



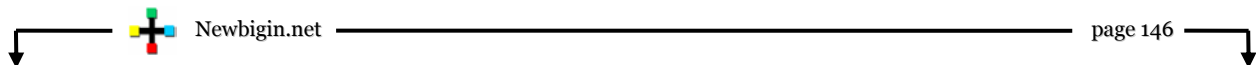
## Cross-currents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Mission

1982

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All seriously committed Christians presumably believe that the gospel is for the whole world. The *evangel* is for the *oikoumene*. It is therefore strange and sad that the adjectives "evangelical" and "ecumenical" should have come in our time to stand for two mutually opposed positions. This absurd and irrational dichotomy was given notable publicity in the summer of 1980 by the juxtaposition of two world missionary conferences at Melbourne, Australia, and at Pattaya, Thailand. Several of those who attended both meetings have discussed the issues between them. I have tried to follow this discussion as one who believes that every Christian must be both evangelical and ecumenical. I am sure there is both truth and error in both camps, and I am sure that it is part of our obedience to God that we should be willing to listen to one another and to receive mutual correction. What follows is a small contribution to the discussion, and an invitation to correction.

Let me begin with some brief definitions. In what follows I am using the term "mission" to denote the totality of that for which the church is sent into the world in accordance with the Dominical word: "As the Father sent me, so I send you." I am using "missions" to denote particular enterprises within the total mission that have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where there was previously no such presence or where such presence was ineffective. And I am using "evangelism" to denote communication-by written or spoken word-of the good news about Jesus. In this definition there will be no evangelism unless the name of Jesus is named.

Among many issues that could be discussed I have selected three that seem to me to be very important. The first is the question of the primacy of evangelism over against social and political action. The second concerns the relation of missions to churches. The third is the complex of issues that centers around the questions of universalism and religious pluralism.

### **I. Mission and Evangelism**

Quite evidently one of the crucial issues in the debate is about the place of evangelism in mission. The cruciality of this issue is indicated in the words quoted from C. Peter Wagner in the January 1981 issue of *Missiology* (p. 74):

As long as the LCWE [Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization] is to continue, its position on the nature of evangelism assumes a crucial significance. It is one thing to assert that the singular task of LCWE is world evangelization, but quite another to define with precision just what evangelism means. Such a definition involves deep theological questions. In my opinion COWE [Consultation on World Evangelization at Pattaya, 1980] answered two of these questions in ways that will furnish a basis for more effective evangelism in the years ahead. The first question relates to the primacy of evangelism in the total mission of the Church.... From beginning to end, COWE took a clear and distinct stand on this issue.... while recognizing that the cultural mandate is indeed part of holistic mission, COWE refused to go the route of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and make it either primary or equal to evangelism.

And after referring to an effort made by some at Pattaya to have social service treated as on an equal level with, or as part of evangelism, the quotation continues:

COWE not only said "No" to the WCC position of the primacy of social service but also to those evangelical [persons] who are attempting to load the word evangelism with meanings it never has had. If they had prevailed a new word would have to be invented, but COWE held the line at this point.

As I understand it, no one is saying that evangelism is the whole duty of the church. No one is denying the duty of compassionate service to those in need. But clearly it is held to be essential to insist on the primacy of evangelism above everything else. What is at stake here?

Is it simply a matter of the relative importance of words and deeds? If so, it would be a futile debate. No priorities can be assigned between them, because each without the other is ultimately vain. It is the "Word made flesh" that is the gospel. The deed without the word is dumb, and the word without the deed is empty. As H. Berkhof has said, there are times when words are cheap and deeds are costly and there are times when deeds are cheap and words cost lives. The dichotomy that opens up in our perceptions at this point is part of the deepgoing dualism that we inherit from the pagan (Greek) roots of our culture and which the biblical witness has never been able to eradicate. (It is worth remembering that the same Hebrew word is regularly translated in English Bibles both as "word" and as "act.")

I do not find this dichotomy between word and deed in the New Testament. In the "mission charge" given to the Twelve according to Matthew, the authority given is for healing and exorcism. The word that they are charged to speak ("the kingdom of heaven is at hand") is the interpretation of the deeds. The healing and the good news are not two things but one. The good news is that there is healing, and because there is healing there is good news. Words and deeds both point to the same reality—the presence of the reign of God. There is not, and there cannot be any allocation of priority between word and deed. Both are essential. The kingly power of God is present in mighty acts and in words that interpret those acts. Neither can be subordinated in principle to the other.

But to have said that is not yet to have come to the heart of the matter. There is, I am convinced, a real misreading of the New Testament, which lies behind the insistence that evangelism must be given priority over compassionate action. To make clear what I mean I must ask that we look at the New Testament evidence afresh.

Since the time of William Carey it has been customary to take the closing verses of Matthew's Gospel as the fundamental mandate for mission. This text has often been referred to as the "Great Commission," and missionary work has been understood essentially as obedience to the "last command" of Jesus. Harry Boer, in

his book *Pentecost and Missions*, has shown why Carey had to make this text so central in his apologia for missions: it was because he had to overthrow the view that it applied only to the first apostles and not to the church in all generations. But Boer demonstrates that this way of understanding the motive of missions is not that of the New Testament. The Great Commission is nowhere cited in the New Testament as the basis of missions. At no point does any of the apostolic writers seek to lay upon the conscience of his readers the duty to evangelize as an act of obedience to the Lord. There is indeed an obligation involved, but it is never a matter of obedience to a command. We shall return to the Matthean form of the Great Commission, but first let us look at the Lucan and Johannine forms of it.

Luke tells us that after the resurrection the apostles came to Jesus and asked whether the promise of the imminent coming of the reign of God was now to be fulfilled (Acts 1:6-8). Since the original "good news" was that the reign of God is at hand, this was a reasonable question. The answer of Jesus is both a warning and a promise. The warning is to remember that the reign of God is – precisely – God's reign and not their program. It is strictly and wholly in God's hands and is therefore not a matter for their calculation or speculation. Even the most sophisticated techniques for handling statistics about unreached peoples do not render this warning otiose. The content of the gospel is *God's* reign. This is not a program but a fact. About a program or a campaign one can be optimistic or pessimistic; about a fact one can only be believing or unbelieving. If one believes that God reigns, that is everything and that governs everything. The time and the manner in which he exercises his reign are wholly in his hands. The second part of Jesus' answer is a promise—the promise of the Spirit. They have asked about the coming of the kingdom; he promises them the immediate coming of the *arrabon* (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14), the first-fruit (Rom. 8:23) of the kingdom, the Holy Spirit. That coming will make them witnesses—for where the first-fruit appears, there the harvest can be confidently expected.

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Immediately the apostles were turned into witnesses. In what sense? Not that they forthwith decided to embark on a preaching campaign. Their being witnesses was not an action or a decision of theirs. They became witnesses by something that God had done, because that "something" became the occasion for questions. The crowds came running to ask: "What is happening?" The first Christian preaching was an answer to that question. It was not a program initiated by the apostles. The initiative was God's and the action was his. His action made the apostles witnesses. As in the Gospel narratives, the words explain the acts. And this is in line with the biblical testimony as a whole. When in former days the Lord said to exiled Israel "You are my witnesses" (Isa. 43:10) the reference was not to something that Israel would or could do, but to something that the sovereign Lord would do to his people—blind and deaf as they are (v. 8). The initiator, the active agent, is the Lord who is the Spirit. The apostolic preaching is not an act of obedience to an order: it is a witness, a testifying, a pointing to the source of happenings, events, actions, which are otherwise inexplicable.

This Lucan interpretation is abundantly supported in other strands of the New Testament. Mark (like Luke) records the promise that when the church is under attack for its faithfulness to Jesus, it is not to be anxious how to answer, "for it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 13:11; Lk. 12:12). And in the great Johannine discourses about the Paraclete it is promised that when the church is hated and rejected for Jesus' sake, the Spirit will bear witness, both as the Advocate who speaks for the church and also as the Prosecutor who convicts the world in respect of its fundamental notions (Jn. 15:18-27; 16:8-11).



If we now turn to the Johannine version of the Great Commission (Jn. 20:19-23), we notice that here also the sending of the disciples is linked to the imparting of the Spirit (v. 22). It is only as the bearers of his own life that the disciples can fulfill the commission to continue that which Jesus came to do ("as the Father sent me ..."), namely, to release men and women from the grip of sin (v. 23). But this account of their sending in the power of the Spirit is significantly preceded by the words "he showed them his hands and his side." It was, we understand, by these marks of the passion that the disciples recognized the risen Lord and were glad (v. 21). It is in this context that we must understand the conjunction "as" in the following verse (v. 21). What does this "as" mean? In what manner did the Father send the Son to be the bearer of his kingly rule? Not in the manner of the kings of the gentiles exercising mastery over others, but in the manner of a servant who "gives his life a ransom for many." The scars of the passion are the visible marks by which the body of Christ is recognizable. It will be by the same marks that the church will be recognizable as the authentic bearer of God's gift of peace, of reconciliation through the forgiveness of sins. The mission must go the way of the cross.

But what does this mean? What *is* the way of the cross? Here we have to guard against the long tradition (inherited from medieval Catholic piety) that has seen the cross as passive submission to evil. The drooping, pain-drenched, defeated figure of the medieval crucifix does not truly represent the passion as it is portrayed in the New Testament, and as it was portrayed in the earliest Christian art. The passion was not passive: it was a mighty victory in which the prince of this world was cast down from his usurped dominion (Jn. 12:31). Jesus' way to the cross was not the way of passive submission to that dominion but of uncompromising challenge to it in deed and word—whether it was manifested in sickness of body or mind, in demon-possession, in the loveless self-righteousness of the godly, in the hypocrisy of ecclesiastics, or in the brutality of rulers. It was a challenge in deed and word, and the Gospels lay enormous stress upon the deeds of Jesus, upon his mighty works of deliverance and upon his compassionate companionship with the rejects of society.

It is impossible to set the deeds and the words against each other or to assign priorities between them. The words interpret the deeds and the deeds validate the words (e.g., Mk. 2:1-12). The point is that this active and uncompromising challenge to the dominion of evil takes Jesus to the cross. And when the risen Lord commissions the disciples to go on the same mission that he received from the Father, he shows them the scars of his passion to remind them of the way the mission must take them. Only as the church goes that way, not submitting to or compromising with the powers that enslave people, but challenging them in deed and word and paying the price of that challenge in its own life, will it be in the power of the Spirit. The manner of that challenge will be conditioned by circumstances. In some situations explicit and active opposition to public wrong is possible; in others the challenge can only be by dissent and the refusal to cooperate. In all cases suffering will be involved. The presence of the Spirit, who is the active witness, is given to the church that goes the way of the cross.

If now, in the light of the Lucan and Johannine versions, we return to the Matthean form of the Great Commission, we see that—on the one hand—it is misread if it is read in isolation from the others, and—on the other hand—that the other two alert us to notes in Matthew's text that we might otherwise have missed. It is, indeed, a command to be obeyed but—like the law as a whole—it is misunderstood if it is read simply as law without its basis in the gospel. The first sentence (v. 18) is a great shout of good news. Jesus reigns; death is overthrown. And it is because he reigns that he can and does pour forth the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:23). This makes possible the discipling of the gentiles—previously (and rightly) understood as the action of God himself in the last days. The last days have indeed come (Acts 2:17ff.), and God himself, God the Holy Spirit, will gather the nations together by his own mighty power. The church, as the appointed witness of God's action, will be the place and the instrument of that gathering. This "discipling" will lead to the

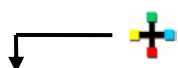
incorporation of believers into the baptism of Jesus (the baptism begun in Jordan and completed on Calvary) and so to following Jesus on the way he went, the way of the cross.

Reflecting on these three forms of the Great Commission I am led to the following conclusions.

a. There is an inescapable element of constraint, of obligation, in any true understanding of the missionary motive. "The love of Christ constrains me" says Paul, and "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." And yet the apostle who wrote these words is never found in any of his letters laying the duty of evangelism upon the consciences of his readers. He knows that the obligation comes from the gospel itself, and it must not be turned into a new law. Evangelism is an overflow from Pentecost. Even from the very beginning we find that, while deliberate actions of sending have an important place (e.g., Acts 13), many of the greatest triumphs of the gospel have been the result of informal contacts of which we know nothing. Two of the greatest of the early Christian communities-those of Alexandria and Rome-were brought into existence by the witness of persons of whom we know nothing. In my own experience as an evangelistic missionary I have found the same to be true. The ways by which people are brought to faith in Christ are many, various, and infinitely mysterious. But at their center is always the contagion of a joy that cannot but communicate itself, rather than the consciousness of a duty that must be discharged, a burden that must be carried.

b. In the communication of the gospel, word and act belong together. The word is essential, because the name of Jesus cannot be replaced by anything else. But the deed is equally essential because the gospel is the good news of the active presence of the reign of God, and because this presence is to be made manifest in a world that has fallen under the usurped dominion of the evil one. A preaching of the name of Jesus which does not challenge this usurped dominion, which does not arise from the common life of the body of the risen Lord where the dominion is challenged and resisted and where the wounds of that conflict are being patiently suffered in the name and in the power of Jesus, is false. Where the church is making this challenge and bearing these wounds, it becomes a place where men and women can recognize in Jesus the presence and the power of the reign of God. Where, on the other hand, the church invites men and women to take refuge in the name of Jesus without this challenge to the dominion of evil, then it becomes a countersign, and the more successful it is in increasing its membership, the more it becomes a sign against the sovereignty of God. An "evangelism" that seeks to evade this challenge and this conflict, which-for example-welcomes a brutal tyranny because it allows free entry for missionaries rather than a more humane regime that puts difficulties in their way, becomes a sign against the gospel of the kingdom. We have, surely, the authority of the Lord himself for saying that church growth that does not bear fruit is only providing fuel for hell (Jn. 15:1-6).

c. Word and deed are related to each other through the shared life in the body of Christ. Every member must be ready with the word when called upon to give an account of his hope (1 Pet. 3:15-and the context is the police interrogation cell, not the pulpit). Equally everyone must be ready to do the compassionate deed-even when Jesus is not recognized (Mt. 25:31ff.). But not every deed must have a word attached to it, nor every word a deed. The members of the body have different gifts, and not all are



evangelists (Eph. 4:11). But when all the members are acting in harmony in accordance with the different gifts given by the one Spirit, the same Spirit uses their faithful words and deeds to bear witness in the hearts of those whom God calls. Words and deeds must be seen to belong together, having their common source in a shared life centered in the broken body and shed blood of Christ. For, once again, it is as the church truly participates in the passion of Jesus that it is the bearer of the risen life of Jesus and therefore the sign and first-fruit of the kingdom.

d. When we look at the history of missions in recent decades, we cannot but be struck by the number of occasions when devoted bodies of Christians have announced their commitment to the primacy of evangelism, their intention to avoid all "secondary" activities in the field of social service and their determination to give themselves wholly to the preaching of the gospel, and yet have found themselves steadily drawn by an inescapable spiritual pressure into involvement in teaching, social service, and healing. For myself I cannot doubt that this pressure comes from the gospel itself. And I have therefore to ask in all seriousness whether those who successfully "held the line" at Pattaya should not ponder again the classic warning of Gamaliel to the authorities in Jerusalem (Acts 5:39).

In trying to overcome the dichotomy between a message addressed to persons calling them to conversion, baptism, and church membership, and a message addressed to societies calling for structural change in the direction of justice and freedom, some use has been made of the term "holistic evangelism." Like C. Peter Wagner I have avoided this term and have preferred to use the word "evangelism" exclusively for an action of verbal communication in which the name of Jesus is central. (I have always had in mind the blurring of issues that resulted from John R. Mott's use of the phrase "the larger evangelism" in the 1930s). I think that the phrase "holistic evangelism" tempts its users to bypass important theological questions.

The human person is indeed to be understood holistically. I suppose that nowhere in the world has the attempt to understand the human person in purely spiritual terms been pursued more relentlessly than in India. The Hindu Scriptures try to find the real human person (*purusha*) by stripping away all the "sheaths" (*upadhis*) that constitute one's visible, contingent, historical being as part of the ever-circling wheel of nature (*samsara*). In the sharpest possible contrast to this attempt, the Bible always sees the human person realistically as a living body-soul whose existence *cannot* be understood apart from the network of relationships that bind the person to family, tribe, *nation*, and all the progeny of Adam. For the biblical writers, continued existence as a disembodied soul is something not to be desired but to be feared with loathing. The New Testament is true to its Old Testament basis when it speaks of salvation not in terms of disembodied survival, but in terms of the resurrection of the body, a new creation and a heavenly city. This vision of the heavenly *polis* forbids us to exclude politics from our understanding of salvation. Yet, on the other hand, the only politics we know deals with structures that are doomed to decay and dissolution, as in the physical frame that is for practical purposes called by one's name. How can our *ultimate* concern be with either of these-perishable as they are? The patients whom we treat in our mission hospitals will all die. The programs for social and political justice in which we invest our energies will all perish and be forgotten, buried under the rubble of history. Is it surprising that we are all tempted by the simplicity and rationality of the Hindu solution, tempted (as many "evangelical" Christians are) to take as our ultimate concern the salvation of the soul that will endure when all the visible frame of this world has perished? To speak of "holistic evangelism" does not enable us to escape this problem-unless we have a very firm grasp of the New Testament eschatology.

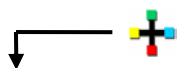
"The reign of God is at hand"-that is the gospel as Jesus proclaimed it. "The Lord is at hand" was the translation of that same message by those who had learned to recognize the presence of the power and the wisdom of God in the crucified and risen Jesus. But what does "at hand" mean? It is commonly said that the early church was mistaken in expecting the immediate coming of the Lord, and that we have now learned to correct that mistake and to live without that expectation. I think this is profoundly wrong. I think that it is of the essence of our life in Christ-whether in the first century or in the twentieth-that we do live "at the end of the times," in the immediate presence of the *imminent* reign of God; that this, and not some indefinite future, is the horizon of all our *thinking* and doing. But this imminence means judgment and grace for human beings as they really are, not just in their souls but in all aspects of their existence-spiritual, intellectual, physical, cultural, political. The new creation, promised in Christ, pledged in his resurrection, present in foretaste through the Spirit, concerns this whole existence, not just part of it. Therefore both the grace and the judgment apply across the whole range of our existence.

Every part of life is confronted with the reality of God's reign as its immediate horizon, and this reality is both promise and judgment. It follows that when we try to withdraw the "spiritual" dimension of our being from the wholeness of human being, and offer "salvation" to this apart from the whole promise of God, we depart decisively from the message of the Bible. The preaching of the gospel necessarily means both judgment and promise for the whole life of human beings. To offer, in effect, "cheap grace" to individuals by peeling off all the social and political implications of the gospel, is to denature the gospel. But that is what happens when compassionate action in society is in principle subordinated to the preaching of a message of individual salvation and the gathering up of individuals into the church.

## II. Mission, Missions, and Churches

The whole life of the church depends upon the sending of God. "As the Father sent me, so I send you." The church is constituted as God's sending, God's mission. But it is not enough to say that and stop. Throughout all our experience of life in Christ we find that a representative principle is at work. All days belong to the Lord, but one day is set aside as "the Lord's Day," not in order to leave the rest to the devil, but to ensure that they all do indeed belong to the Lord: one day is consecrated in order that all may be consecrated. Similarly, the whole church is ministry, but we ordain and consecrate "ministers," not to relieve the rest of ministry but to ensure that all do in truth minister. So also the church is mission, but we need "missions" in order that it may be truly so. Once again, this is not in order to relieve the rest of the church of missionary responsibility but to ensure that its whole life is missionary.

I have defined missions as "particular enterprises within the total mission which have the primary intention of bringing into existence a Christian presence in a milieu where previously there was no such presence or where such presence was ineffective." The important word in that definition is "intention." The whole life of the church-worship, fellowship, preaching, teaching, service-has a missionary *dimension*, but not all has a missionary *intention*. When, following the death of Stephen, the Jerusalem church was attacked and dispersed, the scattering of believers produced an enormous missionary expansion (Acts 8), but there was no missionary intention. On the other hand, when, moved by the Spirit, the church in Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas and "sent



them off" to preach among the gentiles, the missionary *intention* was central. Here is, one may say, the central New Testament paradigm for missions as I have defined them. The Antioch church was itself a witnessing and rapidly growing community (Acts 11:19-26). It was also a compassionate church, responding generously and promptly to the needs of the hungry (11:27-30). But the Spirit did not allow it to be content with this. It was to set apart and send a team called for the specific purpose of taking the gospel to unreached peoples. This team was and remained a part of the church, but it was set apart with a specific missionary intention.

Such specific acts of sending are sometimes necessary if the gospel is to cross a geographical or a cultural frontier. By deliberate act a Christian presence has to be created where there was none. But such deliberate acts ("missions") are not the only (and not even the most important) ways in which frontiers are crossed and unreached peoples are reached. The Antioch church itself was not the result of an intentional mission but of the scattering of the church of Jerusalem. Yet this was, perhaps, the most decisive of all frontiers, for Antioch was the first congregation of gentile believers where a new word had to be coined ("Christians," *Messiah wallahs*) to describe this strange new reality—a gentile Israel of pagan believers. The first witnesses to the gospel in Antioch were not missionaries but refugees. And so it has happened over and over again and so it continues to happen. "Unreached peoples" are reached and cultural frontiers are crossed by refugees, fugitives, famine-stricken villagers, conscripted soldiers, traders,

professional workers, and many others. A whole history of the "expansion of Christianity" could be written with very few missionary names in it! (Most of the histories have been written by the missionaries.)

And yet it remains true that a very important part of the story is the story of missions and missionaries, and the "Antioch mission" of Saul and Barnabas is the first chapter of the story. It is therefore important to spend a little time looking at the relation of the "Antioch mission" to the churches in Asia Minor and Greece, which were the fruit of its work. While Paul and his colleagues form a distinct team set apart by the church in Antioch for a distinct purpose, they do not establish in the cities of Galatia or elsewhere two separate entities—the "Antioch mission" and the "Ecclesia of God." Surely (it seems to me) at this point Roland Allen is right. I find no trace of a dual form of Christianity either in the Acts or in the epistles. I do not find there what I found as a young missionary in India forty-five years ago, namely, two entities side by side: a "mission" responsible for evangelism and service, and a "church" that was (apparently) a mere receptacle for converts and their children. What I do find in the New Testament, and this is very important, is a great variety of forms of *ministry*. In particular it does seem that the early church acknowledged two forms of ministry: the settled ministry of bishops (elders) and deacons, and the mobile ministry of apostles, prophets, and evangelists. These are all listed as part of the ministry of the one body, but they have different roles. I wonder whether or not the split in our contemporary thinking between "church" and "mission" has something to do with the disappearance of the second (mobile) element in the ministry from our acknowledged church orders. Missionary societies and other specialized agencies have begun to provide in our day something of what these mobile ministries provided for the early church, but they have never been integrated theoretically into our ecclesiologies or practically into our church orders. Is not this a real need of our time?

I stand with Lausanne and Pattaya in believing that all Christians ought to be concerned about the great multitudes who have had no opportunity to know, to love, and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that the Uppsala Assembly should have accepted this challenge more frankly and not allowed itself to be influenced by the propaganda barrage put up in advance by my friend Donald McGavran. I believe that missions in the sense in which I have defined them are a necessary part of the total mission of the church, though there may be times and places where they are impossible or inappropriate. I rejoice in the clear and unambiguous affirmation of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism 1981 meeting in Bucharest that "everybody is entitled to know the initiative taken by God in Christ on their behalf" and that "a church is not fully missionary if it only carries out its mission within; it must also open itself to mission outside *ad gentes*." But I stand with Bangkok and Melbourne in having real reservations about the way in which the "challenge of unreached peoples" has been promoted in some statements. I would want to make the following two points: (1) missions are one way in which the gospel crosses cultural and political frontiers, but they are not the only way; the model of Acts 11 has been at least as important in Christian history as the model of Acts 13; (2) it is a terrifying testimony to the power of sin that even the gospel can become an instrument of aggression and domination. The long association of missions with colonial power is not something accidental, which we can forget. It is the visible sign of an underlying perversion that has to be exposed. I vividly remember that when the Indian tanks rolled into what is now called Bangladesh there was an enthusiastic movement in the Church of South India in favor of sending missionaries to that country. No one had apparently thought of doing so earlier and few seemed inclined to ask whether the church in Bangladesh wanted it or not. There seemed to be a strange inner compulsion which suggested that where our power goes, there is the place to send missionaries. To be frank, I am afraid of the strong stench of imperialism, which too often infects the call for world evangelization. Again and again we have to remember the words "He showed them his hands and his side." The authentic bearer of the gospel is the suffering servant, not the masterful ruler and organizer. I am bound to think that the little groups of, for example, the Brothers of Taizé who go to immerse themselves in the slums of Calcutta or Sao Paulo are nearer to the apostolic model of missions than those who go equipped with all the resources, the technology,



and the power of Western culture. As the CWME Bucharest statement says, a crusading spirit was foreign to Jesus: "We are free to use the methodologies that we consider best to announce the Gospel to different people in different circumstances. But they are never neutral. They betray or illustrate the Gospel we announce."

### III. No Other Name

In the continuing debate between "conservative evangelicals" and "ecumenicals," a recurrent theme has been that of "universalism." Ecumenicals, with their eagerness to promote friendly dialogue and cooperation in social action with those of other faiths, have been charged with an easygoing universalism that blunts the cutting edge of the gospel. It has been suggested that the missionary motive is weakened or destroyed if the belief is entertained that salvation is somehow or other possible without explicit faith in Jesus Christ. It is pointed out that the declaration of God's universal love for the world in John 3:16 is coupled with the warning that "he who does not believe is condemned" (v. 18). By many evangelical Christians this is seen as the crucial issue. As a missionary on furlough from India I have sometimes been made aware of the fact that my hearers were less anxious to hear about the growth of the Indian church than to be assured that I knew that the Hindus and Muslims of that subcontinent who had not accepted the gospel were unequivocally destined for perdition.

Now there is indeed a kind of universalism which robs human life of its ultimate seriousness, and which-paradoxically-also robs life of its ultimate hopefulness. There is a kind of rationalistic



universalism which argues that because God is all-mighty and all-loving it follows that there can be no possibility of eternal loss. It is, I submit, impossible to fit the message of the cross into this kind of rationalism. There is also a romanticism, from which contemporary ecumenical Christianity is not free, that turns a blind eye to the traditional Christian teaching about original sin, invests in human nature hopes that it cannot fulfill, and is therefore constantly tormented by ineffective anger against the actual sin that frustrates these hopes. When the hope of a new creation is replaced by the hope of an earthly utopia, the fear of hell is quickly replaced by the fear of an earthly holocaust.

But to make the fear of hell the ultimate motivation for faith in Christ is to create a horrible caricature of evangelism. I still feel a sense of shame when I think of some of the "evangelistic" addresses that I have heard-direct appeals to the lowest of human emotions, selfishness and fear. One could only respect the tough-minded majority of the listeners who rejected the message. And I would dare to claim that I have the great apostle on my side when he pleads so passionately with the Galatians to recognize that, in God's economy, the promise of the gospel and not the threatening of the law comes first (Gal. 3:6-22). The covenant that God made with the whole human race through Noah (Genesis 9), which he made with Abram for the sake of all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3), and which he renewed and sealed forever in the sacrifice of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:25) is a covenant of free, unconditioned grace. This, and not the law, is primary. The law-which brings the threat of death-"was added because of transgressions till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. 3:19). The law has a subordinate and secondary role in God's dealings with us. The free gift of grace is primary, and to reverse the order is fatal-as the whole letter to the Galatians argues so passionately. It is only in the light of the grace of God in Jesus Christ that we know the terrible abyss of darkness into which we must fall if we put our trust anywhere but in that grace. Therefore it is to those who have received the gracious promises of God that the warnings are addressed, lest they fall away from that total devotion that is the only proper response to the grace of God.

Only in the light of the cross is the doctrine of the radical sinfulness of human nature possible. If we try to reverse the order and to convince men and women of their lost condition before they have come to know their Savior, we make ourselves judges of our fellow human beings, and our judgment is rejected because our authority to judge is rightly denied. It is only when I know Jesus as my Savior that I can know that mine was the sin that brought him to the cross. It is only in the light of the gospel that I am capable of acknowledging the darkness of unredeemed human nature.

It follows that the grave and terrible warnings that the New Testament contains about the possibility of eternal loss are directed to those who are confident that they are among the saved. It is the branches of the Vine, not the surrounding brambles, that are threatened with burning. It is those who had their invitation cards to the wedding banquet who will find themselves outside, while the riffraff of the streets and lanes will be sitting at table. The first will be last and the last first.

There is, of course, a plausible logic about the argument from the Christian experience of redemption through the cross of Christ to the conclusion that those outside this experience are lost. I know that I am lost apart from the mercy of God in Christ. May I not, must I not therefore say openly that those who do not know that mercy are lost? I can only answer that, while it seems plausible, it is not permitted for the simple reason that my place in the whole transaction is that of a witness and not that of the judge. My witness must not hide the fact that when a person meets Jesus he meets the one into whose hands final judgment has been given.

But I can never be so confident of the purity and authenticity of my witness that I can know that the person who rejects my witness has rejected Jesus. I am witness to him who is both utterly holy and utterly gracious. His holiness and his grace are as far above my comprehension as they are above that of my hearer. I am witness, not judge.

The temptation to put oneself in the judgment seat is illustrated in the contemporary theologians who confidently assert that people of other faiths or no faith will be saved through their sincere following of the light they have. But Jesus is the Savior of the sinners, not of the sincere! The same temptation is, I think, illustrated by those "evangelicals" who divide their fellow-Christians into "real" and "nominal" Christians—a thing that St. Paul never does, however shocking be the behavior of some in the church. Once again the witness has become the judge, for it is I who decide in the secret of my own mind who are the "real" Christians, and so the "church" in which I believe has me and my judgment as its center.

Every attempt to define, from the place where we stand, the limits of God's saving grace involves those who make it in the kind of "judging before the time" that is forbidden. There is One who is judge, and we may not presume to anticipate his judgments. To put the matter in another way: an entity can be defined either by its boundaries or by its center. The realm of redemption is defined by its center. We have simply to point men and women to Jesus Christ. Because he is "the light that enlightens every man," we cannot presume to set limits to the shining of that light. It is the nature of light to shine on into the darkness and out to the farthest limits of space—unless we try to put it under a bushel and so to define its boundaries. The children of light will rejoice to find even the smallest reflection of light in the remotest places. Their concern will never be to question its reality, but always to point to its source. Christians are called to be witnesses, and they may never presume to speak as though they were the judge. When they do so, they cannot complain if their judgment is thrown back at them by a world that has been mightily hardened in unbelief by their presumption, for they have been warned by their Master: "Judge not, that you be not judged."

As I read the New Testament, I find that it calls the Christian disciple at the same time to a godly confidence and to a godly fear. , Both spring from the knowledge that final judgment is in the hands of God and that we are not permitted to anticipate that judgment. The judge is the Lord whose grace is infinite, and therefore we have a godly confidence that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." And yet this confidence can easily become an ungodly complacency, and so Paul-like an athlete in training—must subject himself to relentless

self-discipline "lest, after preaching to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27). This is the very opposite of an easygoing universalism. Yet the same Paul can write of the day when "The fulness of the Gentiles shall be gathered in and all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:25f.). The terrible possibility of eternal loss is a reality in his mind. But its threat is for him as a believer. For the unbelievers-even for his obdurately unbelieving fellow Israelites-he is willing to be convinced that all will be saved. That, surely, is the true logic of grace as it is known by those who have been made one with him who "made himself sin on our behalf."

And this, incidentally, is the logic that underlies the ecumenical movement. It is the logical outworking of the faith that Jesus Christ alone is the center of the realm of redemption, and that those who confess him as Lord and Savior, however much they may have to accuse one another of error and sin, can never exclude one another from fellowship, because that would be to forsake the witness-stand for the seat of the Judge.

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