

THE COMMUNITY OF SHALOM; GOD'S RADICAL ALTERNATIVE



Jim Punton

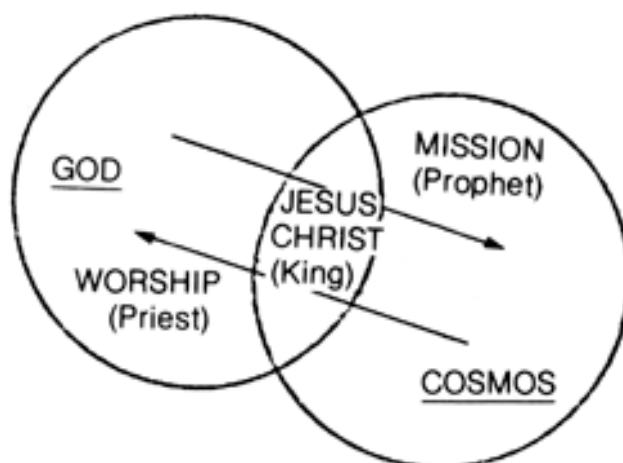
(Adapted from an original paper presented at the FYT Conference in Leicester in 1975)

God is making known the good news:
SHALOM THROUGH JESUS!
HE IS LORD OF ALL! *Acts 10.36*

God was well pleased through Him to
reconcile all things to Himself, having made
shalom through the blood of His cross!
Colossians 1.20

GOD'S PURPOSE IN JESUS

God's great cosmos plan centres upon Jesus Christ. His goal is through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in the heavens, having made shalom through the blood of His cross (Col. 1.20).



It is the cosmos that God's heart is yearning for, His whole created order in its dynamic inter-relatedness, how in un-wholeness and alienation. *God so loved the cosmos that He gave His only Son ...* Jesus lives before the cosmos as the representative of God; He lives before God as the representative of the cosmos.* He is God's prophet of shalom, the world's priest of shalom, and Himself the king of shalom! This beautiful Hebrew word (from a verb "to bring to completeness", "to make whole") speaks of a totally integrated life with health of body, heart and mind, attuned to nature, open to others, in joy with God; of sharing, mutuality and love; of justice, freedom, interdependence, reciprocity. This is something of the vision of the *shalom of God which passes all understanding*, the total well-being He wills for man and the cosmos, the goal of His mission, the content of His reign; and all through Christ!

* *The model is inadequate if taken to suggest (a) that God is not present to the part of the cosmos that is not 'in Christ'; (b) that God relates to the cosmos only through the Christian community (or never vice-versa); (c) the Christian community in its 'normal' life is withdrawn from the world rather than dispersed like salt or yeast.*

Another concept as large as *shalom* is *soteria* which means 'liberation into wholeness', 'salvation'. It has a 'from', a 'to' and a 'for'. Rescue, liberation, emancipation,

deliverance - *from* a non-shalom situation - *into* shalom, experienced variously as new life, wholeness, freedom, health, well-being - for the shalom of man and creation and the glory of God. *"It is related to the whole of life and to the whole world, to the individual, the family, society, the social and personal. It is immediate and it is ultimate. It is universal and inclusive. It is historical, eschatological and eternal. It is a daily experience, a constant possibility, a final hope. Nothing, no-one is beyond the range of this word"*.

Consider Jesus! the One on-Mission and the High Priest (Heb. 3.1). Mission is all that by God's Spirit. He did and does in relation to the cosmos on behalf of God, and worship is all that by God's Spirit He did and does in relation to God on behalf of the cosmos.

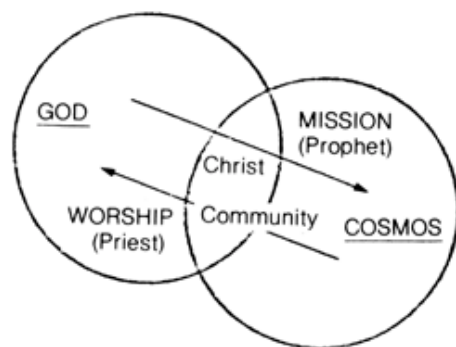
The mission of Jesus included heralding the reign of God; demonstrating it; bearing signs to it in healing, in exposing and opposing the non-shalom of poverty, injustice, exploitation, racism, and idolatry of every kind; in identification with oppressed and powerless; in loving, sacrificial service; in disciplining men and women within His new community of love. All these were shalom signs of the reign of God. So Jesus could say *"God's reign over you has anticipated-its-coming"* (Luke 11.20). This is 'inaugurated eschatology' - the age to come has brought itself forward into the present age and can be experienced now in Jesus Christ.

The worship Jesus offered was alone complete; only through Him can an alienated cosmos acceptably affirm God's worth. Then the Priest offered Himself as Victim in self-sacrifice for man and all creation, the sacrifice that is the ground of liberation and hope, and the shattering of the division between Israel and the nations.

He is our shalom ... having broken down the middle wall of partition... that in Himself He might create the two into one new humanity, making shalom, and might through the cross reconcile both to God in one body ... and having come, He evangelised shalom to you who were distant and shalom to those who were near because through Him we both have an approach to the Father in one spirit.
(Eph.2. 14-8).

THE SHALOM COMMUNITY

Those who commit themselves in trust to the Messiah form the messianic community, the people of God, the new Israel. Incredibly, *He liberated us and called us to be His own people* (2 Tim. 1.9). Those who have recognised His Lordship and entrusted themselves to Him have been incorporated into Him. Sharing His Spirit, men and women share His reign, share His mission, share His worship.



This, then, is to be 'in Christ', and the functions of the Christ Community are:

- (a) to participate freely with Christ in common life, embodying, developing, and demonstrating that shalom to which all creation has been summoned in Christ;
- (b) to participate freely with Christ in life-involving mission to every person and area in the world on God's behalf; and
- (c) to participate freely with Christ in life-involving worship to God on behalf of the world.

Let's look briefly at these in turn:

... *Embodying the reign of God*. The Messiah implies the messianic community. He trained the disciples as the nucleus of the new Israel with whom in His death He made a new covenant. This community, baptised in one Spirit unto Him would be a sign of His presence as King and a witness to shalom as a present reality in terms of love, trust, justice, joy, freedom, etc. It was to be anticipating and representing the reign of God in the conditions of history, living in thought, word and deed in hope of the new heaven and new earth.

It was to be the picture of the world becoming recreated after God's will. It has been rightly called the 'avant garde of the new creation', 'God's provisional demonstration of His intention for all humanity'.

One of the main New Testament terms (115 times) for the messianic community is *ekklesia*, God's 'summoned out'. Brought over from the Hebrew, it identifies those 'in Christ' with the new Israel. The Christian community is a nation with all the dimensions of a nation's life. A nation has a cultus within it: but the nation is much wider than the cultus. Yet Christians have allowed the *distinctive nation* (1 Peter 2.9) to be narrowed into the merely cultic, and have further allowed it to serve as the cultus of nations other than that of the Messiah. So we are living in denial of His Lordship and unable to demonstrate the content of His reign. We must again recognise that our claiming Christ as Lord means a radical break with the past and a transferring of nationality itself to this 'nation'. Therefore we are found as 'migrant workers', as 'aliens' in our former countries, since our only King is Christ, and we are 'a colony from heaven'. The 'good news of God's reign' demands that we be seen again as more than - indeed, other than - a cultic institution.

This is so in the New Testament where each *ekklesia* resembles closely an Israelite community. Elders were appointed as a community council, and in keeping with Old Testament tradition are seen as shepherds, leaders and rulers: they have responsibility for oversight (episcopy) of health, welfare, finance, education and justice. They were the superintendents or guardians (bishops), several in each community (Acts 20. 17, 28; 1 Peter 5. 1-3; Titus 1. 5-9). Nothing is said anywhere about their having responsibility for the cultus, much less are they seen as 'priests' distinct from others.

The open secret of Christ is the single new humanity He came to create in Himself. The gift of the Spirit carried believers into a new unity of common life across the previously impenetrable barriers of language, tradition, race and culture (Col. 3. 11-15). The Christ Community has the resources to transcend the old divisions of colour, class status, gender, education, nationality, etc., and to reveal to the world the shalom of the new creation. There is no suggestion that differences are erased between the sexes, cultures, occupations (Gal. 3.28, Col. 3.11, 1 Cor. 12.1); but in Christ the formerly opposed and mutually exclusive now live together in full equality and harmony. To the extent that the Community fails at any level to embody visibly the reconciliation Christ has made, to that extent it is in denial of the Lordship of Christ. Discrimination on grounds of race, sex, or class is not just an unfortunate thing, or a bad thing - it is impossible without denying the gospel.

The Community, in experiencing Christ as Lord of all, knows genuine brother-sisterhood. And this radically relativises national loyalties and identities. The people of God is a trans-national and supranational reality whose allegiance is to Jesus Christ. Obedience to any state is relative to this and must stop when such obedience would conflict with loyalty to the Lord. With the early Christ Community, our oath of allegiance (*sacramentum*) cannot be given to Caesar.

Nor can the Community now conform to the world. In the Spirit it has distinctive life. Racism and other demonic forces do not belong. What God is working towards in His mission must be lived out in His people.

One of the first things the believers did was voluntarily to share their possessions and live communally. It was no experiment, no trial extravaganza abandoned because it didn't work! The sharing of assets and resources is never said to be discontinued. Research into all the writings of the period shows this the normal practice and part of the ordinary training in discipleship.

"The praxis of the communities remained open-ended but radiated confidence that they represented the eschatological community of salvation: joyous table fellowship, openness to every stratum of society, service to one another, love extended even to their enemies, the eschewing of power and prestige, the common use of money and goods, and all the while confounding the political powers of the day by their strange behaviour. Christians anticipated the fullness of the kingdom by projecting its beginnings to the world around them"(2).

The need for 'orthopraxis' at least as much as 'orthodoxy' has become critical. What kind of discipleship do we now summon men into? One that accepts the 'inevitability' of social dividedness and inequality? Which conforms to racism, to militarism, to capitalism? *"If he is rich he is never asked to leave his possessions. If he is poor he is told to be content with his status. If he lives in a nation built upon the principle of the superiority of one race he is asked to wait for heaven where probably there will be no colour barrier!"(3).*

Christian individuals are deriving profit from the established order, while so many Christian groups *"function as anti-Christian institutions. Their political, social and cultural impact reinforces values and activities that contradict Christ's teaching. Values such as success through competitive struggle, activism and so on, which are not those of Christ"(4).*

In how many Christian groups or congregations does each person experience meeting with Jesus Christ, or discover personal identity and know reconciliation with God, with himself, his neighbours and creation? Such is non-shalom into which we bring new Christians that, like the Pharisees, we often succeed only in making them *twice as fit for the Canyon of Hinnom* as ourselves. Each Christ Community needs Paul's advice. As a community *work out your own liberation-into-wholeness with fear and trembling, for God is always at work among you (Phil. 2.12).*

Let's strive in the Spirit to disengage from captivity to cultural conservatism and materialism. Let's, with the apostolic communities, be shaping a new pattern of community and realising very specific social values. Increasingly we shall, like them, be in collision with existing institutions and vested interest - cultic, economic, social and political - but we shall be demonstrating the rule of the King and His Lordship over the principalities and powers. As the brother-sisterhood prays, loves, instructs, bears burdens, reinforces, as we learn to relate to each other in non-manipulative, non-coercive ways, as we become committed to a life of sharing and simplicity that releases resources for mission and worship, as we are enacted by the Spirit to be forgiving, to live "in the openness and fidelity of friendship, in mutual respect and forbearance, in sobornost, in humility under the judgement of truth" (*What is the Church? - de Waal*), and genuinely to love those who cannot/will not love us, so we shall be authentically the Christ Community. And it will be to us a place from which to say to the world something critically new and a

place to keep testing and exercising the judgement of that critical message; and a place in which the world can see Christ's redemptive community whose being, word and deed is evangelism.

How beautiful is God's vision and provision for His people, and how fruitful for imagination and encouragement to consider even one of its many facets. We could look on it as a community of servants or brothers or disciples or witnesses or heralds: we could see it as messianic, eschatological, evangelistic, hermeneutic, prophetic, subversive, eucharistic or charismatic, or distinctive, or pastoral, or therapeutic or catholic or iconic or sacramental or paradigmatic, or even "partakers of the divine nature" as James put it, holding his breath at his own audacity.

... *Sharing in Christ's mission* involves us like Him in penetration and permeation of the world in every aspect of its life. It involves Christian presence giving 'body' to His loving; it means costly service as an expression of that love and as a sign of His reign. He calls us to heal the sick in body, in mind and in heart, to counsel and support, to declare God's forgiveness, to mediate and conciliate and exercise; to befriend, to hug, to feed, to clothe, to shelter, to stoop to washing feet; He calls us to announce the good news of liberation and wholeness through Him, to make known His shalom, to witness to His friendship, love and power; to challenge men to repentance, discipleship and Christian community; to teach His teaching as normative for personal, social and global relationships; to explore together His way of love.

One aspect of the mission of Jesus in which God is yet again calling His people to share, is His prophetic role in the midst of non-believing society. Isn't He on-mission in the complex socio-political areas of the world? Is He agonising there till His people give body to His love and His outrage?

The concept of 'shalom' offers one useful way to consider the Christian community's responsibility for socio-political involvement in society. Through Jeremiah, to His people in Babylon, God says "*Seek the shalom of the city where I have sent you ... and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its shalom you will find your own shalom*" (Jer. 29.6,7). This indicates a wholehearted and total concern for the welfare, the well-being, of a society that didn't acknowledge God. In similar concern, the Christ Community must see itself as an agent for the elimination of the structural injustices of race, class, privilege and power. It must see that there is no shalom where excess and bitter poverty co-exist in neighbourhood or nation, when high production is at the expense of wasted nature and neglected quality of life, when the wealth of one group or country is at the expense of others, where expenditure on armaments could do so much to relieve suffering, where men are manipulated and made subservient to technology and bureaucracy. As Jesus ranges Himself against all that prevents and destroys man's shalom, so must His body, the community, its "*feet shod in the readiness that has its source in the good news of shalom*" (Eph. 6.15).

The biblical understanding of the 'principalities and powers' should awaken us to an inadequate understanding of sin which will not see its corporate, social and cosmic dimensions. This means that the Gospel of liberation is not seen in all its power. The victory of Christ is to be proclaimed in the political area so that, *through the summoned-out-community, the multi-coloured wisdom of God might be made known to the principalities and powers* (Eph. 3.10). Is the Christ Community showing 'the powers' the Lordship of Christ over what were their domains?

God is dishonoured by the reasons for the plight of the needy, the oppressed and the outcast. With such as these, the hungry, the naked, the captives, Jesus entered into solidarity. Can we do less? Can we ignore our responsibility to incarnate the heart, mind, love, touch and word of Christ? And what of our brothers and sisters in Christ overseas? "*Christians in the Third world ... who contemplate the so-called West, expect from their brethren a word of identification of the patterns of affluence and waste that are made possible*

because of unjust and exploitative trade systems; for a criticism of corruption in the arms race and in the almost omnipotent manoeuvrings of international intelligence agencies"(5).

The Lordship of Christ surely opposes all forms of totalitarianism, but we are complicit in the furthering of non-shalom through the dynamic of capitalism. Inevitably it is leading to the creation of more wealth for the few and more poverty for the many. By-products of the development of the market economy are colonialism and neo-colonialism, and depletion of the earth's resources. To those who feather their own nests at the cost of poverty to others Jesus says "*Alas for you who are full now!*". Has He stopped speaking so uncomfortably? Do the lips of His body refuse to form His words?

As a nation with its own King, whose subjects are in every people and tribe of man, how do we resist together what contravenes His command not to be conformed to the world? How does the discipleship group regard involuntary involvement in violence, war-making, oppression - all done in our name and with our taxes? When we've given to God what is God's, what's left for Caesar? Dare we endorse 'law and order' so long as people suffer injustice? What of the areas where we know young lives are being destroyed or thwarted? How serious does the situation become before we join Jesus in overthrowing the moneychangers' tables and confronting them with the prophetic word of God?

The religious leaders who accused Jesus recognised that the reign He exercised did mean the eventual overthrow of the forces of oppression. If He is allowed to be seen and heard through His community, the same conclusions will rightly be drawn again.

If the Christ Community says and does nothing in the political sphere, it is supporting whatever situation exists, be it apathy or tyranny. Silence and inactivity implies acquiescence in the status quo and makes us complicit with whatever injustice there is. Like every other, the Christ Community is enmeshed in societal structures and can't for that reason, escape politics. Even our very liturgy has its own political assumptions. So if laissez-faire means political support for whomever wins in the struggle of power, then it is not a political choice open to Christian discipleship.

But oughtn't Christians to speak as individuals and not as the Christ Community? Such a question raises others. Has the Christ Community no prophetic voice? Can the individual disciple speak as a Christian for Christ, without speaking from within the Christ Community? Are the resources of individual action not inadequate for the complicated, far-reaching, deep-rooted problems of society?

Nor should the Christ Community allow itself to be intimidated into irresponsible passivity by our undeniable ignorance and the possibility of error; we should expect to misjudge some situations and make mistakes. From these we learn. We also make mistakes in our proclaiming of personal forgiveness through Christ, but would not, for that reason, hold back from sharing the good news! God's outrage, and God's love, and the shalom He has given through Christ, all demand the heart, the action and the voice of His people. "*Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them" (Num. 11.26-30).*

... Sharing in Christ's worship. He has freed us in His blood and made us priests to God (Rev. 1.6,10), a distinctive priesthood to offer to God through Jesus Christ acceptable spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2. 4-5), (cf Ex. 19.6, Is. 61.6).

This priesthood we participate in with Christ does not mean that we are individual 'priests' on our own behalf, nor even on behalf of one another within the Christ Community. It means that corporately, together, the Christ Community shares in Christ's priesthood for the sake of the cosmos. We are called in Him to represent it before God, identifying with it, agonising, suffering, giving time and life and possessions for it, weeping and laughing for it, celebrating, dancing and joying for it, offering obedient lives and sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, bringing it before God in prayer, taking up for it the

cross that leads to death. Such is the vision before which our heads lower in shame. But we have a High Priest in Christ who does not fail.

It is important that we affirm that the Christ Community, as the whole *laos*, is entirely and together the whole priesthood on behalf of those outside it; and that the Christ Community has within it and on its behalf no other priest than Jesus Christ. There is no other mentioned in the New Testament, no other required. (Let's keep the elder distinct: he is a priest as others are, on the world's behalf. He is not a priest in any sense that other Christians are not).

Worship is the 'raison d'entre' and primary objective of the Christ Community (e.g. Eph. 1.6). It is the affirmation of God's worth by person and communities responding to His love with a love His Spirit has given them. The worship God values is the moment-by-moment acknowledgement of obedient and loving service. Celebration divorced from caring and pursuit of justice is welcomed by the demonic and rejected by God. (*"I cannot delight in your sacred ceremonies! Spare me the sound of your song! But let justice roll on like a river!"* (Amos 5.24). A gift brought to God is welcomed only if the giver is first in shalom with others (Matt. 5.24).

Life can be so lived that it *is* worship; mission so enacted that it is worship; adoration, prayer and celebration so at one with being and doing that they are mission and life. An interesting frustration for the New Testament translator is a basic word for 'worship' which means 'work for which a price has been paid', or 'hired labour' (Rom. 12.1).

A related idea gives us 'liturgy'. *Leitourgia* is work or action to benefit the public at large: it was demanded by the state from citizens with the resources and skills to carry it through. So, to benefit those not 'in Christ', the Christian community is required of God and equipped by His Spirit for the service of others, and that service is seen as priestly (Rom. 15.16). Can we hope for such renewal of our celebration that it returns to this authentic liturgy?

We have noted that cultic celebration is acceptable to God only when the Christian community is involved in demonstrating and proclaiming His reign with signs of shalom: but acceptable celebration requires the Christian community to represent the world, as Christ Himself does. Explicitly and corporately through Him the Christian Community meets as mediatorial, to bring the worship of the world before its Lord and to hear His word for His world. It meets to be addressed by Him, to know itself as the *avant garde of the new creation*, and to experience the shalom it is called upon to manifest and promote. It comes to the Lord's Supper (in which worship and mission are supremely one) to celebrate with Christ, the conqueror of sin and death, the Lord of life, a meal of festive joy; there to look back to His atoning sacrifice and forward to festivity in the new world, and outward to the broken world He loves and died to bring to wholeness, and to which Christ sends it back with renewed strength, joy and caring.

The New Testament gives us an exciting insight into its celebration - *"Instead of everything being arranged to exclude as much as possible anything like spontaneity, we find that 'each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation' 1 Cor. 14.26). The meeting is led and conducted by the Holy Spirit, who evidently delights in a greater informality and a larger liberty ... Each one was available to the Holy Spirit, each one had a part to play, and each one benefited from the ministry of the others. The sense of being the body of Christ, the members mutually dependent, was quite inescapable."* (Christ's Living Body). Israel's worship in Old Testament times was marked by noise, by movement, by dance, by music, by colour and by symbol.

God is bringing such openness and reality back to the worship of His people. But the charismatic gifts must not be seen as limited to the gathering for celebration. They are intended for total life-worship and life-mission, for becoming a life-demonstration of shalom community. The gifts of God are for the upbuilding of Christ's body, to assist each

member for his/her part in the joint-venture (koinonia) in the day-to-day setting, to enable the Spirit's wholeness (salvation) to be worked out in terms of the psychological, social and physical needs of all, and to empower it with insight, integrity and courage in His battle against the 'powers'.

Celebration is one of the primary energising sources of every community. The celebrating lifestyle of a commitment community challenges the rigid, dehumanising structures of larger society. Every act of celebration, random or ritual, has known or unknown political significance, explicit or implicit in its political meaning. If it is not affirming the struggle for shalom in the total life of man and society, it is opposing that struggle. It cannot simply be neutral and irrelevant.

"Both the laughter of Easter and the sorrow of the cross are alive in liberated men. They are not only laughing with those who laugh and weeping with those who weep ... but they are also laughing with the weeping and weeping with the laughing as the beatitudes of Jesus recommend. Their game always points critically at the oppressors; it therefore constantly provokes harassment by those who prohibit laughter because they fear liberty" (*Theology of Play - Jurgen Moltmann*). The Christian community, trusting Christ as Lord, can view the demonic as marked for extinction and laugh it on its way. Such laughter is prayer. And we are called to identify with Jesus in a life marked by prayer; by the prayer of silence, of contemplation, of meditation, of action, of anger, of laughter, of grief, of longing, of thanksgiving. And in all, with all and through all - of adoration. The primary word for 'worship' in the Old Testament has God's people on their knees, foreheads to the ground. Even now that we can joyfully call Him 'Abba', their attitude is surely more appropriate than ours. But, then, the main word for 'worship' in the New Testament means 'to kiss towards!' How beautiful! How often do we? The Christian community is caught up, then, in worship. Its total life should be sabbatical, a resting and trusting in God's grace and goodness even as we participate with Jesus Christ in all that reflects and makes for His shalom. Our action adoration and our adoration action, we shall be being true to our calling: worship and mission though logically will not be chronologically distinct: we shall be 'praying uninterruptedly' even as we live "life in all its fullness" against the necrophilic 'powers'. Let the shalom of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3.15).

STRUCTURES FOR FULFILMENT

Jesus' metaphor of wine and wineskins illustrates helpfully the relationship of the messianic community to the structures it adopts

The essence of the community and its God-given functions remain constant; but the structures in which they must necessarily express themselves must change and adapt to be appropriate for different persons, situations, cultures and times. Without this constant change the structures are found to be inappropriate; the functioning of the community is impaired, the realisation of its goals obscured, distorted or quite prevented, and the gospel becomes culture-bound. When particular structures are seen as the *esse* of the Christian community and forget or refuse to change, they have succumbed to institutionalism; used in this sense institutionalism refers to fixity, resistance to change, immobility, rigidity, bureaucracy, subservience to the world. And since structures themselves are not neutral, but communicate a message of their own, the real nature of the community and its functions are not seen or understood.

Do the structures we cling to (from a past where they may have been appropriate) allow the Christ Community to be 'itself'? to exercise the gifts of the Spirit? to bring particular communities and persons before God in intercession? to worship on behalf of different cultural groups? to fulfil its mission in evangelism, service, healing, pursuit of justice for all? to demonstrate the will of its Lord in every place it finds itself through each person who embodies it? to relate to a pluralistic urban society? to challenge values, policies, etc., that deny Christ's Lordship? To what extent are structures 'heretical' if they obscure or distort men's vision of Christ? if they hinder the functioning of Christ's Body in

worship and mission? What of ecclesiastical establishments that buttress the status quo? of clergy? of outmoded liturgical customs? of 'historic' buildings? of large (and small) impersonal 'congregations' on non-participation? of hymns men cannot sing with honesty? of congregations based on residence alone? of the homogeneous culture they sanctify? of the absence of contemporary symbols? of the removal of the Lord's Supper from the people and their homes to clergy and sanctuary? of crusades? of denominations? By what criteria are residential parish congregations seen as 'churches' where action groups, or house cells or Christian Unions are not? Are we keener on the wineskins than on the wine?

What does God want of His people now? What resources and structures has He for us to fulfil His objectives? The charismatic and small group model of the New Testament is one hopeful way to renewal. The Christ Community, informed with a biblical self-understanding, must "take shape around the needs of the world" in all its pluralism, every structural component measured by the extent to which it facilitates being true to God's objectives and enables the making of shalom. To be God's way it must surely be true to Jesus' model of sacrificial loving service, marked by the cross.

All manner of hopeful shalom signs are appearing worldwide. We are surely seeing God's Spirit at work, recalling us to faithfulness and openness. We dare to hope with a contemporary prophet that *Church the radical newness of which can barely be discerned on the basis of our present "we are moving towards forms of presence and structure of the experiences"*(7). And we dare to be confident that God has brought F.Y.T. into being as one part of His purposes now. Are we ready? Are we willing? He is able!

POSTSCRIPT

In considering the wineskins, let's not forget the wine they're there to serve. New methods, strategies and structures will not fulfil God's purposes and meet the needs of men if there is not a continuing and continually radical renewal of trust in Jesus Christ as Lord within the community that is His body. Needful exploration of structures can be an escape from the greater challenge of a crisis in faith within the community calling itself Christian. Let's each for others pray in love:

"The Lord of shalom Himself give you shalom". (2 Thess. 3.16)

"Now the God of hope give you, in your trusting, the fullness of every joy and of shalom, so that you may be abounding in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit". (Rom. 15.13)

"May the God of shalom ... put you all to rights in everything good, so that you can do his will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ to whom be glory into the hidden times of hidden times." (Heb. 13.20)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- (1) Douglas Webster - C.M.S. 1972
- (2) *Christian Political Theology* - J. Petulla
- (3) Samuel Escobar - Lausanne
- (4) *The Church and the Churches* - Charles Davis
- (5) Escobar
- (6) *The Church as God's Agent* - Howard Snyder
- (7) *Theology of Liberation* - J. Gutierrez