



Evangelization Through Community Action¹

Ted Ward

The Issue

Evangelization depends on compassionate contact: therefore an active relationship of the church to the needs of society is essential.

THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

1. What is the scope of the Gospel?
2. How is evangelization defined?
3. What are God's purposes for the church?

MINISTRY QUESTIONS

1. What are the ways that the Gospel touches people?
2. In what ways can Christians minister in communities?
3. How does social ministry relate to the church?

SOCIETAL QUESTIONS

1. What actions and attitudes contribute to credibility?
2. How do societies define responsible participation?
3. In what ways can Christians cooperate with others?

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Sin is the root of human problems.
2. The whole universe is the object of God's redemptive purpose.
3. God's resources are adequate for his purposes.

MINISTRY PRINCIPLES

1. God's providence is to the just and the unjust.
2. The gifts of the spirit for ministry and service are of many forms.
3. Christian ministry among and to non-Christians is appropriate.

SOCIETAL PRINCIPLES

1. The Gospel both strengthens and critiques society.
2. Christians can be effective contributors and partners in society.
3. Society can accept leadership from Christians when it is constructive.

¹ Ted Ward. Ghana, July 1988

Concerns about Christian Participation in Social Action

Common Fears among Christians:

1. Diverting resources away from spiritual purposes.
2. Depriving the churches of needed leadership.
3. Confusing Christians about the purposes of the church.
4. Confusing non-Christians about the purpose of the church.

Theological Issues of Concern to Christians:

1. Cooperation with non-Christians must be evaluated against biblical teaching of separation.
2. Social efforts (good works) can falsely replace the central place of the grace of God in Christ as the basis of redemption.
3. Efforts to “bring in the kingdom” can lead to a faulty eschatology (doctrines of the last days).
4. The motive of the Gospel and the selfish motives of materialism are in conflict.

Possible Meanings of Christians being Isolated from Social Development:

1. The Gospel can be seen as exclusively an abstract proposition.
2. Christians can be seen as putting themselves above the call of social responsibility.
3. God may be seen as remote from practical matters.
4. Christians may be accused of a dualistic philosophy in which spiritual matters and physical matters are separate realms.

The Gospel and Ministry

A Critical Reflection and Creed for Christians in Development:

1. We are not to engage in ministries of helps: agriculture, health, literacy education, and the like in order to win people to Christ. Pragmatic purposes, strategic manipulation, and gaining leverage are alien to the ministry of the Gospel.
2. We engage in compassionate ministry because of what Christ has done for us. We are motivated by his motivation.

3. God reached out to provide redemption through Christ. By his grace, we participate in the works of God as he continues the fulfillment of redemption in this fallen world.
4. The work of the kingdom requires that people be reconciled with God through Christ Jesus. Thus the proclamation of the Word of God is an inseparable component of development ministries.
5. The central emphasis must be on the person of Jesus Christ. God with us, his finished work on the cross, his resurrection, his lively work in the presence and identity with God, his kingdom, and his work in the world and in us.
6. What we are and what we do as Christ's disciples are secondary matters. We neither create his kingdom nor do we bring redemption.
7. Our part is to spread the good news of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and to demonstrate his love through the love-motivated acts of mercy, encouragement, and facilitation.
8. The object of God's love is the *people* of the world. Thus we dare not be preoccupied with projects, technologies, strategies, or even development. Our ministry is with people in love, one by one, moment by moment, as seen in the example of Christ.