

# Editorial

## The Gospel, the Spirit, Justice and Hope

This issue brings together material from three recent international conferences which dealt with the themes of the Gospel, the Spirit and Justice. In addition there is a lively debate on the role of eschatological hope for Christian Social Ethics.

The Social Concern Track of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation at Manila in July 1989 focused on "Seeing People through the Eyes of Jesus" and reflected on evangelisation among for example children and young people, the unemployed, the disabled, those crippled by third world debt, refugees, prisoners and the old. This issue carries the report of the Track and the guidelines that were produced to enable the preparation of case-studies. These guidelines have already been used by other groups in gathering reflective case-studies.

The second conference in the dialogue between Pentecostals/Charismatics and Evangelical Social Activists occurred in London in January 1990. (See *Transformation* October 1988 for the report and papers of the first conference in this process). A Kingdom Manifesto written by charismatics and evangelicals in New Zealand was enthusiastically endorsed. It was especially welcomed by those coming from charismatic and pentecostal churches in Asia because it offers a theological basis for the ministries of such churches in the slums of Asia's cities. A process called Spirit and Kingdom - a Charismatic/ Pentecostal, Evangelical dialogue on Kingdom Christianity was initiated.

In March 1990 the World Council of Churches' Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation was held in Seoul, Korea. A number of evangelicals attending produced a covenant there which is shared here together with reflections on the gathering.

These conferences are signs of where many of the world's Christians are in relation to the issues of the Gospel, the Spirit and Justice. They demonstrate the continuing need for mutual listening. Each conference had its strengths and weaknesses. The Gospel is a gospel of reconciliation, which breaks down barriers. The emergence of a reconciled

people of God which contains people from all sides of the divisions of race, class and gender is a "sign and wonder" demonstrating that the cross of Christ has conquered and broken down the dividing walls of hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-22; 3:4-6, 9-10). In witnessing to the triumph of the cross, we need not be triumphalistic over other Christians with whom we disagree. All of us are shaped by our cultures and by the way those cultures have often expressed and perpetuated divisions. We must therefore allow for the possibility that our understanding of Christian faith and witness will be enriched by listening to and learning from other Christians shaped by different pressures.

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*Transformation* therefore is committed to processes which encourage dialogue between Christians from different backgrounds, cultures and traditions. The reports on the WCC JPIC convocation in particular should be seen as part of an ongoing concern to dialogue with the WCC. We dare not assume that evangelical voices will always be more correct than others. In order for all to be more faithful, we must listen both to each other and to the scriptures in a new way. The WCC needs to listen more carefully to practical business leaders striving to be faithful Christians. Conservative evangelicals need to listen more carefully to those demanding redistribution to empower the poor. Unless we assume that our thinking is without error, we must allow other Christians to challenge our cherished views and entrenched interests. The fundamental issue is whether our security and commitment really do belong to Jesus, wherever that leads us, or to a

version of the civil religion of our tribe be that European, "Southern", North American, capitalist, individualist, socialist or whatever.

An important forum where these issues will be discussed will be the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Canberra in February 1991. There is a WCC task-force on relations with evangelicals. People have strongly urged that there be recognisable evangelical themes on the agenda and spokespersons on the platform. We are encouraged by the words of a former moderator of the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom at the November assembly of the British Council of Churches. John Johansen Berg was responding to the letter of evangelical concerns sent from the San Antonio meeting of the CWME (reported in *Transformation* October 1989). The burden of his speech was to welcome the development among evangelicals in the last 15 years of a renewed social conscience and social involvement, and to express the hope that those from the liberal Christian tradition might in a similar way look to a renewal of their spirituality. It is spirituality which Bishop J.V. Taylor, one-time general secretary of the Anglican Church Missionary Society, identifies as the difference between a genuine Christian engagement with social issues, and an activism which has little to distinguish it from secular ideological politicking. From this perspective, the theme of the WCC Assembly at Canberra - "Come Holy Spirit, renew your whole creation" could prove very fruitful if the fulness and power of the biblical witness is embraced. ●



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