

Your Kingdom Come

IN May 1980 I had the privilege of attending the World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism which was held in Melbourne, Australia. Included in the trip were once-in-a-lifetime opportunities of visiting Bangladesh and seeing a little of the work of our missionaries there, and also the chance to do a little sightseeing in places such as Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur. I was glad, too, to be able to meet fellow-Baptists in Australia and compare notes with them. But the main reason for my trip was the W.C.C. Conference.

A little historical background would be in order to set the context. The Melbourne Conference stands in the line of world mission conferences that began in Edinburgh in 1910. That conference was itself the outcome of the vision of William Carey who had called for such a conference as early as 1810. It took a century for his vision to be realized. Edinburgh 1910, with its watchword "the evangelization of the world in this generation", is regarded as the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement. It was the first time that official representatives from Protestant missionary societies had met together on such a large scale. Its composition, however, was mainly western, and the delegates were still influenced by the nineteenth century world-view. Mission was the announcement of the gospel to non-Christians. Two personalities, J. R. Mott and J. H. Oldham, had a dominant influence on the missionary movement of that period, and they were instrumental in the establishment of the International Missionary Council in 1921.

The First World War destroyed any illusion of identity between Christian faith and western civilization. The Jerusalem conference in 1928 had to grapple with growing secularization on one hand and the realization of the importance of the non-Christian religions on the other. Did these religions contain anything of value, or was the relationship of Christianity to other faiths one of total discontinuity? Are we to attempt to realize the Kingdom of God on earth, or do we see it primarily in its eschatological character?

More than half the participants in the Tambaram (Madras) Conference in 1938 were from the "younger churches". The world then was confronted with militant paganism in the form of fascism. The achievement of this conference was to recognize the local church as the bearer of the missionary mandate, and this conviction marked a significant step on the road to independence for these "younger churches". Whitby (Canada) 1947 spoke of "partners in obedience" rather than of "mother churches" and "younger churches". But Willingen (West Germany) 1952, meeting in the shadow of the cold war, questioned the ecclesio-centrism of the Tambaram and Whitby conferences. It was no longer a matter of "our" mission, but of God's.

At Achimota (Ghana) 1957-8, the I.M.C. and the W.C.C. were integrated. Mission and Church could no longer be separated organizationally. The result of this decision was that the churches of Asia and Africa could take their full part in the ecumenical movement. At the 1961 New Delhi Assembly of the W.C.C. the I.M.C. was formally made the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (C.W.M.E.) of the W.C.C. At the Mexico City Conference in 1963 there were for the first time at a missionary conference Orthodox participants and Catholic observers. The theme of this conference was "mission in six continents" and it affirmed that every church, wherever it is situated, is in mission. The question then becomes how to formulate the message of salvation for humankind today. This question was taken up by the 1972-3 Bangkok Conference under the theme "Salvation Today". This conference took place at the end of a period characterized by wars of liberation, student revolt, and a certain optimism about the possibility of changing the world. Liberation theology was very much in the forefront of the agenda, so that to respond to Christ and his missionary call was seen as involving a struggle for social justice, peace, and a fully human life. Bangkok also affirmed the right of every Christian and every church in its own cultural identity. As a result, the theological imperialism of the West was sharply attacked, especially by the Africans. The question of the structure of missionary relationships was also tackled with the aim of establishing these relationships in a way that would reflect genuine equality between partners. This resulted in the controversial proposal for a temporary moratorium on traditional missionary activity.

The context of the Melbourne Conference can be seen in light of these previous conferences, but also in the light of the current world-scene, with its increase in totalitarian regimes, the spread of violence, torture, denial of rights and militarism, the ever-accelerating concentration of economic power, increasing repression of religious liberty and the breakdown of traditional ideologies. We are living in truly apocalyptic times. At the same time, there are signs of real hope in the church — the continued testimony of faithful Christians in oppressive situations, the growing participation of all traditions in the search for unity, charismatic renewal, and the like.

Perhaps now I may share a few, somewhat kaleidoscopic, impressions of the Melbourne Conference itself. First of all, there was the sheer variety of participants and traditions represented. About 600 people came together, of whom 250 were voting delegates (when there was a vote, however, more than half these delegates abstained). It was a privilege to meet people one had only ever heard of in books and journals, whose writings one had perhaps read, but never dreamt that one day one would meet them. For instance, a member of the Bible study group in which I was put was Professor Ernst Käsemann of Tübingen University, although he turned up for only one session. It was good to meet people of all traditions. The Roman Catholic delegation was large, and so was the Orthodox. Perhaps the latter made the greater impact, visibly because of their exotic robes, but also because of the theological assurance in their contributions to the debates.

Our deliberations were grounded in worship and Bible study. Of these,

the latter⁴ was far and away the most impressive and effective. The setting was given at the very beginning of the conference in an impressive address by Professor Käsemann. Thereafter, we were divided into groups of about 20 according to language, which was obviously the best thing to do, although it excluded the Latin Americans and the francophone delegates. In these groups we studied the Lord's Prayer and passages related to the various clauses of that prayer. It quickly became a more than intellectual exercise. Sharing took place at a deep personal level, and in some cases very movingly.

I felt that my group was a little too dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males! There were present three Americans, several Australians, a white South African (an Afrikaaner liberal!), as well as a laywoman from the Finnish Orthodox Church, and a woman pastor from the Reformed Church in Holland. But we did have as a leader a Baptist from Burma, a most impressive young woman from Zimbabwe (the only black African in the group), two Filipinos (one a Methodist Bishop), two people from the South Pacific, an Armenian Archbishop (of the Armenian Church in diaspora in Australia and New Zealand), a couple of Russians — one an Orthodox bishop from Kiev and the other a Baptist from Moscow.

The worship of the conference was less satisfactory than the Bible study groups. Partly this was due to the setting — a school hall with latecomers banging squeaky desks. Simultaneous translation also detracts from the atmosphere of worship, though things in this respect were worse for the non-English speakers who complained about the imperialism of the English language. Each act of worship began, at least at the beginning of the conference, with a large white cross being carried in and laid beneath the W.C.C. symbol. However, when it was announced that the Australian churches had used this cross over the Easter season, painted black for sin on Good Friday, and painted white on Easter Day this proved too much for the black theology experts! So the cross was banished, though not from our minds as we were constantly reminded at the conference about the cross involved in following Jesus.

Generally, it seemed to me that the worship lacked liveliness, although the final service on the eve of Pentecost, with its quiet dignity and opportunity for silent and extemporary prayer, was deeply impressive. So also was the Orthodox liturgy celebrated early one morning before the day's work began. It was the first time I had experienced an Orthodox act of worship, and it did truly seem that the prayers recited over the soft chanting of an unaccompanied male-voice choir lifted one into another dimension; "heaven on earth" is the claim that the Orthodox have always made about their worship. Another impressive act of worship was that held in Melbourne's Roman Catholic Cathedral on Ascension Day. For some participants, this was more of a performance and less an act of worship. But for me, the helpfulness as an aid to worship of some extremely well done liturgical dance, and a thoughtful address by a Greek Orthodox Archbishop, made the occasion a memorable one.

Now for the main business of the conference. Our theme was "Your kingdom come", and to study this theme we were divided into four sections: "Good News to the Poor", "The Kingdom of God and Human

Struggles", "The Church witnesses to the Kingdom", and "The Crucified Christ challenges Human Power". Before I write about the content of these deliberations, let me say something about the methods by which we reached our conclusions. For the first few days we had nothing but input, i.e. addresses and speeches — scholarly German theology and passionate Latin American pleas for justice. But it was too much, proved by the fact that the final output bore little trace of this input.

I found the discussions in my section ("Good News to the Poor") rather unsatisfactory. Again, we had to endure speeches, and it was only at the beginning of the second week that we actually got into our groups (other sections, I heard, fared better than this). Still, I feel that the time could have been better used by delegates getting to know one another, and the suspicion remains that behind all this solid input was an attempt to manipulate the conference. I don't think it succeeded.

This method of producing a final text did not strike me as being an altogether good one. A committee is not necessarily the best way of producing theology. It can tend to produce the lowest common denominator of the views of those present, and there is inevitably some trade-off between the interests of different groups. When each section had finally done its work, the whole process had to be gone through again by the whole conference. Amendments were quickly accepted in plenary session that had been rejected in the section discussion after spending time on the subject. It would have been better if each section report had been the work of one person reporting on his section, and not subject to amendment by the conference as a whole.

As a conference we were also carefully made aware of the Australian setting in which we met. The Australians did us proud with their hospitality, and were prepared to be honest and critical of the failings of their society. During the central weekend of the conference, delegates were dispersed to various local churches all over the continent. I was at first disappointed not to have to fly off to some remote and distant part of Australia, but in the event I spent a rewarding weekend in an affluent agricultural community some 220 miles north west of Melbourne, in a parish of the Uniting Church in Australia (a union of Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians formed in 1977). Groups in this parish had been grappling with Bible material related to the conference theme, and particularly had focused on the issue of justice for the world's poor. Being conservative, affluent farmers, this was a remote issue for them, and they had difficulty in coping with it. But unlike some fellow Australians, they persisted, and my presence that weekend was for them a crystallization of the issue, and it was really wonderful to see these people facing this new challenge from the Word of God and growing through their response to it.

A conference of the W.C.C. is always subject to pressure groups. Externally, there were anti-communist, anti-W.C.C. demonstrations. Internally, there were, particularly, the Latin Americans with their strong call for national and international justice. I usually reckon myself to be fairly open to such calls, but I must confess that I found some of what our Latin American colleagues said very hard to accept, which is not to say that we should not listen hard to what they are saying. The response by

delegates from the West to these calls was two-fold — certainly there was breast-beating, but also there was resistance to some of the more extreme statements (e.g. good news is for the poor, there can only be bad news for the rich).

Given the international situation at the time of the conference it was inevitable that the U.S.A./U.S.S.R. confrontation should be reflected in the conference. A private meeting of the two delegations produced a moving demonstration of the possibilities of reconciliation across the ideological divide. But on the last day, a resolution clearly referring to Afghanistan but not naming that country, was subject to an amendment, proposed by the Pakistani delegation, which specifically condemned the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The Russian delegation responded vigorously and even threatened to walk out of the W.C.C. if the amendment was passed. In the event, it was just defeated, and the main resolution was then carried by a large majority, the Russians abstaining. The incident exposed the difficulty of the W.C.C. in being balanced in its condemnations of infringements of human rights. It is often said that the W.C.C. is free in its condemnation of right-wing regimes, but remains silent in the case of left-wing regimes. In the former case, such condemnations are issued with the support of and at the request of the churches in the country concerned, but this is not so in the latter instance. The W.C.C. is in a real dilemma here. It was said that perhaps Melbourne would prove to be the last major W.C.C. conference at which the Eastern bloc was not equally condemned along with the West. Time will tell.

Another lobby was that of the women's liberation group, who mostly made a good case, but weakened it by repeatedly objecting to the use of the word "Father" for God.

I don't want to give the impression that social and political issues were all that the conference was about. We were, in fact, discussing a strategy for mission in this generation. It is a strategy which, first of all, if it is to appear credible, must take account of the vast numbers of suffering poor in our world today. This was Raymond Fung's plea in his address to section I "Good News to the Poor":

We wish to report to the churches that a person is not only a sinner, a person is also the sinned-against. That men and women are not only violators of God's laws, they are also the violated. This is not to be understood in a behaviouristic sense, but in a theological sense, in terms of sin, the domination of sin . . . we would like to report to the churches that man is lost, lost not only in the sins of his own heart but also in the sinning grasps of principalities and powers of the world, demonic forces which cast a bondage over human lives and human institutions and infiltrate their very textures. Because of our involvement with the poor, we discover that a person persistently deprived of basic material needs and political rights is also a person deprived of much of his or her soul, self-respect, dignity and will. . . . As it is, I would urge that we do not lose sight of the sinned-againstness of persons in our theological understanding and evangelistic effort . . . the gospel should not only call on the people to repent of their sins, but also must call on them to resist the forces

which sin against them. In the community of the sinned-against, something important very often happens — that, in the struggle against the forces of sin, the sinned-against soon comes to realize that he or she is also a sinner in a way he or she cannot respond to with a “so what?”. . . . A struggle is no romantic place. It is an environment in which one comes to confront one’s ugliness and emptiness, and is most open to God’s forgiveness. The fact of the poor as the sinned-against enables the not-so-poor to see that they too are the sinned-against. And while in their struggles against sin, the poor come to realize that they too are sinners, the middle class can also come to a similar realization, that the sinned-against is also the sinning. On this understanding of human sinned-againstness is hope for genuine solidarity between the church of the poor and the more affluent.

Therefore it does not help in this context to contrast material and spiritual poverty. Good news for the rich confirms what Jesus proclaimed as good news to the poor by calling the rich to trust in God alone and in his abundant mercy. But response does involve repentance, i.e. the renunciation of the security and exploiting power of wealth, and the turning away from indifference to the poor to solidarity with the oppressed. Such a strategy demands that we take steps to identify the poor in our own situation and be prepared to listen to them and learn from them. True evangelism cannot otherwise happen.

We are also called to seek the way of Christ through all the struggles and conflicts of our time. Of course, much of what is happening today is ambiguous — not all is of God, and the Church does not have all the answers. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid our prophetic calling. We have a message that gives meaning to the struggles of people and a message about the possibilities of reconciliation in the midst of these struggles. John V. Taylor, Bishop of Winchester, spoke of the work of the church in these words:

The Church is called into being in order to live the life of the kingdom in anticipation of its arrival. The Church is meant to be shaped by its certainty about the future which God is giving. That certainty throws its light upon everything in the present. The future, in which everything will find fulfilment in accordance with the will and nature of God, is already pressing itself into the present world-order to question it and to change it. The Kingdom arrives from beyond, yet it is this-worldly through and through. It is the Father’s will and the Father’s rule on earth as in heaven. Therefore what the church offers mankind is an alternative life-view and an alternative life-style.

The Church’s witness to the Kingdom may take the form of a search for a new kind of community life, like that of the base (grass-roots) Christian communities being organized within the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America. Such communities have hitherto been regarded with suspicion by the official church structures in that continent. The W.C.C.’s endorsement of them at the Melbourne conference is therefore likely to prove significant.

This witness also includes a renewed emphasis on the ministry of healing

in an holistic approach involving a blend of medicine and counselling, prayer and the sacraments. And we are also invited to examine the role of the eucharist and see it in a new light as an evangelistic tool. In all these ways, the Church is invited to "live the future now", to "make the dream come true".

The conference also called the churches to face the realities of power in today's world, within and without the church. The Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama, gave the conference some fascinating theological reflections on this question of power.

The Church believes that Jesus Christ is the centre of all peoples and all things. . . . But he is the centre who is always in motion towards the periphery. In this he reveals the mind of God who is concerned about the people on the periphery. . . . Jesus Christ is the centre becoming periphery. He affirms his centrality by giving it up. That is what this designation "crucified Lord" means. The Lord is supposed to be at the centre. But he is now affirming his lordship by being crucified! . . . His life moves towards the periphery. He expresses his centrality in the periphery by reaching the extreme periphery. Finally, on the cross, he stops this movement. There he cannot move. He is nailed down. This is the point of ultimate periphery. . . . From this uttermost point of periphery he establishes his authority. This movement towards the periphery is called the love of God in Christ. In the periphery, his authority and love meet. They are one. His authority is substantiated by love. His love is authoritative. In the periphery this has taken place, as in the periphery the sincerity and reliability of Christ were demonstrated.

Such thinking raises important questions. How is power exercised within the Church, and is it in accordance with our Lord's teaching and example, as set out, for instance, in Mark 10:42-45? What about the position of women in the church (in fact, not just in theory)? And how about the use of the undoubted financial power in the hands of local churches and denominational treasurers? Having money to invest carries with it considerable spiritual danger. These are questions we cannot avoid. And sometimes we are called to challenge in the name of the crucified Christ the powers of this world. Are we ready to carry our cross?

Of traditional missionary enterprise very little was said at Melbourne. The assumption was that it is the local church in each situation that carries the main responsibility under God for mission. A suggestion was made that a major emphasis in the future could be the sending of people to and from countries within the countries of Europe, etc. It would also be good to learn how the churches of Brazil, Zaire, India, and so on could help British Baptists instead of the other way around. I did not hear much of the so-called moratorium, but what I did hear suggests that the initiative for such a move should come from what are traditionally called the "receiving" churches. Otherwise, we are in danger of a new kind of paternalism, of suggesting that we know better than our colleagues overseas what their real needs are.

Despite the doubts of some, I do feel that the Melbourne conference

will help to build bridges between the W.C.C. and the Lausanne/Pattaya approach, and between Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox.

It was a privilege to attend such a gathering, to meet such a wide range of Christian experience from all over the world, and to be the recipient of so much first-class theological thinking. I do recommend, particularly, if readers can get hold of it, Bishop John V. Taylor's address on "The Church witnesses to the Kingdom" and also Kosuke Koyama's address on "The Crucified Christ challenges Human Power" — these were undoubtedly the two finest pieces of thinking put before the conference. Raymond Fung's address "Good News to the Poor — the case for a missionary movement" is also very good value. Extracts from these addresses, together with other reports of the conference can be found in the latest issue of the *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXIX (275) July 1980. Issues of *I.R.M.* from about mid-1978 onwards give further background to the Melbourne conference.

I returned home from Melbourne with a deepened awareness of the richness and variety of the people of God, and with a renewed confidence in the power and relevance of the gospel.

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The Tangled Careers of Two Stuart Radicals: Henry and Robert Danvers

IN the decades after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, most Baptists adjusted themselves to the new regime by practising quiescent obedience in political matters and worshipping as best they could in conventicles. Sometimes this entailed persecution through fines or imprisonment, as manifested in the career of John Bunyan and fellow members of the Bedford church. For most Baptists the holy war was no longer to be fought in physical terms but in the world of the spirit, as Bunyan's classic, *The Holy War*, revealed.¹ There were, however, a minority of Baptists who adhered strictly to the Good Old Cause and repeatedly endeavoured to overthrow the Stuart monarchy by renewed revolution. Of these the most prominent Baptist leader was Henry Danvers, but in seeking to pursue his surreptitious activities in the 1660s and 1670s the historian must disentangle him from his near namesake, Robert Danvers, also a revolutionary and perhaps a Baptist.

Henry Danvers was a Staffordshire gentleman who possessed an estate worth some £300 p.a. He may have studied at Trinity College, Oxford, for the title-page of the Congregational Library copy of his 1663 tract, *The Mystery of Magistracy Unveiled*, contains an annotation suggesting as