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EVANGELISM / SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY — SIAMESE TWINS

by John A. Knight

Evangelicals and evangelism have almost always been bracketed. So much so that the adjectives 'evangelical' and 'evangelistic' have often been identified in the popular mind. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that whenever evangelicals have become concerned about social issues, some eyebrows have been raised, and questions have been asked whether the cause of the Gospel is not about to be betrayed.

Even in the first century New Testament church, these particular perspectives seem to have been at least latently present. Acts 6 records that "when the number of the disciples was multiplying," that is, when evangelistic efforts were meeting with success, "there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution," that is, by the compassionate ministries efforts. "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not good that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' And the saying pleased the whole multitude" (Acts 6:1-5, NKJV).

I am not suggesting that the earliest Christian leaders were intending to bifurcate the gospel or separate evangelism and social responsibility. In fact, I choose to believe they were dealing with a practical problem and came up with an ingenious methodology to meet real needs. They were in essence saying that within the Christian church, all believers are ministers. However, their stated rationale might incline the uninstructed mistakenly to conclude that

compassionate ministry is a kind of "second-class" labor of love.

This hapless dichotomy might be traced throughout various periods of Christian history. More recently, the history of the ecumenical movement has unfortunately strengthened evangelical suspicions of social involvement. Modern ecumenism was born in the missionary and evangelistic enthusiasm of the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. As a "longstanding reproach" to the church, it was noted that there were still millions of people who had never heard of Christ, and the church must develop a strategic plan "for the evangelization of the whole of this multitude."

This high point of commitment to world evangelism on the part of the World Council of Churches unfortunately declined steadily, and primary emphasis was given to social action. The convening by evangelicals of the two Congresses on World Evangelization at Berlin in 1966 and at Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 (at which I was privileged to be present) has been understood, at least in part, as a loss of confidence in the more "liberal" World Council of Churches, which tended to neglect evangelism. But it must be acknowledged that leaders of the World Council have also been justly critical of many of us evangelicals for our lack of social concern.

The Church of the Nazarene has not been immune to this polarization of thought and practice. Dr. Phineas F. Bresee, founder of the mother church of the denomination, set out deliberately as a vital part of his mission to minister in the name of Jesus to the destitute and down-trodden in our society. That bright vision seems to have faded in our Church in America in the 1930's, '40's, and '50's due in part to the fact that the more liberal segments of the larger church replaced some of the historic Christian tenets with deeds of mercy and acts of compassion, and proclaimed what became known as the "Social Gospel." Happily our

denomination is maturing and learning that what it was recoiling from was not compassionate ministry, but the loss of much of the biblical and theological underpinnings of the Church's historic teachings.

At times in the Church, the necessity of proclamation is clearly recognized, but the cries of the poor, the hungry and the oppressed predominate. At other times, the cries of the needy are heard, but the call to proclaim the Gospel to the unevangelized predominates. It is imperative that the proponents of these viewpoints come to understand each other better and to appreciate each other's perspectives more fully. There must be a unity of mind on the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility or compassionate ministry, not by a superficial semantic consensus but by a real theological agreement according to Scripture. All of us must commit ourselves, and encourage other believers to commit themselves, to a yet more active fulfilment of our evangelistic and social responsibilities.

In the printed program which I saw prior to this conference, it was stated that I would present "A Biblical Theology for Compassionate Ministries." That is far too ambitious for my proliferated remarks for this first session, and probably beyond my understanding or capacity to produce. However, it is my conviction that Jesus Christ calls all his followers to witness to him in word and deed, that is, to share his good news with others and to serve them according to their needs. It is not a matter of either/or, but rather both/and. Therefore, it is my purpose this evening to relate on the basis of Scripture, and with Christological understanding, these two duties of evangelism and compassionate ministry.

There is no reason to fear, as some do, that the more we are committed to the one, the less we shall be committed to the other; that if we commit ourselves to both, one is bound to suffer;

and in particular, that a preoccupation with social responsibility will be sure to blunt our evangelistic zeal. Ideally, at least, evangelical Christians — certainly those in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition — who seek to live under the lordship of Christ and the authority of Scripture, and who pray to be guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, should not be divided on an issue of such importance to the Christian life and to the coming of Christ's great kingdom on the earth.

It goes without saying that we must let our minds be formed not by any human ideology, but by the Word of God. Admittedly, however, all of us to some extent are conditioned by the cultural environment in which we live, by our ideological settings and theological traditions, and this tends to determine what we are able to 'see' in Scripture. It is not that God's Word is unclear in itself (although some portions seem more clear than others), nor that its meaning is captive to any culture. The problem lies rather within our minds, and perhaps our hearts, as we read. The assumptions and biases we bring with us, which are often insufficiently examined and corrected in the light of God's Word, distort our understanding of it. Nonetheless, we believe the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth", has been sent to lead us into all truth. Though we see through a glass darkly, we still are enabled to "see through."

My thesis is that evangelism and compassionate ministry are part of a single package. They go together like Siamese twins. Or to change the metaphor, like "love and marriage" or "horse and carriage", "you can't have one without the other." Hopefully each of the following points will elucidate this perspective.

I.

"To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was

raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe [and consecrate]... Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world," including compassionate ministry (Lausanne Covenant, para. 4).

Reconciliation to God lies at the very heart of the good news. Evangelism involves a personal encounter between the messenger of the gospel, and the hearer of the gospel. The most essential qualities of gospel messengers are loyalty to the biblical Gospel and personal authenticity. They must embody the good news they proclaim. Few things repel people more than hypocrisy, and few things attract them more than integrity. This includes a genuine selfless love for the one who needs to be reconciled to God and served.

The bearer of the Gospel must begin where the unreconciled are, deal with their "felt and real" needs, and then lead them to where they have to come, that is, to Christ as Savior from their deepest need — their separation from God.

All believers in Christ, and especially those who are predominately involved in compassionate ministry, must keep in mind the motivation for evangelism. To begin with, there is simple obedience to the Great Commission, and to the Lord of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). Then there is the terrible knowledge that human beings without Christ are lost or

perishing' (Jn. 3:16; 1 Cor. 1:18). Another powerful motive is zeal for the glory of Christ, whom God has exalted so that every knee should bow to him and every tongue confess him Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).

Yet the most basic of all motives lies in the very nature of God himself, and in his saving work by which he revealed himself. The living God is a missionary or evangelistic God. He created all human kind, and when calling Abraham promised through his posterity to bless 'all the families of the earth'.

Further, Jesus Christ during his public ministry sent his disciples to the 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel', and subsequently he commissioned them to go and make disciples of all the nations [or ethnic groups]. God has raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to be Lord. The church's universal mission derives from Christ's universal authority.

In addition, the Holy Spirit is a missionary and evangelistic Spirit, and Pentecost was a missionary event. He gave his people power for witness, as Jesus promised, and thrust them out to the ends of the earth, as Jesus foretold (Acts 1:8).

This Trinitarian basis for mission and evangelism is primary. It is the missionary heart of God himself -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If he yearns in his love for his lost world, we his people must share his yearning. Commitment to world mission is unavoidable, and indifference to it inexcusable.

II.

Those who are the recipients of the gospel message, and those who are the proclaimers (and the proclaimers are also recipients), are all called to assume social responsibility. We who are in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition cannot escape the fact of John Wesley's role in

ministering to the poor and destitute.

Certainly the need and opportunity to fulfil this part of the gospel is everywhere apparent in our world. Approximately one-fourth of the human race are destitute, lacking the basic necessities for survival, and thousands of them die of starvation every day. Millions more are without adequate shelter and clothing, without clean water and health care, and are condemned to eke out a miserable existence without the possibility of self-improvement for themselves or their families. They are oppressed by gross economic inequalities, bitter environmental conditions, unfavorable geographic situations, and by diverse cultural systems which cause and perpetuate their misery.

The oppression of others is political. They are denied fundamental human rights by totalitarian regimes of the extreme left or right. Others suffer discrimination on account of their race or sex. Indeed, virtually all the human race is oppressed by global problems which seem to defy solution -- conditions of over-population and famine, the exploitation of non-renewable resources of energy, the spoilation of the environment, community violence, national and tribal wars, the scourge of terrorism, and the ever-present threat of a nuclear holocaust.

All these are rooted in the profound sinfulness of humankind, and they demand from the people of God a radical response of compassion. Only the gospel can change human hearts, and no influence makes people more human than the gospel does. Yet we cannot stop with verbal proclamation, as though this were all of our duty and responsibility. As a part of our worldwide evangelization, the followers of Christ must be compassionately and deeply involved in relief, aid, development and the quest for justice and peace, and ministry to the bodies and souls of real people who are the creatures of a loving God.

We believe that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men and women from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of religion [including those who are not followers of Christ and may never be], race, color, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited or ignored.

We confess that we have not always measured up to this biblical and Christian ideal, and express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-cultural involvement and compassionate ministry are both part of our Christian witness. Both are necessary expressions of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ.

The message of salvation, including holiness, implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, discrimination, and oppression. We therefore have obligation to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist, and to alleviate human suffering wherever we encounter it. "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas. 2:17, NKJV).

In Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life several writers, including Henri J. M. Nouwen, have written: "Honest, direct confrontation is a true expression of compassion. As Christians, we are in the world without being of it. It is precisely this position that renders confrontation both possible and necessary. The illusion of power must be unmasked, idolatry must be undone, oppression and exploitation must be fought, and all who participate in these

evils must be confronted. This is compassion. We cannot suffer with the poor when we are unwilling to confront those persons and systems that cause poverty. We cannot set the captives free when we do not want to confront those who carry the keys {to their prison gates}. We cannot profess our solidarity with those who are oppressed when we are unwilling to confront the oppressor. Compassion without confrontation fades quickly into fruitless sentimental commiseration."

Then the authors add a much needed word: "But if confrontation is to be an expression of patient action, it must be humble. Our constant temptation is to fall into self-righteous revenge or self-serving condemnation. The danger here is that our own witness can blind us. When confrontation is tainted by desire for attention, need for revenge, or greed for power, it can easily become self-serving and cease to be compassionate."

The motivation for social responsibility and compassionate ministry is located in the character of God himself. He is the God of justice, who in every human community hates evil and loves righteousness. He is also the God of mercy. Though he made the universe, he nevertheless humbles himself to care for the needy, 'executes justice for the oppressed', and 'gives food to the hungry'. The Lord sets the prisoners free, and opens the eyes of the blind. He lifts up those who are bowed down, watches over the sojourners, and upholds the widow and the fatherless (See Ps. 146:5-9).

Since the Psalmist, and many other writers of Scripture, show us the kind of God he is, and since these concerns are further expressed in the demands of the law and prophets, it is indisputable what kind of people we should be, seeking justice, freedom and dignity for all, especially the powerless who cannot seek them for themselves.

According to the New Testament Gospels, Jesus reflected this lovingkindness of God his Father. He had compassion on the hungry, the sick, the bereaved, the outcast. He had compassion on the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Always his compassion issued in appropriate action (Cf. Mt. 9:36; 14:4; 15:32; 20:34; 23:37; Mk. 1:40-41; Lk. 7:13; Jn. 11:35).

Moreover, the first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). It is therefore he who gives his people a tender social conscience, and impels them to immerse themselves in humanitarian relief, development, and the search for justice. *in the light of the Lord's (R.E.) mission.*

Thus there is a Trinitarian basis for our social involvement, just as there is for our evangelistic outreach. We who claim to belong to God and who worship him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, must express our worship in deeds of mercy and compassion.

III.

The relationship between evangelism and social action has been expressed in a variety of ways throughout the history of the church. Christian people have often engaged in both activities quite unselfconsciously, without feeling any need to define what they were doing or why.

The Great Awakening in North America, the Pietistic Movement in Germany, and the Evangelical Revival under the Wesleys in Britain, which all took place in the early part of the 18th century, proved a great stimulus for philanthropy as well as evangelism. The next generation of British evangelicals founded missionary societies and gave conspicuous service in public life, notably Wilberforce in the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery itself, and Shaftesbury in the improvement of conditions in the factories.

But at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the so-called 'social

gospel' was developed in America by theological liberals. Some of them confused the kingdom of God with Christian civilization in general, and with social democracy in particular, and they went on to imagine that by their social programs they could build God's kingdom on earth. In over-reaction to this distortion of the Gospel many evangelicals became suspicious of social involvement, including the Church of the Nazarene as noted earlier.. Happily, evangelicals, including Wesleyans, are recovering a social conscience and rediscovering their evangelical social heritage, although some persons may look askance at the church and suspect it of relapsing into the old heresy of the social gospel. But the responsible social action which the biblical Gospel lays upon us, and the liberal 'social gospel' which was a perversion of the true Gospel, are two quite different things. We readily acknowledge that the notion that man can ever build a utopia on earth, as the social gospel declared, is a self-confident dream.

The inclination of some to think dichotomously has contributed to the separation of evangelism and social responsibility. We tend to set over against one another soul and body, society and the individual, redemption and creation, grace and nature, heaven and earth, justification and justice, faith and works. While Scripture distinguishes between these, it also relates them to each other and instructs us to hold each pair in a dynamic and creative tension.

We insist that both evangelism and social responsibility are at the heart of the Christian life and life-style.. This is not to say that neither can ever exist in independence of the other. The Good Samaritan, for example [if we may characterize him as a Christian] could not have been blamed for tending the wounds of the victim and failing to preach to him. Nor is Philip to be blamed for preaching the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot and failing to enquire into his social needs. It is legitimate at times to concentrate on one or other of these two

Christian actions or ministries. It is not wrong to hold an evangelistic crusade without an accompanying program of social service. Nor is it wrong to feed the hungry in a time of famine without first preaching to them — although both of these things must be done at appropriate times in the Name of Christ and for his glory.

Sometimes the distribution of spiritual gifts may cause us to separate evangelism and social action. The Holy Spirit endows members of the Body of Christ with different gifts for different forms of ministry (See Eph. 4:11; Rom. 12:7-8; 1 Pet. 4:11). Whatever our gifts may be, we are neither to depreciate them nor to boast of them (1 Cor. 12:14-26), but rather to use them for the common good. This diversity of gifts may help explain the different roles assigned in the early church according to Acts 6 (referenced earlier). The decision left the apostles free to concentrate on the pastoral ministry for which they had been commissioned, although they also retained a social concern (e.g., Gal. 2:10). Whatever the diversity of our spiritual gifts, and there are many within the Body of Christ, all are called to be persons of compassion.

There is no one relationship in which evangelism and social responsibility are joined, but there are at least three possible valid relationships. First, social action or ministry is a consequence of evangelism. That is, evangelism is the means by which God brings people to new birth, and their new life manifests itself in the service of others (See 1 Jn. 3:16-18). In 1900 Robert E. Speer wrote: "Wherever it goes, [the gospel] plants in the hearts of men forces that produce new lives; it plants in communities of men forces that create new social combinations." Perhaps more importantly, social responsibility is one of the principal aims of evangelism. Christ gave himself "to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:14). Paul says that through the Gospel we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works..."

(Eph. 2:10). While good works cannot save, they are an indispensable evidence of salvation (Jas. 2:14-26). Although compassionate service is not necessarily an automatic or immediate consequence of evangelism or of conversion, certainly social responsibility, like evangelism, should be included in the teaching ministry and practice of the church.

Secondly, social activity can be a bridge to evangelism. It can break down prejudice and suspicion, open closed doors, and gain a hearing for the Gospel. An African proverb illustrates this point: "An empty belly has no ears." Jesus himself sometimes performed works of mercy before proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. By seeking to serve people, it is possible to move from their 'felt' needs to their deeper need concerning their relationship with God. If we turn a blind eye to their suffering, they may turn a deaf ear to our message of eternal salvation.

This is not to say that Christian compassion is merely one strategy for evangelism. It is more. It is an expression of Christian character and a dramatization of the gospel. That is, true compassion has value in itself since it is a part of the character of God himself. Christian compassion is, as Dr. Tom Nees has stated, "an expression of the very nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and reflected in his disciples" (Why We Do What We Do, unpublished, 1998, p. 2). So that even if persons to whom we minister never become Christians, we must love them with the very love of Christ and without ulterior motive, remembering that they are creatures of God for whom Christ died. With this spirit, which is the mind of Christ, our actions will be not "bribes but bridges" — bridges of love to the world.

Thirdly, and more directly, social activity accompanies evangelism as its partner. They are like the blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird. This partnership is clearly seen in the public ministry of Jesus, who not only preached the Gospel, but fed the hungry and healed

the sick. Compassion is at the heart of Jesus' ministry -- not peripheral, or secondary, or even instrumental. In his ministry, proclamation and service went hand in hand. His words explained his works, and his works dramatized his words. Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be expressions of ours as well. Both also issue from the lordship of Jesus, for he sends us out into the world both to preach and to serve. If we proclaim the good news of God's love, we must manifest his love in caring for the needy. Indeed, so close is this link between proclaiming and serving, that they actually overlap.

Strictly speaking, it is true that evangelism is not social responsibility, nor is social responsibility evangelism. Yet, each involves the other. To proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior (evangelism) has social implications, since it summons people to repent of social as well as personal sins, and to live a new life of righteousness and peace in the new society which challenges the old. To give food to the hungry (social responsibility) has evangelistic implications, since good works of love, if done in the name of Christ, are a demonstration and commendation of the Gospel.

Evangelism, even when it does not have a primarily social intention, nevertheless has a social dimension, while social responsibility, even when it does not have a primarily evangelistic intention, nevertheless has an evangelistic dimension. Thus evangelism and social responsibility, while distinct one from the another, are integrally related in our proclamation of and obedience to the Gospel. The partnership is, in reality, a marriage.

If the question is raised as to which takes precedence, evangelism or social responsibility, we may respond that evangelism has a certain priority. But it is a logical priority. That is, the very fact of Christian social responsibility presupposes socially responsible Christians, and it can

only be by evangelism and discipling that they have become such. If social activity is a consequence and aim of evangelism (as we have claimed), then evangelism must logically precede it. 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 (See 11 Cor. 4:16-18). Yet this fact must not make us indifferent to the degradations of human poverty and oppression, or to the commands of our Lord. The choice is largely conceptual. In practice, as in the public ministry of Jesus, the two are inseparable and mutually support and strengthen each other.

There is an even more basic way in which evangelism and social responsibility are united, namely by the Gospel. For the Gospel is the root, of which both evangelism and social responsibility are the fruits. As good news of God's love in Christ, the Gospel demands both to be preached and to be lived. Once we have come to know it, we are obliged to share it with others and to 'adorn' it by good deeds (Tit. 2:10).

Here Jesus, as the Incarnate Lord, is our supreme Example and Model. Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2 in declaring his mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To preach deliverance to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (NKJV).

As members of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition who take seriously the possibility of living a holy life, and who define holiness and holy living succinctly as Christlikeness, we can find no better reason to keep together evangelism and social responsibility than the person of

Jesus himself. To do so, however, requires more than a mental decision, a renewed determination, or a self-producing motivation. It requires the transforming grace of God, making us to be new creatures in Christ Jesus and compelling us to respond to God's love by serving with compassion persons of every station and circumstance, not to acquire merit, or make ourselves look good in the eyes of others, or even for self-fulfilment; but rather that God's kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven, that men and women will be confronted with the claims of the Gospel, and that Christ's name will be glorified.

Compassion is not a mere human quality or an admired or desirable human attribute; it is a spiritual quality, a divine work wrought in the heart. It is not an isolated action, or the result of imagining ourselves in the misfortune or the joy that another is experiencing. Compassion is a quality of spirit, with a continuing character that stirs one to action. It is not self-produced, but divinely implanted by a work of grace. Thus where it is absent, there may be spiritual lack. This deep "addiction" to the Gospel and to compassionate ministry must be continuously nurtured by an ever growing and enriching relationship with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

IV.

Evangelism and Compassionate Ministry are held together by true worship and thanksgiving. God created and redeemed our world in order to reveal his infinite majesty and eternal love. Therefore, the primary sin is to refuse to honor him as God and to give him thanks (Rom. 1:21) The supreme duty of God's redeemed people is to worship him in humble praise and obedience. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19).

From this adoring and loving encounter with God, there immediately and inevitably flows a desire to share his love with our fellow human beings, both by telling them how God in Christ

has loved them and by serving them with deeds of mercy and compassion.

Only if they are rooted in a vertical relationship to God in worship can the church's two ministries of kerygma (proclamation) and diakonia (service) be held in proper balance and tension. Only in this way, too, can evangelism and social responsibility be kept from degenerating into merely human activity and even propaganda. Where worship and thanksgiving languish, the mission of the Church is liable to fall into this trap. It is therefore urgent to heed the pre-eminent call to these primary Christian attitudes and actions.

Illustration: Several years ago on one of my visits to India I was in Calcutta, the home of Mother Teresa. The district superintendent asked me and the missionary and Regional Director Franklin Cook if we would like to see Mother's Teresa's convent. Of course, we did. We made our way to the heart of the city, to a narrow walkway, and arrived at her "headquarters." The door was dilapidated, unpainted wood, hanging crooked. The D. S. rang a bell. Soon a nun appeared. Our spokesman stated that we would like to see Mother Teresa. She responded that Mother Teresa sees no one. He stated that we would like to see inside the compound. She reluctantly invited us inside. Superintendent Singh told who we were, ministers in the Church of the Nazarene, and repeated that we would like to see Mother Teresa. Finally, the missionary located a tattered calling card found in his wallet. The nun took it, and disappeared. In a few minutes she returned and said, "Follow me." We went upstairs past numerous signs which said, "No pictures allowed." Some of us had cameras.

Mother Teresa stepped out of a room, onto a balcony, and greeted us. She was very short in stature, probably less than five feet, dressed in her habits. I had the feeling we were standing in the presence of a truly "holy" person. We enjoyed a brief conversation, commended

SHE AGREED.

her Christian ministry of compassion, and asked if we could pray. I prayed. She then permitted us to take pictures with her. It was a rare and unexpected moment.

Walking away somewhat transfixed and blessed, Dr. Singh asked if we would like to visit Mother's Teresa's Clinic for the "Destitute and the Dying". We said "Yes". It was located in one of the poorest sections of Calcutta. Next door on one side was a Hindu house of worship, where we saw live animals being slaughtered and offered to the Hindu gods.

The clinic was more than (less than) modest -- barren walls, low ceilings, long hallways filled with cots or half beds about a foot and a half off the cold concrete floor. Hundreds of bedfast "patients" were being ministered to by unsalaried "Sisters of Charity" dressed in white. People did not come here, or were not brought here, to become well, but to be spared pain and comforted as they waited to die.

I wandered away from our party to be alone. I became fascinated by a young nun, possibly twenty years of age, on her knees feeding an old gentlemen out of a tin cup. I kept asking myself, What would make a young lady with other career options choose this lifestyle and mode of ministry? As I walked back to the group, I found my answer. I saw about twenty nuns off the hall in a little cove, standing in straight rows, hands folded, faces lifted heavenward, countenances radiating, worshiping and reciting The Apostle's Creed. I listened to the music of their voices, as they repeated, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in his Son Jesus Christ, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried. He arose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of God the Father, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the one, holy Catholic Church, and the resurrection from the dead."

I wept as they recited this early Christian creed. Then the insight came. This was the reason the young lady in the hallway would give her life in service, with virtually nothing in return. It was her worship and thanksgiving which produced her motivation and fueled the fires of passion to love God supremely and to minister to his creatures compassionately and faithfully.

I applaud you, the participants of this conference, and celebrate your ministry. You are an inspiration to the whole church. You are Christ's special servants. As you fulfil your distinctive role, always remember that while doing is important, being precedes. Prayer and worship come first; deeds of mercy then follow. Prayer, devotion, thanksgiving alone will save us from performing mere humanitarian acts of philanthropy. These ingredients of spiritual formation issue in true Christian compassion, and enable us to minister "in Jesus' Name."

May God bless you and your "labors of love."