio-political level. I wonder how many of us who serve predominantly white congregations thought it necessary to give our people some instruction about Christian citizenship in the lead up to the latest, white elections. I suspect that you would hardly know there have been elections from our preaching.

We have some statements out on nudity and we are wrestling with Sabbath observance, but we have no statement on apartheid, conscientious objection, the ways in which South African policies are racist, practical ways in which the church can combat racism etc., etc. What is more, we do not seem to be part of the evangelical debate with respect to socio-political involvement either at an international level or at a national level. At an international level, Lausanne I in 1974 was a very significant conference. Since then a number of consultations have taken place and this year in July 11-20 Lausanne II took place in Manila. People from more than 180 countries were there including some 40 delegates from the USSR. Out of Lausanne II came the Manila Manifesto which you will find in Appendix B. Even at a quick scan you will see that it is an important document in terms of the church's relationship to society. The point is though that we had no delegates there – sponsorship was available especially for black and women delegates. But we were not represented there and I imagine that many of you have just heard about Lausanne II for the first time. And don't think that Lausanne II was simply a gathering of all those who support Stott's position. Arthur Johnston has been a major critic of Lausanne's understanding of the

relationship between evangelism and socio-political involvement, but he was there, we were not.

Even in the SA context, or should I say especially in the SA context, we have not, I think, been in open and real dialogue with other evangelicals on these issues. I'm not suggesting that we need to go along with them at every point, but do we not at least need to be part of the dialogue – are we to write off PACLA, SACL A and the NIR completely? In a crisis situation like the present it seems to me that we are silent.

I would therefore argue that we fall under the first category. It seems to me that as a denomination that is where we are.

3. WHERE IS THE WORLD EVANGELICAL DEBATE AT THIS POINT?

There can be no doubt that in world evangelical circles the relationship between socio-political involvement and evangelism is controversial. In order to develop the discussion at this point we would need to survey the main evangelical conferences of this century and see how the understanding of the church's mission has developed. We don't have time for this so let me simply illustrate something of those developments by quoting Stott at the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966 and comparing his view then with some of his more current statements.

At the Berlin Congress Stott delivered a number of Bible Readings on the different versions of the Great Commission as we find them in the four Gospels. In the reading on Luke 24:44-49 he comments as follows, "The commission of the church, therefore, is not to reform society, but to preach the gospel. Certainly Christ's disciples who have embraced the gospel and who themselves are being transformed by the gospel, are intended to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5:13,14). That is, they are to influence the society in which they live and work, by helping to arrest its corruption and illumine its darkness. They are to love and serve their generation and play their part in the community as responsible Christian citizens. But the primary task of the members of the Christian church is to be gospel heralds, not social reformers" (*Study Papers Book 1*, World Congress on Evangelism, 26 Oct-4 Nov 1966).

By Lausanne in 1974 and in a series of lectures at Wycliffe Hall in 1975, Stott had developed his thinking somewhat. "Today, however, I would express myself differently. It is

not just that the commission includes a duty to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded ... and that social responsibility is among the things which Jesus commanded. I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus" (Stott 1975, 23).

We could spend a lot of time looking at the development of Stott's thought in terms of the difference between his position at Berlin in comparison with Lausanne. What is clear is that by Lausanne evangelicals were really wrestling with the whole question of socio-political involvement in a way that they simply were not doing at Berlin. What is also clear is that by Lausanne many evangelicals were laying far more stress on socio-political involvement in terms of its theological importance. Neither Lausanne nor Manila have settled the debate. Theologians like Arthur Johnston and John Woodhouse have been highly critical of Lausanne for putting socio-political involvement on par with evangelism, as have men like Peter Beyerhaus. The key issue in the world evangelical debate is: How does the Bible relate socio-political involvement to evangelism?

I find the debate very interesting and would love it if we could spend hours looking at the different views. That however must wait. The point that we must note is that hardly anyone in the world evangelical debate is arguing that socio-political involvement is a distraction from or betrayal of evangelism. All are agreed that the church is called to both socio-political involvement and evangelism – the debate is over the relationship between the two!

Just to prove my point let me quote from two great critics of Stott. Firstly, Arthur Johnston in his *The Battle for World Evangelism*. He criticises Lausanne for a "theological blurring" of the evangelistic focus that characterised evangelicalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, in the context of his criticisms of Lausanne he is quite clear that the Scriptures obviously teach both evangelism and socio-political responsibilities (Johnston 1978, 327).

Secondly John Woodhouse in his provocative essay, "Evangelism and Social Responsibility." For all his criticism of Stott's and Lausanne's understanding of the relationship between evangelism and socio-political involvement he comments that he has not been able to find anyone who does not believe that on some definition of the terms Christians must be concerned for both evangelism and social action (Webb 1988, 4).

So yes, there is a debate on in world evangelical circles with respect to the relationship between socio-political involvement and evangelism, but no one is seriously arguing for socio-political involvement as a distraction from and betrayal of evangelism. The point is this – we may not use Johnston and Woodhouse to defend where WE are if my analysis of the CESA is correct.



Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Davos in the Summer*

4. THIS PAPER IN RELATION TO THE WORLD DEBATE

You may be expecting me to get into the world debate and defend Stott or oppose Michael Cassidy or something like that. I am not going to take this approach. Such a debate is important, but I don't think it is relevant to where we are. So in terms of our categories of relating socio-political involvement to evangelism my intention is not to make a final judgment between positions 3 – 7. In the course of our discussion I will make comments on them, but my aim will not be to come down on Stott's side or Bavinck's side or anything like that. My aim rather is to demonstrate the inadequacy of position 1 and to show that however we relate socio-political involvement to evangelism, socio-political involvement is an important part of the duty of the church.

Some of you will no doubt be wondering what moved me to a new understanding in this area of socio-political involvement. Can I put your minds at rest in some areas? I did not change my view on the role of the church in society while over in the UK. Oxford cannot be

held responsible for where I am at present! How I came to a fuller understanding of socio-political involvement was by returning to SA and by reading the evangelical authors that I knew from BI. My thinking in a more serious way about socio-political involvement began with a discovery of the horror of abortion and the forces at work in SA to liberalise our laws. This made me read widely in the area of ethics and to go back to my Bible and that led me to where I am today. You will note that throughout our discussion I will quote from evangelicals and mainly reformed evangelicals.

5. EVANGELISM AND SOCIO-POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

On all accounts evangelism is at the very heart of the church's relationship to society. The question that I want to pose is whether at the end of the day evangelism can be put in a different category to socio-political involvement, as I think we often tend to do. There is, I think, an underlying presupposition in the CESA that it is possible to be altogether apolitical and yet to preach the gospel in all its fullness in the South African context. It is this presupposition that I wish to question.

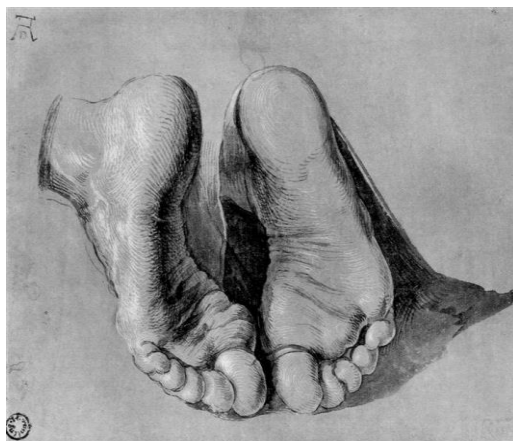
You know as well as I do that for a person to become a Christian they need to do two things, namely, to repent and to believe on the Lord Jesus. In our Reformed tradition we lay great stress on the necessity of repentance; how many times haven't we told people that they cannot have Christ as Saviour if they will not have him as Lord. There has to be a change of mind, a *metanoia* so that we are prepared to hand over all areas of our lives to him. Repentance, especially in terms of its OT background, means turning away from sinful patterns of behaviour back to the living God and a lifestyle which is in accord with his will. Now you and I know the extent of man's depravity – total – and we know that it is not enough to speak of sin in general categories. The preaching of the law which awakens sinners is a preaching which gets down to the specific, real sins of our hearers. The classic example of this is the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). Many of you will have read Walter Chantry's moving exposition of Jesus' handling of the rich young ruler in his *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* You remember how Jesus referred this young man to the commandments but he thought he'd kept them, and then Jesus puts his finger on his area of sin – covetousness and materialism. Chantry comments, "The Lord was pointing out the particular sin of covetousness in his heart ... He must turn his back on his green god to have

heavenly treasures ... But he would not empty his hands of filthy lucre to receive the righteous Son of God."

Repentance is a crucial element in evangelism, and our call to repent must move beyond vague generalities to specifics. In other words, while the essential content of our preaching will not vary, the way in which we apply and develop that content will vary in terms of different contexts in which we proclaim the gospel. This can easily be demonstrated from the NT.

All this brings me to this question: For those of us who serve predominantly white congregations, what are likely to be the hidden sins of our people that we will need to get to and to disturb if we are to be like Jesus in our evangelism? Knowing myself and something of white SA, I cannot believe that there are not many in our congregations who are guilty of racism. And yet this is the one sin that I hear so rarely preached against. I hear us denounce adultery, idolatry, alcoholism, homosexuality, premarital sex, drug addiction but I do not hear a probing denunciation of racism. Ah, but some of you say, maybe the Bible doesn't make so much of it. But it does. You know as well as I do that the entire will of God can be summed up as "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbour as yourself." And I say to you, who is my neighbour in SA? Jesus tells me "He's that guy on the ground who belongs to a different race group and is in need of help which I am in a position to give." For white South Africans our neighbour is often not next door; Group Areas ensures that the needy are kilometres away. And repentance means that I will love my neighbour.

I ask you therefore, gentlemen, are we preaching repentance and faith as Jesus did? Sin has social dimensions; it manifests itself relationally and we shall produce genuine repentance in our hearers as we put our finger on specific sins.



Albrecht Dürer, *Feet of the Apostle*

I am well aware that I have primarily addressed myself to those of us who serve white congregations; the principles apply to us all. To preach Christ is costly and it may be in the townships that one will have to call people to repent of violence and hatred. The danger is though that in our predominantly white congregations we denounce the sin of resorting to violence and in our black congregations we denounce racism. It is easy to denounce sins of which we are not guilty. Our people will love it. I suspect that we could go back to our predominantly white congregations and denounce communism and the ANC and sanctions; weep over Zola Budd being discriminated against and we wouldn't upset our white congregations. But go back and preach on the sin of not loving my black neighbour AS MYSELF, or of not loving my white neighbour AS MYSELF and I suspect we could be in trouble.

Can I also make a few other comments at this point? In terms of the relationship between evangelism and socio-political involvement I believe we do need to affirm the primacy of evangelism. I agree with Tokunboh Adeyemo when he urges that we must never forget that cutting edge of the gospel – the salvation of man's soul, which naturally places unparalleled emphasis on verbal proclamation. Now I am sure you are very relieved to hear me say that – he's still with us I hear some of you say. But, brethren, where are we? We pride ourselves on being committed to evangelism and I think we are but may I ask you to reflect on two points:

Firstly, are we really committed to world evangelism? Then why were we not at Manila? Both Lausanne I and II were essentially congresses on world evangelism. Arthur Johnston himself says of Lausanne that no one can seriously deny its remarkable evangelistic impact upon the world. He goes on to explain that since Lausanne many areas of the world have recorded unusual responsiveness to the Gospel. Evangelistic conferences and campaigns seem to be multiplying beyond all expectations of the 1960s ... The Lausanne Congress has provided the roots and impetus for the reversal of the non-evangelistic theology of the world conciliar bodies. (Johnston 1978, 335). One of the interim consultations between Lausanne I and II was held in Thailand. The resulting report consists of a very useful collection of monographs on evangelising Hindus, Buddhists, urban groupings, secularised man, etc.

When I had an appointment with Michael Cassidy recently he told me that Manila, like Lausanne, was essentially about evangelism. There were about 400 workshops over 10

days and looking through the topics evangelism is obviously the dominant theme. A few of the titles of the elective sessions on Thursday, July 13 were as follows:

Toward AD 2000 – Can we evangelise the world by the year 2000?

Research and World Evangelisation: Where are we?

Global report on tentmaking

Youth: Now and in the Future

The unreached peoples – global overview

Theology of the city

Evangelising college and university students

Reaching children today: strategies that work

Sports and recreation – Tools for evangelism and discipleship

Doesn't this whet your appetite? It certainly does mine! Are we committed to world evangelism?

Secondly, are we committed to evangelism in SA? Now of course we are, but can I remind you that effective evangelism requires a careful and deep understanding of our context. The world is changing into what *Time* magazine has called a global village and this is affecting and will affect the CESA. It seems as though megacities will be a characteristic of the global village and the concomitant problems of urban mission are on our doorstep when you remember that Durban is the second-fastest-growing city in the world. Brethren, I suggest that if we are committed to evangelism in SA then when an evangelical like Raymond Bakke is out here, we will be spending time with him." Who is he?" you say. A leading figure in urban mission, he was a leading figure in this respect at Manila and is in SA at present.

I trust you are with me therefore when I say that evangelism and socio-political involvement are not so far apart. Repentance will mean repenting of sins at the horizontal as well as at the vertical level. Now of course following on from repentance and faith will be a new life, a life of discipleship and so we come to our next heading.

6. DISCIPLESHIP AND SOCIO-POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

John Stott has argued that socio-political involvement is inherent in the Great Commission, and those of you who have read *Christian Mission in the Modern World* will

know that he develops his view from the Johannine version of the Great Commission: “As the Father has sent me so I send you.” Now whether we go with the Lausanne Stott or with the Berlin Stott is not my chief concern at this point. The common ground between the two Stotts is that discipleship has socio-political aspects to it. It is this common ground which I wish to focus upon and explore.

1. Recovering a Christian understanding of vocation.

- a. **The Kingdom of God**

The kingdom of God is clearly the main theme of Jesus’ teaching ministry, at least in the synoptic Gospels. This is obvious, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount. Much has been written about the kingdom but it is clear that to become a Christian is to enter the kingdom and entering the kingdom involves coming under the active and daily reign of King Jesus. The whole of a Christian’s life is to be of service to God, i.e., it is all to be lived with the eye on what pleases him. This of course means that in a real sense every Christian is in full-time service and every Christian is in the ministry. I have no desire to play down the importance of the ordained ministry, rather I wish to exalt it. For it is there to disciple and to equip the saints to serve God inside and outside the church, or, to put it another way, in all spheres of their lives.



Cathedral at Bayonne. Photo: Jim Rusthoven

This much is certain: if we are Christians we must spend our lives in the service of God and man. The only difference between us lies in the nature of the service we are

called to render. Some are indeed called to be missionaries, evangelists or pastors, and others to the great professions of law, education, medicine and the social sciences. But others are called to commerce, to industry and farming, to accountancy and banking, to local government or parliament, and to the mass media, while there are still many girls who find their vocation in homemaking and parenthood without pursuing an independent career as well. In all these spheres, and many others besides, it is possible for Christians to interpret their work christianly, and to see it neither as a necessary evil, nor even as a useful place in which to evangelise or make money for evangelism, but as their Christian vocation, as the way Christ has called them to spend their lives in his service. Further, a part of their calling will be to seek to maintain Christ's standards of justice, righteousness, honesty, human dignity and compassion in a society which no longer accepts them. (Stott, 31-32).

I suspect brothers, that we have lost this Reformed doctrine of vocation. Let me elaborate. In our churches we have people involved in all sorts of careers. We are called to disciple these people and to equip them to serve God in and outside the church. Let us imagine you have a doctor in your congregation and let me ask you what you would imagine a Christian doctor to be. I suspect that many of us would see a Christian doctor as a doctor who is a Christian; a man who has been converted and is increasingly involved in the church and preaches the gospel to his colleagues and patients. But a Christian doctor is far more than that; surely he is a man who is seeking to bring the rule and mind of Christ to bear on all of his life, including his medical practice. That will involve wrestling with things like IVF and contraception and reality therapy from a Christian perspective. It will involve serving Christ in this area of life to which Christ has called him.

Instead of doing this we tend to suggest to people that work is necessary but only to provide the nuts and bolts for serving God in the church. We are the ones who are really serving God and the laity must work in order that in their spare time they can help us serve God.

I say, brethren, that we need to repent of such a view if we hold it and are teaching in this way. I commend to you Carl Henry's book, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, in which he shows that this view in modern evangelicalism which plays down the vocation of each Christian is a long way away from Reformed theology and closer to Roman Catholicism. The

cultural mandate has not been rescinded and God is not only the redeemer but also the creator. Discipleship will always follow evangelism and discipleship will involve helping Christians to learn to live as Christians in all areas of their lives. Our business managers must learn to negotiate with the labour unions as Christians. How you do that I don't know, but I do know business managers who are struggling in this area, and I do know that God is calling them to obey him at that point and I do know that if I'm their pastor then I must be involved in equipping them to serve God at that point.

Oh brothers, I suspect that we have lost a lot in this area. So often one gets the impression that the more committed come to more activities and sacrifice the standard of their jobs to a greater extent. Surely what is needed is a balance between church involvement and vocation with a dynamic interaction between the two.

2. Secondly, I want to demonstrate that if we simply were to follow through on the Great Commission we would be involved socio-politically. The Great Commission commits us to teaching Christians all that Jesus taught. Let me take you through some NT passages and bring out their socio-political significance.

b. Matthew 5:13-16 Salt and Light

I think most of us are aware of what is going on in these verses. Salt had a number of uses in the ancient world but the dominant one in mind here is that of preservation. In a hot society, without electricity, salt was rubbed into the meat to prevent it from going off. When Jesus calls his disciples salt, he is referring to the preservative influence they are to have on the broken world in which they find themselves. The world, being made up of fallen men, has a natural tendency to decay and this process of decay is to be prevented by the influence of God's people.

Apply that to the South African context. South African society has a natural tendency to go off. This tendency manifests itself in all areas of our country but certainly not least in the socio-political. The racist laws that have characterised our legislation represent part of that decaying process. God expects the CESA to be part of that salt which will hold back this decaying process. The influence of communism is another sign of the decaying process – God expects the CESA to be part of the salt that will arrest the decaying influence of communism.



William Moore, *Lecture Night at the Baptist Church, Port Jefferson*

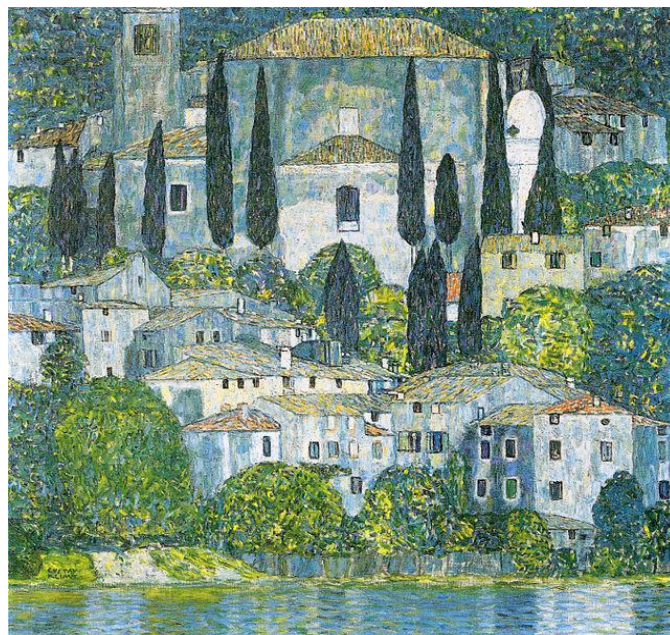
The million-dollar question, of course, is HOW God wants us to be salt and light in SA. And the point I want us to note is while evangelism is a major way in which the disciples of Jesus are salt and light it cannot be regarded as the only way. Listen to what Donald Carson says:

The norms of the kingdom, worked out in the lives of the heirs of the kingdom, constitute the witness of the kingdom. ... For a variety of reasons, Christians have lost this vision of witness, and are slow to return to it. But in better days, and other lands, the faithful and divinely empowered proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ so transformed men that they in turn became the light of the world. Prison reform, medical care, trade unions, control of a perverted and perverting liquor trade, abolition of slavery, abolition of child labour, establishment of orphanages, reform of the penal code – in all these areas the followers of Jesus spearheaded the drive for righteousness” (Carson 1978, 32-33).

What are we to learn about being salt and light from a passage like Matthew 25:34 ff. Listen to what Jay Adams has to say: “There can be little question that a total ministry of mercy that is led by the pastor, carried on largely by the elders and deacons, and that enlists all the members of the congregation is what is needed. At points this may lead to the development of hospitals, adoption agencies, etc. At the very least it will insist upon seeing

that all physical and other needs are met” (Adams 1974, 111). Adams is, I know, dealing with pastoral care in the church but it does not seem as though these principles can be confined to our relationships to each other. We are to do good to all men, especially those who believe. In the words of John Wesley, we are to “do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, at all the times we can, to all the people we can, as long as ever we can.” We surely cannot restrict loving our neighbour to preaching the gospel to him – our neighbour is a whole person, and our love must embrace the whole person with all their needs.

And can I remind you that I do not believe we can draw a radical distinction between social and political. Take a social issue like abortion. I hope that you are opposed to abortion and I hope that in our teaching ministries we are not only helping our people to come to grips with the great principle of the sanctity of life but that we are working out that principle in terms of the life of the unborn child in SA. But tell me, is abortion a social or a political issue? The answer is of course that the two cannot be separated. The polis of SA is a socio-political entity. Yes, the detailed formulation of policies must be left in the hands of the experts in that area but the principles that must guide and control the formation of those policies can never be left in their hands. Christian citizenship should be taken seriously by all Christians and the church should be equipping its members to be good citizens. Which brings me to Romans 13.



Gustav Klimt, *Church in Cassone*

c. Romans 13

We obviously haven't got time to wade through the vast amount of literature on Romans 13 and submission to the state. Allow me to make a few pertinent comments on Romans 13 in SA. It seems to me that this passage is often used to justify almost anything the government does. Michael Cassidy relates that when he went to see PW Botha as the representative of the NIR, when he went into PW's office and before he could sit down, PW was reading to him Romans 13. Certainly at a popular level in SA many Christians feel that God has ordained the Nationalists to rule over us and we should therefore not oppose them but submit to them in all their decisions. Is this what Paul is saying?

Leon Morris has recently brought out a new commentary on Romans and I commend to you his handling of 13:1-7. There are two points in his treatment that I want to highlight. Firstly, Morris points out that Paul is firmly convinced that God is in control and that nobody secures a position of rulership without God's permission. This means that at this point in SA we must see the Nationalists as appointed by God to rule. Secondly though, note that this same state is referred to as God's servant. To be God's servant is to have dignity, but it is also to be put in one's rightful place. Rulers, and that includes the National Party, have a responsibility to act responsibly. Morris quotes Harrisville: "In one fell swoop government is torn from its pedestal and made the servant of God for the Christian." He also quotes Calvin who says of rulers, "Nor do they have unbridled power, but power that is restricted to the welfare of their subjects."

No theology can ever therefore be or become a theology of the people. We are very aware of this in liberation theology where theology is used to justify revolution. What we seem to be not so aware of is the extent to which theology has been bound up with the establishment of white supremacy in SA. Just as there is black theology there is what I call "white theology" in SA. In this respect I commend to you *The Apartheid Bible* by Dr J. A. Loubser, a Dutch Reformed theologian. Theology has been used by the Afrikaner churches to justify rebellion against the authorities but that same theology has been used to clamp down on black nationalism. We in the CESA need to stand against liberation theology. It is gratifying to see Dr Knox's paper being distributed. But where are all the papers on white theology? You can criticize the left but where is the critique of white theology? Romans 13 must also be read alongside Revelation 13. Phillip Hughes comments that, "The state that has become the destroyer of its citizens rather than their protector is manifestly branded

with the diabolical stamp. The question then arises whether the Christian has not a duty as a citizen to do as far as he may be able what the state is failing to do.”

The church must therefore, in terms of Romans 13, exercise a prophetic ministry to the State. We must encourage our members to be good citizens but remember that a good citizen doesn’t always stand with the state. The good citizen renders to Caesar what is Caesar’s but remembers that Caesar is only the servant. We must respect the servant, but who would ever put the servant on par with the master? No, where the servant acts contrary to what the master stands for we must address the servant and tell him so.

The methods we must use to influence society will be varied. What we may not do, at least not in most circumstances, is to resort to violence. As a church we may not commit ourself to any political party, but the great principles that underlie society must be clearly proclaimed and applied in our context. As individuals we must encourage our members to get involved in society and equip them with biblical principles. On issues which are clear from Scripture, for example discrimination is wrong, taking of innocent life is wrong, etc., we need to look at ways of getting involved as churches. We cannot ignore the structures of society.



Gustave de Smet, *Weeding Woman*

Can I say as well that there is a tremendous need in SA at this time for the Reformed Evangelical voice to be heard, and that there are many willing to listen. Thielicke, the late German theologian in discussing human rights points out that, “human rights as abstract quantities, cut off from the soil of faith in which they had all their origin, are in danger of withering away.” At present the subject of a bill of rights is one very much on the South African agenda. The point that Thielicke is making is that for rights to mean anything they

need to be anchored in an adequate base. And the only adequate base is God and his word. Man in the image of God and the cultural mandate and so on are the foundations in which rights can be anchored. Cut them loose from their soil and chaos will result. What I am trying to say is that the church in SA needs to hear the Reformed Evangelical voice of the CESA.

And I do not believe that it is entirely unwilling to hear. In preparation for this talk I have tried to give myself as much exposure as possible and among other things have attended the Pinetown group of Christian Leadership Trust, a group which brings Christians from across the political spectrum together for discussion and the building of relationships. Soon I was asked to present a short paper on the biblical base for a bill of rights. They were wide open for such a contribution.

7. WHERE TO FROM HERE?

I am well aware that this paper has simply opened up many, many areas that need to be worked through. Let me remind you of my aim. It has simply been to demonstrate that we cannot see socio-political involvement as a distraction from or betrayal of evangelism. That is a position we may not take. I also have problems with seeing socio-political involvement as only a means to evangelism. It certainly will be in many cases but surely I do not help people only in order to evangelise them. Is there not a real sense in which I am to love my neighbour irrespective of his relationship to Christ.

Whether we wish to see socio-political involvement as a partner of evangelism, as a consequence or manifestation of evangelism, or as implied in evangelism as Adeyemo suggests, that is another discussion. What we have to rediscover is that the service God is calling us to in SA includes both evangelism and socio-political involvement. How we work that out in detail is another question.

Can I conclude by making a few practical suggestions.

1. Let us renew our commitment to world evangelism and to evangelism in SA. Can we not all commit ourselves to the conclusion of the Lausanne covenant: "Therefore in the

light of this our faith and our resolve, we enter into a solemn covenant with God and with each other, to pray, to plan and to work together for the evangelisation of the whole world. We call upon others to join us. May God help us by His grace and for His glory to be faithful to this covenant! Amen, Alleluia!" I believe as well that in our understanding of evangelism and socio-political involvement we need to assert with Manila and Lausanne the primacy of evangelism.

2. I urge Synod and the Executive to take us back into the mainstream of evangelicalism. I'm not saying that we must follow all the trends but let us at least be involved in the debate and the pooling of resources. They need us and we need them. We need to at least speak to our fellow evangelicals in SA and to have dialogue over these areas.

Schaeffer urges that on major socio-political issues like abortion that Christians work with all like-minded parties whether they be Christian or not. Surely we can at least open up discussions with men like Cassidy and so on at an official level.

3. In our local churches and at a denominational level we must rediscover the dynamic of vocation and discipleship. God is calling our people to serve him not only in the church but in his world and those of us in the ordained ministry are to equip them to perform that service in a way that honours him and glorifies him. If I had time I would love to elaborate on how we are starting to do that with the arts community in Natal. But we do not only need to do it with respect to the arts world but with respect to commerce, politics, medicine, the family and so on.

4. As part of the evangelical community we must start wrestling seriously with the macro issues that SA is facing at the present. I urge Synod to create structures within which we can start to reflect theologically upon issues like conscientious objection, ministry in the townships, missionary expansion of the CESA by the year 2000, urban ministry in SA in 2000 AD, multiracial churches and so on.

It is impossible not to take a position socio-politically. We cannot escape from society. My earnest plea is that we abandon once and for all this view of socio-political involvement as a distraction from or betrayal of evangelism and that we begin to wrestle with the nature of our socio-political involvement. Evangelicalism has a long and proud history of socio-political involvement – one thinks of Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, the Clapham

Sect and so on. May God grant that we like them will rise to the challenge of being salt and light in the darkness of SA at this present time.

SOLI DEO GLORIA



Gert Swart, *Contemplation: Restoration*

Appendix A: THE LAUSANNE COVENANT

Available online: <https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant>

Appendix B: THE MANILA MANIFESTO

Available online: <https://lausanne.wpengine.com/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto>

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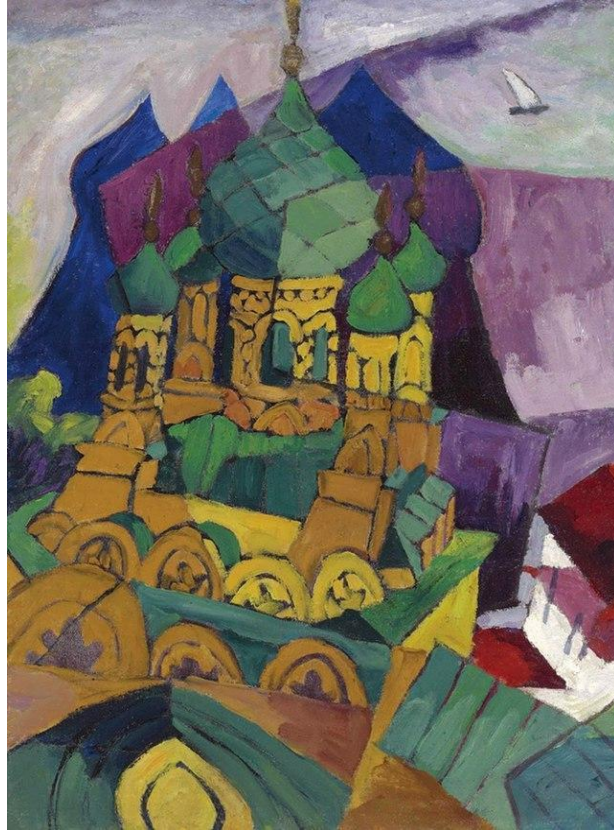
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Aristarkh Lentulov, *Church in Alupka*