

**The Significance Of Galilee
To The Mission Of The Church**

**By Caleb Rosado, Ph.D.
ROSADO CONSULTING
For Change in Human systems
Calebrosado@earthlink.net
www.rosado.net**

**© Caleb Rosado, October 3, 1994
Revised December 6, 1995**

The Significance Of Galilee To The Mission Of The Church

Introduction

If there is one question the church must constantly be addressing, it is the question of the nature of mission. The ultimate goal of the mission of God and His Church is always the same: that of bringing under the lordship of His Son, Jesus Christ, the kingdoms of this world (Rev. 11:15). Thus, the mission of the Church is to reach the Good News about the Kingdom of God so as to provide opportunity for every person of every nation to decide for or against the saving grace of God's Kingdom. This is the *ultimate* goal of the mission of God and of His Church. Everything we do in life, whether as pastors, teachers, students, administrators, employees, business persons, homemakers, children, whatever, should have this ultimate goal in the background, as the basis for all our activities. If we don't, then we become like the unfaithful servant who began to take advantage of his fellow servants due to the mission to which his master had called him, becoming obscured in his mind.

While this is the ultimate goal, the *intermediate* or intervening goals of mission which define, delimit or broaden the nature of the mission of the church, do vary depending on time and place. It is this understanding of the relative nature of mission, depending on place and time, that has often not been too clearly understood. It has resulted in a uniform concept of mission from one given historical time and place, superimposed on the rest, for all times and in all places. The result has been: at worst, an aborting of mission; at best, a misunderstanding of the nature of mission and of God's Kingdom.

As José Comblin declares in his book, *The Meaning of Mission*:

The cultural system known as Christendom enunciated the Christian message in Greco-Roman terms, which were quite useful in proclaiming God's truth to Greeks and Romans. Reliance on those particular formulas caused missionaries to forget about carrying the divine message to other peoples. Or else it did something even worse. It prompted them to convey the message to other peoples in Greek and Roman terms, thus provoking a highly ambivalent reaction of rejection. To cite just one example, such has been the rejection of Christianity by broad sectors of modern Western culture.¹

And I would hasten to add: Such has been the reason for the majority of the non-western world to turn their back on Christianity.

Part of the problem has been a selective reading of the Bible by those in influential positions, often unconsciously, so that the full impact of God's Word to humankind has not been seen. Thus, where you stand determines what you see. My own understanding of Scripture has changed with changes in my ministry. The demands of the Gospel and the changing face of my ministry have forced me to re-read Scripture from another perspective. Granted, it has been a cultural re-reading of the Gospel so as to discover how Jesus of Nazareth functioned in relation to His history and culture, so that by discovering how he functioned then, we will discover how He functions now. Let me quickly remind you that all reading of Scripture is culturally and class-conditioned.

The Significance of Galilee – 2

None of us ever read Scripture in a vacuum. I am fully conscious that we, like all Christians, are historically-culturally conditioned and that it is from within our conditioned perspective that we re-read the Gospel. Yet it is precisely this type of re-reading that will constantly discover new aspects of the functioning of the Gospel which has remained hidden until the present moment. Far from diluting the full meaning of the Gospel, this type of culturally conditioned re-reading will contribute to the church's growth in understanding the full impact of the liberating mystery of Christ.

The real danger in reading Scripture is when we think that we are approaching God's Word *free* of any bias, *free* of any historical, cultural and class conditioning, so that we actually believe that the way we read Scripture is the “pure,” “unadulterated” distillation of God's truth for all peoples in all times and in all places. And anything that differs from this we regard as a distortion of truth. Can you imagine the arrogance of such a stance? Such was the position of the Pharisees in Jesus' day, and of the Pharisees today. The Gospel is universal, but the pulpit is not. Yet, the myth of the universal pulpit is very much prevalent in the Church today.

Seeking to provide spiritual nurture to my ethnically diverse congregation has given me a new *optic* by which to approach Scripture, which has broadened my concept of mission and the way the Church should carry it out. Seeking, also, to make the demands of the Gospel relevant to my own Hispanic people has also given me another optic to view our reality. No wonder Paul talks about the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3;8).

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, the Apostle Paul speaks about contextualization—becoming a Jew to win Jews. What does it mean to become an Hispanic to win Hispanics? What does it mean to become a Black to win Blacks? What does it mean to become a woman to win women to Christ? What does it mean to be rich or poor to win the rich or poor to Christ? Such are the questions that challenge our Christian commitment. Such also are the questions that challenge the Church's understanding of the nature of it's mission in a multicultural society.

The Significance of Galilee:

The radical truth of Christianity, which sets it off from all other world-faiths, is that God became a human being. Not just any human being, but *Jesus of Nazareth* — culturally situated and socially conditioned by time and place.² There is no other Christ than Jesus. There is no other Jesus than the Jewish carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee. He was not just a human being, He was a Jew. He was not just a Jew, He was a Galilean Jew. And throughout His life Jesus and His disciples were ever identified as Galileans.

Why Galilee? God could have chosen in His great cosmic plan for the salvation of the human race, to have situated His Son in time and space, in any social setting and in any social position He desired. So He chose Galilee. Why? True, Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, but His stay in Bethlehem was only a matter of weeks. Nazareth, in Galilee, was His real home. And throughout His earth-walk He was never known as Jesus of Bethlehem, but Jesus of Nazareth. Why Nazareth? Why Galilee? Why not Jerusalem? Why not Judea? In order to understand the mission of Jesus, we must first understand Galilee.

For “almost the entire career of Jesus of Nazareth lay within the borders of this tiny region.”³ The vast majority of “the gospel account, prior to the passion narrative, is in the setting of the Sea of Galilee.”⁴ The biblical evidence shows that Jesus made

Galilee the center of His work.

What is so significant about Galilee? “Geographically this northernmost district of Palestine was a little island in the midst of unfriendly seas.”⁵ On all sides were Gentile nations separating it from Judea to the south. It early acquired the name in the Old Testament of “Galilee of the Gentiles” or “Galilee of the nations” (Isaiah 9:1). For the Jews living in Galilee, their home was not only surrounded, but also inhabited by Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabs, Greeks, Romans and others. It was a multicultural, multiracial region, biologically and culturally mixed. Thus the name “Galilee of the nations,” or “of the Gentiles,” reflected a reputation for racial variety and mixture.⁶ It was indeed an “all nations” community, and the Galileans were, in every sense of the word, a *mestizo* people—racially and culturally mixed.

Because of this racial and cultural *mestizaje* it affected their language; they spoke different; the Galilean accent was heavy for the foreign influence was strong. Galileans were often ridiculed for not speaking a correct Aramaic and Hebrew. Geza Vermes declares that “the distinction between the various gutturals almost completely disappeared in Galileans Aramaic; the weaker guttural sounds, in fact, ceased even to be audible. Put differently, in careless everyday conversation the Galileans dropped their aitches.”⁷ Their slipshod speech betrayed them. Peter could deny Jesus, but he could not deny being a Galilean: “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean, your accent betrays you” (Mark 14:70; Matthew 26:73). They were a multilingual-multicultural people, with all the implications and effects that the impact of more than one culture has to bear upon a people, their culture and their language.

Galilee also was a rich farming region, so rich in soil and pasturage, that Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, once described Galilee as a place where “even the most indolent are tempted by these facilities to devote themselves to agriculture.”⁸ The terms “peasants,” “the common people,” the ‘am ha-arez —”the people of the land” —were all terms applied to Galileans, all of which carried the stigma of a religiously uneducated people. The following Talmudic quotation reflects the sentiments of the orthodox Jews in Judea for the Galileans: “No man may marry the daughter of the ‘am ha-arez, for they are like unclean animals, and their wives like reptiles, and it is concerning their daughters that Scripture says: ‘Cursed be he who lies with any kind of beast’ (Deut. 27:21).”⁹

Galilee was the headquarters for the majority of the revolutionary movements attempting to overthrow Roman oppression. Judas the Galilean, the founder of the Zealot Movement, was from this region. When Jesus Himself was just a small boy in Nazareth, possibly 8-10 years of age, Judas the Galilean broke into the weapons arsenal of Herod the Great, in Sepphoris, after Herod’s death. He captured the arsenal and revolted against the Romans. But Rome came in, captured the rebels, crucified some two thousand Jews, razed Sepphoris to the ground, and sold the women and children into slavery.¹⁰ All of this took place just four miles from Nazareth. Can you imagine the impact that this must have made on Jesus’ young impressionable mind?

More Galilean Jews were crucified by the Romans than Jews of any other region. Jesus Himself relates the incident of Pilate mingling the blood of Galileans with their sacrifices in Luke 13:1-3. Notice the tone of compassion towards the Galileans in His words: “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no.” It could very well have been that some of these Galileans whom Pilate had killed were His own playmates as a boy in

The Significance of Galilee – 4

Nazareth. The point is that rebellion was so common in Galilee that the term “Galilean” “took on the dark political connotation of a possible association with Judas the Galilean.”¹¹ Thus, when Jesus was crucified and over His head was placed the sign: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” the connection to Galilean rebellious movements was most strong. “Here is another pretender to the throne; this is what Rome does to such!”

Galilee was the land of the rejected, the despised, the outcasts, the foreigners. It was here where people, wanting to escape from the puritans of Judea, could flee into anonymity and obscurity. This is where Jesus found Mary Magdalene and healed her of demon possession. Their racial and cultural mestizaje, their constant contact with gentiles and heathens, resulted in the Galileans being despised and rejected by the “pure” Jews of Jerusalem in the south, who saw themselves as the sole heirs of cultural and religious purity.

Galilee was far from Jerusalem—the center of theology and religion; Galilee was far from Rome—the center of law and government; Galilee was far from Athens—the center of culture and the arts.¹² The same is held today. Nothing good comes from the Galilees of the world—Africa, Latin America, Asia. Only Europe and America produce the quality stuff. So speak the modern day Judeans and Pharisees. As far as the southern Jews were concerned, nothing good could ever come out of Galilee, except a bunch of rabble rousers, half-breeds, ruthless, unrighteous people who despise the teachings of God. Thus Galileans were regarded as fools, heretics and rebels.

We cannot begin to understand the feelings of Judean Jews towards Galileans, unless we understand Jewish insistence on ancestral and racial purity.¹³ The Jews held that only Israelites of pure ancestry made up the pure Israel. Thus, “even the simple Israelite knew his immediate ancestors and could point to which of the twelve tribes he belonged.”¹⁴ After the exile, genealogies became important in order to separate pure families from those racially mixed, as a result of the racial-mixing practices of the Assyrians. The books of Ezra, Nehemiah and 1 and 2 Chronicles, written after the exile, are all filled with genealogical lists. We often wonder why all the fuss over genealogies. In the post-exilic period, these lists were important in order to determine who was a pure Israelite. A person could not be a priest unless they could prove their ancestral purity to at least five generations. No person could hold a public office who was not of pure ancestry. nor would they associate in court or in public office with persons whose ancestry was of doubt. Proof of pure ancestry was important for a woman to marry into a priestly family.¹⁵

The most important reason for proof of ancestral purity had to do with religion and salvation. If one came up short of merits in the judgment, the merits of Abraham could be added to one's account, so as to assure one's salvation. However, only those who could trace their lineage to Abraham would have access to his merits. Thus, a person's salvation depended on their ancestral purity. Then too, prophecy had declared that before the coming of the end of the age, the prophet Elijah would return “to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to their children” Malachai 4:5-6. In other words, Elijah would restore the family to its ancestral purity so that people would be ready for the final salvation.

Joachim Jeremias declares:

Only families of pure Israelite descent could be assured of a share in the messianic salvation for only they were assisted by the 'merit of their legitimate ancestry'. Here we have the most profound reason for the behaviour of these pure Israelite families—why they watched so carefully over the maintenance of racial purity and examined the genealogies of their future sons- and daughters-in-law before marriage. For on this question of racial purity hung not only the social position of their descendants, but indeed their final assurance of salvation, their share in the future redemption of Israel.¹⁶

Thus, Galileans, by their racial and cultural mixture were not only deprived of earthly social positions, but of their heavenly inheritance as well. They had no chance of being saved, another reason why they were despised and rejected. They were predestined to hell!

Yet, when one looks at the attitude of John and Jesus, they both disdained all this preoccupation with ancestral and racial purity. When the Pharisees insisted they were the children of Abraham and had Abraham as their father, John tells them that it is not ancestral purity that matters in the Kingdom of God, but *repentance* (Matthew 3:9). And Jesus declares to the religious leaders, that it is belief in the *Son of God*, and not in being descents of Abraham, that would save them (John 8:36).

Jesus and Galilee:

“The human scandal of God's way does not begin with the cross, but the historical-cultural incarnation of His Son, Jesus, in Galilee.”¹⁷ “That God had chosen to become a Galilean underscores the great paradox of the incarnation in which God becomes the despised and lowly of the world”¹⁸, identifies with them and becomes one with them. “In becoming a Galilean, God becomes the fool of the world for the sake of the world's salvation.”¹⁹

In Mark 1:9,14-15, we read that Galilee is not only the place *from* which Jesus comes to be baptized, but the place *into* which He goes to begin His ministry.²⁰ One of the problems that minority groups, or people that have experienced a great deal of powerlessness in society have, is that once they leave the barrio or the ghetto, nobody wants to go back into the barrio, the ghetto. The push for upward mobility is too strong, and people no longer want to identify with their roots, their people. As someone once declared: “When the ax entered the forest, one of the trees was overheard saying, ‘The handle was one of us.’” Leonard Harman Robbins declares the same in his short poem, showing how hatred of one's own is a distinct possibility.

“How a minority
Reaching majority,
Seizing authority,
Hates a minority!”

But somebody has to go back and tell them that there is hope, for Jesus is a “barrio boy”—He comes from the ghetto—He was a “homeboy”! Out of Galilee, the place of the nobodies, comes the Somebody of God, Jesus Christ, who goes back into Galilee to

The Significance of Galilee – 6

form a new humanity so that they can become the children of God.

No wonder Nathaniel was shocked to hear that the Messiah was coming from Galilee. It was the last place one would expect the Messiah to come from: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:43-46). If the Messiah were to come from any place it would be from Judea, from Bethlehem, from Jerusalem— but not Galilee! When Nicodemus stood up in the Council and defended Jesus, even he was labeled as a Galilean: “Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee!” (John 7:40-52).

Where do you come from? The ordinary stereotypes assign 'acceptability' to some places and not to others.. We live in a society that gives value to people on the basis of their place of origin. If you're from Cuba, you are all right, because the United States government wants to make a statement against communism. But if you are from Haiti, you are of little value and not wanted. This is not just true of popular stereotypes, but it becomes most evident when you travel. In 1967, I spent the summer in England in street evangelism as part of our seminary field training, working with runaways from the continent who had come over to England. At the end of the summer, I took off hitch-hiking for three weeks throughout Europe. Prior to my leaving some of my street friends told me to be careful in France, as the French were not to pleased with Americans, at the time. They therefore gave me an English flag that I could put on my pack. I thus had the American flag on one side and the English flag on the other, and as I traveled through the different countries I displayed the appropriate flag, depending on the attitude at the time.

Of course, one look at me and some wondered what I really was. When I lived In California, some thought I was Hawaiian; when I traveled in Europe, I passed for Italian; when I went to Cuba, Cubans in Havana thought I was a Cuban from the Oriente Province; others have asked me if I am an Arab. No, I tell them (tongue in cheek). The reason why I have such an “international face” is because I pastored an “All Nations” Church.

Where you come from does makes a difference on your acceptance. Virgilio Elizondo reminds us that:

The passport you carry will determine very realistically where you are welcome, where you will be tolerated and what places you will not be allowed. Your place of origin already marks you as acceptable or non-acceptable. Furthermore, geography marks the ordinary person who is born and raised in that particular region for there will be certain mannerisms, actions, speech patterns, and even accents that will identify the person for life. People either take pride in where they come from or become apologetic about their origins. Many of the ethnic and racial jokes have their basis on the common geographical scorn that people tend to develop for each other, especially for the weaker or more impoverished areas of the world.²¹

A good example of this is the case of Poland, which has gone through much suffering as the various powers of Europe have tried to wipe it out literally. First the Russians came in and took a province of Poland. Then came Prussia and took another province. Austria then came in and became the third province of Poland. Finally, those Poles that could, left Poland and came to the United States, where they established the fourth province, and call it “Polonia”.²² Yet, in spite of it all, the Polish people have

resisted and continue to survive as a people. The sadness is that rather than admiration for their courage and survivability, there has developed a prejudicial attitude manifested in an overabundance of jokes about “dumb Pollacks,” who can't defend their own country.

One seldom hears now any more “dumb Pollack” jokes, now that the Pope is Polish, and Solidarity brought about the end of communism in Poland come into national prominence, and Lec Walesa was awarded the Noble Peace Prize.

Jesus comes from such a place, and was never apologetic about being a Galilean. His genealogy in Matthew 1 reveals the people with whom he identified: murderers, thieves, adulterers, liars, foreigners, you name it. They are all part of his family heritage. The point of Jesus' genealogy is found in vs. 21, “He shall save His people from their sins.” His people desperately need saving. So Jesus becomes “mixed” humanity in every sense of the word— by blood, social class, culture and race (22). As Elizondo says, “Considering what the Jewish people of his time thought of mixed blood, it is noteworthy that Matthew does not hesitate to bring out the mixture of Jesus thus putting him among the 'out's' of his socio-cultural religious group.”²³

John declared that He came unto His own and His own received Him not (John 1:11). The full implication of this needs to be better understood in light of Jesus being a Galilean. In Luke 2:4-7, we are told that there was “no room” in the inn. Just how do you think a Galilean would have been received in Bethlehem of Judea? About the same way a Black family from the North would have been received in a white motel in the South in the fifties. The Bible does not say that the inn was *full*. It simply states that there was “no room.” The “no room” most probably meant, “There is no room for people like you because of who you are.”

How often did Blacks, Latinos and other racial groups see “vacancy” signs change quickly to a “Sorry, no vacancy. We're all filled up,” simply because they were not wanted there, because of who they were? Jesus, my friends, tasted it all, so that no one could possibly say, Jesus has not experienced my trial. And yet such a place that declares, by attitude and action, that there is no room for you is also proclaiming that it is not the proper place for God to dwell. God will not make His abiding presence in a place which rejects the rejects of society.²⁴ “The true Temple of God's abiding presence will emerge elsewhere, wherein all peoples can have easy access to His liberating presence.”²⁵ Any place which rejects people because of who they are is not a fit place for God's dwelling. Too many of churches are not fit places for God's dwelling, because of their racial and class exclusiveness.

Now we can best understand Jesus' words in Matthew 23:38, “Behold, your house is left to you desolate.” Since you would not accept the One of whom Isaiah the prophet wrote: “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not” (53:3). Therefore, your house, your, beautiful Temple, is left desolate, empty and forsaken. I'd rather be born in a stable, where the shepherds, the rejected ones; where the magi, the foreigners, are all welcome to visit me.

And yet, in the end He was rejected by all, both Galilean and Judean, for they both misunderstood His intent and mission of creating a new humanity and bringing it into a oneness akin to that one existing between Himself and His Father (John 17:22).

Why did God select Galilee, that mestitized, despised region of the earth, as the place that would mark His Son's identity for life? The answer is found in Hebrews 2:17,

“He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest.” Jesus so identified Himself with fallen humanity that no person could ever say: “Jesus cannot empathize with my situation.”

The Church and Its Mission:

What does all of this have to do with the mission of the Church? Much. Can you imagine the impact that a message such as this would have on the poor of the earth? And what about to migrants and refugees? Would it touch their very soul? Take the Hispanic Church, for example. What kind of gospel is being preached to the second and third generation Latino in the church? The gospel of the “Judeans,” more concerned with racial, cultural, linguistic purity and the preservation of the status quo and their vested interests, then with the compassion of Jesus? What do we tell the “neo-Galileans—those who are a biological mixture of the Spaniard, the Indian, and the African—the mestizos; as well as the second and third generation, who like the Galileans, may not know Spanish well and find themselves doubly marginalized by their people and the larger society? Is the street the only recourse?

The modern neo-Galileans, such as Latinos, African Americans, immigrants, Asians and American Indians, often see themselves as marginal in the wider church. How do we view their rich cultural heritage, as negative or positive in relation to the Gospel? What kind of picture of God are they receiving?

For too long the church has been presenting a Christ more reflective of the Pharisees' understanding of God; an exclusive, indifferent Christ, concerned only with personal devotion to God divorced from genuine concern for humankind. And many today are saying “No” to this Christ.

Jesus, in Matthew 21:28-31, describes what is happening to the church today.

But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, “Son, go work today in the vineyard.” And he answered and said, “I will, sir; and he did not go.” And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, “I will not; yet he afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said, “The latter.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you.”

Many of our Black, Latino, and Asian youth, especially the second and third generation, as well as many white youth, and women, just like the harlots, tax collectors and the common people in Jesus' day, have turned their back on the God of the Pharisees in the Church because they see that God as not identifying with their needs and experience. But when Jesus the Galilean began to demonstrate by word and deed the God of compassion whom He came to reveal, these very same people who had said “No” before, now said a resounding “Yes.”

The same is happening in the church. For too long the “Generic Christ,” the Christ of the universal pulpit, has prevailed in the church. This is the Christ similar to generic foods, with no identifying market-specific identity, just a universal label stating what He is. As a result the quality of the goods tends to be inferior. You are not always too sure what you are getting—just general fodder for the masses. The high quality of the Divine Product, based on the market-specific need of the different people, is missing.

For this reason Paul never preached a “Generic Christ,” but a market-specific one:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow-partaker of it (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

A new Christ needs to be experienced in the Church today—Jesus the Galilean. And to this Christ, who has identified with their specific needs, Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, whites and women, will respond with a resounding “Yes.” As for the “Generic Christ” of the colonial, ethnocentric, Western Church, concerned with homogeneity and uniformity, He is no longer acceptable to the needs of a multicultural world, but is a product of a by-gone age. The significance of Galilee to the mission of the Church lies in that Jesus the Galilean becomes the Biblical Model by which to minister to the neo-Galileans of the world—the despised, the rejected, the outcasts of society—the two-thirds majority of the world's population living in the Third World. For Jesus the Galilean reveals God to be the God who has identified with their situation of alienation and deprivation. Jesus the Galilean is also the Biblical Model by which to minister cross-culturally in a multicultural society. Jesus the Galilean also becomes the Biblical Model by which the Church re-interprets and re-designs its mission as it approaches the dawning of the 21st century.

This is why Jesus, after the Resurrection, *returns* to Galilee, there to meet His Church. “He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you” (Mark 16:7). It is there in the “Galilees” of the world where we will find Jesus, and from where the Church is to begin its mission into the world. It was from Galilee that Pentecost began, as brought out by the exclamation of amazement from the people, “Are not these who are speaking Galileans?” Peter told Cornelius that the Gospel began to be proclaimed from Galilee (Acts 10:37).

The problem is that for too long the Church has been trying to avoid Galilee and have little to do with it. For example, what happens when a neighborhood begins to change, and neo-Galileans—Blacks, Hispanics and other non-white minority—begin to move in large numbers? Does the Church follow the example of its Lord and Master, and serve Him there “in Galilee,” by implementing models of ministry as “salt,” “light” and “leaven,” relevant to the people wherein it finds itself? Or is its concern more with economics, security and the value of its properties? If it is the latter, the result will be “white flight”—a fleeing of its responsibility with exclusion. But what kind of statement as to the validity of the Gospel is being made by such action? And of greater importance, what examples of ministry are church leaders giving its members and the community when the church relocates? The church must readdress its understanding of mission, for it is in Galilee where its mission must begin. It is there where its Lord and Master, Jesus the Galilean, has promised the Church will find Him. “Go, tell his disciples . . . that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you” (Mark 16:7).

But Jesus not only identifies with Galilee, He also is seeking to create a new

humanity right here on earth in the present, as His Kingdom is manifested through the Church. The message from the Galilean is that God does not accept racial, sexual and social divisions, but will establish a new humanity built on unity in diversity in Christ (Galatians 3:28), where “There is neither Jew nor Greek [no division based on race and ethnicity], there is neither slave nor free [no division based on social class], there is neither male nor female [no division based on sex and gender]; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” This is the “Galilean Principle,” that “what human beings reject, God chooses as His very own.”²⁶

Many Blacks and Latinos are great champions of the first two causes—racial and economic injustice, but somehow on the third one—sexual injustice based on sexism—we are loudly silent. We cannot choose our causes when it comes to the Gospel demands. The Gospel must be preached and practiced at all levels of human need! Thus Jesus will use what the world regards as weak and foolish and no-good and despised to bring about the establishment of His kingdom (1 Corinthians 1:26-30).

The nature of God's Kingdom is to break down all dividing walls that separate people, whether they be racial, cultural, sexual, social, political or economic, which keep His children from becoming the new humanity in Christ. The Church must do battle against this evil in the Church and as well as in society. Jesus told Peter: “On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). We often read this passage from a wrong perspective. We tend to view the Church as a “fortress” being attacked by the “gates of hell.” And the clarion cry from pulpits across the land is that the “gates of hell” shall not prevail against the Church. My friends, we've got it all backwards. Have you ever seen “gates” attacking anything? Gates are there to keep in or keep out. It is not the Church that is being attacked, but the Church that is *on* the attack. The Church as the rock, like the rock that destroyed Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2, is seen by Jesus as taking the battle for justice right to the very gates of hell—to the root and source of evil—and bringing liberty to the captives and those in prison (Luke 4:18). And the gates of hell “shall not prevail,” shall not withstand, the attack. The Church must see its mission in a new light. Instead of a fortified fortress, cowering against the enemy, we need to view the Church as a “flying fortress,” much like the B-29 Bombers of World War II, taking the battle against evil right to the stronghold of the enemy, in a mission of search, reclaim and destroy.²⁷ After all, is not the logo of the Seventh-day Adventist Church three angels, flying in mid heaven, having the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6)? This is the true picture of the Church, militant against evil, and not complacent in conformity.

The problem is that we are not only a cowering church, but also an escaping church, escaping behind texts like, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Let me do some exegetical surgery right here. We have wrongly interpreted this text to mean that the church should not get involved in societal issues other than spiritual ones, for it is not of this world. Therefore, as Christians we should patiently endure the hardships and injustices of this world, until which time God ushers in the next. May I say to you, friend, that this is an eisegetical cop-out! The key word in this text is the word “of.” The Greek word is *ek*, meaning “out of,” “from,” “the point of origin.” What Jesus is saying is, “My kingdom does not proceed out of this world. The principles which govern my kingdom do not come from this world, but from another world— a heavenly one. If they came from this world, then my servants would fight. My kingdom, however, is based on, comes out of, proceeds from, originates in another world. Therefore my servants behave

differently, because they are guided by principles of action from another world, which govern their practice in this one.”

Jesus never preached nor practiced an escapist theology, but a theology that revolutionized life here in this old earth, in preparation for the new earth. This is the message of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians.²⁸ According to Ephesians, the “mystery of Christ” is the incorporation of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity in Christ. And in Ephesians 3:10, Paul tells us that this manifestation is to be made visible in the Church. There is a reason why this oneness is not made manifest, because of what I call, a “theology of neglect.” Seventh-day Adventists have neglected to teach as Doctrine *The Principle of Inclusiveness of the Gospel*—that because we are one with God, we are also one with each other, equal before both (John 17:23; Acts 10; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14-22). Ellen G. White concurs: “The secret of unity is found in the equality of believers in Christ. The reason for all division, discord, and difference is found in separation from Christ. *Christ is the center to which all should be attracted; for the nearer we approach the center, the closer we shall come together.*”²⁹

From grade school we teach our children, through campaigns, oratorical contests, media material, that the use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs is morally and physically wrong, and is therefore sin. We have never done the same with racism, classism, and sexism. Can you imagine the impact on our children that poster campaigns, oratorical and essay contests, and films on unity in diversity in Christ would have? We are great at developing Five Day Plans and producing films like the old One In Twenty Thousand, depicting the surgical removal of cancer. How about Five Day Plans and films on the removal of the cancer of racism and sexism from the Church? This is why in 1984, at the anniversary celebration of the All Nations Church, the “Unity in Diversity in Christ” Theme Contest for youth was inaugurated, with oral, essay and visual presentations. We need to instill in our youth those divine values that will counteract the social “isms” of racism, sexism, classism and ageism.

The reason why we are doing very little here is because we are guilty. Let me illustrate. If as Seventh-day Adventists we ate pork, smoked and drank alcoholic beverages, as do other churches, we would not be able to preach the strong health message that we have. But because we practice racism, classism and sexism, we cannot preach it. Our practice in this area is reflective of the practice of society, which is living by the principles of the Kingdom of Satan. Thus, we are drinking at “broken cisterns,” and the Living Water of the Gospel is seeping through the cracks of racism, classism and sexism!

We need to return to the primitive godliness of the Early Church where Acts 4:32-35 tells us:

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.

This passage tells us that the Early Church had two basic characteristics:

1. They experienced love for one another in the context of a warm, caring,

compassionate community.

2. They took care of the needy within their community.

The problem with our churches is that we lack in these two characteristics, and many have left the church as a result.

In November 1978 our society was shocked with the news of the massacre of Jim Jones' followers. Many of those that chose to follow Jim Jones were Christians. Why did they leave their faith to join a cult? What attracted them to the People's Temple? Mel White, a film producer, decided to investigate the question. In interviewing defectors, he found that the answer to this question dealt with two areas: "First, the Christian people in their experience didn't seem to love each other inside the church. And second, Christian people didn't seem to love the needy outside the church."³⁰ In other words, the churches out of which the defectors came prior to joining with the People's Temple, were churches that lacked the two characteristics of the Early Church—compassion within a caring community, for those inside as well as outside.

White goes on to record the testimony of several defectors. I want to focus on two of them.³¹ The first is Jeannie Mills. White writes:

For fifteen years Jeannie worked hard in her church as a teacher and in other volunteer capacities. She had struggled in the early years of her marriage to put her husband through Bible school, so that he might become a minister in their denomination. When she was twenty-nine her marriage failed. Jeannie and her first husband were divorced. Eventually she expressed her desire to remarry, and so began her journey to the People's Temple.

Jeannie's testimony:

The church fathers called me and suggested that they understood how these things go, but by the rules of the church, the first person to remarry was committing adultery, and that I could save everybody a great deal of embarrassment if I would just quietly withdraw my membership from the church. This left me without a church. I was very concerned about my children's souls. I still sent them to Christian schools, and I asked my mother if she still was praying, and to please pray for the souls of my children, but I felt go alone. Then I got to thinking. When I was in church where we were all going to heaven, we hardly talked to each other on earth. How was it that when we sit in heaven in a twinkling of an eye everything will change? Will everybody start loving and caring up there? Or in heaven am I going to still feel like an outcast— like I am never really good enough? After they asked me to leave the church I went to churches, all kinds of different churches. And in every church, maybe the minister would say hello to me, if I stood in line. In some churches maybe a deaconess or a greeter would come up and welcome me. Sometimes someone would share a hymnal with me. When I left the service that was it. It was as if I had entered somebody else's sacred domain, and if I worked really hard, if I went back again, and again, and again, maybe I would find a church family there. But I didn't have the energy to try. I was so turned off in every church, I left because nobody cared. Nobody cared that I, a human being with feelings, thoughts and emotions, came into their doors. And that is when I went to People's Temple.

Everybody seemed so caring and loving. They hugged us and made us

welcomed. So many said they liked us, and wanted us to come back. And after the first service many people sent letters. The church even sent a box of candy. Who was this Jeannie Mills? She was a Seventh-day Adventist ! Jeannie Mills says:

I attended and taught in my church's Christian education program from childhood. When I was eighteen years old I was leader of the Pathfinder Club, which had over fifty kids in it, and I had twenty-two adults working under me. I could give you an answer from the Bible for any question. I knew the Bible backwards and forwards. At one point in my life, the minister tried to send me to college to become a Bible worker. I was very dedicated to the church.

I got in contact with Jeannie Mills in early February of 1980, and asked her to come and speak at All Nations Church. She accepted to come on May 10, 1980, with her husband, Al Mills, the official photographer of the People's Temple. On February 15, 1980, Jeannie sent me a book on her autobiography, *Six Years With God: Life Inside Rev. Jim Jones' Peoples Temple* [Jim Jones regarded himself as "God"]. On the fly leaf she wrote: ' "To Pastor Rosado: Always question authority! Jeannie Mills." On February 26, she and her husband Al and' daughter Dauphine, were slain in their apartment by a death squad which Jim Jones had left behind to do away with defectors. She never made it to All Nations.

Grace Stoen:

Her mother was Mexican, her family was Maltese. She was a beautiful olive-complected woman, yet the discrimination she experienced in a white parochial school in San Francisco, because she was poor and not quite white, made her feel unloved and uncared for in her church, and a perfect candidate for membership in People's Temple.

Grace Stoen's testimony is one of the clearest statements why the Christian Church must go multicultural:

I remember walking into my Catholic school and the Irish kids would call me nigger. When I told my parents they told me not to listen to them. My mother was a Mexican, and all her life she had been told that Mexicans were dirty and that they were no good, so she worked doubly hard to make sure that we had neat, clean uniforms. One day when I was in the second grade, I played kickball on the way to parochial school, and my shoes got scuffed. A nun made me stand in front of the class, and proceeded to humiliate me. She said I was filthy and why would I come to school looking like that. We lived on the fringe of a very rich parish. The rich and the white were always favored. Once in the second grade they expected us kids to bring envelopes with money in them. We didn't have any money. But they still asked me why I didn't put any money in the envelope? I was in the second grade and being put up for not having money in my envelope. Money was all they talked about. They wanted people to give fifty dollars. They had plaques on the wall saying who had five hundred dollars, and who had given one thousand dollars. When I was eighteen I still didn't have five hundred dollars, but I finally realized why it was that there was all those special memorials for people who gave money, but nobody befriended me. I spent ten years of my life

in that church, one day a week, and I never knew anybody. All that I saw was these family cliques and the strong, white Irish thing, so I quit. When I went to People's Temple they weren't taking any offerings. I'll never forget seeing all the races, black and white together. You always heard it couldn't be done, and they couldn't get along. Yet, at the Temple there were educated and illiterate, there were middle class and poor, there was everything there, and I was really touched by the warmth of the people. You didn't see people whispering, you know, talking about each other. Everybody was open, warm, open-hearted and getting to know one another, and I felt that my heart was just taken in by those beautiful people.

Many people ask me after a message like this: “Caleb, is it really possible to bring about such racial unity in the Church? My answer is an unqualified yes! And I back it up from both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. The whole theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesians deals with the incorporation of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity in Christ.³² In chapter one Paul introduces us to the “mystery of God's will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Christ” (vs. 9). What is this “mystery”? It is “the summing of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth” (vs. 10): It is the bringing together in Christ, all things which have been estranged. In chapter two, Paul makes clear what the “all things” are that are brought together in Christ; it is the bringing together of Jew and Gentile into one new humanity, thereby establishing peace, vss. 12-16. In chapter three, Paul leaves no doubt as to what is the “mystery of Christ”:

When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (vss. 4-6).

Paul then goes on to declare in verses 8-12, that this “mystery”, this bringing together of different ethnic groups into one body, is to be made manifest *through the Church*, where God will make the final manifestation of the Gospel which unites humanity into a visible oneness, to the chagrin and exposure of the principalities and powers of evil.

The major problem confronting the Early Church, which threatened the validity of the Gospel in the first century, was the conflict between Jew and Gentile. The Book of Acts and the majority of Paul's letters deal with this problem. It threatened to divide the Church in Acts 6; it caused Peter problems with church leaders after the conversion of Cornelius; the first Christian Church Council ever held in the history of the Church was convened specifically to deal with this problem; Paul's rebuke of Peter in Antioch was over the same problem (Galatians 2).

What was the problem? The problem was that many Jews converted to Christianity still hung on to the socially divisive, exclusive teachings and practices of Pharisaic Judaism. It was a system of attitudes and actions that gave rise to ethnocentrism, segregationism, racial and sexual prejudice, discrimination and religious bigotry. The problem was primarily with the Jews, and so dominated the Early Church

that an entire religio-political party developed within the first-century Christian Church—the Judaizers—whose sole mission was to get Gentiles to live like Jews.

The problem was finally resolved by an appeal to the Gospel, when Paul made it crystal clear that Christ “is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Ephesians 2:14-16). That was the problem of the Early Church, and its solution.

The major problem confronting the Last-Day Church, which is also threatening the validity of the Gospel in these last days, is a resurgence of the old problem, but in a new garb and on a grandeur scale— the conflict between whites and non-whites. It has divided the Church into Black and White, East and West, North and South, First World and Third World. The problem is essentially the same, in that most people converted to Christianity have still hung on to the socially divisive values and practices of the white Western world, with its built-in ethnocentrism, segregation, racial and sexual prejudice, discrimination, and religious and ideological bigotry. And like the Judaizers of old, many white Westerners are imposing a cultural and religious baggage on the rest of the world, which has nothing to do with the Gospel, in an effort to get them to live like Westerners. The result has been at worst, a rejection of the Gospel; and at best, a divided Church.

The problem, as of old, can only be resolved by an appeal to the Gospel, and a manifestation of that appeal in the practice of the Church. The fleshing out of this manifestation in the Church needs to be the primary focus of the mission of the Church. As long as this oneness is not made visible in the Church, the Church has no message. Wasn't this what Jesus said: “I in them, and Thou n Me, that they may be perfectly one, *then* the world will know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love me” (John 17:23)? We may talk about Church Growth, and have all kinds of seminars on the Caring Church, but until the oneness of Galatians 3:28 is manifested in the Church we are spitting into the wind, and the world will turn a deafened ear.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul also speaks of the Church as being one body with many members. In verses 24-25, he gives us the Divine Intention as to how the Church is to be structured for effective ministry: “But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.” Talk about conflict resolution within the Caring Church; here is the key! God's intention for His Church is that it be structured in such a manner, that those regarded as inferior be given the greater honor, that there may be no discord within the Body. And God is not talking about some future time in glory, but now, in our present social reality.

The Early Church reflected this caring oneness, as we have read in Acts, and so will the Last Church. Sister White tells us that, “Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth, there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of *primitive godliness* as has not been witnessed since apostolic times.”³³ The godliness of the Early Church consisted, among other factors, in the *koinonia*, the fellowship, that sense of caring community manifested in a oneness, which all the believers from different ethnic groups had in common with each other. And I say that the time for that display of “primitive godliness” is now! That more than anything else, according to Jesus'

prayer in John 17, will convince the world that Jesus is Lord!.

Conclusion:

God wants to convert our elaborate, expensive and exclusive temples, where there is no room for people who might be different from us, into stables where all of humanity can come and worship Him freely in open, loving oneness, without distinction.

Therein lies the significance of Galilee to the mission of the Church, for Galilee, the “stables” of the world, has become the dwelling place of God. Jesus has already gone ahead of us into Galilee, and there He has promised to meet us in mission and service. The end result will be *the turning of stables into temples*— His Holy Temple—and the turning of temples, the human constructions of exclusiveness into forsaken, desolate stables. Jesus is first born in a stable, however, and then converts that stable into the Temple of the Living God.

Is your church the “stable of God”?

¹Comblin, Jose. *The Meaning of Mission*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 35.

²Costas, Orlando E. "Evangelism from the Periphery: A Galilean Model," *Apuntes*, 2:3 Fall, 1982.

³Clark, K. W. "Galilee," George A. Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 347.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Vermes, Geza. *Jesus the Jew*. (London: William Collins Sons, 1977), p. 44.

⁶Clark, p. 345.

⁷Vermes, pp. 52-53

⁸*Ibid.* p. 46.

⁹*Ibid.* pp. 54-55.

¹⁰Schurer, Emil. *The History of the Jewish People In the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C. - A.D. 135)*, Vol. 1. (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark Ltd., 1973), p. 332.

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 47.

¹²Elizondo, Virgilio, "A Theology of Evangelization," in Thomas Patrick Hull, ed., *Developing Basic Christian Communities--A Handbook*. (Chicago: National Federation of Priests' Councils, 1979), p. 10.

¹³This section on ancestral and racial purity is taken from Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem In the Time of Jesus*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 275-302.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 301-302.

¹⁷Elizondo, Virgilio. *Mestizaje: The Dialectic of Cultural Birth and the Gospel*. (San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1978), p. 430. Edited and reprinted by Orbis Books in 1983 as *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise*.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Costas, p. 54.

²¹Elizondo, p. 445.

²²Lopata, Helena Znaniecki. *Polish Americans*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

²³Elizondo, p. 446.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 447.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 73.

²⁷I want to thank Samuel Betances, professor of sociology at Northeastern Illinois University, for giving me this thought on the role reversal of the church.

²⁸For a full explanation of the Letter to the Ephesians from this perspective, see Caleb Rosado, *Broken Walls*. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990).

²⁹White, Ellen G., *Selected Messages, Vol. 1*. (Washington, DC: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 259.

³⁰White, Mel. *Deceived*. (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1979), p. 17.

³¹*Ibid.* pp. 15-19.

³²See Caleb Rosado, *Broken Walls*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1990.

³³White, Ellen G. *The Great Controversy*. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), p. 464.