



J. K. Howard

the gospel today
C.T. Symons

ADULT STUDIES

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THIS BOOK is one of the adult resources in the Christian Life Curriculum for use in Methodist, Presbyterian, Churches of Christ and Congregational Churches in Australia and New Zealand and Anglican Churches in New Zealand.

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the gospel today

C.T. Symons

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ADULT STUDY
CHRISTIAN LIFE CURRICULUM



THE ASSEMBLY BOOK SHOP
44 MARGARET STREET
SYDNEY

This study book

Christians believe that the gospel is at the heart of the Christian faith. But what is the gospel? How are we to understand it today? What does it mean to us? How can the gospel be communicated today?

This series of studies is designed to help adults think through these important questions.

Each of the studies has procedures written into it. As you plan to use the studies you should select and adapt procedures to suit your circumstances. It is important to have available the following materials: chalkboard or flip chart and marking pens; a number of different translations of the Bible; some Bible commentaries.

Cover design

The artist, John Howells, has placed one of the early symbols of Christ, the CHI RHO (a combination of the first two letters of the Greek spelling of Christ) at the centre of the complex technological world of today.

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**If you don't make the scene
WITH A MONTHLY PROFIT**
and the best money can buy
keep your cold a secret

FORGET GREASE PROBLEMS

and enjoy the big country

BY MAKING THEM LAST LONGER!

Out now
based tough, damage resistant

FREE!

POTENTIAL

discover how clear

OF MORE THAN \$3,000 —

if not we'll develop one no matter how 'special'

STUDY ONE

**THE GOSPEL
IN A
CHANGING WORLD**

GOOD NEWS ! All kinds of organisations today take up this theme in one way or another. They study the market and take infinite pains to be sure they communicate to people how much they need the particular product for their well-being.

In the midst of all these organisations and all this high-pressure salesmanship stands the church. It also is an organisation or society. It also declares it has good news. Indeed, it claims to have the most important good news there is. It calls this good news "the gospel." But what is this gospel? If someone asked you what it was, what would you answer?

A crisis for the gospel

"The times they are a-changing" — and with increasing speed, one might add! Certainly no one is unaware of change today, nor of the opportunities and problems it brings.

For many people in our society the church is an old-fashioned and out-moded institution whose message has no relevance to modern world issues.

And within the church there is uncertainty. Some are enthusiastic about new ways of doing things, while others are bewildered and concerned lest essential things are being discarded.

All this has brought about a crisis — how are we to express the gospel in a way which is meaningful for today?

has to their own felt needs

and many are vague as to what it's all about

mosquito larvae still bleeding on slide

Making the gospel known

ASSIGNMENT

In this changing age, Christians understand the gospel in different ways, and try to communicate in different ways. We are going to look at a few incidents in which some kind of understanding of the gospel and its communication is involved.

In groups of two or three discuss the problems which arise in the following attempts to explain the gospel to others. Let each group take one illustration and consider these questions in relation to it:

a. *What do the people in these illustrations think the gospel is?*

b. *To what extent is this good news put in a way that other people, especially non-church people, understand?*

In an open air meeting, a speaker said: "You have to be washed in the blood of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be cleansed from your sin and to be saved. If you don't you will be damned in hell." The people listening to him laughed and walked away.

A minister, asked to state what the gospel was, replied: "We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and received by adoption into the community of the redeemed through baptism in his name".

Another minister stated it this way: "Jesus Christ meets us in our existential predicament and enables us to be freed from anxiety. This makes us open to the future and enables us to live as men for others".

After a minister had preached on some social questions, a member of the congregation said: "Why does our minister bother about politics and social matters? Saving people's souls is his business".

Another said: "What we need is the simple gospel. Get people's hearts right and society will be right. This is what Jesus did. He saved people's souls and that is what we ought to be concerned about".

A church member told a friend that she lived next to some rather undesirable people. The husband was a heavy drinker and found it difficult to keep his job. The son was somewhat wild and in danger of becoming a delinquent. He had been spoken to several times by the police. The daughter had been seen with some older men in a car on at least one occasion. The mother seemed a decent enough person, but her clothes were shabby. Apparently she had no friends, for no one ever visited her. The church member went on to say: "Of course, I feel sorry for her, but it doesn't do to get mixed up with that sort of people".

The neighbour watched the church member go by on her way to church. In her eyes was a brooding hopelessness which said: "Doesn't anybody care?"

Her husband, peering through a window, muttered, "----- hypocrite!"

Reports from groups

As each group reports its findings, the leader should write up a summary on flip charts. These should then be discussed by all members to clarify the points made.

After all findings have been reported and considered, let the whole group discuss these and compile their own understandings of the gospel and how it should be communicated. There may be disagreement or uncertainties at this stage. Note these and, if necessary, determine to review them after further study. Your understandings can be charted as follows:

THE GOSPEL	COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL
What it is	Helps
What it is not	Hindrances

Summary

The study has revealed various interpretations of the gospel held by Christian people. It has also indicated difficulties in regard to the communication of the gospel. In the light of these it is necessary to consider the origin of the gospel and what it meant to those who were first concerned with it. This takes us to the New Testament. The next two studies will deal with the gospel in the New Testament, one concentrating on the gospels and the other on passages from some of the letters.

THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE

WHOLENESS OF LIFE

THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL is about Jesus, the Christ.

Our primary source for understanding the gospel is the New Testament. It contains the record written by Christians of the first century, as they recalled the deeds and words of Jesus, and drew out the meaning of those deeds and words for their life in the various communities of the day.

The gospel in the Gospels

Read the following passages, with the help of the notes. These selected verses are not intended for lengthy discussion at this stage, but rather as an introduction to the message of the gospels.

Mark 1:1 is the title of the Gospel according to St. Mark. In this verse Mark indicates that his story is the good news of Jesus Christ. It is the good news he brought but also the good news about him.

Mark 1:14, 15 shows Jesus in action as a preacher. He proclaims, or publicly declares, "good news" about God. It is good news for which God is responsible and also good news about God. In verse 15, Mark says that the good news means that a special time has arrived in history; God is about to establish his rule or kingdom. Jesus calls men to repent and to believe this good news about God.

Luke 4:16-21 gives an account of Jesus at Nazareth. In the town of his childhood he sets out as it were his platform in regard to the good news he has come to proclaim.

Matthew 11:2-6. In these verses Jesus points to what he has done as evidence or signs of God's kingdom or rule amongst men.

The rule of God

The good news of Jesus concerned the kingdom or rule of God. Over against this were all the evil forces which harmed and destroyed men. Jesus was involved in a conflict. Read *John 10:10* concerning the purpose for which he engaged in that conflict. In contrast with what denies, degrades and destroys life, Jesus brings abundant life. The kingdom of God means fullness of life.

Let us now examine what the gospel brought by Jesus meant for different people.

Divide into groups. Allowing 20-30 minutes let each group examine one of the following aspects of the work of Jesus for reporting to the whole group. If any group finishes early it can begin to examine one of the other aspects listed for study.

1. PHYSICAL WHOLENESS

Sickness is a common affliction of men. Jesus performed many acts of healing.

Read *Mark 1:40-45* using a number of translations. Note, in particular, the way the New English Bible translates the passage.

Lepers were banished from society at large. They were no longer able to live with their families, attend places of worship, or carry on their normal occupations.

Jesus came with "good news". For the leper it meant good news in the form he needed it most — physical healing. God's rule for him meant health instead of disease. Other consequences followed this physical healing. The conquest of disease was a step towards health and wholeness of life under God's rule.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Examine the passage again and note any evidence for the following aspects of the leper's restoration to wholeness of life: He joined in the worship of his people. He was restored to society.*

2. *How would you describe the leper's attitude and relationship to Jesus? How did this contribute to his healing?*

2. WHOLENESS OF MIND

In New Testament times people thought that mentally disturbed persons were under the control of demons. This control by demons was bad news. Jesus brought good news of the rule of God.

THE MAN IN THE TOMBS

An extreme case of mental sickness is given in *Mark 5:1-20*. Study this carefully. As you study note the verses which indicate the following aspects of the story:

This man, possessed by demons, put himself in isolation through mental disturbance and fear. He lived among the dead, because he was dead to society. He shouted to frighten others because he himself was afraid. He cast off his clothes because he had thrown off his social relationships and responsibilities. He could not give his name, which would have identified him as a person, because he was a split personality.

Jesus brought to the man an interest in him as a person. He led him from fear to trust, from a divided and lost self to an integrated and found self. Jesus made with him a new personal relationship as the first step in his return to society.

The man wanted to remain with Jesus. He felt safe with him. Jesus commanded him to go home. He would not allow him to escape from the normal relationships of life. He made him take up his responsibilities, in the home, at work, in society, and there be a living witness to the victory of God's kingdom over evil. He had to move from wholeness of mental life to wholeness of life.

FOR DISCUSSION

What evidence is there in this passage to show that the conquest of mental disturbance was a step towards health and wholeness of life under God's rule?

3. SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS

Read *Mark 2:1-12*, noting the verses which indicate the following aspects of the cure:

Jesus saw more deeply into the needs of this man than did his friends. He was spiritually sick. Unforgiven sin — a guilty conscience or a guilt complex — was at the root of his physical paralysis.

The assurance that his sins were forgiven removed the cause of his physical sickness. The symptom vanished when the real disease was cured. So the man rose up well and went home.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Why did Jesus say to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven"?*
2. *What evidence is there in the passage to show that the conquest of spiritual sickness was a step towards wholeness of life under God's rule?*

4. SOCIAL WHOLENESS

Read *Luke 19:1-10* and consider what the passage has to say about the nature of the gospel of God's rule as it came through Jesus.

Palestine was under Roman rule. Of all people in Palestine the tax collectors were the most hated for they had taken service under the Roman government. They were regarded as renegades and traitors.

"Lost" to God, to himself, to his people, Zaccheus was "found" by Jesus. Found by Jesus, he was restored to honesty, integrity, generosity. From this followed restoration to right relationships with his people, who named Abraham as their spiritual forefather. This was "good news" to Zaccheus. Salvation, healing, wholeness of life had come to his house.

FOR DISCUSSION

What evidence is there that Zaccheus' contact with Jesus was a step towards wholeness of life under God's rule?

5. GOOD NEWS ABOUT DEATH

Read *Mark 5:21-24, 35-43*. Consider this story from the point of view of human relationships within a family and how these are connected with fullness of life.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. *What did the death of the girl mean to the members of the family?*
2. *Compare what happened when the girl was restored to life and health. Are any clues given for this in the story?*
3. *In human existence as we know it, those who die are not restored to life and human relationships on earth. Has the gospel anything to say to this? In what ways do John 14:19 or John 11:25-26 help?*

Reports and summary

Divide your flip chart into three columns. On the basis of group reports list in two columns what the gospel meant to the people considered in this study. In one column put the bad news from which they were saved and in the other the good news to which they were saved.

These changes came about because a new relationship was established between the people involved and God. Jesus was responsible for this new relationship. Discuss what was the nature of the relationship with these people and Jesus which made the good news effective in their lives. Add the findings of the group as a third column on the chart.

Jesus brought "good news," the gospel of God's rule. Evil injured, frustrated, defeated and destroyed men. The rule of God meant health, fulfilment, victory and life. At the point of their need, Jesus brought the power of God. Here the rule of God, once established, moved into all areas of human concern until God ruled in the wholeness of life.

As a private exercise, read through the gospels and find what the gospel meant to people who met Jesus. Compare these with what other members find and add them to the study.

STUDY THREE

THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

AFTER THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ, the early Christians preached the gospel to people of the first century. They did this, not merely in missionary campaigns, but also through personal witness and through letters written by Paul and other apostles. These letters were concerned with the problems and real-life situations of the people to whom they were addressed. Consequently, they dealt with many issues. There are, however, some major themes which are common to most of them. These include forgiveness and reconciliation. These themes can be found in letters written to cities as far apart and as diverse as Rome, Colossae and Ephesus. In this study we will consider passages related to the people of these cities, and bring out truths concerning the gospel which apply to us.

Procedures

This study is primarily a Bible study, so group members need to give close attention to the scripture passages. Reference to commentaries is advisable to make sure the true significance of terms is brought out. Useful commentaries for this purpose are the *Moffatt Commentaries* and those by William Barclay in *The Daily Study Bible*.

There are three passages for study. The most important of these for our purpose is *Romans 5:1-11*. The following are some possible ways of developing this session:

(1) The whole group can study each passage. If you use this procedure you may need more than one session.

(2) The whole group can study *Romans 5:1-11* and then select one of the other two passages for study.

(3) All study *Romans 5:1-11* and then divide into small groups, each of which can study one other passage and report back.

1. ROMANS 5:1-11

Rome was the capital of the Empire and the centre of the ancient world. Paul had not visited it, but planned to do so. He wrote to the church there to prepare the way for his visit and to give its members an outline of the gospel as he understood and preached it. Paul probably realised that the church in Rome would have a tremendous influence in the future even as the city did. He therefore goes to considerable trouble to place before its members the great truths of the gospel.

Many of the chief themes of the gospel are contained in *Romans 5:1-11*. They are given in key words which require definition before the meaning of the whole passage can be understood. These should be carefully studied before the assignments and questions are considered. Apart from commentaries on Romans, helpful material on the basic terms used can be obtained from "*A Theological Word Book*", ed. by A. Richardson (S.C.M. Press).

Justification means 'to put in the right'. It involves a new status with God, but this is given by God. God takes the initiative to accept men in a new relationship with him. He puts them right with himself and accepts them as in the right (or righteous). They are "righteous" because they are "right with God".

Faith is the response of man to God's action towards him. It involves, not merely belief in God, but trust and commitment to God in the light of the revelation that God is prepared through Jesus Christ to accept him as he is. Men by such faith accept the new relationship of being right with God in spite of the fact that they do not deserve it and can do nothing to earn it.

Peace means harmonious relationships, first with God and then with men and in all situations of life.

Grace is loving kindness, love in action for the good of others, but love which is undeserved.

His Blood. Blood in the Old Testament stands for 'life,' for what gives existence to both men and animals. When an animal was sacrificed, its blood was poured

out at the altar or sprinkled on the altar and the people. This was symbolic of the complete offering of the animal to God and of people as completely dedicated to God. In the case of Jesus, his blood means the complete offering of himself to God in utter obedience for the fulfilment of God's will, even to death on the cross. This purpose was the salvation of man, so the cost of it to God and Christ is death on the cross. The motive of it is the love of God. This means there is no division between God and Christ in attitude to man. Christ, through his death, does not appease God or prevail upon him to pardon and save man. Rather the love of God goes to this extremity and expresses itself in this offering of Christ even to death on the cross to save men. The phrase 'justified by his blood' thus indicates that the basis of God's approach to put men in the right with him is the utter giving of Christ in love for men even to death (losing of his life) on the cross.

Wrath of God. This should not convey the image of an angry God as applies to human anger. It has two aspects. The first is God's implacable attitude of hostility to evil, though not to the sinner. The second aspect describes the inevitable working out of evil in men's lives. To persist in evil means to reap the results of evil in the destruction of relationships between God and men and between men and men. It means the destruction of moral and spiritual worth in men. To refuse the love of God is to fall victim to the destructive powers of evil in all relationships of life.

Reconciliation. This means essentially to bring into harmonious relationships of love and goodwill. It is the work of God, who takes the initiative in Christ, to bring men into such a relationship.

ASSIGNMENTS AND QUESTIONS

1. Read Romans 5:1-11 in modern translations, e.g. R.S.V., New English Bible, Phillips, Moffat and compare these.
2. What are the key thoughts in this passage? Write your answers on a flip chart.
3. How would you express these to someone who had no church background? Go over your answer to question 2 with this in mind.
4. Check your findings against the scripture passage.

You can prepare your answers for presentation to the whole group.

2. COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Two special problems disturbed the church at Colossae. Some of its members were particularly interested in philosophy, in questions about the creation of the world and the powers which controlled it. They tended to be influenced by ideas current in those days. This led them to adapt and modify the Christian gospel. Another problem arose from the desire of some Christians to continue the observance of practices which belonged to the Jewish religion, such as circumcision and festivals. Consequently, arguments and divisions occurred within the church. From these arose the danger of antagonism and hostility between church members as well as perverted ideas of the gospel.

Paul reminded the Colossians of the Lordship of Christ and of his gospel of forgiveness. He also emphasised that they were committed to Christ and had found new life in him. The demand now is for them to be his people, to put away their former way of life, and to express the gospel in all their relationships. So a number of questions arose as to what it meant to be and to live as one committed to Christ. These questions are answered in the passage given for study. With this in mind consider the following questions:

ASSIGNMENTS AND QUESTIONS

1. Read Colossians 3:12-17.
2. What terms does Paul use to describe the Colossian Christians? (verse 12).
3. What qualities of character are they to show?
4. What attitudes are they to take to one another?
5. How are they to behave towards one another?
6. What is the basis of their new attitudes and conduct?
7. How is their corporate life in the church to express itself?

You can write out your answers on a flip chart for presentation to the whole group.

3. EPHESIANS 2:11-19

Ephesus was the greatest commercial city in Asia (Asia Minor). As such it attracted people of many nations. In it there was a large number of Jews. These had at least one synagogue as the centre of their worship and teaching. Though they were important and valuable citizens of Ephesus, there was a deep cleavage between the Jews and other races (the Gentiles). The Jews had their own distinctive religion and customs which marked them off as a separate race. This happened all over the world. The Jews were a race apart, separated from all others. This bred misunderstanding and resentment, which often became hostility and even hatred. Jew and Gentile seemed to be two separate races of mankind with no hope of reconciliation and unity.

Paul spent two stormy but successful years in Ephesus. The result was a strong missionary church whose membership included both Jews and Gentiles. How did this come about and what was its significance in regard to the gospel? These are questions which are answered in the passage set for study.

In the first ten verses of chapter 2, Paul reminds the Ephesians, both Jews and Gentiles, of their common experience of salvation which came to them through faith in Jesus Christ. He then goes on in verses 11-19 to apply this to their relationships as distinct races.

"Strangers to the covenants of promise" (v. 12). The covenants of promise refer to the covenants made between God and Abraham and renewed at Mt. Sinai with Moses and the people. These carried the promise of God's blessing, but belonged to the history of the Jews. As such they were outside the history and experience of the Gentiles.

"The blood of Christ" (v. 13). For the meaning of this phrase see notes under *Romans 5:1-11*.

"The law of commandments and ordinances" (v. 15). The Jewish Law with its multitude of rules and regulations, maintained the separateness of the Jewish people and made their exclusiveness distasteful to the Gentiles. It was "in his flesh"—through his human life and death that Jesus Christ abolished that which separated Jew and Gentile.

"Afar off . . . and near" (v. 17). These do not denote geographical situations. Those who were "afar off" were the Gentiles. The Jews were "near" having been brought into fellowship with God as his people.

"Saints" (v. 19). This does not mean 'perfect people'. It signifies those who belonged to God through their acceptance of Christ as their Saviour and Lord. It does not signify their spiritual worth, but their status as accepted children of God.

ASSIGNMENTS AND QUESTIONS

1. Read Ephesians 2:11-19 comparing a number of translations, if possible.
2. Set out in parallel columns what Paul has to say about the Gentiles under the headings (a) before hearing the gospel (verses 11-12) and (b) after hearing the gospel (verse 13 ff).
3. Note where Paul changes from "you" to "we." How is this change brought about? What is its significance? *(Point - a Jew himself)*
4. List the results of the work of Christ described in this passage.

You can write out your answers on a flip chart for presentation to the whole group.

Summary

If you have worked in small groups on different assignments come together and receive reports.

Whatever procedure you have followed summarise the main things you have learned from this study.

OR

Let the whole group discuss the findings from the following points of view:

1. The basic ideas brought out from each passage.
2. The relation of these basic ideas to one another.
3. The thoughts in these passages concerning the nature of the gospel and its application, perhaps under the following headings:
 - (a) the gospel for the individual;
 - (b) the gospel for the church;
 - (c) the gospel for the world — or the nations.

Conclude by reading in silence 2 *Corinthians 5:16-21* thinking about our responsibility for the gospel.

UNDERSTANDING THE GOOD NEWS TODAY

HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND the significance of Christ today? How are we to interpret the good news for people of the twentieth century?

Let us consider some attempts made today. The members of the group should read the following statements in preparation for the group session. If possible, members should also read the whole book or article, to gain a more adequate view of the writer's thought. Members could be given assignments along these lines, each taking a separate book for private reading.

Divide into small groups, each group taking one of the following statements. Study the statement with a view to finding —

- (i) How this person understands the gospel.
- (ii) How effectively the methods recommended or language used by this person communicate the gospel today.

1. BILLY GRAHAM AND TRANSFORMING POWER

The best known evangelist of today is Billy Graham. How does he interpret the gospel? It is impossible to cover all the material available in his sermons, broadcasts, films and books. The following, however, may be taken as a summary of his teaching in his own words.

"The mercy the world needs is the grace, love, and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is his transforming and regenerating power that the world needs more than anything else.

"To be sure, we are to use the world's physical resources, but along with them we are to take the regenerating power of Christ. We are to take a cup of cold water in one hand and regeneration in the other and give them to a physically and spiritually

starved world. We have thought that man's needs were entirely physical, but we are beginning to realise that they are also spiritual.

"The gospel of Christ provides for man's physical being. Materialism can see nothing in our bodies except laboratory analyses, but the Bible with stern rebuke exclaims: 'What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?'

"The gospel provides for man's intellect. It stimulates his intellect to the highest activity. It commands the complete education of all his intellectual powers. The Bible instructs: 'Gird up the loins of your mind'. It opens before a regenerated man a whole universe of truth.

"The gospel also provides for man's sensibilities. 'Let not your heart be troubled'. 'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted', says Jesus. This is what humanity needs. Humanity wants comfort in its sorrow, light in its darkness, peace in turmoil, rest in its weariness, and healing in its sickness and disease: the gospel gives all of this to man.

"The gospel provides for man's will. It provides that man may yoke his will to the omnipotent will of God and thereby become omnipotent himself.

"The gospel also provides for man's moral nature. Its code of morals is acknowledged by any man to be above reproach.

"The gospel also provides the only satisfaction in the universe for man's spiritual nature. The gospel recognises the tremendous fact of sin and proposes an adequate remedy.

"It does not evade the age-old question 'What must I do to be saved?' by saying there is no need of salvation. It does not lift a man out of the pit by telling him that he is not bad. It does not remove the sting of a man's conscience by taking away conscience itself. It does not haunt men.

"The gospel shows men their wounds and bestows on them love. It shows them bondage and supplies the hammer to knock away their chains. It shows them nakedness and provides for them the garments of purity. It shows them their poverty and pours into their lives the wealth of heaven. It shows them their sins and points them to the Saviour.

"This is the message we are to take to a lost, confused, and bewildered world! This is showing mercy."

From *The Secret of Happiness* by Billy Graham, published by The World's Work Ltd., 1956.

2. GEORGE MACLEOD AND SOCIAL CONCERN

George Macleod is a vital and dynamic Christian who has made a strong impact upon many people. He founded the Iona Community and gave a new impetus to the work of the church in Scotland and other parts of the world. His approach, however, differs radically from that of Billy Graham. Consider the following quotations.

"When I was in South Africa, just prior to a big public meeting in Durban an unknown Ulsterman approached me and said, 'I hope you are going to give them the Gospel red hot'. 'Yes', I replied, 'I am speaking of its social implications here in Durban'. 'Social implications?' he repeated in an acme of suspicion, 'What is wanted is the Gospel red hot'. 'But is it not of the Gospel', I asked, 'that by right of Christ all men have an equal dignity?' 'Yes', he said, 'that is of the Gospel'. 'Then what', I said, 'are you Gospellers doing about the ten thousand Africans and Indians who have not got a decent shelter in Durban this cold night?' 'Them?' replied the hot Gospeller, 'I wish the whole damn lot were sunk in the harbour! Yet that man could have recited the whole Christian offer immaculately, and his own engagement to be in Christ.

"What had happened? We have allowed him to mythologise the gospel offer itself. He had never really faced the terrible challenge that the apex of the Divine Majesty resides for ever in Christ's most glorious humanity".

From *Only One Way Left* by George Macleod, published by the Iona Community.

3. PAUL TILLICH AND ACCEPTANCE

Few theologians have had such a marked influence in this century as Paul Tillich. He has himself tried to re-think the gospel in terms of modern psychology and philosophy and to relate it to the situation of modern man.

Consider the following quotation from Tillich on grace and acceptance.

"We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace ...

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: 'You are accepted. *You are accepted*, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. *Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!* If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sins, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement. And nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral or intellectual pre-supposition, nothing but *acceptance*.

"In the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our relation to others and to ourselves . . . We experience the grace which is able to overcome the tragic separation of the sexes, of the generations, of the nations, of the races, and even the utter strangeness between man and nature.

"And in the light of this grace we perceive the power of grace in our relation to ourselves. We experience moments in which we accept ourselves, because we feel that we have been accepted by that which is greater than we. But sometimes it happens that we receive the power to say 'yes' to ourselves, that peace enters into us and makes us whole, that self-hate and self-contempt disappear, and that ourself is reunited with itself. Then we can say that grace has come upon us".

From *The Shaking of the Foundations* by Paul Tillich, published by S.C.M. Press 1949, Pelican edition 1962.

4. THE GOSPEL IN ACTION

In *Come Out the Wilderness*, Bruce Kenrick records efforts by ministers and lay people to make the gospel relevant to people in East Harlem, New York. The whole book is an inspiration to read, but only one quotation can be given here.

"That was the crux of the matter. 'We have to live it!' And the work of the East Harlem Protestant Parish was born out of the conviction that only by living itself into the life of East Harlem could the church learn how to bring the Gospel to men like this resentful Negro.

"'We saw', said Webber later, 'that neither our enthusiasm, nor our bright ideas, nor our compassion for East Harlem were of much avail. There was no way out by methods of evangelism or by new organisations'. The one way out was by entering right into the heart of East Harlem's tensions, and from that position physical involvement, learning how to be ministers of Christ.

"The three summed up this basic conviction in the one word *identification*. Identification would mean living in the same kind of apartment and amid the same garbage as others in East Harlem. It would mean taking their families along, and exposing their children to the same temptations as their children who lived next door. It would mean being always at the disposal of the people with whom they sought identity, always having an open door, always responding to a visitor's knock, however late in the night it might come; it would mean, in other words, an abandonment of privacy and a free welcome into their family circle for the drug addict and the drunks and the friendless and the thieves. Identification with East Harlem would mean looking down the dismal streets and saying, 'This is my home; this is where I belong'.

"This was, of course, what Christ had done on the first Christmas Day when he came right down in the dirt of the stable in order to be with men, to share with them their loneliness, their tensions, and their rats, and from that position to offer his good news. No doubt this was a way that might lead his disciples beyond Christmas Day to the darkness of Good Friday; but it might also be the one way that would lead to Easter Sunday".

From *Come Out the Wilderness* by Bruce Kenrick, published by William Collins as a Fontana paperback, 1965.

5. PIETY AND RESPONSIBILITY

A Christian man is secretary of a political party in a Communist country of Eastern Europe. When he became a Christian, he said he was conscious of two things. Firstly, he was committed to Christ as his personal Saviour, and to a life of individual piety. Secondly, and together with this, he was committed to social responsibility. He, as a Christian, found himself to be responsible for the kind of society in which he lived. So he is an officer of a Christian political party which tries to bring to a Communist government its concern for the welfare of all citizens and to suggest ways in which justice can be done for them. In what to many may seem an incredibly difficult situation he lives as a Christian and endeavours to express his Christian witness in social and political action. The gospel, for him, is for individual lives and also for national policies.

Colin Williams applies this also to the world as a whole.

"What we are called to today then is an evangelism in which calls for decisions for Christ (and these we must make) are related to calls for decisions 'in Christ': to a call to be free for the presence with Christ within the struggles of our time where Christ is working to overcome prejudice and poverty and political irresponsibility and international tribalism in order that all men may grow up together as one new man in Christ".

From *Faith in a Secular Age* by Colin Williams, published by William Collins as a Fontana paperback, 1966.

Report back

As each group reports, write summaries of the different approaches to the gospel and its communication. Let group members say which approach or approaches make most sense to them. Why?

Which approach or approaches do group members think would make most sense to people they know who have not responded to the gospel?

Now consider the following points, discussing whether they form a comprehensive statement of the factors to be borne in mind as we seek to understand and communicate the gospel today.

1. *The dimensions of the gospel.*

While basically the gospel is concerned with a relationship of people to God through Jesus Christ, this

relationship involves the whole of God's love for men and the total response of men to God.

A danger that constantly besets the evangelist is that he limits the gospel to a particular area of the revelation of God or of the life of man. It is essential to realise that the gospel is for all men in the whole of their personal lives and their lives in society.

2. *The individuality of persons.*

The individual differences between people must be recognised. All have their individual concerns and needs.

3. *The contemporary situation.*

Men do not live in a vacuum, nor does the gospel apply in a vacuum. The gospel speaks to men as they are involved in contemporary life. Men's situations must be taken into account in the interpretation and presentation of the gospel.

4. *Comprehensive evangelism.*

The gospel requires a comprehensive evangelism if it is to be related in its wholeness to the totality of men's need and experience. Evangelism, therefore, must take many forms, each complementary to one another.

Jesus Christ provides the guide-lines for these principles. He met people in their contemporary situations and ministered to them according to their need, but in such a way as to bring them into fullness of life through the wholeness of the gospel.

THE GOSPEL TODAY

IN OUR STUDIES so far we have considered several matters.

Firstly, we have realised that we, as a church and as individual Christians, face a crisis in understanding and communicating the gospel today.

Secondly, we have considered the biblical record and tried to see how the gospel was interpreted and communicated by Christians in the first century.

Thirdly, we have listened to some contemporary Christian leaders to discover how they interpret and communicate the gospel today.

We now have two tasks. Firstly, we need to clarify what we believe the gospel or good news to be. Secondly, we must consider how the gospel can be communicated.

What the gospel is

The group should first review findings from the previous studies in regard to what the gospel is. Summaries at the end of study one and at subsequent studies should assist with this. Take some time to clarify these findings. Write them up on flip charts so that they may be clear to everybody. From a careful examination of the findings, transfer to a new sheet what is the common mind of the members in regard to the essentials of the gospel. Then print on another sheet any additions that individuals believe to be important. The more concise the statements are the better, but the findings of the group should be adequately represented. If there are sharp differences of opinion between members, these should be noted and given due consideration as they probably indicate some important truth with which the group has come to terms.

The gospel in action

The group now has before it, statements concerning what the gospel is. The next step is to bring the gospel to bear upon concrete situations in which members may be involved. Can we help one another to share the good news with each other and with people around us?

In sub-groups, or as individuals, consider the following case studies. If so desired, these could be treated as role plays. If used as role plays, the leader should select and brief various members for their parts. It may be desirable to use some instances as case studies and others as role plays for variety.

1. IN SUNDAY SCHOOL

Mr. A. . . . has a group of young teenage boys. At high school they have encountered a critical and supercilious attitude on the part of some teachers and other pupils towards the church and the Christian religion. During a series of studies on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, one of the boys interrupts the group. "I don't get this gospel business", he said, "Christianity doesn't mean a thing to the chaps at High School. When I try to explain it, I don't know what to say. What is Christianity all about anyway?" Several of the other boys took up the theme. Said one, "What difference does it make to be a Christian?" Another went on, "I reckon this good news is a bit phoney. How is it good news to me?"

There was a short silence. Then Mr. A . . . began to explain.

ASSIGNMENT

*If you were Mr. A . . . what would you say?
Work out your answer, then share it with the group.*

2. A HOME VISIT

A Visitation Evangelism Campaign has been arranged in the church at ". . ." Mr. X . . . and Mr. Y . . . had been appointed to visit the home of Mr. and Mrs. Z . . . They arrived, were duly welcomed and entered into conversation. Mr. X . . . indicated the purpose of the visit and stated that they desired to put to Mr. and Mrs. Z . . . the claims of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Mr. Z . . . replied, "We appreciate your interest, but to be quite frank, we don't see much relevance in the church and Christianity. We live a good life. We have a happy marriage and home-life. Our children are normal healthy youngsters. I have a good position. In fact we get along very well and don't see any need to be different".

After some moments of silence Mr. X . . . spoke.

ASSIGNMENT

*Do you think such a direct approach is likely to succeed?
If you were Mr. X . . ., what would you have said?*

3. CHURCH TENSIONS

It was 10.30 a.m. on Sunday. Bill Jones was seated in front of the TV.

"Aren't you going to church?" asked his wife.

"No," replied Bill.

"Why not?"

There was a short silence.

"Because I'm not going to be cold-shouldered by church people like last Sunday."

"You mean because of Jean and Bert?"

"What else? Churchgoers tell young people to do what they believe to be right, but as soon as they do it, they call them commos, anarchists, hippies. Just because they have the guts to demonstrate against conscription."

"Well, we've got to defend our country. You had to fight in the last war."

"I fought for freedom for my kids. Why can't Jean and Bert have it? Why can't the church let these youngsters say and do what they think is right?"

ASSIGNMENT

What issues concerning the gospel are raised in this situation?

If you were Bill Jones what would you do?

4. A NEIGHBOUR IN TROUBLE

Mrs. F . . ., a person of Christian faith, lived next door to a family that always seemed to be in trouble. The husband was a heavy drinker. He was frequently out of work. The son was an apprentice, but his work was unsatisfactory. He sometimes skipped his classes, and occasionally joined a gang of young people in wild pranks around the town. The daughter, a high school pupil, was rebellious at home and a problem at school. She was suspected of shop-lifting and the police had interviewed her several times. The mother was a hard-working woman who appeared rather tired and dispirited. She took in washing and cleaned some offices to help maintain the home.

One evening, after the noise of a family quarrel, the mother begged Mrs. F . . . to come and talk to the family "You're a Christian woman", she said, "can't you help us?"

With considerable trepidation Mrs. F . . . went.

ASSIGNMENT

If you had been Mrs. F . . . what would you have said and done?

5. GOOD NEWS FOR PENSIONERS

A minister called at a small cottage in an inner suburb. He found the house dilapidated, dirty and untidy. It was occupied by two elderly pensioners, both in their late seventies. The wife was ill. The bed was covered with old and soiled blankets. The husband, himself somewhat tottery, was trying to look after his wife. His clothes were old and patched. The old fashioned sink was cluttered with unwashed dishes. The stove was greasy and the saucepan on it emitted the smell of an unsavoury stew.

Both the old people looked thin and miserable. They had no relatives and were unused to visitors. They were also obviously incapable of looking after themselves.

As the minister looked at the old couple and the tumbled-down cottage, the thought struck him. What does the gospel mean to these people?

ASSIGNMENT

Well, what does it, or could it mean?

6. ACROSS FRONTIERS

The soldier guard looked curiously at the prisoner. He was reading a Bible.

"Are you a Christian?" he asked.

"Yes", replied the prisoner.

The guard's eyes lit up. "So am I", he said.

For a few moments they looked into each other's eyes, the man with the rifle, and the man behind barbed wire. Perhaps they were thinking the same thing and asking the same question.

ASSIGNMENT

What has the gospel to say to these men and to this situation?

What would you say if you were the guard? If you were the prisoner?

Some guiding principles

In consideration of the above — and similar situations — a number of factors have to be taken into account.

1. The need or problem must be clearly defined.

We must ask: What are the basic needs of the person or persons in this situation?

2. The relation of the gospel to these needs must be discovered.

We must ask: What has the gospel to say to these needs or problems? Or how can we interpret the gospel in this situation?

3. The expression of the gospel in the situation must be found.

We must ask: How can we communicate the gospel in this situation?

4. Communication involves more than words. It involves persons, who express themselves through appropriate attitudes, words, actions. It also involves groups and committees of people as well as agencies at the disposal of people and institutions.

We must ask: What form must communication of the gospel take in this particular case?

5. The church is the gospel-community. As a fellowship it was brought into being by the gospel, and it exists to communicate the gospel. We must ask: What is the role of the church in this situation?

WE HAVE STUDIED THE MEANING OF THE GOSPEL TODAY

NOW AS A RESULT OF OUR STUDY AND IN APPLYING DEEPENED INSIGHTS

1
WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED IN THE LIFE OF OUR CONGREGATION?

2
WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MAKE THE GOSPEL KNOWN IN OUR COMMUNITY?

What can we do to begin these changes?
What plans can we begin to make?

LIST YOUR PLANS
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