

WORLD EVANGELIZATION AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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"World Evangelization and the Kingdom of God!" Seldom in my life has a work been assigned to me which was so inspiring to myself as this biblical foundation paper. Why? Firstly, because this task has forced me to rethink my own mission theology in the light of one of the Bible's most central themes. This has led me to new insights and clarified my total view. Above all it has filled me with deeper joy about the richness of God's wonderful counsel of salvation!

This joy was greatly increased, secondly, by the discovery how much agreement there exists between evangelical Christians on all six continents on the basic principles of world evangelization. This has been a genuine surprise to me. I spent several days in studying the more than 2000 responses to this paper. There were, to be sure, many details that were questioned from various positions. A few writers even outrightly rejected the whole conception as irrelevant. But the overwhelming response was a cordial consent to the main thrust of the presentation. I believe the reason for this worldwide agreement is this: we evangelicals have one authoritative frame of reference which is shared by us all. The Bible is the infallible source and rule of our faith, teaching and practice. Where this frame of reference, however, becomes shaky, our understanding and practice of evangelism, too, will diverge into most bewildering directions.

I. The Distinction between the Kingdom of Grace and of Glory

Let me briefly summarize the main points of our paper. World evangelization — more than any enterprise — needs a strong, inspiring motivation. We have chosen to express this motivation by the key message of the greatest of all evangelists, Jesus Christ himself: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

The Kingdom of God has always been central in the history of Christian missions. Today it has become the watch-cry again to missions of rather different theological assumptions. Accordingly, the same term "Kingdom of God" may mean something totally different to them. Therefore, we must redefine it on the basis of biblical theology. The concept "Kingdom of the Lord" originates in the Old Testament. The final coming of the "Malkuth Jahweh," the universal rule of the Lord, was the sum total of the great promises, which God had given to his chosen people Israel. It meant, first of all, liberation and a state of spiritual and physical well-being — shalom — through an unbroken covenantal relationship between Israel and her God. But much more, it also meant Jahweh's universal reign of peace from Mt. Zion over all the nations on earth. The visible bearer of this eschatological rule would be the royal Messiah whose law is administered to the rest of mankind by his royal priesthood Israel. Therefore the expectation of the Kingdom of the Lord was concentrated in the hope for the coming Messiah.

The great and decisive message of the New Testament Gospel is, that this expectation is fulfilled through the coming of Jesus. But at once

a great paradox was presented to the minds of the Jews. Jesus clearly indicated that in his person and ministry the Kingdom had come. His miracles caused many of his hearers to believe in him. But still the great event, the turning of all historical and even cosmic conditions, did not take place. This was a riddle which became a real stumbling block to the Jews. It finally caused them to deliver their Messiah over to the Gentile governor to be executed.

Yet there was an answer to the mystery of the Kingdom as presented by Jesus. This answer was that the establishment of the Kingdom is not one single event, but a sequence of decisive stages. My paper is based upon the clear distinction between two decisive stages. We have called them the *Kingdom of Grace* and the *Kingdom of Glory*.

I believe that it is crucial for our understanding of evangelism to keep this distinction in mind. The conflict between two completely different understandings of mission today originates in the confusion about the difference between the present and the future stage of the Kingdom. This is why we had to bring in so much eschatology into our argument.

The coming of the Kingdom is just one way of describing God's redemptive work with his fallen creation. God has created the world, and especially man, to be the object of his love and to reflect his eternal glory. But the original harmony was broken by the double rebellion in the spirit world and in the human world. Therefore all creation has fallen into the slavery of corruption and death. The misery of the present physical world is just the visible expression of the broken inner harmony in the spiritual world. The two are interrelated. But since the structure of God's creation is spiritual, it is necessary that the redemption starts from within.

The gift which is brought to us by Jesus under the term "Kingdom of God" is basically the restoration of the broken relationship between God and fallen mankind. Our sins, which separate us from God, are forgiven, and through the Holy Spirit our mind is renewed into child-like trust and obedience to God our heavenly Father. This gift is based upon the redemptive work of Christ, his death and resurrection. The gift is enjoyed within the fellowship of the believers in Christ, the church, which is the Kingdom of Grace. The gift is mediated through the preaching of the Gospel and sealed by baptism. Administering the means of grace, therefore, is the main task of evangelism.

This insistence on the spiritual nature of the Kingdom in its present state, does not mean that its working is merely internal and invisible. Where God rules over man anew, new life flows into his heart, but also into his society, and finally also into his whole environment. Through renewed people God really starts to renew the structures of our physical world. The evangelistic work of Jesus, too, was accompanied by his visible signs of healing, feeding, and exorcising the demons.

Yet we must insist that in its present state as a Kingdom of Grace, God's Kingdom is not complete yet. Neither by a history of evolution nor by violent revolutions will this present world of ours be changed into the ideal state of the Kingdom of God as promised through the prophets. Physically, man and all creation are still under the laws of the

old age of corruption. The Kingdom of Grace is still counteracted by the three ancient enemies sin, devil and death, although they are, in principle, already defeated by Christ. We are still longing for the redemption of our bodies and of the physical world. This will take place in the apocalyptic event when Christ returns and establishes his Kingdom in power and glory. This will mean the complete transformation of the present structures of fallen creation into structures that without resistance function in accordance with the will of God.

What, then, is the meaning of the present phase between the first and the second coming of Christ? The meaning is that the saving Lordship of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to all the nations on earth. It is to invite people everywhere to join the Kingdom of Grace now and thereby to become partakers of the forthcoming Kingdom of Glory. Scripture tells us that Jesus will not come again before all nations have heard the Gospel and the full number of the elect has been gathered into the messianic community.

Evangelism, therefore, is the one basic function which gives meaning to the present interval between the establishment of the Kingdom of Grace and its consummation into the Kingdom of Glory.

But here one more distinction must be observed: world evangelization is not identical with world Christianization. We have both the command and the promise to complete the evangelization of the world before Christ's return. But we have no promise that we will achieve the conversion of all people whom we reach. We hope and pray that the harvest will be abundant.

Perhaps here my paper sounded a little different in comparison with the optimism of my friend and colleague, Dr. McGavran. Basically we are in agreement. I do trust that Christ will bless our evangelistic testimony. With my own eyes I have seen in East Africa, in India and in Korea and even in Germany that he is just now doing so. But still I do not expect finally all mankind will join the church and thereby transform the world into the Kingdom of Glory.

Such a mistaken view — sometimes called post-millennialism — is contradicted by the clear prediction of Jesus Christ and his apostles. I am especially referring to Christ's Sermon on the Mt. of Olives (Matt. 24) and to the Revelation of St. John. Therefore I endorse the statement of my paper: "The final phase of church history will not be marked by great revival movements or by the complete Christianization of the nations. On the contrary: only a minority of elect will endure and be saved."

Now I do not want to take up the quarrel of the three conflicting eschatological views of a-millennialism, pre-millennialism and post-millennialism again. I have been justly warned not to wreck this Congress by introducing the one topic on which evangelicals are most passionately divided. Many other correspondents have pointed out that my own position in Part Two, statement two, was not really clear. I don't agree. Scripture itself by its seemingly contradicting statements has drawn a veil over the exact sequence of the, apocalyptic mysteries. This veil will only be removed as the prophecies are fulfilled.

But there are two points where a certain amount of eschatological agreement is absolutely indispensable for Christian mission.

The *one* is that worldwide evangelization is the most important and joyful task which is to be fulfilled by the church before Christ will come to erect his Kingdom in power and glory.

The *other* point is that the whole history of mankind is heading for the forthcoming clash between Christ and Antichrist. We are — in this phase of history — not facing the unification of mankind under one head, Christ. Rather we are torn apart by two opposing unification movements: the gathering of the messianic community, that is the church of Christ on the one hand, and the great union movement of the worshipers of the "beast." Finally, each human being will find himself involved on one side of this war. Therefore the words of Christ to the last generation are very solemn: "He who endures till the end shall be saved!" (Matt. 24:13).

II. Three Conflicting Views on World Evangelism

The clear apprehension of the eschatological nature of the Kingdom is not only decisive for our theological understanding of world evangelism. It also determines the adoption of evangelistic methods. Let me first restate and develop what I called the "two dangerous alternatives":

A) One is current within the *conciliar movement*. It is inspired by the "utopian vision" of a united world community. It is developed without proper regard to the biblical prophecies of the return of Christ, his victory over Antichrist and the great judgment, which must precede such a state of eschatological universal shalom. People of all denominations, classes, religions and ideologies are seen as already now being drawn together into one society which is ruled by justice, peace and continuous development. It is not the Gospel, but the ideals of a new humanism which brings them together. One way to overcome the present resistance to such development is to overthrow all oppressive systems by violent liberation movements. This is really advocated today as a new form of world mission, and I have called it the "*Mission of Barabbas*."

Barabbas was probably a member of the political party of the Zealots. He wanted to hasten the coming of a national Messianic Kingdom by throwing out the Roman oppressors. Therefore he joined the guerrilla movement. And we remember: he was much more attractive to the Jews than a Savior decorated with a crown of thorns.

An additional way toward worldwide unification is to pull down the dividing walls between Christianity and other religions. This is done by engaging in dialogue and thereby establishing the alleged spiritual unity of all religions. This will necessarily result in a new form of syncretism, where the different ways of separation of the religions are seen as leading to the same goal.

These two concepts of liberation and unity are evident distortions of the biblical understanding of true freedom and fellowship in Christ. Yet the "utopian vision" is spreading with an alarming speed in world Christianity. Many Christians — even evangelicals — are attracted by it. For they regard it as the only alternative to the imminent destruction of our world by a collective suicide of mankind.

Indeed, it would be the only alternative, if we had no hope in the return of Christ. But the Bible gives us a different, yet much more reliable answer to our present anxieties. Therefore it is imperative that we reaffirm the authentic prophecies of the coming Kingdom and refute the "utopian vision." This has been done quite recently by an International Convention of Confessing Christians. It was held in Berlin on the Day of Ascension this year. We issued a biblical document which tackles exactly these issues. It is, therefore, called the "Berlin Declaration on Ecumenism 1974: Freedom and Fellowship in Christ." Already now it has been acclaimed and signed by evangelical Christians from all parts of the world.

B) But there is another dangerous alternative. It has originated within evangelical Christianity itself. Here the mistaken idea which corresponds to the "utopian vision" of the present Ecumenical Movement is the enthusiastic expectation of an imminent "second Pentecost." Through its power, it is believed, all mankind will be converted and thus the kingdom will be ushered in, in glory.

In response to hundreds of questions let me briefly develop this point. The type of evangelism which is based on such an enthusiastic expectation puts exceeding trust in a new occurrence of an abundance of signs and miracles, attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit. This induces the evangelist to try to get hold of such extraordinary power by getting into physical touch with other persons who are laden with it already. Then the minds of the listeners are attracted to the promised manifestation of that extraordinary force. If they actually do not see real miracles happen, they are at least caught by the suggestive spell of the evangelist.

This mistaken concept of evangelism is tempting especially Bible-believing Christians. For it is a subtle imitation of the true gifts of the Holy Spirit as we find them especially in the book of Acts, and as they are found, in exceptional cases, also amongst genuine Christians today.

But the difference is a double one.

Firstly this concept replaces the biblical hope for the returning Christ by the unbiblical expectation of a second Pentecost. Neither Jesus nor his apostles promised this to the church.

Secondly the main evangelistic impact is no longer the convincing force of the Gospel on the conscience of man. Rather it is the irresistible pull of an anonymously radiating soul-force not entirely different from the demonic spirit forces in non-Christian religions. I have, indeed, come across the work of such pseudo-evangelists who have attracted many Christians. They were left behind in a state of spiritual confusion and anxiety.

The reason was that those evangelists did not really work in the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead they used the charm of their personality and a parapsychological force which is also exemplified by Hindu gurus and African diviners. Therefore it is most important to exercise the discernment of the spirits. Usually a biblical examination of their teaching is quite sufficient. For seldom is Christ as crucified for our sins the center of their message. Instead the whole emphasis

is on the extraordinary gifts ascribed to the Holy Spirit quite apart from the true redemption of the sinner.

As Christians are approaching the final stage of history, they must increasingly become aware of the working of such spirits of imitation. For Christ tells us that shortly before the end false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect (Matt. 24:24).

C) What, then, are the main features of a world evangelization which is determined by the biblical concept of the kingdom? The eschatological notion of the kingdom, we said, implies two basic affirmations:

One is that evangelization is heading for the victorious return of Jesus Christ, the Conqueror of Calvary.

The other is, that this final victory is preceded by the increasing confrontation with Antichrist.

These two affirmations must determine our attitude and our methods in evangelization. What does this mean?

1. World evangelization is expectant of great victories. Let us, like Paul, be assured that we have the one message which has the power radically to renew the life of every human being and even to turn the course of world history. It is the message that the crucified Savior is the Lord, and that in Jesus alone there is salvation now and on the coming Day of Judgment. This unchangeable message is meant for people at all times, in all parts of the world, in every sphere of society, for people of every religious or secular conviction, for man in every spiritual and moral condition. If faithfully communicated, God's Word will never return in vain. It will accomplish the purpose for which he has sent it.

2. Christ is already the Lord of the universe invisibly. His Lordship will be revealed at his return, when all knees will bow in his name. Therefore in evangelism we have to claim for him the totality of man's life — first of all, his life as an individual, and then, also, his corporate life as a social and political being. Therefore the oral witness must be accompanied by deeds of love that manifest the capacity of the Gospel to give new life to the whole man.

3. If evangelism is heading for the climax of world history, Christ's coming in glory, only total mobilization for evangelism can befit such a great cause. If we believe that this event is very near, no half-hearted solutions will be acceptable. This is the reason why I have pleaded, and why I am pleading again today:

Let us evangelicals all over the world line up in an international fellowship in world evangelization! The reason is not the joy to found another organization, as some have thought. The reason is that today only evangelicals are fully aware of the real need of the desperate unevangelized billions, their need of the saving Gospel. But up to now there is not enough wise coordination and mutual encouragement between the ten thousands of scattered evangelical enterprises which are serving this purpose. Therefore we run into the risk of functional and sometimes even theological disorientation. This may prove to be disastrous in our present spiritual conflict in world Christianity.

But total mobilization for evangelism starts on the local level. I

have also pleaded for the nationalization of the indigenous ministry within the next ten years. I did not mean the voluntary withdrawal of foreign missionaries, but their change in function. There are still needs — also in the West! — for mutual inspiration and for breaking new grounds. The cry for a “moratorium” issued at Bangkok can not be justified on a biblical basis. But I mean that evangelism will unfold its full force only if it is carried by fully responsible local churches which are growing spiritually and numerically.

Now let us turn to our second eschatological affirmation: the growing polarization between Christ and Antichrist. Satan uses his remaining time before the glorious return of Christ to disturb his growing Kingdom of Grace both from outside and from within. This means:

4. We have to guard the biblical Gospel which alone can bring salvation to the world. The greatest menace to world evangelization today does not come from *outside* but from inside the church. It is Satan's dissemination of a spirit of doctrinal confusion amongst the laborers of the kingdom. I believe that even the efforts of this costly Congress will be totally frustrated if we do not give an unmistakable direction to the forces of world evangelization, a direction which enables them clearly to discern the spirits. Therefore I have referred to the Declaration of Wheaton 1966, Frankfurt 1970 and now Lausanne 1974. These are documents which do not simply restate the well-known evangelical position. They clearly take issue with the actual heresies which undermine this position, although they make use of evangelical words.

5. True evangelism always implies the risk of *persecution* both of the preacher and of the converts. If our churches and missions live in perfect peace with the world, we must be alarmed. Most likely we have conformed ourselves and our message to the humanistic spirit of our age which finally will bring forth the Antichrist. Therefore it is most essential that in our deliberations about world evangelization we fully bring in the experience of our brethren who already today are rendering their witness in view of open persecution. Their situation can be ours tomorrow. This will be the actual test whether our evangelical conviction is genuine.

6. Satan's tenacious resistance cruelly reminds us that it is not our human efforts — not even our evangelistic efforts — which establish the Kingdom of God. In every moment we are wholly dependent on the concurrence by our heavenly King and the sending of his Spirit.

Therefore the top priority for fruitful evangelism is the daily renewal of our personal relation with Christ. Several of my correspondents have rightly stressed the central place of *prayer* in evangelism. I regret that I have not pointed out this sufficiently in my paper. But it is central to my own view of evangelism:

“Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.” (Martin Luther)

What then is the first and the last decisive contribution to our topic: “World Evangelization and the Kingdom of God”? It is the fervent prayer: “Thy Kingdom come!”

EVANGELISM AND MAN'S SEARCH FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND FULFILLMENT

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1. The world in which we live

“Imagine that all the population of the world were condensed to the size of one village of 100 people. In this village 67 of that 100 people would be poor; the other 33 would be in varying degrees well off. Of the total population, only 7 would be North Americans. The other 93 people would watch the 7 North Americans spend one-half of all the money, eat one-seventh of all the food, and use one-half of all the bathtubs. These 7 people would have ten times more doctors than the other 93. Meanwhile the 7 would continue to get more and more and the 93 less and less.”¹

This dramatic account of the disparity of wealth in the world becomes more significant for Christians today because it can be said that Christianity at the moment is concentrated in that part of the world where the privileged 33 per cent live. Moreover, the average income in the opulent Christian West is about \$2,400, while the average income for the non-Christian underdeveloped world is \$180. This gap is widening, and it is expected that in the next ten years another \$1,100 will be added to the difference.² What are the consequences for Christians in the developed countries — North America, for example — who have an evangelistic concern?

“As part of the wealthy seven we are trying to reach as many of the other 93 for Christ as we can. We tell them about Jesus and they watch us throw away more food than they ever hope to eat. We are busy building beautiful church buildings, and they scrounge to find shelter for their families. We have money in the bank and they do not have enough to buy food for their children. All the while we tell them that our Master was the Servant of men, the Savior who gave his all for us and bids us give all for him . . . We are the rich minority in the world. We may be able to forget about that or consider it unimportant. The question is, can the 93 forget?”³

Our situation is quite different from that of New Testament days. Then the developed world and the powerful metropolis were pagan lands, and the message of salvation spread from a poor obscure province subjugated under colonial rule. In those days, the mother church in the undeveloped province went through a famine and was helped by offerings gathered in the young churches of the rich Greek cities.⁴ As we think of evangelism in a world dimension, we cannot forget the facts that surround our task these days, the reality that overpopulation, hunger, oppression, war, torture, violence, pollution, and the extreme forms of wealth and poverty are not disappearing, but rather growing at an astonishing pace.