

other books by John R. W. Stott  
*Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*  
*Basic Christianity*  
*God's Book for God's People*  
*The Message of Ephesians*  
*The Message of Galatians*  
*The Message of 2 Timothy*  
*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*  
*The Year 2000*  
*Your Mind Matters*

booklets by John R. W. Stott  
*The Authority of the Bible*  
*Becoming a Christian*  
*Being a Christian*  
*Culture and the Bible*

Steve - in gratitude for  
 your leadership and our friendship

Uncle John.

London  
 1st July 1998

# Christian Mission in the Modern World

**John R.W. Stott**

InterVarsity Press  
 Downers Grove  
 Illinois 60515

© 1975 by J. R. W. Stoll

Published in America by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, with permission from Faldon Books, London.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois.

InterVarsity Press is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, a student movement active on campus at hundreds of universities, colleges and schools of nursing. For information about local and regional activities, write IVCF, 233 Langdon St., Madison, WI 53703.

Biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946 and 1952 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and are used by permission.

ISBN 0-87784-485-2

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 75-21455

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 15 14

Foreword 7

Preface 9

Introduction: words and their meanings 11

## 1 Mission

Two Extreme Views 15

A Biblical Synthesis? 20

The Great Commission 22

The Relation between Evangelism and Social Action 25

The Great Commandment 28

Practical Implications 31

## 2 Evangelism

The Priority of Evangelism 35

The Meaning of Evangelism 37

Is there a New Testament Gospel? 41

The Gospel Events 44

The Gospel Witnesses 46

The Gospel Affirmations 48

The Gospel Promises 51

The Gospel Demands 52

The Context of Evangelism 55

## 3 Dialogue

Extreme Views 58

Dialogue in the Bible 60

The Argument against Dialogue	64
The Place of Elenctics	69
The Argument for Dialogue	71
Dialogue with Hindus	74
Dialogue with Moslems	76
Dialogue in Industrial Britain	79

#### 4 Salvation

The Centrality of Salvation	82
Salvation and Physical Health	84
Salvation and Political Liberation	88
The Theology of Liberation	92
The Hermeneutical Question	95
Salvation and Personal Freedom	101
Freedom from Judgment for Sonship	103
Freedom from Self for Service	104
Freedom from Decay for Glory	107

#### 5 Conversion

The Contemporary Distaste for 'Conversion'	109
Conversion and Regeneration	113
Conversion and Repentance	117
Conversion and Church	118
Conversion and Society	121
Conversion and Culture	122
Conversion and the Holy Spirit	124

## Foreword

Each year, a distinguished visitor is invited to deliver at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, a series of public lectures known as the Chavasse Lectures in World Mission. The 1975 Chavasse Lectures, were given by John Stott to a packed audience (and an overflow as well) drawn from the University of the city as well as from Wycliffe Hall itself. I am delighted that the Lectures are now being made available in book-form to a much wider public, and I am honoured by being invited to contribute a foreword.

John Stott's aim is to examine the biblical meaning of some of the great key words which are at the centre of the contemporary debate about Christian mission. In that debate, the interpretation of mission which is popular in some circles within the ecumenical movement differs acutely from that which has been held traditionally by many evangelicals. Sometimes the difference has seemed to amount to an impasse where further discussion is useless, and there is no hope of progress towards reconciliation. The way forward is for the two sides to meet together in joint study of the Scripture, and to correct and enrich their own and others' understanding of mission by a deeper understanding of the biblical missionary theme and a fuller submission to it. John Stott's lectures and now his book are a notable contribution to this enterprise.

As I listened to the lectures, four adjectives kept coming to me as I think they will to the readers of the book.

First, biblical. He goes direct to the Scriptures, works hard at

society. God created man, who is my neighbour, a body-soul-in-community. Therefore, if we love our neighbour as God made him, we must inevitably be concerned for his total welfare, the good of his soul, his body and his community. Moreover, it is this vision of man as a social being, as well as a psycho-somatic being, which obliges us to add a *political* dimension to our social concern. Humanitarian activity cares for the casualties of a sick society. We should be concerned with preventive medicine or community health as well, which means the quest for better social structures in which peace, dignity, freedom and justice are secured for all men. And there is no reason why, in pursuing this quest, we should not join hands with all men of good will, even if they are not Christians.

To sum up, we are sent into the world, like Jesus, to serve. For this is the natural expression of our love for our neighbours. We love. We go. We serve. And in this we have (or should have) no ulterior motive. True, the gospel lacks visibility if we merely preach it, and lacks credibility if we who preach it are interested only in souls and have no concern about the welfare of people's bodies, situations and communities. Yet the reason for our acceptance of social responsibility is not primarily in order to give the gospel either a visibility or a credibility it would otherwise lack, but rather simple uncomplicated compassion. Love has no need to justify itself. It merely expresses itself in service wherever it sees need.

'Mission', then, is not a word for everything the church does. 'The church is mission' sounds fine, but it's an overstatement. For the church is a worshipping as well as a serving community, and although worship and service belong together they are not to be confused. Nor, as we have seen, does 'mission' cover everything God does in the world. For God the Creator is constantly active in his world in providence, in common grace and in judgment, quite apart from the purposes for which he has sent his Son, his Spirit and his church into the world. 'Mission' describes rather everything the church is sent into the world to do. 'Mission' embraces the church's double vocation of service to be 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world'. For Christ

*sends* his people into the earth to be its salt, and *sends* his people into the world to be its light (Matthew 5.13-16).

### Practical implications

In conclusion, it may be helpful to consider what the realistic workings of this understanding of 'mission' are likely to be. Evangelical Christians are now repenting of the former pietism which tended to keep us insulated from the secular world, and are accepting that we have a social as well as an evangelistic responsibility. But what will this mean in practice? I would like to explore three areas—vocational, local and national.

I begin with vocation, by which I mean a Christian's life-work. We often given the impression that if a young Christian man is really keen for Christ he will undoubtedly become a foreign missionary, that if he is not quite as keen as that he will stay at home and become a pastor, that if he lacks the dedication to be a pastor, he will no doubt serve as a doctor or a teacher, while those who end up in social work or the media or (worst of all) in politics are not far removed from serious backsliding! It seems to me urgent to gain a truer perspective in this matter of vocation. Jesus Christ calls all his disciples to 'ministry', that is, to service. He himself is the Servant par excellence, and he calls us to be servants too. This much then is certain: if we are Christians we must spend our lives in the service of God and man. The only difference between us lies in the nature of the service we are called to render. Some are indeed called to be missionaries, evangelists or pastors, and others to the great professions of law, education, medicine and the social sciences. But others are called to commerce, to industry and farming, to accountancy and banking, to local government or parliament, and to the mass media, while there are still many girls who find their vocation in home-making and parenthood without pursuing an independent career as well. In all these spheres, and many others besides, it is possible for Christians to interpret their lifework Christianly, and to see it neither as a necessary evil (necessary, that is, for survival), nor

even as a useful place in which to evangelize or make money for evangelism, but as their Christian vocation, as the way Christ has called them to spend their lives in his service. Further, a part of their calling will be to seek to maintain Christ's standards of justice, righteousness, honesty, human dignity and compassion in a society which no longer accepts them.

When any community deteriorates, the blame should be attached where it belongs: not to the community which is going bad but to the church which is failing in its responsibility as salt to stop it going bad. And the salt will be effective only if it permeates society, only if Christians learn again the wide diversity of divine callings, and if many penetrate deeply into secular society in order to serve Christ there.

To this end I would personally like to see the appointment of Christian vocation officers who would visit schools, colleges and churches not to recruit for the pastorate only but to set before young people the exciting variety of opportunities available today for serving Christ and their fellow human beings. I would also like to see regular vocation conferences, not *missionary* conferences only which accord the top priority to becoming a cross-cultural missionary, nor *ministry* conferences which concentrate on the ordained pastorate, but *mission* conferences which portray the biblical breadth of the mission of God, apply it to today's world, and challenge young people to give their lives unreservedly to service in some aspect of the Christian mission.

A second application concerns the local church. Here again our tendency has been to see the church as a worshipping and witnessing community, its responsibility to the parish or district being largely restricted to evangelistic witness. But if the local church is 'sent' into its area as the Father sent the Son into the world, its mission of service is wider than evangelism. Once the local church as a whole recognizes and accepts this fuller dimension of its responsibility, it is ready for a further truth. Although all Christians are called in general terms to both kinds of service, to witness to Christ and to play the good Samaritan when the opportunity presents itself, not all Christians are called either to give their lives to both or to spend all their spare time in both.

It is clearly impossible for everybody to do everything which needs to be done. Therefore there must be specialization according to the gifts and calling of Christ. Some members of the local church are without doubt gifted for evangelism and called to evangelism. But can we now say with equal conviction that Christ's gifts and calling to others point rather in a social direction? Can we now liberate ourselves from the man-made bondage (for that is what it is) of supposing that every really keen Christian will devote all his spare time to some soul-winning enterprise? Surely the biblical doctrine of the body of Christ, with different members gifted to fulfil different functions, should be enough to give us this larger freedom?

Once this principle has been welcomed, it should be possible for groups of concerned Christians in every congregation to coalesce into a variety of 'study and action groups'. For example, one might concentrate on house-to-house visitation, another on the evangelistic penetration of some particular unreached section (e.g. a hostel or youth club, a college or coffee bar), another on community relations among immigrants, another on setting up a housing association to help the homeless, another on visiting old folk or the sick, or helping the handicapped, while others might address themselves to wider socio-ethical or socio-political questions such as abortion (if there is an abortion clinic in the parish) or labour relations (if the parish is industrial) or permissiveness and censorship (if local pornographic shops or cinemas are an offence in the neighbourhood). I have deliberately used the expression 'study and action groups' because we Christians have a tendency to pontificate from a position of ignorance, and we need to grapple with the complexities of our subject before recommending some course of responsible action, whether evangelistic or social or both, to the Church Council.

My third example of taking seriously the broader biblical understanding of mission brings us to the national scene. Although initiatives ought to be taken locally, it would be a considerable strength to parochial study and action groups if some kind of national network could be established. At the moment in England national organizations exist for youth work (eg Path-