

Thy Kingdom Come

By Ernst H. Wendland

In the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come." What does this mean? We remember Luther's answer in his explanation to this petition: "The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it come unto us also."ⁱ

Then Luther continues with the question: "How is this done?" How does God's kingdom "come unto us also"? Missiologists have asked this question repeatedly, especially since the turn of the Twentieth Century, when Protestantism's ecumenically-oriented missionary conferences came into prominence.

In 1980 mission representatives of most non-Roman churches throughout the world will come together in Melbourne, Australia under the biblical theme: "Your Kingdom Come." Editor Emilio Castro of the *International Review of Mission*, a quarterly published by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, says that "this Conference will be the moment of fruition of a long process of reappraisal of our own missionary understanding and practice."ⁱⁱ The entire July 1978 issue of this quarterly presents a historical review of past missionary conferences, showing how "church" and "mission" have been conceptualized within this century, a century which has seen two world wars, the disintegration of empires, the rise of nationalism and communism, and especially the establishment of national churches in areas which were begun as "mission fields."

It is interesting to follow this review by the World Council's own representatives, and to note how through the years new understandings of the words "church" and "mission" have arisen. All of which will certainly influence the thoughts of those who at Melbourne will discuss the many questions which will arise concerning an interpretation of this petition of the Lord's Prayer.

Edinburgh, Scotland—1910

The 1,200 high-spirited delegates who met at Edinburgh just after the turn of the century were certainly intent upon spreading Christ's kingdom into all the world. "The evangelization of the world in our generation" was Edinburgh's stirring watchword. There were many countries still to a great extent untouched by the gospel. If only the activities of the many Protestant mission societies could be ecumenically coordinated, then certainly the frontiers of the kingdom of God could be effectively extended. At least that was the optimistic plan of Edinburgh's enthusiasts.

Edinburgh's confident tone echoed the euphoria of a world still impressed by its own evaluation of progress, and of empires which had not yet felt the winds of change. Mission work was still regarded as an activity of the Western world. Although the involvement of nationals in mission fields was encouraged, the reports reflect a dominating attitude on the part of the sending agencies.

Theologically Edinburgh was still quite conservative when compared with conferences of a similar nature today. Scripture had authority. Non-Christian religions were not regarded as "aids" in preparing for the kingdom. Christ's commission to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature was understood literally. Harry Sawyer reports, "The fundamental assumption of the Conference was the absoluteness and finality of the Christian revelation."ⁱⁱⁱ

Jerusalem—1928

Out of Edinburgh came the International Missionary Council, organized in 1921 at Lake Monk, New York, as a coordinating agency of Protestant mission activities. An enlarged meeting of this Council was held at the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem, seven years later. Although not as many delegates were at Jerusalem as at Edinburgh, more representatives came this time from the "younger churches," which had come into being in areas where the mission agencies of the West had enlarged their frontiers.

At Jerusalem it was apparent that Edinburgh's euphoria had given way to feelings of uncertainty. In the aftermath of World War I the leadership of the West was called into question. The "benighted heathen" of Asia and Africa were no longer convinced that societies from countries torn asunder by bitter conflict were morally so superior. Serious questions began to be raised by representatives from the "younger churches," involving the entire concept of kingdom work.

Were non-Christian systems of belief and social makeup really so bad? Couldn't they be considered as an "aid in the fight against materialism and secularism"? Was the work of missions the prerogative of the West, or shouldn't older and younger churches carry it on in partnership? Was it the mission of the church to extend its work primarily through proclaiming biblical teaching, or couldn't this be done with equal effectiveness through the church's involvement in promoting social justice and bettering racial relationships?

These and other questions, Jerald D. Gort reports,^{iv} were raised at Jerusalem more pointedly than ever before. The resolutions adopted at the Conference obviously tried to satisfy everybody who came, and in the end nothing was really decided. A shift in emphasis, however, came to the surface. This is reflected in the use of the word "mission" and "missions" in the resolutions which were adopted. "Missions" was used in the sense of extending the influence of Christianity through some agency or society especially designated to do this work. "Mission" stood for the witnessing obligation of the church in all its activity. Gradually in subsequent meetings the latter term superseded the former. While at first this change seemed to some to lie in the field of semantics, it did later on reflect some major distinctions in missiological thinking.

Tamparam, Madras, India—1938

The next meeting of the International Missionary Council was held in Asia in order to emphasize the growing importance of the "younger churches." "The Upbuilding of the Younger Churches as a Part of the Historic Universal Christian Community" was the central theme of the Conference.

Tamparam was organized as a "working conference," Evert Schoonhoven reports.^v Delegates spent more time in smaller committee sessions than in plenary assembly. This gave representatives from the "younger churches" greater opportunity to voice their opinions.

The liveliest discussions at Tamparam centered about the subject of the church's witness to non-Christians. In order to prepare for this Conference missiologist Henrik Kraemer was assigned the task of writing his well-known book, "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World." In it Dr. Kraemer opposed the idea that a non-Christian faith could serve the outreach of the Gospel. The Conference failed to reach agreement on this point and resolved to give this matter further "thought and united study."^{vi}

No doubt the rising threats of fascism and communism had an unsettling effect upon Tamparam's 400 participants, who again failed to come to any significant formal agreement on divisive issues.

Whitby, Ontario, Canada—1947

For the first time North America hosted an enlarged Conference of the International Missionary Council. A world which had been again sadly shaken by a global conflict, and which in the process had witnessed an increased breakdown of established institutions and an accelerated decay of traditional patterns of life, could only hope for some kind of renewal. Kenneth Latourette, the noted church historian, thought that he found this at Whitby, which he described as "another Pentecost," and which again held forth "the evangelizing of the world" as a goal.^{vii}

Once again the place of the "church in mission" (resp. "missions") was a source of debate. Was some organized agency within the church to provide the impetus for mission work, or should the main thrust of mission rest with the younger churches? Was God at work in bringing his kingdom to others through movements outside the Christian Church, or was the work of Christianizing others necessarily done through the verbal preaching of the Gospel? Was a striving for greater social justice and human betterment a primary task of the church in mission, or should such social efforts be secondary to the real mission of the church?

One is at a loss to find Whitby's answer to these concerns in its vague and visionary pronouncements. One reads about "God's activity in history as giving birth to a new society," and a "dynamic presence of Christian fellowship in the world as the real evangelistic event," and "the Risen Christ entering into every sphere of the world's life—economical, social and political." At the same time Whitby emphasized the "Given Word" as the starting point of the evangelistic task.^{viii}

Significant was a directive to the older churches to place greater confidence in the abilities of the younger churches to manage their own affairs. Reporter Feliciano V. Carino sums it up this way: "Partnership in obedience means that the age of missions is past; the age of *mission* has begun. Churches as the bearers of the missionary obligation are in a missionary situation wherever they are."^{ix}

A year after Whitby the World Council of Churches came into formal being at Amsterdam. With this "superchurch" came the increased emphasis of Protestant leaders upon involvement in social and political programs as a primary function of kingdom work. Although the International Missionary Council was not as yet an integral part of this World Council, it was clearly headed in that direction.

Willingen, Germany—1952

At Whitby hope was expressed that some of the problems facing Christian mission were passing away. Shortly thereafter, however, India became independent of colonial rule, the communists began their long march in China, and a war began in Korea. A changing world-picture meant facing new situations.

Willingen offered little that was new. "The Missionary Obligation of the Church" was the general theme under which the same old issues were debated. If anything at all evolved out of the discussions, it was the theological approach to mission known as the *Missio Dei*. God was emphasized as the source of mission. God worked both independently of the church in world history as well as through the church by evangelizing action. Yet the "what-God-is-doing-in-the-world" perspective was gaining considerably in emphasis.

Arthur F. Glasser, the Editor of *Missiology*, has recently questioned the missiological trend which came to expression at Whitby. Already at the time of that Conference he put his question this way: "Are we right in calling for the primary obligation to listen to the voice of God in Scripture *prior* to proceeding to the examination of (world) 'issues' "?^x Apparently quite a few evangelical missiologists were becoming disturbed about *Missio Dei*.

Feliciano V. Carino, on the other hand, reports: "A new consciousness of the environment of the Church's life in terms of the determinative and comprehensive social, political and historical forces... must become integral to the conceptualization and program of the Church's missionary and evangelistic task."^{xi}

Achimota, Ghana—1957

Ralph Winter calls the Ghana meeting of the International Missionary Council "a preparation for marriage."^{xii} Dr. Winter refers to the subsequent amalgamation of the International Missionary Council (IMC) with the World Council of Churches (WCC) which took place at New Delhi, India, in 1961.

Anyone following the progress of these two organizations, the IMC and the WCC, will know that their integration was inevitable. "Mission" strategy was becoming more and more a matter of "church" strategy. Mission organizations were being replaced by church structures in the areas in which they were active. Representatives from the younger churches in the Third World countries outnumbered those from mission agencies. Even missionaries were being thought of as expendable. Why not settle an "anomalous situation," as Winter calls it, by making "mission" an integral part of "church" organizationally?

Ghana's "engagement" ended in "marriage" at the very next meeting of the WCC. The IMC became the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the WCC. This "marriage," if we may continue to speak metaphorically, produced "children" which because of irreconcilable differences preferred to express themselves in separate assemblies. This happened at Wheaton and Berlin (1966), Frankfurt (1970), and Lausanne (1974), where those generally referred to as the "Evangelicals" preferred to make their own

declarations concerning mission strategy. Especially the Wheaton and Frankfurt Declarations were sharply critical of trends within the IMC and the WCC.

Mexico City—1963

Mexico City served as host to the first enlarged meeting of the CWME of the WCC. Bishop Anastasios of Androussa, representing the Greek Orthodox Church as a participatory body for the first time, refers to this conference under the heading “Old Wine into Fresh Wineskins.”^{xiii}

The Bishop’s designation is apt. The “old wine” which had fermented for some years at previous meetings of the IMC was now poured into the “fresh wineskins” of the CWME. Interesting to note is the Bishop’s added comment that the meeting produced “less new theological insights and much more the consolidation of previous achievements.”^{xiv}

“Mission in Six Continents” was Mexico’s leitmotif. The old distinction between “sending” and “receiving” churches was swept away, to be replaced by the concept that the missionary frontier is “everywhere where the universal Church is found throughout the world.” Foreign mission and home mission were viewed as a common task. Together with this geographical shift in emphasis was a theological one, which Bishop Anastasios refers to as “in the anthropocentric direction.” This happened, according to the Bishop, “through the increased sensitivity to social duties and concern with the agenda of the world which marked the Mexico talks.” In these discussions, he notes, “the Cross, that authentic symbol of Christianity...failed to be made visible.”^{xv}

One can certainly agree that “old wine” was being poured into “fresh wineskins.” A new organizational structure, the CWME of the WCC, had come into being. This “wineskin,” however, merely provided a forum for the same arguments which had fermented at Jerusalem, Tambaram, Whitby, Willingen and now Mexico City, and were by this time sufficiently aged to be considered as a product.

Bangkok, Thailand—1972

The reports and resolutions at the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968 thoroughly aroused the contingent known as the “Evangelicals.” Apparently their warnings raised so strongly at Wheaton and Berlin in 1966 had not been heard. Dr. Donald McGavran wrote about a “betrayal of the Two Billion,” referring of course to the vast majority of the world’s people who were non-Christian. German churchmen reacted in the “Frankfurt Declaration,” stating that “humanization is not the goal of mission.”^{xvi}

Uppsala’s document on “Renewal in Mission” was largely responsible for these sharply critical reactions. This document emphasized “a humanity that cries passionately and articulately for a fully human life,” so that man’s physical and social needs cannot therefore be a “secondary responsibility” for the Christian Church.

Bangkok with its theme “Salvation Today” did little to ease the troubled situation. Even Bishop John V. Taylor, the WCC’s eloquent apologist, admits that Bangkok’s “ringing statements about the meaning of salvation actually raised more questions than they answered.”^{xvii} He presents the two incompatible views regarding “salvation” in this way: “Those who hold that the Gospel, primarily concerned with that in man which is eternal, is an offer of personal forgiveness and atonement with God,” and “those who hold that Mission is not so much telling as doing—joining the God of history in what he is doing to create the kingdom of righteousness and freedom in the life of this world.”^{xviii} Taylor’s words “joining the God of history” are rather significant.

Taylor leaves little doubt as to the side on which he stands. He writes: “Mission agencies and their supporters were reminded (at Bangkok) unequivocally that an essential part of proclaiming the Gospel is to help the poor and the weak to liberate themselves from injustice, exploitation and subhuman living.”^{xix} The Evangelicals at Bangkok must have felt very frustrated when the Frankfurt Declaration was withheld from discussion because it was “a German matter, not a world matter,” and when McGavran’s question about the two billion was ruled not to be a “debatable issue.”^{xx}

Taylor closes his summary report with the words: “The value of the Bangkok Assembly is that of a leaven. But it is the job of the leaven to work slowly and patiently through the lump, and not blow itself out of the mixing bowl.”^{xxi} To us it seems that the leaven had already permeated the lump. Uppsala had already declared that the goal of Mission was to offer the world “the new humanity in Christ.” Bangkok according to one observer pretty well substantiated the proposition that Jesus was “the prototype of an ideal social attitude” and that “salvation” was to be regarded as “any liberating experience.” Dr. Peter Beyerhaus concludes: “In such a concept (i.e. humanization) the eschatological kingdom of Christ is swallowed up by the immanent achievements of historical evolution.”^{xxii}

Melbourne, Australia—1980

When the representatives of world missiological thinking meet at Melbourne in 1980, what kind of “kingdom of God” will they be praying for? How will this “kingdom” be expected to come as a blessing to mankind? Melbourne’s theme “Your Kingdom Come” is indeed an excellent one. It should arouse the interest of anyone who is concerned about the work of God’s kingdom, its extension here on earth, and the hope that it extends for the future. One can assume that position papers are already now in process of formulation by Protestantism’s leading spokesmen as they prepare for Melbourne’s response. Without having had access to these one can pretty well predict the direction which will be taken.

The kingdom of God will be expected to come chiefly through God’s humanizing activity in the history of world events, so that people everywhere will be able to share more equitably in social justice, racial equality and economic development....It will be a kingdom in which Jesus Christ is primarily a “man for others,” an example of human selflessness....It will be a kingdom through which the two (or by this time three?) billion non-Christians will learn to know Jesus primarily through a process of spiritual osmosis. Christ’s presence as reflected in the lives of his Christians rather than aggressive acts of church planting by mission agencies will be the important “evangelising” principle....It will be a kingdom in which the death of Christ on the cross will be held forth not so much as an atonement for sin, but as a symbol of self-sacrificing love....It will be a kingdom in which heaven is chiefly referred to as a part of the “here and now” rather than a hope which rests in an eternal future.

Compared with God’s inerrant revelation in Scripture this humanistic jargon has the insipid flavor of a mess of theosophic pottage. How does God’s kingdom come to us also? One prefers to hear Luther’s answer as he explains the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “When our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word, and lead a godly life here in time, and hereafter in eternity.”^{xxiii}

Yes—“*when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit.*” A true knowledge of God’s kingdom is a gift of divine revelation. It begins with God’s Spirit. “No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor 12:3). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Ro 10:17). Luther therefore declares in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; in like manner as he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”^{xxiv} To begin with a thorough study of the Holy Spirit’s activity through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments would be an excellent way to ponder the coming of God’s kingdom today.

“...so that by his grace we believe his holy Word,” Luther continues in his explanation of the Lord’s Prayer. That Word proclaims grace and truth to fallen mankind. It is centered in a Savior from sin, who died for all, that they might by faith receive the forgiveness of their sins and the assurance of eternal life with him. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Ro 14:17). In this newfound joy as children of God believers will surely want to share their great spiritual blessings with those who do not have these blessings. Following their Lord’s command they will want to proclaim his saving truth so that God’s kingdom might be extended everywhere.

“...and lead a godly life here in time and hereafter in eternity.” Yes, this kingdom *is* here and now. Believers say with Paul: “Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living” (Ro 14:8,9).

But this time is short. Eternity beckons. Convinced that there is salvation in no other name but the name of Jesus, believers will certainly want to be about their heavenly Father’s business, proclaiming that name to the ends of the earth so that people everywhere can be assured of eternal happiness in a kingdom of glory. We have seen the hearts of Christians in some of the most deprived and remote corners of this world find this joyful assurance in their Savior-King. Often we have experienced that they appreciate God’s grace in Christ in far greater measure than people who are literally surrounded and surfeited by the so-called “good” things of this life. With Luther we can join in confessing our Lord in these words: “Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death; that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness; even as he is risen from death, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.”^{xxv}

Our closing prayer, therefore, as we think once more of our theme is Martin Franzmann’s beautifully poetic paraphrase of the conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer:

*Thine is the kingdom, unto thee
Shall bow in homage every knee;
And thine the power; no power shall be
That is not overcome by thee;
The glory thine, by every tongue
Thy praise shall be forever sung. Amen.*^{xxvi}

ⁱ *What Does This Mean?*, Luther’s Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, Second Petition.

ⁱⁱ *International Review of Mission*, LXVII (July 1978), 249.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 275.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 300.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, p. 311.

^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 316.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 322.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, p. 326.

^x Arthur F. Glasser, “Can This Gulf Be Bridged?” *Missiology*, VI (July 1978), 277.

^{xi} Feliciano V. Carino, “Partnership in Obedience,” *International Review of Mission*, LXVII (July 1978), 317.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 338.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*, p. 354.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, p. 356.

^{xv} *Ibid.*, p. 364.

^{xvi} *Eye of the Storm*, D. McGavran, ed. (Waco: Word Books, 1972), p. 288.

^{xvii} John V. Taylor, “Bangkok 1972–1973,” *International Review of Mission*, LX–VII (July 1978), 368.

^{xviii} *Ibid.*, p. 366.

^{xix} *Ibid.*, p. 367.

^{xx} “The Theology of Salvation at Bangkok,” *Ev. Missions Quarterly*, IX, 3, pp. 150–161.

^{xxi} John V. Taylor, “Bangkok 1972–1973,” *International Review of Mission*, LX–VII (July 1978), 370.

^{xxii} Peter Bayerhaus, “Mission and Humanization,” *International Review of Mission*, LX (January 1971), 19.

^{xxiii} *How Is This Done?*, Luther’s Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, Second Petition.

^{xxiv} *What Does This Mean?*, Luther’s Small Catechism, Apostles’ Creed, Third Article.

^{xxv} *What Does This Mean?*, Luther’s Small Catechism, Apostles’ Creed, Second Article.

^{xxvi} *Worship Supplement*, The Lutheran Hymnal, No. 767, Stanza 3.