

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF EVANGELISM

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Introduction

It may seem crazy, in a cross-cultural Congress like this, that I should begin by quoting from those two peculiarly English characters of fiction, Alice in Wonderland and Humpty Dumpty! For it is more than possible that some of you have never heard of them. Never mind: I still think you will appreciate this part of their conversation.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master — that's all."

The issue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty — whether man can manipulate the meaning of words or whether words have an autonomy which cannot be infringed — is still a contemporary issue. The modern church sometimes seems like a kind of theological wonderland in which numerous Humpty Dumptys enjoy playing with words and making them mean what they want them to mean.

The task assigned to me is to take a cluster of related words in the forefront of recent debate — mission, evangelism, dialogue, salvation and conversion — and attempt to define them biblically.

Please do not misunderstand my purpose. I do not propose to put up a few ecumenical skittles in order to knock them down with well-aimed evangelical balls, so that we can all applaud our easy victory! We all know that during the last few years, especially between Uppsala and Bangkok, ecumenical-evangelical relations hardened into something like a confrontation. I have no wish to worsen this situation. Mind you, I believe some ecumenical thinking is mistaken. But then, frankly, I believe some of our evangelical formulations are mistaken also. Many ecumenical Christians seem hardly to have begun to learn to live under the authority of Scripture. We evangelicals think we have — and there is no doubt we sincerely want to — but at times we are very selective in our submission, and the traditions of the evangelical elders sometimes owe more to culture than to Scripture.

So I hope in my paper to strike a note of evangelical repentance, and indeed I hope we shall continue to hear this note throughout the Congress. Both our profession and our performance are far from perfect. We have some important lessons to learn from our ecumenical critics. Some of their rejection of our position is not a repudiation of biblical truth, but rather of our evangelical caricatures of it.

Since I have been invited to speak on "the nature of biblical evangelism" I shall try to define it according to Scripture and so bring both

ecumenical and evangelical thinking to the same independent and objective test. If both sides are willing for this, then neither of us need copy Humpty Dumpty and twist words to suit our own pleasure.

1. Mission

The first word is "mission," for it is here that we have to begin.

In the past — at least until the IMC conference at Willingen in 1952 — it was taken for granted that mission and evangelism, missions and evangelistic programs, missionaries and evangelists were more or less synonymous. "The place of missions in the life of the church," said Archbishop Randall Davidson on the first night of Edinburgh 1910, "must be the central place, and none other." I do not think he was using the word "missions" in any special or technical sense, any more than when the Division of World Mission and Evangelism was brought into being the expressions "world mission" and "evangelism" were neatly distinguished from one another.

Recently, however, the word "mission" has come to be used in a wider and more general sense, to include evangelism but not to be identical with it, and I see no reason why we should resist this development. "Mission" is an activity of God arising out of the very nature of God. The living God of the Bible is a sending God, which is what "mission" means. He sent the prophets to Israel. He sent his Son into the world. His Son sent out the apostles, and the seventy, and the church. He also sent the Spirit to the church and sends him into our hearts today.

So the mission of the church arises from the mission of God and is to be modeled on it. "As the Father has sent me," Jesus said, "even so I send you" (John 20:21 cf. 17:18). If, then, we are to understand the nature of the church's mission, we have to understand the nature of the Son's! Not, of course, that his church can copy him in all things, for he came to die for the sins of the world. Nevertheless, in at least two major respects, he sends us as he was himself sent.

First, he sends us *into the world*. For he was sent into the world and enter the world he did. He did not touch down like a visitor from outer space, or arrive like an alien bringing his own alien culture with him. No. He took to himself our humanity, our flesh and blood. He actually became one of us and experienced our frailty, our suffering, our temptations. He even bore our sin and died our death.

And now he sends us "into the world," to identify with others as he identified with us, to become vulnerable as he did. It is surely one of our most characteristic evangelical failures that we have seldom taken seriously this principle of the Incarnation. "As our Lord took on our flesh," runs the report from Mexico City 1963, "so he calls his church to take on the secular world. This is easy to say and sacrificial to do." But it comes more natural to us to shout the Gospel at people from a distance than to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, to think ourselves into their problems, and to feel with them in their pains.

Secondly, Christ sends us into the world to *serve*. For he came to serve. Not just to seek and to save, nor just to preach, but more generally to serve. He said so. His contemporaries were familiar with Daniel's picture of the Son of man receiving dominion and being served by all

(7:14). But Jesus knew he had to serve before he would be served, and to endure suffering before he could receive dominion. So he fused two apparently incompatible Old Testament images, Daniel's Son of man and Isaiah's suffering servant, and said, "The Son of man... came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). What is unique is that he came to "give his life," to die. But this supreme atoning sacrifice was the climax of a life of service. In his public ministry he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught its implications, he fed hungry mouths and washed dirty feet, he healed the sick, comforted the sad, and raised the dead. He gave himself in selfless service for others.

Now he tells us that as the Father sent him into the world, so he sends us. Our mission, like his, is to be one of service. He emptied himself of status and took the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7). So must we. He supplies us with the perfect model of service and sends his church into the world to be a servant church. Is it not important for us to recover this biblical emphasis? In many of our attitudes and enterprises, we (especially those of us who come from Europe and North America) have tended to be more bosses than servants. Yet is it not in a servant role that we can find the right synthesis of evangelism and social action? For both should be authentic expressions of the service we are sent into the world to give. How then, someone may ask, are we to reconcile this concept of mission as service with the Great Commission of the risen Lord? Often, perhaps because it is the last instruction Jesus gave before returning to the Father, I venture to say that we give it too prominent a place in our Christian thinking. I beg you not to misunderstand me. I believe the whole Church is under obligation to obey its Lord's commission to take the Gospel to all nations. But I am also concerned that we should not regard it as the only instruction Jesus left us. He also quoted Lev. 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," called it "the second and great commandment" (second in importance only to the supreme command to love God with all our being), and elaborated it in the Sermon on the Mount. He insisted that in God's vocabulary our neighbor includes our enemy, and that to love is to "do good," to give ourselves to serve his welfare.

Here then are two instructions, "love your neighbor" and "go and make disciples." What is the relation between the two? Some of us behave as if we thought them identical, so that if we have shared the Gospel with somebody, we consider we have completed our responsibility to love him. But no. The Great Commission neither explains, nor exhausts, nor supersedes the Great Commandment. What it does is to add to the command of neighbor-love and neighbor-service a new and urgent Christian dimension. If we truly love our neighbor we shall without doubt tell him the Good News of Jesus. But equally if we truly love our neighbor we shall not stop there.

So we are sent into the world, like Jesus, to serve. For this will be the natural expression of our love for our neighbor. We love. We go. We serve. And in this we have (or should have) no ulterior motive. True, the Gospel lacks credibility if we who preach it are interested only in souls, and have no concern about the welfare of people's bodies, situa-

tions, and community. Yet the reason for an acceptance of social responsibility is not in order to give the Gospel a credibility it would otherwise lack, but simple uncomplicated compassion. Love does not need to justify itself. It just expresses itself in service wherever it sees need.

"Mission," then, is not a word for everything the church does (including, for example, worship). "The church is mission" sounds fine, but it's an overstatement. Nor does "mission" cover everything God does in the world. For God is the Creator and is constantly active in the world in providence and in common grace, quite apart from the purposes for which he sent his Son, his Spirit, his apostles, and his church into the world. "Mission" rather describes everything the church is sent into the world to do. "Mission" embraces the church's double vocation to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." For Christ *sends* the church into the earth to be its salt, and *sends* the church into the world to be its light.

There are important lessons for us evangelicals to learn from those two controversial ecumenical reports on the missionary structure of the congregation published in 1968 under the title *The Church for Others*. A good deal in it we would not be able to accept, but much is stimulating and challenging. In particular, relating to our present theme of "mission," there is the call to the church to live "ex-centredly," to find its center not in itself but outside itself, "to turn itself outwards to the world" and to be truly a "church for others." Such an inside-out revolution would lead to a radical change in our church structures. The book is right to brand many of them "heretical structures" because they deny the Gospel and impede the mission of God. Too often we are "waiting churches" into which the people are expected to come. We must replace our "come-structures" by "go-structures" (pages 17-19). All this is implicit in "mission."

2. Evangelism

Evangelism is an essential part of the church's mission. What is it?

Euangelizomai is to bring or to announce the *euangelion*, the good news. Once or twice in the New Testament it is used of secular news items, as when Timothy brought Paul the good news of the Thessalonians' faith and love (I Thess. 3:6) and when the angel Gabriel told Zechariah the good news that his wife Elizabeth was to have a son (Luke 1:19). But the regular use of the verb relates to the Christian Good News. It is the spread of this which constitutes evangelism. This fact has important consequences.

First, evangelism must not be defined in terms of its *results*, for this is not how the word is used in the New Testament. Normally the verb is in the middle voice. Occasionally it is used absolutely, for example "there they evangelized," meaning "there they preached the Gospel" (Acts 14:7, cf. Rom. 15:20). Usually, however, something is added: either the message preached (e.g., they "went about evangelizing the word," Acts 8:4), or the people to whom or places in which the Gospel is preached (e.g., the apostles "evangelized many villages of the Samaritans" and Philip "evangelized all the towns" along the coast, Acts 8:25, 40). There is no mention whether the word which was "evangelized" was

believed, or whether the inhabitants of the towns and villages "evangelized" were converted. To "evangelize" in biblical usage does not mean to win converts (as it usually does when we use the word) but simply to announce the good news, irrespective of the results.

You may recall that the famous watchword of the Student Volunteer Movement, "the evangelization of the world in this generation," was criticized for this reason. Professor Gustav Warneck attacked it at the ninth Continental Missions Conference at Bremen in May, 1897, on the ground that it was a naively optimistic and rather man-confident forecast that the world would be won for Christ in that generation. But John Mott rallied to the watchword's defense. He maintained that "the evangelization of the world" meant neither its conversion nor its Christianization, that it did not encourage superficial preaching, and that it was not to be regarded as a prophecy. As William Richey Hogg writes, the watchword was "a call to obligation, not a prophecy of fact!"

In a somewhat similar way J. I. Packer in his *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* has justly criticized the famous definition of evangelism first formulated in England in 1919 by the Archbishops' "Committee of Enquiry into the Evangelistic Work of the Church." It begins: "To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through him. . . ." Dr. Packer draws attention to the form of the sentence "*so* to present Christ Jesus . . . that men *shall* . . ." This is to define evangelism in terms of success. But to evangelize is not *so* to preach that something happens. Of course the objective is that something will happen, namely that people will respond and believe. Nevertheless, biblically speaking, to evangelize is to proclaim the Gospel, whether anything happens or not.

Second, evangelism must not be defined in terms of *methods*. To evangelize is to announce the good news, however the announcement is made, or to bring good news, by whatever means it is brought. We can evangelize by word of mouth (whether to individuals, groups, or crowds); by print, picture, and screen; by drama (whether what is dramatized is fact or fiction); by good works of love; by a Christ-centered home; by a transformed life; and even by a speechless excitement about Jesus.

Third, evangelism may and must be defined only in terms of the *message*. Therefore biblical evangelism makes the biblical evangel indispensable. Nothing hinders evangelism today more than the widespread loss of confidence in the truth, relevance, and power of the Gospel. When this ceases to be good news from God and becomes instead "rumors of God," we can hardly expect the church to exhibit much evangelistic enthusiasm!

If we agree that the Gospel is God's good news and that, despite all the rich diversity of its formulation in the New Testament, this was only one basic apostolic tradition of the Gospel (as Paul claims, I Cor. 15:11), we should be able to reconstruct it. Indeed, many have done so. All concur that, in a single word, God's good news is Jesus. He is the heart and soul of the Gospel. Thus, what Philip told the Ethiopian was simply "the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8:35), and Paul began his great manifesto of the Gospel — his letter to the Romans — by describing

himself as "set apart for the Gospel of God . . . concerning his Son . . . Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:1-4).

But how did the apostles present Jesus? If we compare the early sermons recorded in the Acts with each other and with Paul's statement of the Gospel at the beginning of I Corinthians 15, it becomes clear that the good news contained at least the following four elements.

First, there were *the gospel events*, primarily the death and resurrection of Jesus. Sometimes the apostles began with a reference to the life and ministry of the man Jesus, and usually they went on to his enthronement as Lord and his return as Judge. But their message focused on his death and resurrection. Nor did they proclaim these (as some say) as non-theological history, just "you killed him, but God raised him." Already they had a doctrine of both. His death was "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), and the Cross on which it took place they deliberately called a "tree" to indicate the divine curse under which he died (Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29; Deut. 21:22, 23; Gal. 3:10, 13; I Pet. 2:24), while the resurrection was a divine vindication, snatching him from the place of a curse to the place of honor and authority at God's right hand (e.g., Acts 2:32, 33).

Second, there were *the gospel witnesses*. That is, the apostles proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus both "according to the Scriptures" (Acts 2:25ff, 3:18, 24; cf. I Cor. 15:3, 4) and according to the evidence of their own eyes. "We are witnesses of these things," they kept saying (e.g., Acts 2:32, 5:32). So we today have no liberty to preach Christ crucified and risen according to our own fancy or even according to our own experience. The only Christ there is to preach is the biblical Christ, the objective historical Jesus attested by the joint witness of the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New (cf. Acts 10:39-43). Our witness is always secondary to theirs.

Third, there were *the gospel promises*. The apostles did not proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus merely as events, even when enriched by doctrinal significance and biblical witness. For the good news concerns not just the historic but the contemporary Christ, not just what he once did but what he now offers on the basis of what he did. What is this? In Peter's Pentecost address, the very first Christian sermon ever preached, he was able to promise them with complete assurance that they could receive both "the forgiveness of sins" and "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Salvation is more than this, but it is certainly not less. It includes the remission of past guilt and the gift of an entirely new life through the regenerating and indwelling Holy Spirit.

Fourth, there were *the gospel demands*, namely repentance and faith. "Repent," Peter said (Acts 2:38, 3:19), but also declared that "everyone who believes in him (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43 cf. 13:38, 39). In addition he commanded, "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ." The apostles certainly never held a mechanical view of baptism, for they always set it in its context of repentance and faith. On the day of Pentecost those Jews were being required to submit to baptism in the name of the very Jesus whom they had previously repudiated and killed. Whatever else baptism may signify, it certainly was

and is a public token of repentance and faith in Jesus.

It is true, of course, that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, and we must be careful never to define faith in such a way as to ascribe to it any merit. The whole value of faith lies in its object (Jesus Christ), not in itself. Nevertheless, faith is a total, penitent, and submissive commitment to Christ, and it would have been inconceivable to the apostles that anybody could believe in Jesus as Savior without submitting to him as Lord. We cannot chop Jesus Christ up into bits and then respond to only one of the bits. The object of saving faith is the whole and undivided person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Evangelism, then, is sharing this Gospel with others. The good news is Jesus, and the good news about Jesus which we announce is that he died for our sins and was raised from death by the Father, according to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and that on the basis of his death and resurrection he offers forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit to all those who repent, believe, and are baptized.

3. Dialogue

The next question about evangelism brings us to our third word. Is there any room in the proclamation of the good news for "dialogue"? It is well known that during the past decade or two the concept of "dialogue with men of other faiths" has become the ecumenical fashion, and that we evangelicals have tended to react rather sharply against it. Is our negative reaction justified?

We could begin our answer by realizing that the word "dialogue" is derived from the Greek verb *dialegomai*, to "discuss" or "argue," which Luke used some nine times in the Acts to describe Paul's preaching, e.g., "For three weeks he argued with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead . . ." (Acts 17:2, 3, 17, 18:4, 19, 19:8, 9, 20:7, 9, 24:25). This at least shows that Paul was not afraid in his evangelistic preaching to use the massive reasoning powers which God had given him. He did not only "proclaim," Luke says; he also "reasoned," "persuaded," and "proved." At the same time, this is not the sort of dialogue which people envisage today, for Paul's dialogue was part of his Christ-centered proclamation.

James A. Scherer, in his contribution to *Protestant Crosscurrents in Mission* (1968), traces the popularity of dialogue back to the 1928 IMC conference at Jerusalem. "Jerusalem had seen a momentary flirtation with religious sophistry," he writes, but ten years later at the Tambaram conference "Christ became once again the Word made flesh in whom God had acted for men's salvation." One of the most influential figures at Tambaram was Hendrik Kraemer. He called the church to repossess its faith "in all its uniqueness and adequacy and power," and added, "We are bold enough to call men out from them (sc., other religions) to the feet of Christ. We do so because we believe that in him alone is the full salvation which man needs."

It is precisely this emphasis on the uniqueness and finality of Christ

which tends to be muted by those who are calling the church to dialogue. Evangelism gives way to syncretism, and the proclamation of the truth is replaced by a common search for truth. The most extreme ecumenical statement I have read comes from the pen of Professor J. G. Davies, who insists on openness as a prerequisite of the dialogue. "Complete openness means that every time we enter into dialogue our faith is at stake. If I engage in dialogue with a Buddhist and do so with openness I must recognize that the outcome cannot be predetermined either for him or for me. The Buddhist may come to accept Jesus as Lord, but I may come to accept the authority of the Buddha, or even both of us may end up as agnostics. Unless these are *real* possibilities, neither of us is being fully open to the other. . . . To live dialogically is to live dangerously."

No evangelical Christian could accept this kind of uncommitted openness. On the contrary, if we enter into dialogue with a non-Christian, whether a person of some other faith or of no faith, we enter it as committed men, men unashamedly committed to Christ. The paragraph on dialogue in the Uppsala report expressed this point well, "A Christian's dialogue with another implies neither a denial of the uniqueness of Christ, nor any loss of his own commitment to Christ."

Why, then, should Christians engage in dialogue with non-Christians? Here are some words from the report of the CWME conference in Mexico City in 1963, "True dialogue with a man of another faith requires a concern both for the Gospel and for the other man. Without the first, dialogue becomes a pleasant conversation. Without the second, it becomes irrelevant, unconvincing or arrogant." Or, as Uppsala put it, "A genuinely Christian approach to others must be human, personal, relevant and humble." It is these qualities which, I fear, are sometimes missing in our evangelical evangelism. We often give the impression of being glib and brash, and our critics accuse us of a wide variety of horrid attitudes like "paternalism," "imperialism," and "triumphalism."

If dialogue is a serious conversation in which we are prepared to listen as well as speak, is it not an indispensable aspect of true evangelism? Although the Gospel is invariable in its substance, the way we approach people and explain things to them is bound to vary, unless we are totally lacking in sensitivity. Dialogue, writes Canon Max Warren, "is in its very essence an attempt at mutual listening, listening in order to understand. Understanding is its reward."

So dialogue becomes a token of Christian humility and love, because it indicates our resolve to rid our minds of the prejudices and caricatures we may entertain about the other man; to struggle to listen through his ears and see through his eyes so as to grasp what prevents him from hearing the Gospel and seeing Christ; to sympathize with him in all his doubts and fears and "hang-ups." No one has expressed this better than Archbishop Michael Ramsey who tells us that we are to "go out and put ourselves with loving sympathy inside the doubts of the doubting, the questions of the questioners, and the loneliness of those who have lost their way." It is once more the challenge of the Incarnation, to renounce evangelism by inflexible

slogans and instead to involve ourselves in the real dilemmas of other men.

4. Salvation

Having talked about "mission" and "evangelism," it is natural to take the word "salvation" next. For the Gospel is "the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" and it is through the *kerygma* that God chooses "to save those who believe" (Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 1:21).

But many people are embarrassed by salvation terminology, while others reject it as a meaningless inheritance from the traditional religion of the past. So there are not wanting those who are seeking to translate the word "salvation" into a more modern idiom. This is fine and necessary, provided that they remain loyal to the biblical revelation. For a translation is one thing (the old message in new words); a fresh composition is something quite different.

First, some say that "salvation" means psycho-physical health or "wholeness." They point out that Jesus said to the woman with the issue of blood, to blind Bartimaeus, and to a leprosy sufferer, "Your faith has saved you," which in each case the Authorized Version renders "your faith has made you whole" (Mark 5:34, 10:52; Luke 17:19), while we are also told that as many as touched Christ's garment "were made well," which in the Greek is *esoonto* "were saved" (Mark 6:56). But Jesus spoke to the fallen woman the same words, "Your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:48-50), and "salvation" words are also used of deliverance from drowning and from death (e.g., Matt. 8:25; Mark 15:30, 31). Are we then to argue from these uses of the verb "to save" that the salvation Christ offers is a composite rescue from physical ills of every kind, including disease, drowning, and death? It would be impossible to reconstruct the biblical doctrine of salvation in these terms. Salvation by faith in Christ crucified and risen is moral not material, a deliverance from *sin*, not from *harm*, and the reason Jesus said "your faith has saved you" to both categories is that his works of physical rescue (from disease, drowning, and death) were intentional "signs" of his salvation, and were understood by the early Church to be such.

In saying this I do not deny that disease and death are alien intrusions into God's good world; nor that God heals both through natural means and sometimes supernaturally, for all healing is divine healing; nor that our new life in Christ can bring a new physical and emotional well-being as psychosomatic conditions due to stress, resentment, and anxiety are cured; nor that at the consummation when we are given new bodies and enter a new society we shall be rid of disease and death forever. What I am saying is that the salvation offered in and through Jesus Christ today is not a complete psycho-physical wholeness; to maintain that it is to anticipate the Resurrection.

Second, others are saying that "salvation" means, or at least includes, socio-political liberation. It is not now health, but justice for the community.

The Mexico City Conference in 1963 had asked, "What is the form and content of the salvation which Christ offers men in the secular

world?" but left their question unanswered.

At Uppsala in 1968, "the goal of mission" was defined in terms of "humanization." The influence of the report *The Church For Others* was strong. It had affirmed that "wherever men and women are led to restored relationships in love of neighbor, in service and suffering for the sake of greater justice and freedom," these things must be recognized as "signs of humanity" which Christ is providing. After Uppsala at the ecumenical "Consultation on Development" at Montreux (1970) it was said that "God's salvation of mankind in Christ encompasses the development of all of man's faith, institutions and structures. . . . True development is the battle for the wholeness of man both individual and corporate." The reference to man's "wholeness" is again significant, although it was conceived now more in social than in physical terms. It was taken up again at Bangkok. Here there was certainly the recognition that "salvation is Jesus Christ's liberation of individuals from sin and all its consequences," but the Assembly concentrated on a different kind of liberation, "The salvation which Christ brought, and in which we participate, offers a comprehensive wholeness in this divided life . . . God's liberating power changes both persons and structures . . . Therefore we see the struggles for economic justice, political freedom and cultural renewal as elements in the total liberation of the world through the mission of God."

Humanization, development, wholeness, liberation, justice: let me say at once that all these are not only desirable goals, but that Christians should be actively involved in pursuing them, and that we evangelicals have often been guilty of opting out of such social and political responsibilities. We are to blame for this neglect. We should repent of it and not be afraid to challenge ourselves and each other that God may be calling many more of us than hear his call to immerse ourselves in the secular world of politics, economics, sociology, race relations, preventive medicine, development, and a host of other such spheres for Christ.

But these things do not constitute the "salvation" which God is offering the world in and through Christ. They could be included in "the mission of God," insofar as Christians are giving themselves to serve in these fields. But to call socio-political liberation "salvation" is to be guilty of a gross theological confusion. It is to mix what Scripture keeps distinct — God the Creator and God the Redeemer, justice and justification, common grace and saving grace, the reformation of society and the regeneration of man. It is significant that the main biblical argument with which Bangkok tried to buttress its position was the liberation of Israel from the oppression of Egypt, which is not only an embarrassing topic for residents in the Middle East, but a misuse of Scripture. The Exodus was the redemption of God's covenant people. It is used in Scripture as a foreshadowing of redemption from sin through Christ. It offers no conceivable justification or pattern of national liberation movements today.

Third, if biblical "salvation" is neither psycho-physical wholeness nor socio-political liberation, it is a personal freedom from sin and its consequences, which brings many wholesome consequences in terms both of health and of social responsibility (as we have seen). In many

ways "liberation" (personal, not economic or political) is a good modern word for "salvation" because it not only alludes to the rescue we sinners need but also hints at the "liberty" into which the liberated are brought.

Freedom is as popular a word today as salvation is unpopular. But unfortunately too many people think and talk of freedom in purely negative terms. One of the Christian's best contributions to the debate about freedom is to insist that we think of it *positively*, in terms not only of what we are set free *from* but of what we are set free *for*. This is what Scriptures does, as I would like now to demonstrate while touching briefly on the familiar three phases or "tenses" of salvation.

First, we have been saved from the wrath of God, from his just judgment upon our sins. It is not merely that we had guilt feelings and a guilty conscience, and found relief from these in Christ. It is that we were actually objectively guilty before God, and that Christ bore our guilt and was condemned in our place in order that we might be justified. The argument of Romans 1 to 8 is so familiar to us that I do not need to elaborate it. The point I emphasize is that salvation does not stop with justification and must not therefore be equated with it. For with justification comes adoption. We were "slaves" under the curse of the law, but now we are "sons," enjoying free and happy access to our heavenly Father. And the Holy Spirit constantly witnesses with our Spirit that we are indeed his children (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7). Now we are to live as free men.

Second, we are being saved. Salvation in the New Testament is as much a present process as a gift or possession received in the past. If you ask me if I am saved, and if I think biblically before I answer, I could just as well reply "no" as "yes." I have been saved by the grace of God, yes, from his wrath, from my guilt and condemnation. But no, I am not yet saved, for sin still dwells within me and my body is not yet redeemed. It is the common tension in the New Testament between the "now" and the "not yet." Nevertheless, during this present time, gradually but surely, the indwelling Spirit of Christ is subduing the flesh within me and is transforming me into the image of Christ, "from one degree of glory to another" (II Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16-26).

In this present salvation too we should emphasize the positive. We are being set free from the bondage of our own self-centeredness. Why? In order to give ourselves in service to God and man. We exchange one slavery for another. We are no longer the slaves of sin and self, but we are the willing slaves of God, yes, and you are slaves too for Jesus' sake (Rom. 6:22; II Cor. 4:5). I wonder if it is our evangelical concentration on the negative aspect of salvation which has often brought our doctrine into disrepute? Should we not emphasize far more than we usually do that we cannot claim to be saved from self if we do not go on to abandon our liberated self in selfless service?

Third, our final salvation lies in the future. It is the object of our hope, for Christian hope is precisely "the hope of salvation" (I Thess. 5:8; cf. Rom. 8:24). It is not only that we shall be delivered from "the wrath of God," but also from the whole process of decay in creation and from evil whether in ourselves or in our society. For we are to have new bodies, and there is to be a new heaven and a new earth (e.g., Rom. 8:

18:25; II Pet. 3:13). Then we shall experience, and the whole creation will experience with us, what Paul calls "the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

Thus in each phase of our salvation Scripture lays its emphasis not on our rescue (from wrath, from self, from decay) but on the freedom which this rescue will bring — freedom to approach God as our Father, freedom to give ourselves in service, and finally the "freedom of glory" when, rid of all the limitations of our flesh-and-blood existence, we can devote ourselves without reserve to God and to each other. Are we saved? Yes, and "we rejoice" (Rom. 5:2, 3, 11). Are we saved? No, and in this body and with the whole creation "we groan inwardly" as we wait for the consummation. We rejoice and we groan: this is the paradoxical experience of Christians who have been saved and are being saved, and at the same time are not yet saved.

5. Conversion

The fifth word we have to consider is "conversion." It indicates that the announcement of the good news of salvation requires a response. We must reject as hopelessly unbiblical the notion that all men have been saved by Christ and that the only function of "evangelism" is to acquaint the ignorant of this good news. It is true that "God . . . through Christ reconciled us to himself," but this does not mean that all men are reconciled to God. For now he commits to us the ministry and the message of reconciliation, and bids us beg people on behalf of Christ, "Be reconciled to God." What validity would such an appeal have if those who hear it are already reconciled to God but simply do not know it? (II Cor. 5:18-20). No, God was indeed "in Christ" reconciling the world to himself, but now we must be "in Christ" ourselves if we are to receive the reconciliation and to become a new creation (II Cor. 5:19, 21, 17).

Solemnly we have to affirm that those to whom we announce the Gospel and address our appeal are still "perishing." We proclaim to them the good news of Christ not because they are saved already but in order that they may be saved. It is impossible to be a biblical Christian and a universalist simultaneously. We may (and I think should) preserve a certain humble and reverent agnosticism about the precise nature of hell, as about the precise nature of heaven. But clear and dogmatic we must be that hell is an awful, eternal reality. It is not dogmatism that is unbecoming in speaking about the fact of hell; it is glibness and frivolity. How can we even think about hell without tears?

If, then, a response to the Gospel is necessary, this response is called "conversion." *Epistrepho*, though usually in the middle or passive voice and therefore commonly translated to "be converted," really has an active sense, to "turn." When used in secular contexts in the New Testament it means either to "turn around" (as when Jesus turned around to see who had touched him, Mark 5:30) or to "return" (as when an unwanted greeting of peace returns to its giver, Matt. 10:13. Note that the usual word for "return" is *hapestrepho*, e.g., Luke 2:20, 43). And when the word is used theologically it also means to turn from one direction to another, or return from one place to another. Thus, Christians can be described as having "turned to God from idols" (I Thess.

1:9) and, after "straying like sheep," as having "now returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (I Pet. 2:25). Since the turn from idols and sin is usually called "repentance," and the turn to God and Christ "faith," we reach the interesting biblical equation that "repentance + faith = conversion."

As we consider the call to conversion in the contemporary world, it may be appropriate to issue three warnings.

First, conversion is not a work which man can do by himself. True, men are described as "turning to the Lord" (e.g., Acts 9:35, 11:21), and conversion is something we do in contrast to regeneration which is something God does, a new birth "from above." True also, evangelists are sometimes described in the New Testament as themselves "converting" people, like John the Baptist who would "turn many . . . to the Lord their God" (Luke 1:16, 17) and like the brother who "brings back a sinner from the error of his way" (Jas. 5:19, 20). Nevertheless, neither could the sinner turn nor could the evangelist turn him but for the work of the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., Acts 26:18). So repentance and faith are plainly declared in the New Testament to be both the duty of men (e.g., Acts 2:38, 16:31, 17:30) and the gift of God (e.g., Acts 11:18; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29). And however perplexing this antinomy may be, it is necessary in our man-centered, self-confident age to assert it, so that we may humble ourselves before God.

Second, conversion is not the renunciation of all our inherited culture. Conversion involves repentance, and repentance is renunciation. But what needs to be renounced? Too often we expect conversion to take place in a vacuum, without helping the convert to grasp in precise concrete terms what he is having to turn from. Or, worse still, we expect the convert to step right out of his former culture into a Christian subculture which is totally distinctive. Sometimes, we seem to call him to withdraw from the real world altogether. It is probably in reaction to this kind of "conversion" that the DWME study "Conversion in a Secular Age" said, "Conversion . . . is not, in the first place, either saving one's own soul or joining a society." The pre-Uppsala booklet, *All Things New* (p. 43), added that, though it is both these things secondarily, yet "fundamentally conversion means commitment, in penitence and faith, to what God himself is doing in human history." Candidly, this is over-stated, for conversion is turning to God and not to anything God is doing. Nevertheless, the emphasis is understandable. Conversion must not take the convert out of the world but send him back into it, the same person in the same world, and yet a new person with new convictions and new standards. Christ says, "Come," but then immediately adds, "Go," that is, go back into the world for me.

In both West and East it is vital for us to distinguish between Scripture and culture, and between those things in culture which are inherently evil and must be renounced for Christ's sake, and those things which are good or indifferent and may be retained, even perhaps transformed and enriched. In the West, according to the authors of *God's Lively People* (1971), we seem to expect new converts to abandon their contemporary behavior and adopt a new life-style which turns out to be not new but old. "The new Christian has to learn the old hymns and

appreciate them. He has to learn the language of the pulpit. He has to share in some conservative political opinions. He has to dress a bit old-fashioned. In brief, he has to step back two generations and undergo what one may call a painful cultural circumcision" (p. 206). In the East too and wherever a non-Christian religion dominates a country's culture, we need great wisdom to discern between what can be retained and what must be renounced. We cannot agree with Dr. M.M. Thomas' call for "a Christ-centered fellowship of faith and ethics in the Hindu religious community." Bishop Lesslie Newbigin is right to call this proposal "quite unrealistic" and to insist that "a man who is religiously, culturally and socially part of the Hindu community is a Hindu." But I think we can agree with Bishop Kenneth Cragg who, against a Muslim rather than a Hindu background, writes that "baptism . . . does not, properly understood, deculturalize the new believer; it enchurches him . . . conversion is not 'migration'; it is the personal discovery of the meaning of the universal Christ within the old framework of race, language and tradition."

Third, conversion is not the end. On the contrary, it is a new beginning. It is to be followed by the life of discipleship, by a growth into Christian maturity, by membership in the church (see Acts 2:40, 47) and by involvement in the world.

Such is the nature of biblical evangelism. It is part of God's mission through God's church in God's world. It is the spreading by any and every means of the good news of Jesus, crucified, risen, and reigning. It includes the kind of dialogue in which we listen humbly and sensitively in order to understand the other person and to learn how to present Christ to him meaningfully. It is the offer, on the ground of the work of Christ, of a salvation which is both present possession and future prospect, both liberation from self and liberation for God and man. And it invites a total response of repentance and faith which is called "conversion," the beginning of an altogether new life in Christ, in the church and in the world.

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY AND EVANGELISM

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Introduction

The problem of authority is the most fundamental problem that the Christian Church always faces. This is because Christianity is built upon the truth mediated by God's revelation. Without revelation there would be no foundation for Christian faith and action. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that with the reality of revelation Christianity stands or falls.

However, today the very concept of revelation is under attack. Is there such a thing as what the church calls "the revelation of God"? asks modern man living in the present age of mass atheism and a completely secular culture. Usually his reaction to this question is quite sceptical or strongly negative. He believes a "modern myth" that all that lies beyond the world of senses, the conclusions of logic, and all that cannot be proved scientifically, is purely incredible. Hence, the Christian claim to have the revelation of the transcendent God stands in the sharpest possible antithesis to the claim of our age. The sense of transcendence and the consciousness of divine revelation has disappeared almost completely. What is allowed at most by modern man is a kind of religion of this world only, in which the very concept of revelation has no place.

But if there is a divine revelation as the church has believed through the centuries, what is its mode or form? Is it discoverable in all existing things or only in some? If in some, then in which? And by what criteria are they selected as its media? Where are they found? What is their authority? (cf. W. Temple: "Revelation" in *Revelation*, ed., J. Baillie and H. Martin, 1937). The church has to face all these questions, and it is certainly the duty of the church, both to itself and to the world, to make a clear theological statement about the fundamental issue of revelation on which her life rests.

General revelation and evangelism

The opening verses of the epistle to the Hebrews inform us that it has pleased God to reveal himself in "diverse manners." In the course of the church's history God's revelation thus given in diverse manners came to be commonly understood under two categories, namely, *general* and *special* revelation. Down through the centuries it has been an integral part of the teaching of the church that the Scripture teaches the revelation of God in his works of creation. On the basis of the so-called "nature psalms" (Psa. 8, 19, 65, 104) as well as other passages such as John 1:4-9, Acts 14:17, 17:22ff., Rom. 1:18ff. and 2:14ff., the church has proclaimed that God always surrounds all mankind "like a theater"