

How Do We Communicate The Gospel?

Learning a foreign language can easily lead to a tongue twisting experience. Try this one long word "phiniquichipushallawarkanquichejtajchari." This is Bolivian Quecha meaning "I expect you caused me to continually jump around for someone." But even your own language can be a problem. A Filipino asked me, "Do you have a newspaper behind the news?" He spoke English alright; but what did he mean? He wanted an old newspaper. Communication can be difficult.

If problems in communication arise in the course of an ordinary conversation about newspapers, you can understand how hard it is to communicate the Gospel in a foreign culture.

Missionaries sow the Gospel seed, but will the seed find fruitful soil? I want to raise this question not as a theological but as a practical one. How can we communicate the Gospel in the most effective way so that we don't prevent the hearers from understanding?

Can a North American evangelist preach the same message and use the same methodology in Asia as in Detroit, Michigan, or Edmonton, Alberta? Some Christians say "Yes. The Gospel proclamation is the same for everyone. Whether you live in the East or in the West, it doesn't make any difference. Many reject the Gospel because it is a stumbling block. This is the reason."

Campus Crusade's "Here's Life Manila" campaign had poor results, its several thousands of phone decisions yielded relatively few church affiliations. The multi-million dollar American Christian Broadcasting Network beams Pat Robertson's charismatic "700 Club" throughout Asia from Manila. Its annual Philippine budget is \$200,000

Many evangelicals in the Philippines use the booklet the *Four Spiritual Laws*. This approach is presumed to be useful because it is used on campuses in North America. The question /request, "Will you pray this prayer with me?", forgets that in many cultures in Asia, people pray with you, and not from conviction of sin, but out of concern, lest you be offended if they don't do so and so lose face. The first law, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life", presumes a Western context, where there is still some idea of Ultimate Being, but it has no meaning in a Buddhist culture where the existence of a personal God is denied or where God is a sacred tree or stone, as in some animists tribes.

A communicator cannot presume that what is understood in the West will be automatically understood in Asian or African cultures.

How do we preach the Gospel in a culture not our own? A text can be easily misunderstood by the hearers. For example, "heap coals of fire on his head", does not describe a technique for torturing a person to death, as some Kituba speaking people in

the Congo understood it, but a way of making people ashamed by doing good to them. Matthew 7:10 says "Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" We have no trouble understanding these words of our Lord. Who wants to eat a snake? But they seem absurd to many people in Africa, who often much prefer a serpent to a fish. How do you explain the text: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," (Rev. 3:20) to a tribe in the Philippines who has never seen a door? There is one tribe here who builds huts on hills. These huts are open from all sides so that approaching enemies can be easily spotted.

In evangelistic rallies, the invitation is extended "to receive Christ." But rather than a call to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, it often means for the devout Roman Catholic Filipino "to receive the water of the Eucharist." A Hindu is invited to be "born again." This is not good news for him as he is desperately trying to escape the endless rounds of rebirths in his religion. He is promised by Christians a life that never ends, while the highest good in his world view is the cessation of individual existence.

The Gospel message is the same everywhere; but it needs to be interpreted in such a way that the hearer can understand it from his cultural perspective. An effective missionary is one who studies and attempts to understand the culture in which he works.

The pioneer missionary Bartholomew Ziegenbalg, the first Protestant missionary from Europe to India, developed some principles that were way ahead of his times. One of them was, "The preaching of the Gospel must be based on an accurate knowledge of the mind of the people." Ziegenbalg applied this principle with vigour. He saw fruit for his labour. When he died (1719) there was a Protestant church of about 350 believers in Tranquebor and the evangelical faith had started to take root.

How do we communicate the Gospel? With this question the church, at home and abroad, must continue to wrestle.

The Christ of the Scriptures is the core of the missionary message. But how do we communicate Christ cross culturally? This is a crucial question as everyone sees through the "glasses" of his own world-and-life view. The Gospel message must penetrate through the filter of the hearer's culture before it can touch the heart. Communication never occurs in a vacuum.

The living context of a culture and the environment often determine a missionary's methodology and the way he brings his message. The apostle Paul spoke differently to the crew of a ship in the midst of a storm than on a ship quietly in the harbour. The Gospel writers Matthew and John greatly differ in approach and style. The 23rd Psalm needs extensive interpretation for an Eskimo audience, while it is easily understood in the Middle East. Each language has its own symbols.

How sensitive have missionaries been to cultural differences? Some claim that knowledge of a culture is necessary pre-evangelism. How can you approach

unbelievers if you don't know where these people are in their understanding of God and the world? Others believe that the study of foreign cultures and customs is a waste of time and talent. The missionary must be busy with the proclamation of the Gospel! Any other activity is superfluous. Thus, the approach to the question is far from uniform.

The work of William Carey, Joshua Marsman and William Ward in early 19th century India is well known. Concerning them, Stephen Neill writes that they "held strong views as to the exclusive claims of the Christian faith; the religions of the world were delusions of the devil. Yet they saw clearly that the missionary must understand not only the language but also the thought-world of those to whom the Gospel is to be preached." A similar thought was expressed during the 1910 world missionary conference in Edinburgh: "Men who have to preach the gospel to minds to which its initial presuppositions are completely strange, what a knowledge should they have of those minds, with their interest, their traditions, their beliefs, and their whole ethos." But generations of missionaries succeeding Carey and even the 1910 Edinburgh conference often neglected the study of Indian cultures. Many prominent Indian Christians, who have learned of their Christian faith only through a Western context; now experience great difficulties in communicating Christ to their own people.

Since the 1950's, missionaries are increasingly realizing the need to learn as much as possible of the culture before evangelism is even attempted. In 1970, Sabapathy Kulandran, Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, wrote: "Indian Christian theologians must be willing to steep themselves far more in the spirit and atmosphere of living Hinduism."

How successful are missionaries in understanding the cultures of the Filipinos? David and Evelyn Feliciano, leading Filipino evangelical educators, charge Western missionaries with insensitivity towards Filipino cultures. In a recent article they wrote; "And so Protestant Christians mouth the same slogans, put up the same gimmicks, and do the same antics that are found in the West, especially the United States, heedless and insensitive to our own people's sensibilities, values and culture. No wonder the Protestant Faith has remained a 'potted plant' in Asia, to use colorful language attributed to D.T. Niles." The Felicianos are convinced that the Biblical Christian faith is true and meaningful, but they believe that an emphasis is needed on "the dimension of national consciousness, of national pride and cultural relevance."

How do we develop effective communications? In many cases, missions have been more program than audience-oriented; but people cannot be "programmed." Jesus knew His audiences. He understood the problems, the desires and the nature of man. He "knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

So more and more missionaries today are seeking to understand in-depth the cultural context of the place in which they are stationed. They begin to realize that the understanding of the local culture may often determine the degree of acceptance the Gospel will receive.

How does this development affect the missionary's approach? He will try to work out an indigenous form of communication. The better the missionary identifies himself with his audience, the more effective and forceful his appeal. In some cultures people don't respond to the standard sermonic style so well known in the West. They don't think analytically. For example, in some situations the Gospel is best understood when presented in the real life context of popular stories, such as Jesus used in His parables. Creativity in communicating the Gospel in an alien culture is a missionary's greatest asset.

How do we communicate the Gospel in the Philippines with its great diversity of cultures and languages? The Cebuanos in the backwood barrios of Cebu are not the same as the throngs who walk down Taft Avenue in Manila. Well educated leaders in Manila find it hard to understand what is needed for tribal people in the mountains of Luzon. University students are influenced by Western secularism, but they are very superstitious at the same time. Many Filipinos speak English for everyday business, but they use their own dialect or language when it comes to the matters of the heart.

Filipinos are Asian. But they have Spanish names (Rizal, Lopez). Every time a Filipino hears his name, he is reminded of the Spanish colonial rule that lasted from 1521 until 1898. Then the Philippines came under American rule. During the Second World War, the country was occupied by the Japanese. In 1946, it achieved independence.

It is obvious that the Filipino doesn't have a "pure, intact self-identity". The historical experiences with colonialism have left their mark on the nation. The Filipinos have become a people with a "shared self-identity". When you peel off the Spanish, American and other Western influences, you'll have an oriental Filipino. How does the Filipino think and act? I don't pretend to be an expert on the Philippines. I am still reading, studying and continually observing new cultural practices and ideas.

The Filipino's way of reasoning goes through the symbolic and poetic. Some claim that this way of thinking and approach to education hinder the economic development in East Asia. They attribute modernization and technological progress to the capacity of Western man to objectivize.

The Philippines is the only Christian nation in Asia. But the predominant Roman Catholic religion is mixed with traditional nativistic religions and pre-Spanish practices. The symbolic plays an important role in the religious life of the Filipino. The statues of Christ, the virgin Mary and the saints are taken as seriously as the persons themselves. The non-secular Filipino farmer thinks in terms of symbols and causality. In order to have yellow sweet potatoes he wears yellow clothing for planting.

The Filipino accepts the existence of God as a reality. He doesn't question it. He sees God as judge and ruler of the universe. The Filipinos stress on hierarchy in society puts God in such a place that He is beyond approach. Just as one doesn't approach BIG people in Philippine society, but must make use of intermediaries, so is the Filipino's attitude towards God. Christ is symbolized as the suffering and dying one, who, for all

the sympathy He may elicit, does not succeed in creating a desire for emotional attachment or commitment. Good Friday is more important than Easter. The Virgin Mary has her multitudes of devotees. She is the symbol of life, beauty, motherhood, the bestower of blessings, the symbol of the welfare of the whole of society.

The Filipino is fatalistic. He commonly reacts to trouble with "It is my fate," or "Bahala na," which would translate approximately as "God wills it." He tries to take the present in stride and awaits the future without much confidence that he can change it. This attitude may account for the fact that many Filipinos do not plan for the future. They live a day at the time.

When I read books on aid to developing nations, I am always amazed that so few take into consideration that the religious features of a people can hinder development or initiative. For example, a Filipino farmer, though he may not say it, still believes that luck may have more to do with a good rice crop than fertilizer. It is no surprise that with the emphasis on luck, gambling is so widespread. Gambling is a vice of the rich and the poor alike.

A Westerner is individualistic. A Filipino is society-oriented. The Oriental stresses the good of society over against the individual. A Filipino feels insecure when alone, so he finds strength and fulfillment in groups. A young lady may forsake marriage because she feels obligated to take care of her sick and aged parents. The oldest son may forego the opportunity to get an education for the sake of the careers of his brothers and sisters. Extra food is shared with neighbours. Relatives feel they have a share in somebody's position or job. When a man has a windfall, he will have relatives at his doorstep in no time. This cultural practice has its drawbacks, but it also provides a system of social security.

I have referred only to a few unique cultural ideas and practices, but they do show how much a missionary has to learn when he arrives on the mission field. Missionaries must reckon with culture(s) of the land in their desire to be as effective as possible in communicating the Gospel.

How do we communicate the Gospel in a rapidly changing world? A century ago missionaries worked in the far flung British, French and Dutch empires. Colonies were bought and sold. Many believed that the colonial empires would endure forever. Western civilization was considered superior, and it spread a blessing. The Gospel and Western civilization often came in one wrapping.

The world has drastically changed. The two great wars of our century have destroyed the old European continent. The empires, built up in the course of the ages, no longer exist. The French and Dutch tri-colours and the Union Jack no longer fly in Saigon, Batavia and New Delhi. The names of the first two cities have even been changed. While the European remembers with a measure of pride what he has given the non-Western nations, the Asian recalls with bitterness the humiliations experienced.

One colony after another has become independent in the post Second World War years. Nationalism and independence have become revered and even mystical words. Nationalism has often been inspired by Asian leaders trained in Europe. There they learned liberal principles at secular universities. But not every newly founded state is a nation. In many former colonies you find multi-nationalities. For example, the Philippine nation is far from one due to very real ethnic, linguistic and religious differences. The tensions are heightened because of the great economic, social and cultural changes that have been occurring here since independence.

In this post-colonial period, while Asian nations are free from Western political domination; the Christian missionary movement is often viewed as a new form of Western imperialism. As a result, some nations have either closed their borders to missionaries or curtailed their "proselytizing" activities. A case in point is two recent decrees issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion.

The first decree prohibits missionary (evangelistic) activity which is directed to convert adherents of other religious faiths through literature, material help or other gifts or inducements. The second decree is directed toward religious institutions or individuals that receive foreign aid. It involves the admission of foreign missionary personnel in Indonesia. The stipulation is that institutions receiving foreign aid should devise programs to replace foreign personnel with nationals. The Christian church in Indonesia is shocked by these government actions. A strong appeal has been made to the President to withdraw the decrees.

In spite of political independence, the continued exercise of Western influence is strongly felt. Western secularism and technology, and political, economic and cultural domination create conflicts in the loyalties of Asians to their own cultures and traditions. In the contemporary Filipino, there is a contradictory complex of traditional and Western elements.

To the Asians, the Western man is a newcomer in history. They are Orientals with a history of thousands of years. This is their pride and stay. Asians have been able to absorb foreign influences for centuries. They think that the same historic pattern will be true for the Westerners.

Asians have a different frame of reference, a different world and life view, mentality, value system; and religious expressions and experiences are totally different from the West. For centuries they have had their culture makers, religious leaders, philosophers, creeds and confessions. The roster of names and religions is impressive - Zoroaster, Buddha, Lao-Tze, Confucius etc.

As Westerners we tend to speak and write about THE Asian mind and THE culture. But we should be aware that the Asian does neither have a common mind nor a unified culture. Dr. Harvey Smit, former C.R.C. missionary to Japan, remarked: "Another common misconception in the West is that there is an oriental mind or way of thinking shared by all the people of the East:

Indian, Chinese, Korean, Malaysian, and Japanese. But anyone who has carried on a discussion with an Indian and a Japanese cannot help but realize how completely different their ways of thinking are and anyone who has lived for any time in China or Japan recognizes the basic differences of social attitude and the ways of thinking between these two cultures."

How does a Western Christian speak attractively, convincingly, and meaningfully the Gospel to Asians? How can the missionary persuade the Asians that his message is from God - the true, living, personal God? How can he get across to Asians that the Gospel is not Western oriented, but universal in scope - relevant for all mankind, whatever race or colour of skin? How can a Western witness, preach and teach effectively and build vibrant churches?

Theologian John Baillie once said: "Theological ideas are created on the Continent (Europe), corrected in Great Britain, and corrupted in America." Dr. Bong Rin Ro, a South Korean now heading the Asian Theological Association, said that he would like to add, "and crammed into Asia." He also remarked: "But shoving the 'Westerner's Christianity' upon other nationals is no longer acceptable."

Contextualization is the latest "in" word in mission circles. Dr. Harvey Conn, professor of missions at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, was asked to give a simple definition of the new concept. He replied: "In its simplest terms, contextualization means wrestling with the challenge of living as a Christian and sharing the Gospel in different situations."

Why this concern with communicating the Gospel in the context of a culture? Missionaries have personal limitations in presenting the Gospel. Consciously or unconsciously, they are representatives of their own culture. National churches have often been indoctrinated in Western ways of thought and procedures. European and North American distinctives have been transplanted in the East. The result has been a very Western looking church. But we cannot expect churches founded in non-Western cultures to adopt a European or North American tradition. We must make a distinction between Christianity and Western culture. An African or Asian, wishing to become a Christian, shouldn't have to embrace the whole of the Western value system.

Western theology doesn't speak to the issues in the third world countries. To a great extent, Western thought has remained a good academic exercise for Asian thinkers, but it has not contributed to a living theology that serves the church and her mission. Most of the theological heresies the Asian churches face have been imported from the West, just as the helpful theologies have come from the West. The pressing questions addressed to by academics in the West are often considered irrelevant in the East. They are not where the people are at in Asian or African villages or cities.

The communication of the Gospel has often been hindered by the lack of cultural sensitivity. Asian and African Christians complain that their own people can't follow what they are saying. They feel handicapped by their Western orientation and indoctrination.

The word contextualization may be new, but the questions it raises are as old as the mission of the church. I like to illustrate this with the way two different missionaries dealt with the issues at hand.

Emde, a watchmaker of German descent married to a Javanese, worked and evangelized in Surabaya. He requested his converts to cut their hair, to replace their sarong by western style trousers, and to wear shoes instead of sandals. The gamelan (Javanese musical instrument), wayang performance (Javanese shadow play), and tembang (Javanese reciting style) were forbidden. Emde replaced through this method the Javanese with European customs and thereby "westernized" his converts. As a result, he estranged the new believers from their own community. The mistake was that he identified the Gospel with his own culture and upbringing.

Coolen, the son of a Dutch farmer and Javanese mother, started his evangelistic work in a village southwest of Surabaya. Born and raised in the Javanese culture and framework of reference, he "Javanized" the Gospel in every way. His converts would sing hymns in the form of tembang, perform Bible stories by the way of the wayang, and the gamelan was freely used in the worship services. His meetings resembled Javanese religious gatherings. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were not practiced, because Coolen feared that his converts would lose their identity and become too "Dutch". Coolen went to the other extreme. He neglected to teach some of the universal truths of the Gospel and thus comprised his Christian faith.

If the church has struggled for centuries with the question of communication, why is contextualization such an "in" word in mission circles today? Because people in the Third World are so much more sensitive, in our post colonial era, to the influences of Western culture. They want to assert their own self identity. So today, we are witnessing the emergence of Asian, Latin American and African theologies.

In December 1977, African theologians met in Accra, Ghana, in the context of the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians, to discuss "Emerging Themes in African Theology." In a communiqué, they said that African theology must be understood in the context of Africa and its cultures, and the creative attempt of African people to shape a new future - that is different from a colonial past and a neo-colonial present. They believe that God is encountered in the poor of today. Theology must be accountable to the context in which people live. The African theologians see the traditional religions as a preparation for the Gospel. They also claim that theology must be a liberating theology, liberating from socioeconomic exploitation.

In the Asian church, a variety of Asian approaches to Christian theology is emerging. Contextualization is viewed as an attempt to affect an Asian expression of Christianity. Years ago, the famous Indian evangelist-scholar, Sadhu Sunder Singh, spoke of his desire to be able to give to his fellow countrymen "the water of life in an Indian cup."

Asian theologians struggle with the question of poverty, pain and suffering. The Indian theologian Saphis F. Athyal believes that Asian Christians must think through the question of Christian social responsibility. But he says that "to an Asian theologian the issue is all the more difficult as he tries to develop a theology of Christian social concern in a non-Christian and even anti-Christian social and political order." Arevalo, a Filipino theologian, asked the question: "How many of those who claim they have been changed by Christ are helping change our society in a concrete, visible way into a meaningful society?"

In their search for relevance, some Asian theologians tend to obscure the uniqueness of the Gospel through accommodating or situational theologies. Theology must be made relevant to the living situation in Africa, Asia and Latin America. But as the evangelical South Korean theologian Dr. Bong Rin Ro observed: "Bearing in mind the differences between East and West, we Asians desperately need to formulate Asian theologies which are relevant to Asians and yet based on biblical doctrines."

Emerging nations. Poverty, Neo-colonialism, Search for self-identity, Contextualization of Christian theology. The new Asia confronts the missionary with new problems. Asians no longer allow themselves to be led by the white race and Western ideologies.

What is to be the response of Reformed Christians to the issues in theology, economy and politics confronting missions today? In the current discussion on contextualization, even Reformed Christians may be tempted to place parts of the confessions and creeds of the church, and even parts of Scripture, on the altars of relevance and contextualization.

The basis for communicating the Gospel should be an unswerving, uncompromising confidence in God's infallible, revealed Word. Theology must be relevant. It must speak to the needs of the people and their society. But some theological schools in Asia, in their desire to train their students to be prophetic in an exploited or underdeveloped society, attempt to shrink their Biblical core subjects and even downgrade the study of Biblical languages. In such schools, more courses in socio-economic studies are added. But instead of lowering the requirements for studying Biblical languages, the opposite should be the case. In contextualization, the original Scriptural languages, Hebrew and Greek, are important. It is essential that national pastors are trained to develop skill and knowledge in both the original text and context. A high view of Scripture demands high standards for the ministry. The practice of Scripture interpreting Scripture provides the key for relevant Gospel proclamation in any culture.

The national pastor must be trained to let Scripture speak to all of life. When the Sword of the Spirit is no longer forcefully wielded, the deterioration of theology and all other sciences will occur.

A missionary must preach the universal Gospel in the "demonstration of Spirit and power." (I Cor. 2:4) He must speak boldly, persuasively, intelligibly and lovingly to people who are of a different race and culture. He needs to interpret the Gospel in relation to the needs and issues peculiar to the place where he works. In his attempt to reach the lost for the Lord, he must take the superstitions and beliefs of the people seriously. No missionary can assume that ancient beliefs and practices will disappear if ignored.

The late Dr. J.H. Bavinck, who was a missionary in the Dutch East Indies and later professor of missions at the Free University, Amsterdam, wrote, shortly after World War II, that on the mission fields the young church should express her faith in her own confessions, try to find models for her own architecture, and develop her own form of worship. He said that the one Gospel shines over all nations, and should find its own expression according to the diversity of gifts and talents God has bestowed upon man. In communication of the Gospel we must come to the heart of the matter - that only in the cross of Jesus Christ redemption is found.

Do we find any attempt in Scripture to contextualize? Scripture reveals different ways of presenting the Gospel. John the Baptist found his context at the river Jordan. His message was directed to and understood by the people who heard him preach. On the day of Pentecost, the people heard the Gospel, not only in the words, but also in the expressions and way of thinking that they understood (Acts 2:11). The apostle Paul had to fight a running battle with leaders of the Hebrew church who felt that the Gentiles had to adopt Hebrew ways. These Christian-Jewish leaders wanted to simply impose Hebrew theological concepts and a Hebrew frame of reference upon new Gentile converts. They were engaged in theological imperialism.

The missionary not only needs a firm confidence in God's inerrant Word, he must also be convinced that the Holy Spirit is The Communicator. A missionary must not shrink from developing every possible skill to facilitate communication, to deepen his understanding of culture, but he must not rely on his own wisdom and talents. It is still true that only the Holy Spirit can open hearts for the Gospel (Acts 16:14), convince man of sin and lead him in the truth of God's Word. The missionary is God's called instrument, to spread the good news of salvation. But the Spirit alone is the One who can change lives and meet the deepest needs of 20th century man, whether he belongs to a stone age or to a highly sophisticated Western culture.

"Christ is the Answer!" I saw this message painted on a barn alongside a highway in British Columbia. I have seen the same statement, in enormous letters, painted on the outside wall of a large church in downtown Manila. Is this Gospel proclamation? I like to ask: "If the Gospel is the answer, what are the real questions?"

Dr. Francis Schaeffer once said that evangelical Christians are often answering questions nobody is asking. When and wherever that is true - communication has broken down. Theologians, missionaries, and pastors shouldn't only discover the real questions, but respond to them as well. What are some of the real questions?

Demonology

In Asia and Africa, the demonic and the world of evil spirits are a horrifying reality in the world view of millions. It is unrealistic to ignore beliefs that so strongly influence the lives of so many.

In the East, the Lordship of Christ over demonic powers should be emphasized. Christ is the Liberator. He is Victor over Satan himself. The people in the East need to see that Christ's power is supreme even over magic, evil spirits, witchdoctors and their curses. The message of salvation, of real and lasting deliverance from the power of evil must be proclaimed with a ringing conviction.

Secularism

In the Philippines, the evangelistic message often comes in a pietistic, other worldly form, which sees no place for a distinct contribution to social or political issues as such.

The Protestant church has preached a compartmentalized Christianity in culture where a distinction between the sacred and the secular is not known. For example, the rural Filipino reads the signs of nature, lives by nature, and relates it to the Unseen Owner. Religion is integrated in the whole of life of the average Filipino, though secularism is very much on the rise in academic circles.

David and Evelyn Feliciano, Filipino evangelical educators, criticize Protestants for fragmenting the Gospel, "Despite our insistence that all of life is God's," they say, "in actual practice, the Protestant church has divided life into secular and sacred, the laity and the clergy, the physical and the spiritual, and has put undue emphasis on the latter. The stress on the eternal destiny of man necessarily obviates his physical, social and economic needs now. The teaching does not therefore address to the totality of the person and so long as the emphasis is only on the world beyond, Protestant society will have very little impact or influence on the total Philippine life."

Missions should not only reach the masses, but the educated as well. The formation of a Christian community of scholars should be considered. These scholars are needed in every branch of science and learning.. From a Biblical perspective, the trained Third World national leader can address himself to the issues of life where he is in today's world.

The Gospel with its demands and blessings for all of life is the message needed. The presentation of this message is a great challenge for any missionary.

Poverty

The church through her mission is to reach man with his peculiarities, yearnings, hopes, aspirations, his longing for peace and his rebellion against God. The target of the missionary struggles with poverty, injustices, class distinctions. The poor man sees the rich man living in luxury, owning one or more cars, while he is undernourished and lives in a shack. As his heart is filled with bitterness, he cries out for justice.

In the Philippines, the per capita annual income is still only \$400. The average annual increase in population is 2.8%. The prospects for economic expansion are not bright. Government leaders predict that in the next two years, the Philippines will be hit by a recession.

In this context, the church shouldn't proclaim only a futuristic Gospel, saying nothing and doing nothing about the miserable poverty of the masses. The church is to challenge the evil and to affirm the good, to oppose injustice and support the needy, hungry and oppressed, to spread - in word and deed - the liberating Gospel for this life and the life to come.

Communicating the Gospel is difficult in this complex and dangerous world. But in reliance upon the power of the Spirit of love and truth, the church can go forward - proclaiming the good news of salvation to every creature until her Lord returns.

Johan D. Tangelder
1978