



in our villages, towns & cities

Hope 08

Integral Mission - Jesus Style

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Preface

The Evangelical Alliance is pleased to be a key partner of *Hope08*.

We are excited about *Hope08* and the ways in which local churches can get more involved in their communities throughout the year. Whether in schools, youth clubs or community centres up and down the country this initiative will provide lots of practical ways to live out and demonstrate the gospels injunction to be "salt and light", bringing hope, social and spiritual transformation to local people and communities.

We hope that the theological resource that follows will be both useful and informative, challenging all of us to share our faith through proclamation and action.

I highly commend *Hope08* and the exciting vision of its leaders; I also want to encourage our churches and members to find creative ways to get involved with this timely initiative.



Joel Edwards

Integral Mission – Jesus Style

Let me tell you about Hope. Not the 2008 campaign that goes by that name, though I will come to that shortly, but a poorly paid hospital worker that I met in Kenya while I worked there as a paediatrician. Hope was incredibly bright. She probably had the best English of anyone I met. She was intelligent, efficient, courteous and fantastic with the patients. Yet, Hope was stuck in one of the lowest paid jobs available, even by Kenyan standards. Why? Because she refused to sleep with those who had authority over her. Once, when we talked about the fact that she was not yet married she said this, "I am not married because I do not want to marry a Kenyan, I want to marry a Christian." What she meant by this is not that there were no Kenyan Christians but that corruption, especially by those in power, was so rife in her country that the person she would marry would be someone whose identity was primarily defined by the gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than by the prevailing culture. I met many Kenyans like Hope. They were honest and hard-working but struggling against a system that seemed designed to keep those with integrity at the bottom. One such Kenyan said this to me: "What we need is not more money from the West, that just encourages dependency. What we need is a transformation in our values."

Let me tell you about someone else, this time from the United Kingdom. Simon was a young man who had been in trouble with the police on many occasions. He had lost count of the number of times he had been excluded from school for violent behaviour. He had been in and out of care homes, and his father was a drug addict. But Simon was also intelligent. There was no question that he had potential to do something really positive with his life. On one occasion, when Simon and I were discussing what he might be able to do, I tried to encourage him that if he knuckled down at school, got on with his work and stayed out of trouble, he really might be able to achieve something. This was his response: "Why should I bother, all I ever do is fail." Simon was devoid of Hope. Like my friends from Kenya, a change in the material conditions of his life required more than 'handouts'. He needed a different value system, a different set of beliefs – about himself and the world around him: a worldview that would recognise his own potential, irrespective of what had taken place in his life until that point.

I have told these two stories because they highlight an issue that has been troubling evangelicals for the last thirty years or so. What is the precise relationship between Christian social action and evangelism? On the one hand, there are those who argue that all that matters is the eternal destiny of Hope and Simon, and therefore our primary responsibility towards them is to verbally proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ so that they might trust in him for their eternal salvation. On the other hand, there are those who argue that in response to the biblical mandate to seek justice we need to work at improving the material conditions of their lives, that issues of eternal destiny are beyond our control, and our only responsibility is to demonstrate the love of Christ by our actions towards them. According to the first of these views, Christian social action is a distraction from what should be our main activity, the verbal proclamation of the gospel. According to the second, to ignore the material conditions of people's lives is to embrace a neo-platonic Christianity that is a travesty of the actual gospel preached and practised by Jesus Christ.

The relevance of the stories I have told is that it is clear in both of them that evangelism and social action are both needed if Hope and Simon are to find salvation in the biblical sense. Enough academic work has now taken place to demonstrate that the concept of salvation in the New Testament is not restricted to our eternal destiny, but embraces a far wider canvas. Michael Green writes,

The raising of the dead, the cleansing of the menstruous woman, the healing of the sick, the opening of the eyes of the blind are all messianic activities; they are signs of the presence in the world of the promised salvation. Furthermore they make abundantly plain that the concern of Jesus was with the whole man and afford no justification whatever for the disjunction between the physical and the spiritual, the sacred and the secular, that has long typified the church doctrine of salvation.¹

So, while both Hope and Simon need the material conditions of their lives to be different, they also in different ways need the gospel proclaimed. Hope needs her culture to be transformed by the values of Jesus Christ, and Simon needs his own framework of belief to be changed. For both of them, evangelism and social action are both required. And of course, the two responses outlined above represent two extremes. The vast majority of evangelicals now find themselves embracing *both* evangelism and social action. The 1974 Lausanne covenant was seminal in this regard, and its fundamental message – that these two aspects of our ministry must go hand in hand – has been repeated ever since.² Having said that, there remains an inherent ambiguity in how we see these two tasks inter-relating. That they do relate is a given, but how they relate remains uncertain.

At the time of Lausanne, this issue was paid little attention, but in 1982 at the Grand Rapids summit a major report was produced which explicitly addressed the relationship of evangelism and social action.³ Three conclusions were reached. The first of these was that social action was a "consequence of evangelism".⁴ It is worth remembering that the command in the so-called 'great commission' was not that we make converts, but that we make disciples "*teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28: 20). Hence, if we fulfil this commission then the transformation that takes place is not merely cognitive – a new set of beliefs – but also practical – a new set of behaviours. Such reoriented praxis would presumably include a greater concern for compassion and justice, and therefore social action among the poor and marginalised. This is how social action and evangelism might work together to serve Hope in her situation.

The second form of relationship identified in the Grand Rapids document was that social action may be a "bridge to evangelism". It has frequently been noted that 'empty bellies don't have ears', and therefore if we want people to hear our gospel proclamation, it is imperative that they are not treated as detached Cartesian minds. As John says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with

¹ Green, Michael, *The Meaning of Salvation* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000) p120.

² *Lausanne Covenant* available at: www.lausanne.org/lausanne-1974/lausanne-covenant.html

³ *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* available at: www.lausanne.org/grand-rapids-1982/grand-rapids-1982.html

⁴ 'Three kinds of relationship' in *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*.

words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:17) Having acknowledged this, the report goes on to stress that we must never be in the business of using our social action as a "bribe" to evangelism. Our service of the poor must always be out of genuine compassion for their needs, and not because of some "ulterior motive".⁵

Finally, the report notes the way in which evangelism and social action should be seen as partners. "They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird...[Jesus'] words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be ours."⁶ The application of this to Simon's story is obvious. Not only did Simon need a new kind of environment – one free of drugs and violence, and where love alone is shown. He also needed a new internal dialogue. He needed to see that in God's eyes he was of inherent worth, that he had dignity, and that he was someone God could use for good. To demonstrate and talk of God's love and forgiveness to Simon would be to bring evangelism and social action together to seek the wholeness that he needs.

This, then, is how the Grand Rapids report articulates the relationship between social action and evangelism. Since then, a number of scholars have questioned whether Evangelism and Social Responsibility went far enough in identifying the necessary integration between these two aspects of our ministry. In the course of these deliberations, the concept of "integral mission" has been adopted, and many of its proponents would argue for a stronger sense of integration than was evident in the Grand Rapids report. In particular, there is a concern amongst some that Evangelism and Social Responsibility continued with such a dipolar view of mission that inevitably each could be conceived as existing on its own. David Bosch writes:

The moment one regards mission as consisting of two separate components one has, in principle, conceded that each of the two has a life of its own. One is then by implication saying that it is possible to have evangelism without a social dimension and Christian social involvement without an evangelistic dimension. What is more, if one suggests that one component is primary and the other secondary, one implies that one is essential, the other optional.⁷

In fact, Evangelism and Social Responsibility itself acknowledged this issue of primacy when it wrote:

Seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls, since an authentic love for our neighbour will lead us to serve him or her as a whole person. *Nevertheless, if we must choose, then we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all humankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and that therefore a person's eternal, spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal and material well-being.* (Emphasis added)⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bosch, David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991) p405.

⁸ 'The question of primacy' in *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*

Yet, as Bosch has said, "One has to ask whether this approach is *theologically* tenable."⁹ The 2001 Micah Declaration on Integral Mission was one attempt to address this issue by signalling a greater sense of integration without conflating evangelism and social action. It states:

Integral mission...is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.¹⁰

In contrast to Evangelism and Social Responsibility, the Micah Declaration does not specify whether evangelism or social action should be considered as prime, and thereby it might be concluded that the Declaration is moving away from the position articulated at Grand Rapids. However, apart from that implied stance, it is not immediately clear that this declaration takes us any further beyond the Grand Rapids report. Evangelism and Social Action are still both necessary, and both relate to each other. Therefore, both are required. The implicit questions regarding primacy and ultimate aims remain in the background.

More recently, Vinoth Ramachandra has suggested that we need to develop this sense of integration even further. Referring to the paragraph above from the Micah Declaration, he writes:

This is often taken to mean that there can be no authentic Christian social action that is not accompanied *at the same time* by the verbal proclamation of the Gospel ('evangelism'), just as there can be no authentic proclamation that is not accompanied *at the same time* by social action. This approach then tends to understand 'integral mission' as holistic practice, a strategy or methodology for our missionary outreach. The search then begins for 'models' of such 'integral mission' across the world for us to emulate.

He then goes on to suggest:

Whatever the intention of the framers of the Micah Declaration, can the lingering sense of ambiguity be dispelled if we understand 'integral mission' less in terms of the church's activities and more in terms of what the church is called to *be* (which, of course, includes its actions in the world)?...The emphasis lies, then, not so much in the practical 'balancing' of our various activities, but rather in the firm refusal to draw unbiblical distinctions. When, for instance, Jesus voluntarily engaged a social outcast like the Samaritan woman (John 4) in face-to-face conversation was he doing 'evangelism' or was he performing a 'political action' in challenging the political taboos of his society?...When the Rev. Martin Luther King confronted the white racism of American society in the name of the living God of Scripture who had declared all human beings equal and reconciled them to each other through the death of Jesus, was he evangelizing the nation or engaged in political action?...To raise these questions is to take the Micah Declaration in a direction that challenges the whole church

⁹ Bosch, *Transforming*, p406.

¹⁰ 'The Micah Declaration on Integral Mission' in Chester, Tim (Ed), *Justice, Mercy and Humility* (Paternoster: Milton Keynes, 2002) pp17-23.

of Jesus Christ, and not just those who are professionally involved with the poor. It is not only the case that...Gospel proclamation has 'social consequences' and social involvement has 'evangelistic consequences', but also that all such actions can be narrated under other, alternative descriptions with more profound implications for our lives. When Jesus was asked to sum up what God required of us, he did not answer in terms of either a set of 'projects' to be performed or a set of 'doctrines' to believe. Instead we are called to love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbour in the same way we love ourselves.¹¹

I believe that Ramachandra is on to something profound here – perhaps even a paradigm shift in our concept of integral mission. For too long, we have interpreted these activities – evangelism and social action – by means of our limited frame of reference as 'activities of the church'. To use some UK based examples, we are either 'painting railings and picking up litter', or we are 'doing evangelism' by running an alpha course or preaching a particular kind of sermon. What we are not doing, however, is simply being the people of God. We have adopted the viewpoint of the strategic manager who is positioning his staff for maximum effect. Indeed, in our churches we even have the 'social action' team, and the 'evangelism' team – and we somehow conclude that because we have both, we are doing 'integral mission'. However, as Tim Chester has said, "The New Testament does not describe development projects or, for that matter, evangelistic initiatives. Its focus is on Christian communities, which are to be distinctive, caring and inclusive. Integral mission is about the church being the church."¹² Surely, it is time for a new approach and a new understanding.

Moreover, given that the mission of the church is derived from and dependent on the *missio dei*, it is imperative that we look to Jesus' model for integral mission. In John 20:21 (see also John 17:18), Jesus speaks these words to his disciples following his resurrection, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Don Carson rightly warns against an over-literalist interpretation of this verse.¹³ Clearly, we are not all meant to die on a Roman cross! Yet, it would be wrong to deny that they point to Jesus' model of mission as a paradigm for our own. The verse is immediately followed by the gift of the Spirit, and as Carson notes the perfect tense of 'sent', "suggests...that Jesus is in an ongoing state of 'sentness'...Thus Christ's disciples do not take over Jesus' mission; his mission continues and is effective in their ministry."¹⁴ Hence, it is to Jesus' practice of integral mission that we now look.

Integral Mission: Jesus Style – the theory

You would be hard pressed to find an evangelical that does not agree that the great commission and the great commandment are both central in understanding what it is that we are called to be and do as Christians. It is worth reminding ourselves of what precisely they say:

¹¹ Ramachandra, Vinoth, *What is Integral Mission?* available at: http://en.micahnetwork.org/integral_mission/resources/what_is_integral_mission_by_vinoth_ramachandra

¹² Chester, Tim, 'Introducing Integral Mission' in Chester, *Justice*, p8.

¹³ Carson, Don, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991) p648.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p649.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40 NRSV)

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20 NRSV)

I shall begin with some brief reflections on these sets of commands, before then considering how they were practised in the life of Jesus Christ. Two aspects of the great command are worth highlighting at the outset. The first is that the love we offer to both God and neighbour is a love that flows from the whole of our person. The list of heart, soul and mind was not intended to indicate that the human person is a fragmented set of parts, and that each of those parts is required to love. Rather it was a way of referring to the whole person, everything about them. Joel Green has written, "The New Testament is not as dualistic as the traditions of Christian theology and biblical interpretation have taught us to think...the dominant view of the human person in the New Testament is that of ontological monism...New Testament writers insist on the concept of soteriological wholism."¹⁵ Green goes on to comment on Paul's benediction in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 – 'may your spirit, soul and body be preserved in entirety' – that "Paul uses these three terms to repeat and expand on the idea of 'completeness'...This is not a list of parts, then, but a reference to 'your whole being'."¹⁶ The point, then, is that the command we are under is to love – both God and neighbour (as the latter is implied by the former) – with the whole of our beings. Everything we are must be given over in love to the Other – whether God or neighbour.

The second point of relevance arises from the first, and it is simply to say that the commands to love God and neighbour can never be taken in isolation from one another. To put it bluntly, it is simply impossible to love God rightly without loving your neighbour, and it is impossible to love your neighbour rightly in the absence of love of God. The first epistle of John makes this abundantly clear, "If anyone says, 'I love God' yet hates his brother, he is a liar." (1 John 4:20)¹⁷ But why is this the case? Why is it that we cannot properly love God, or love our neighbour in isolation from the other? After all, our personal experience is that we frequently love some and not other people. The reason why these two commands necessarily go together is due to the first point I mentioned. In order to love anyone – God or neighbour – rightly, we need to love with the whole of our being, with our heart, soul, body and mind.

¹⁵ Green, Joel B., "'Bodies – That is, Human Lives': A Re-examination of Human Nature in the Bible", in Brown, Warren S., Murphy, Nancey and Maloney, H. Newton (eds), *Whatever Happened to the Soul: Scientific and Theological Portraits of Human Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) p173.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p162.

¹⁷ Some would avoid the conclusion I have reached by drawing a sharp distinction between those we love as neighbours, and those we love as brother and sisters. The latter would be identified with the church of God, and the former would include everyone. However, given Jesus' command to love our enemies, and the parable of the good Samaritan, I find this distinction theologically illegitimate.

However, to love in that fashion indicates that we have been so overwhelmed with God's love for us (see 1 John 4:19) that there is no aspect of who we are that is not suffused with the love of God flowing to us, through us and out of us. But if there is no 'part' of us that is untouched by the love of God, then there is no 'part' of us that can display a lack of love towards others. Because we know God's total love upon us, we cannot help but totally love others. It is also for this reason that John so readily equates knowing God and loving God (1 John 4:8). If we can only love God rightly by having the whole of our persons directed towards God, then we will obviously 'know' God as our minds are also directed towards him. Similarly, however, we can only 'know' God fully by having the whole of our persons (including our minds) directed towards him, and therefore inevitably loving him in turn. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that loving God and loving our neighbour with the whole of our being are all part of one single package that occurs as we know and accept the love of God for us. This is not to suggest that a binary polarisation is in operation here – that we either love God, or we do not. Clearly, we grow in our love for God. But it is to say that these three aspects grow in tandem. As we grow genuinely in our love for God, we will also grow genuinely in our love for others and grow genuinely in the extent to which the whole of our being is directed toward God. The option of loving God, and hating our brother simply is not possible for the Christian.¹⁸

Turning, then, to the great commission it might be worth noting what it does not say, namely: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to believe everything I have taught you." This, of course, is not to suggest that what we believe – sound doctrine – is unimportant or unnecessary, but it is to say that we too frequently restrict evangelism to the transfer of a set of cognitive attitudes. By placing an unscriptural emphasis on 'conversion' rather than 'discipleship', we have in practice at least considered the evangelist's job to be done when the new convert / disciple is able to assent to a certain prescribed list of doctrines. But such an approach is a travesty of the gospel, and certainly has nothing to do with the task laid upon us in these verses. The verb 'make disciples' in fact has three subordinate participles that fill out its meaning. The first of these occurs before the main imperative verb 'make disciples', and is the participle 'going', the second and third occur after the main verb and are 'baptizing' and 'teaching to obey'. The sense we get, then, is that disciple making involves going, baptizing and teaching to obey. What it does not involve is mere proclamation with a view to conversion. Commenting on these verses, Donald Hagner writes,

The word 'disciple' means above all 'learner' or 'pupil'. The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship, an emphasis that is strengthened and explained by the instruction "teaching them to keep all that I have commanded" in v. 20a. To be made a disciple in Matthew means above all to follow after righteousness as articulated in the teaching of Jesus.¹⁹

In addition, the phrase used in the great commission is a deliberate echo of Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:19. "Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Given all this, it may in some sense be the case

¹⁸ For more on this, see Thacker, Justin, *Postmodernism and the Ethics of Theological Knowledge* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)

¹⁹ Hagner, Donald A., *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995).

that 'evangelism' is the practice of proclamation with a view to cognitive conversion, but that is categorically not what the great commission is calling us to do. These verses lay upon us the task of 'disciple making', which of course includes proclamation with a view to cognitive conversion, but also includes far more. In particular, it includes as Hagner puts it, "the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship". And at least one of the reasons that task is arduous is because, as Matthew 5:19 indicates, it involves our own obedience to the commands of Jesus. Teaching others to obey cannot be separated from our own practice of obedience precisely because it is our own demonstration of the obedient life that is the most effective teacher.

In conclusion, then, the great command and the great commission teach us three main lessons. Firstly, love of God and love of neighbour can never be separated from each other. Secondly, love of God and love of neighbour involve the whole of our persons being directed towards the beloved. Thirdly, the task laid upon us by Jesus is to engage in the hard, slow process of teaching others to love God and neighbour, and we do this best by means of a combination of word and deed. In short, our job is to make disciples of Christ by being disciples of Christ. This is Integral Mission: Jesus Style. Its practice in the life of Jesus is where we now turn.

Integral Mission: Jesus Style – the practice part 1

When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." (Matthew 8:1-4)

Let me ask a simple question. In this episode, was Jesus engaged in evangelism or social action? On the one hand, he was clearly involved in what we would think of as social action. The man had a particular material need – he suffered from leprosy, or some other skin condition that went by that name in the first century. His encounter with Jesus led to that material need being met – the leprosy was cured. Clearly, then, Jesus was a social activist, at least on this occasion. But at the same time, we could also interpret this event in terms of Jesus engaging in evangelism or even disciple making. The reason for this is due to the Jewish notions of ritual cleanness / uncleanness. When the man acknowledged before Jesus that he was unclean, he was not just making a physical or medical statement regarding his skin disease. Rather, he was making a social and spiritual statement regarding his access to fellowship with God. In the first century, there were many things that could render a person ceremonially unclean – menstruation, contact with the dead, certain diseases, imbibing the wrong food – but the significance of them all was that while unclean a person was forbidden from full participation in the religious or social life of the community. They were kept at arms length, literally and figuratively from both other people, and from worship of God in the Temple. It is in this context that Jesus' actions must be understood. On more that one occasion, Jesus heals people with merely a word, but on this occasion he heals by means of touch. Matthew knows that this is no accident, and so draws our attention to it by adding the phrase "reached out his hand"

(incidentally in contravention of Leviticus 5:2,3). It is in this act that Jesus' 'evangelism' is evident. Due to his disease, the man was ritually unclean, cut off from God. In response to his faith, Jesus reaches out and touches the man, and thereby restores his fellowship with God, for Jesus is God. Prior to this event, the man was cut off from the Temple and therefore God, but in touching him, God himself makes his redemption complete. Given that the whole purpose of evangelism (and discipleship) is to bring about restored fellowship with God, then Jesus' actions on this occasion have done precisely that. Jesus' declaration 'be clean' is in fact translated by Hagner as 'be whole'.²⁰ Its intent is to emphasize yes that the leprosy is cured, but much more importantly fellowship with God is now available to the man, and in particular fellowship through Jesus.

I would suggest, though, that what we see here in the practice of Jesus is not so much evangelism and social action in partnership, or social action acting as a bridge to evangelism, or social action resulting from evangelism (the familiar triad of relationships), but rather Jesus Christ responding in his fullness to the whole situation of the man before him. The man's needs were social, material and spiritual, and Jesus loved the man in the whole of his being, and so met those needs in the round. Consider how this man might have been treated if he had been met, not by Jesus Christ, but by Jesus the evangelist, or Jesus the social activist. Jesus the evangelist would no doubt have looked with compassion on his leprosy, but without touching him, would have begun to explain that salvation and wholeness are only possible through him, that if the man repents of his sin and acknowledges Jesus as Lord, then he can look forward to that day he dies from his leprosy entering into eternal fellowship with God. On the other hand, Jesus the social activist would have felt deeply for the suffering that the man's leprosy brought, and with just a word (and no touch) would have cured him, turned and walked away to find the next deserving leper to heal. The man would have been cured, would even have been able to enter the Temple again, but would have no idea that it is through Jesus that salvation (in the broad scriptural sense) is to be found. He would have gone away thinking, 'what a lovely man – now back to the Temple and those sacrifices.'

Integral Mission: Jesus Style does not deny that evangelism and social action are distinct activities – on occasions, they may be – but it does say that the nature of the integration does not reside in the fact that we enact the two alongside each other, or that we find appropriate connections between them. Rather, it argues that the integration that is relevant is that we respond as whole people to the whole person or persons before us.

Integral Mission: Jesus Style – the practice part 2

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans). Jesus answered

²⁰ Hagner, Donald A., *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995).

her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. (John 4:5-10)

Once again, in this little story it is easy to see Jesus acting as either the social activist, or the evangelist, depending on our particular bias, when in reality I would suggest we see the same of kind of integrated mission that was evident in the story above. Moreover, it is useful to set this story alongside the previous one as the kind of social activism evident here is less about an individual person, and more about a cultural ethos.

Firstly, in what way could Jesus be perceived as a social activist here? Vinoth Ramachandra has already given us the clue. I quoted him earlier, "When...Jesus voluntarily engaged a social outcast like the Samaritan woman in face-to-face conversation,...was he performing a 'political action' in challenging the political taboos of his society?"²¹ Almost certainly he was. The person he was talking to had at least four factors counting against her engaging in conversation with Jesus. She was a Samaritan, she was a woman, she was alone, and she was an adulteress who had led a less than virtuous lifestyle. More than one commentator has suggested that she may even have been a social outcast within her own Samaritan community, which is why she was alone collecting water in the heat of the day. Hence, it is no surprise that when the disciples return they are "surprised to find him talking with a woman" (John 4:27).

Purely, then, at the level of actions, Jesus was challenging the socio-political stereotypes that would have existed amongst his followers (and subsequent hearers of this story). For them, adulterous, Samaritan women were the least likely people with whom Jesus should converse, let alone offer eternal life. A rabbinic instruction of the time said this, "One should not talk with a woman on the street, not even with his own wife, and certainly not with somebody else's wife, because of the gossip of men." And another says, "It is forbidden to give a woman any greeting."²² Therefore, simply at the purely political level, the very fact that Jesus speaks with this woman says to his followers that these are people that you must no longer distance yourselves from. To put it in contemporary terms, it is the direct equivalent of the Archbishop of Canterbury inviting a convicted terrorist to Lambeth palace for dinner. It is just not done in polite society – and to do it is to make a profound political statement. Incidentally, the fact that John places this story immediately after Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, a male, Jewish, learned Pharisee and member of the ruling council, is almost certainly intended to highlight how this woman is at the opposite pole of conventional acceptability, and therefore deepen the significance of Jesus' conversation with her.

Yet, at the same time we can also interpret Jesus' actions as those of an evangelist. Bruce Milne, whilst recognising the broader political aspects, draws particular attention to this interpretation and offers us seven lessons for personal evangelism drawn from this story: Jesus' relevance, his humanity, his knowledge, his integrity, his

²¹ Ramachandra, *What is Integral Mission?*

²² Both cited in Beasley-Murray, George R., *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999) p62.

positive presentation, his refusal to be side-tracked and his compassion.²³ Beasley-Murray does something similar concluding that the relevance of the passage is in its depiction of Jesus the evangelist, concluding that, "We do well to go and do likewise."²⁴ Both these commentators have good reasons for reaching this conclusion. After all, Jesus immediately turns the conversation to the salvation that he has to offer (v10). He then goes on to spell out the nature of that salvation (v14), whilst highlighting her need for repentance (v17ff). He gives her some solid teaching (v21ff) before concluding with a declaration of his own messiahship (v.26). Finally, his evangelistic actions on this occasion are clearly effective (v.39-42). On every level, then, this is clearly Jesus the evangelist.

Or is it? Is it in fact the case that once again what we have here is Jesus the Christ, rather than Jesus the evangelist, or Jesus the social reformer, in action? Consider how Jesus might have acted if he had been concerned purely with just one or other of those aspects of his ministry. Jesus the social reformer would have met with the woman, he would have talked with her, he would have shared the cup of water with her – and he would have made sure that his disciples saw him doing this. But what he would not have done is challenge her about her lifestyle, or her theology. He would not have declared that he was the messiah, and that eternal life was available through him. As with the leper, she would have gone away thinking, 'what a nice guy, so loving, so caring, so non-judgemental. I wish everyone was like him', but what she would not have done is realise that Jesus was indeed "the saviour of the world" (v42). How, though, would Jesus the evangelist have acted? Well, I suspect he would not have found himself in public talking to the woman. He would either have written a book, or preached a sermon – all making the points highlighted earlier. At the very least, he would have considered it inappropriate to be seen alone with the woman, and so would have ensured that he did so in a group with many others there. We cannot know how the woman might have responded to this. She might have been persuaded, she may even have believed, and therefore been 'saved'. However, neither Jesus' disciples then, nor through the following twenty centuries would we, have felt the need to question our prejudices regarding the radical nature of God's love, forgiveness and acceptance. We would still have thought it right for us to force people to jump through certain hoops before they can be welcomed into God's kingdom. We would, like the Pharisees, have loaded "people down with burdens they can hardly carry" and yet fail to "lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11:46). To put this in practical terms, we would have been a church that had great difficulty opening our doors to the alcoholic, the drug addict or the prostitute – and as a result, we and they would have been greatly impoverished.

Once again, then, it seems to me that what we have here is not Jesus the evangelist, nor Jesus the social reformer, but Jesus the Christ, or Integral Mission: Jesus Style. We see the whole of Jesus responding in love to the whole of this woman's needs, and we see him doing it in word and deed. This woman clearly had social, emotional and psychological needs, but Jesus met them by openly talking with her. She also had spiritual needs, to know him as saviour, and Jesus clearly communicates both her need and his ability to meet it. He neither neglects any aspect of who she is, nor any aspect of his responsibility towards her. By his words and his actions he communicates God's

²³ Milne, Bruce, *The Message of John* (Leicester: IVP, 1993) pp85,86.

²⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Word*, p66.

love into the whole of her life. And let us be clear. It is not the case that he does the evangelism by words, and the social reform by actions. Both are communicated by both. His 'evangelism', if we want to call it that, takes place both by his very presence with her, by the fact that he does not avoid her, as by the particular content that he communicates. Similarly, his social reform, if we insist on calling it that, is evident both in his speech (consider his first question), and in his actions (the fact that he sits with her). Integral Mission: Jesus Style is seen when the love of God flows through us such that the whole of who we are responds to whole of the other to meet their needs.

Now, of course, I have only highlighted two relevant passages here, and there are many other passages that may indicate to us more of what we would call 'social action', or more of what we would call 'evangelism'. However, it is my contention that more often than not, we simply do not see in Jesus the kind of polarisation that frequently affects our discourse on this matter. Consider the Sermon on the Mount, was that evangelism or social action? It is certainly the case that in the context of Roman occupation, Jesus' command to 'love your enemies' was clearly both evangelism (reflecting God's unlimited love) and a call to social transformation. Similarly, as Elaine Storkey has argued, both are evident in the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), and in Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).²⁵ This is not to say that evangelism and social action are one and the same thing. I believe they are distinct *activities*. However, my contention is that in our theology and practice, we should not focus so much on our *activities*, as that is to adopt a worldly managerial ethos. Rather, our focus, our frame of reference should be the person or community undertaking the task, and the person or community to whom the effort is addressed. If we adopt that paradigm, then the relevant question is no longer, 'What shall we do – evangelism or social action, or the two together in some artificial partnership?' Rather, the relevant question becomes 'How am I, or are we, being the people God calls us to be' as well as 'What are the whole needs of this person / this community to whom God has sent me?' When we ask those questions, then in relation to ourselves we are driven back to God and his word, as we become acutely aware of our own need for wisdom, repentance and enabling to serve him. At the same time, we are also driven to see the person we encounter in their full humanity, and therefore meet them as fully human persons. Now, of course we cannot meet every need that someone has, but by asking the question of our own resources in God, and the needs of the other, we can more appropriately respond by addressing the particular needs to which God directs us at that time.

We see this in the practice of Jesus. He did not touch the woman (as far as we know), for that was not what she required. He did not engage in extensive conversation with the leper, for that was not what he required. But knowing how we respond in this particular situation with this particular person requires us always to consider our own full humanity before God, and the humanity of the other before God. Vinoth Ramachandra, once again, captures the relevance of all this particularly well.

Integral mission flows out of an integral gospel and integrated people. There is a great danger that we transform the mission of the church into a set of special 'projects' and 'programs', whether we call them 'evangelism' or 'socio-political action', and then look for ways to integrate these methodologically. Rather, the

²⁵ Storkey, Elaine, 'Integral Mission in the Teaching and Ministry of Jesus' in Chester, *Justice*, pp27-41.

mission of the church is located in the adequacy of faithfulness of its witness to Christ. Our core-business is neither the take-over of the world's systems nor the maximising of church membership. Moreover, we need to remember that the primary way the church acts upon the world is through the actions of its members in their daily work and their daily relationships with people of other faiths. A congregation with huge social welfare projects or many 'church planting' teams may be far less effective in secular society than congregations with have none of these things but train their members to obey Christ in the different areas of civic life into which they are called.²⁶

This last point is particularly important. If you scrutinise the letters of Paul to the early churches, you do not find him emphasizing their duty to go out and do 'evangelism', nor do you find him carping on about their welfare programs. And yet, both of these things are precisely what the early church was particularly effective in. They did go out and spread the word, and they were known for their care and compassion for the communities around them.²⁷ Paul's emphasis in letter after letter is simply this. "Be who you are in Christ." So, in Ephesians, the turning point of the letter is this: "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4:1) He has spent the previous three chapters spelling out in detail the wonderful salvation that is theirs in Christ, and the following three chapters are consumed with what this means in terms of practical obedience, and so the pivot is what we find in 4:1, 'because of all you are in Christ, go now and live in the light of that'. A similar theme is evident in Romans, where repeatedly Paul's mantra is that 'now because God has done this, we should live like this' (chapters 6 through 8, and 12 onwards). Similarly, in Colossians 3:12 Paul states, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." And again in Philippians 2:1, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

Paul's strategy, then, in encouraging 'evangelism' and 'social action' was not so much to mention them, let alone spell out particular programs, but rather to encourage us to reflect on what it means that we are the children of God, and then encourage us to consider how that might work out in relation to those around us. If we think about it, this of course makes sense. I mentioned earlier that the mission in which we participate is not *our* mission, but *God's* mission. Hence, it will only be effective if we understand our own identity in terms of God's identity. In God there is a perfect unity between words and deeds, character and action, and so to the extent that we are truly united to Christ, our lives will similarly display a consistency between everything we are and do. It is not *our* compassion that is relevant, but *God's* compassion flowing through us. It is not *our* evangelism or social action that matters, but *God's* work in the world exercised through us. That is why knowing who we are in Christ, reflecting on God's perfect character is what enables us to become integrated people. It is *Christ's* integral mission we join in rather than our own. Hence, it is not about dividing up particular *activities*, labelling them as one or the other, and then making sure we

²⁶ Ramachandra, *What is Integral Mission?*

²⁷ See Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004)

have a healthy mixture of both. Rather, it is about being the people of God in light of a world in need.

Hope08

So, where does all this leave us in respect of Hope 08? Fundamentally, Hope 08 is about mission in the local community, but the obvious question is what kind of mission? Is it evangelism? Is it social action? Is it word? Is it deed? What is it? It is here that the theological vision I have outlined chimes with the spiritual vision that the founders of Hope 08 received from God. For Hope 08 is not evangelism, or social action, or word, or deed, it is all of the above and more. It is a vision of God's people doing God's thing, and doing it together. There are a number of aspects to this worth highlighting. Firstly, Hope 08 is about both evangelism and social action. In this sense, it is drawing on the theological foundations re-discovered²⁸ at Lausanne in 1974 where the absolute necessity of the integration of these aspects of our ministry was laid. However, in two distinct ways Hope 08 is moving beyond the mere partnership model that was provided by Lausanne. One of these is that Hope 08 is explicitly grounded in prayer. The year of community action, 2008, is merely the culmination of a year of church action in prayer, 2007. In addition, Hope 08 is not limiting itself to so-called evangelism and social action projects. It also embraces worship in the fully rounded sense of that word (i.e. music, teaching, dancing, singing, etc.) It strikes me that all of this reflects the kind of theology I have been articulating above. It is not merely that the church is being asked to pull itself up by its bootstraps and then get out there 'in the world' and do something. Rather, Hope 08 is about immersing ourselves in the riches of Christ by worship, and by prayer, so that then we can go out in *God's* strength, with his wisdom and his enabling to be the whole people of God, for the whole of our communities. Tied in with this is the fact that Hope 08 is also about serving our communities in partnership, across denominations, and for me this is proof that we are in the right place to do mission in the first place. If I, or my church, is reaching out as God's people then it will not matter which denomination we are coming from, we will all be seeking to bring Christ to a world that needs him. Mission grounded in prayer and worship that takes place across traditional boundaries, and is expressed in a multitude of forms, including so-called 'evangelism' and 'social action', that is Integral Mission: Jesus Style, that is Hope 08.

Yet, having said that, it is up to individuals and churches to put this vision into practice, and it is here that certain dangers lie. The Jerusalem Trust report into Manchester 2000, Festival Manchester, Soul in the City – London, MerseyFest and NE1 drew a number of conclusions on the effectiveness of these outreach events. However, one conclusion serves as a warning shot for all those involved in Hope 08. "The need to find ways of branding the events more clearly as Christian without losing the

²⁸ I say re-discovered because the history of evangelicalism (whether in the broader reformation sense, or the narrower 18th Century revival sense) has always concerned itself with both social action and evangelism. The restriction of the evangelical task to 'evangelism' alone that took place in the early half of the 20th Century was a departure from the history of evangelicalism and had more to do with Descartes than the Bible.

support of statutory bodies or the acceptance of local communities."²⁹ The report interviewed a wide range of people from the local communities. However, it states
The most disappointing finding was that only two people could remember why the event had taken place. One was a church member and the other person said they knew the young people were from a church. More typical comments about why the work was done were: 'just to develop the area', 'There was funding from somewhere', 'I think we won a competition'.³⁰

As it stands, this is not Integral Mission: Jesus Style. That is not to say that such action is not valuable or worthwhile, practically to the local community, and in terms of encouragement to those involved. In addition, it is quite possible that a more integrated form of mission was evident when those who took part in these activities returned to their home communities, and shared with their non-Christian friends and families more of why they had been serving in the way they had. In addition, these activities also provide an opportunity for what we might call co-belligerent mission, that is working alongside non-Christians on these projects, and proclaiming Christ not so much to the receiving community as to your fellow workers. Nevertheless, we must be honest with ourselves about what we are doing, and not claim that 'litter picking' is integral mission when the local population think you are simply a bunch of young offenders on work experience! So, what is the solution here? The report makes a number of suggestions including better branding (which might not be a sufficiently radical answer to what is a deep problem), but also "Encourage conversational skills in the young people so that they are more confident in sharing their faith during spontaneous conversations. This is also a training need."³¹ This is getting closer to the mark, but it is still not quite there. Surely, the solution is for all those on these events to have a strong sense of *why* they are there. In other words, they are not just there to 'do some good'. Neither are they there to 'have a good time'. Rather, they are there to be the hands, feet, arms, legs and mouthpiece of Jesus. They are there to be God's people for the world. This seems to be the approach that Paul took when he was encouraging his churches in mission. Reflect on who you are in Christ, and then go out and serve. I would hope that a strong emphasis in that direction, through song, prayer and teaching, is what is required if we are to truly be the people of God.³²

What might this mean in practice for churches engaged in Hope 08? Well, I do not necessarily think that a church or group of churches having an 'evangelism' committee or a 'social action' group is necessarily wrong. However, what is needed is that all the people engaged in those respective groups appreciate that their responsibility before God will go far beyond the terms of reference of the particular group on which they sit. It is not enough for Christians to say that because someone else, or some other group are doing the 'evangelism', it is acceptable for us to just do the 'social action'. That is the wrong framework of thought. Rather, all of us, irrespective of the *activities* in which we are involved have a responsibility before God to love the whole of the person before us with the whole of God's good news.

²⁹ *A Report on the Evaluation of Evangelistic events in the UK* commissioned by The Jerusalem Trust, available at: www.fyt.org.uk/showdetails,pdf,56.htm

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Having said that, I recognise the reality that there will be people engaged in these activities simply to have a 'good time', or to 'hang out with their friends'. We should not discourage this. My intention rather is to express the ideal to which we should all aspire.

Therefore, if I am engaged in what previously I thought of as 'evangelism', perhaps for instance by running an Alpha course, that does not excuse me from helping those very same people in whatever practical needs they may have. Similarly, if I am, to use one well known phrase, 'painting railings for Jesus' that does not mean I have no responsibility to tell the community I am serving why I am doing it, and what has brought me to that place. At the same time, however, and this is possibly the biggest challenge, just because I am engaged in some 'evangelistic' activity, and some 'social action' project – perhaps I run the alpha course, and do the soup run for the homeless – that does not excuse me from my responsibilities towards those I work with and interact with on a daily basis. Integral Mission does not mean being able to list different activities and demonstrate that we are covering all the bases. It means living an integrated life, where as God guides us, we seek to meet all the needs of those we encounter with the saving power of Jesus Christ. It is worth repeating Vinoth Ramachandra's caution in this regard: "A congregation with huge social welfare projects or many 'church planting' teams may be far less effective in secular society than congregations with have none of these things but train their members to obey Christ in the different areas of civic life into which they are called." It is especially important that churches involved in Hope 08 bear that principle in mind. The primary responsibility of church leaders is neither to increase their Sunday attendance, nor to inspire social work; it is to build the people of God in love of God, and love of neighbour. That is what the great commission and the great command demand. That is Integral Mission: Jesus Style, that is Hope 08.³³

As the Father sent me, so I send you (John 17:18)

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³³ Special thanks go to Cathi Thacker and Susannah Clark who prayed for me during the writing of this piece. Thanks also to Dewi Hughes, Rose Dowsett, David Muir, Don Horrocks and Susannah Clark for comments on the paper.