

THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

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I have been asked to present an introductory paper on the concept and practice of Christian mission, based upon scriptural and theological sources, and in relationship to Islam. I propose to address myself to two questions: What is the true nature of Christian mission? What is the motive of Christian mission? . . . or to put it very simply: Why mission?

The practice of mission raises the question: what form should Christian mission take? In answering this question I propose to deal not with the history of mission, but rather to set out some thoughts about what the form of Christian mission should be in principle, and how Christian mission should, in principle, be undertaken. The question of "how mission?" is of course closely related to the question "why mission?"

The search for answers to these questions in this paper will be based upon the New Testament and upon Christian theological sources. By the latter I understand the theological motives underlying the Scriptural command to evangelization, and the Church's ecumenical thinking about Christ as expressed in the confessions of the Church based upon the Scriptures rather than on the ideas of any particular Christian theologian. Our attention is drawn to Christological questions regarding the incarnation, since these underlie the whole idea of mission in the New Testament.

I. The "Why" of Mission

For evangelical Christians the question of the "why" of mission does not appear to raise any problems. Mission is seen as the personal duty of every individual Christian, who is called as part of his or her faith to witness and to evangelize. The evidence is found in Scripture, and notably in the concluding verses of the Gospel of St Matthew which constitute the Great Commission:

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28 : 19).¹

But is there in fact any clear commandment in the New Testament to the effect that every individual Christian has a duty to witness and to preach the Gospel? The answer depends on how we read the Scriptures. If, on the one

¹ All biblical quotations in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Jerusalem Bible.

hand, we read the New Testament as a collection of divinely inspired principles and commandments, everything being applied in exact detail to every Christian, our answer to the above question must be affirmative. But if we read the New Testament in its historical context and ask to whom specific verses were addressed, I would argue that there is then no general commandment to every Christian to preach or to witness in word to the Gospel in his or her individual capacity.

However, let us put the question differently: Has Christ given the apostolate of mission to his Church in general, or has he given it only to the twelve apostles and other apostles and members of the Church as part of their special ministries? Here the answer from Scripture is clear and unambiguous. All the writings of the New Testament are either direct missionary literature or written in a missionary situation. Each of the four Gospels can be said to prepare the way for Pentecost, the founding of the Church, through the evangelistic preaching of the apostles. The "Acts of the Apostles" is the first history of mission, and at the same time it is the first history of the Church. In the New Testament the history of the Church and the history of mission are one and the same, and this remained so for several hundreds of years of subsequent Christian history.

All the New Testament Gospels are to be classed as missionary literature and they all lead up to the commandment to evangelize. Therefore any understanding of the nature of the apostolate of mission as it continues in the Church must begin with the Gospels, and we should pay close attention to them:

Matthew 28 : 18-19

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Mark 16 : 15-16

Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned.

Luke 24 : 47-48

In his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.

John 20 : 21-23

"As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." After saying this he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained."

John 20 : 31

These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

Cf. Acts 1 : 8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea, and Samaria and indeed to the ends of the earth.

Clearly the command to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples extends to all nations, to the ends of the world, to the whole creation; there can be no limitation, for the Gospel is for all people. The same conviction is to be found in the letters of St Paul and also of St Peter, who understood the Gospel as meant not only for the Jews who already had the law, but also for all the Gentiles. In this there is also a deeper theological meaning, that through the Gospel the enmity and divisions between Jews and Gentiles shall be broken down. They shall be reconciled to each other through their participation in Christ's love; they shall become not only brethren but a single family, members of the same body of Christ: "it means that pagans now share the same inheritance, that they are parts of the same body, and that the same promise has been made to them, in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel." (Eph. 3 : 6.)

Earlier Protestant missions had as their main motivation and purpose that individuals should be saved through faith in Jesus Christ and this is undoubtedly in accordance with the New Testament as shown in the passages quoted above : "Those who are baptized will be saved" (Mark); "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke); "the authority to forgive sins given to the apostles" (John). Peter, in his great mission speech, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, says: "for of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved." (Acts 4 : 12.)

Some may feel this call to personal salvation to be too anthropocentric a motivation for mission today; indeed there are Christians who may feel embarrassed by this type of thinking, but no-one can deny that it is a fundamental scriptural reason for the "why" of mission.

It may be correct to balance this call to individual repentance with the more positive assertion that there *is salvation in Jesus Christ*. But there is a yet more positive, or Christocentric, assertion which finds powerful expression in the New Testament, namely that we are saved in order to belong to Christ. This means that we are baptized in Christ's name not only to receive forgiveness of our sins and to be saved, but in order that we shall belong to Jesus Christ who is now the Lord of everything and everybody. We are baptized into his body, into the Church of which he is the head. This idea is intrinsic to the great commission to mission as we have seen it in the Gospels, where the main motivation for making disciples is that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28 : 18). This is the main idea in Paul's letter to the Philippians (2 : 9-11) where he writes: "But God raised him high and gave him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father."

Compare also the letter to the Ephesians (1 : 20-23), which recalls the mighty works which God accomplished "... in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand, in heaven, far above every Sovereignty, Authority, Power or Domination, or any other name that can be named,

not only in this age but also in the age to come. He has put all things under his feet, and made him, as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation."

So the faith of the New Testament is that Jesus is Lord, and that everything and everybody rightly belongs to him. Mission, therefore, is to bring all mankind to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, because he owns us all, and has a just claim on us all. Here we have the real motivation for mission. It follows, therefore, that a proper Christian theology of mission depends on our Christology; mission in the New Testament is only a corollary of what the New Testament writers assert about Christ, and perhaps much of the weaknesses and confusion in modern Christian mission thinking are due either to the fact that we treat missiology separately from Christology, or to the confusion and uncertainty in our Christology; perhaps our Christology is not closely enough related to the incarnation of God the Son.

For the apostolate to Islam it is quite clear that this is the crucial point. The Lordship of Jesus in the absolute sense is contested by Islam and thereby the very foundation and motive for Christian mission to Islam is questioned. This means that one of the most important by-products of the Christian apostolate to the Muslim world will be to force the Christian Church to take its Christology absolutely seriously in all its aspects. I personally am convinced that if we want to have an honest meeting with Islam, and an honest discussion here in our seminar, we will have to apply ourselves diligently to the Christological question. The incarnation does not primarily mean that in Jesus Christ we have real humanity, though that is, of course true, but that in Jesus Christ we have God who *really* became man.

This is the main issue we have to face, and it would be disaster to avoid it through a watered-down Christology more or less over-shadowed by theories about natural revelation. This is an absolute must if we want to have honest dialogue. The real motive in the New Testament for mission is that the crucified and risen Jesus is Lord. This is substantially more than saying that Jesus gives us a saving knowledge, or that he reveals something from God; in either case it could be rightly argued that this knowledge and revelation may be found in other places, better or poorer, twisted or perverted, usually judged according to the degree of our own intolerance.

The real New Testament motivation for mission is that Jesus Christ, himself, is God revealed: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14 : 9 RSV.) He, himself, is salvation and eternal life: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." (John 14 : 6.) "The Truth" should perhaps be translated into the Islamic context as *al-Haqq*. Jesus is Lord through whom everything is created and one day everyone shall acknowledge him as Lord (Phil. 2 : 10, 11; Eph. 1 : 23). The Lord is here taken in the absolute sense and should perhaps be translated into the Islamic context as *Rabb al-'Ālamīn*.

In the post-resurrection New Testament, "Lord" means "God" and this we can clearly see in the Gospel according to St John where the climax of the whole gospel is in the confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God", and we see that every attribute connected with the Lord of the Old Testament can be attributed to Jesus Christ in the New Testament.² This is the faith and confession of the New Testament and the real motivation for its mission and answers our question about the "why" of Christian mission.

If it is not understood that this is the motivation for the mission of the Christian Church, then mission will be considered only as an expression of the intolerance and fanaticism of the Church, or as an expression of the colonialism of the Western world in the religious field. The reason why the WCC is engaged in the world-wide mission is that it consists of "Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures". The phrase "God and Saviour" indicates the deepest motivation for Christian mission. God has become man in order to be our Saviour; God in his love for us gave himself for us (II Cor. 5 : 14-21); God was in Christ and became sin for our sake; his love compels us to preach the good news about salvation in him in order that he may be acknowledged as Lord and Saviour by every man; we as his Church no longer belong to ourselves but to him.

The motive for mission that emphasizes that each individual man must be saved, and that which says that all men must belong to him at this point converge. We were created and he came in order that we may become members of his body and his Church of which he is the head. (Eph. 1 : 4-23 "... that God would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth ... He has put all things under his feet, and made him as the ruler of everything, the head of the Church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills the whole creation.")

The Church is not a group of people who think more or less the same way or have a common interest. Rather the Church exists in God's will from before the creation of the world and we are baptized into it, not only in order that we may receive the forgiveness of our sins and be saved, but that we shall be made members of Christ's Body, to whom we rightly belong because he has a claim upon us all. This does not mean that we are baptized in order simply that the Church will have some more members, but that his body may be completed. The existence of his Church, his body on earth means that the kingdom of heaven is here, that *jannah* is here; that salvation is in the world here and now and available to men by faith in Jesus Christ. "And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17 : 3.)

It is one of the motives for mission that his body may be completed; but the corollary is that the role and purpose of the Church in this world is — and must be — to proclaim the love of God given to us in Christ our Lord, that there

² See Oscar Cullman: *The Christology of the New Testament* (1973).

is salvation in him, and that he is our Lord. But her task is also to implement in her life the new commandment that we shall love each other as he has loved us (John 13 : 34-35) — love which should also reach out to those who have not yet become members of his body as he loved us and gave himself for us when we were enemies and strangers.

II. The “How” of Mission

We must now address ourselves to the second of our two questions: what form should Christian mission take? How should Christians practise mission? One of the most taxing issues in Christian missionary thinking today seems to be: what is the proper relationship between the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel and Christian service, or *diakonia* as it is termed in the Greek of the New Testament, meaning to live out the Gospel in selfless service and social action for others who are in need and trouble.

In the New Testament it seems that the task of mission is overwhelmingly thought of as being the commission to proclaim the good news — evangelization. The apostles were witnesses of the life of Jesus, his crucifixion and resurrection, and concerning these they were called to be witnesses before all people so that all may believe. In relation to this central theme, the New Testament seems to place *diakonia* — service extended to those in need — in a secondary position, and certainly more in the background than is the case with much modern missionary thought. For this change of emphasis, I would suggest, there seem to be two reasons, one theological and the other practical.

The practical reason is the result of the changed economic situation of most of the Christian world. In the early Church, the Gospel was brought from a poor country, Palestine, to the more prosperous regions of Asia Minor and Greece, and as a result we find that the daughter churches were sending gifts — “aid”, as we would say — to Jerusalem, to the mother Church which remained beset by economic difficulties. Today the situation is reversed. The countries in which the Church is numerically strong and established happens to be the richer “developed” countries and the younger churches belong to a great extent to “developing” countries, and this has had a marked effect on the practical shape of mission. Besides the political and other problems to which this situation gives rise, it has made the question of the relationship between the proclamation of the Gospel and *diakonia* a burning issue. How can we preach to starving or sick people without first helping them materially if it is in our power to do so. The New Testament itself forces such questions on us when we read such words as these of Jesus, “I have not come to be served but to serve”; and we are reminded in the first letter of John (3 : 16-17), “This has taught us love — that he gave up his life for us; and we, too, ought to give up our lives for our brothers. If a man who was rich enough in this world’s goods saw that one of his brothers was in need, but closed his heart to him, how could the love of God be living in him.”

According to Luke, writing in the Acts of the Apostles, the first office to be separated from the apostolate was that of deacon, which was to be responsible for looking after the needy in the congregation. But this decision was reached, as Acts 6 makes clear, in order to ensure that the apostles could concentrate fully on their activity of preaching:

... there were murmurings ... because the widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve disciples summoned the body of disciples and said: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6 : 1-4, RSV).

Preaching, clearly, was seen as the first duty of the apostles, and as a matter of principle the practice of the *diakonia*, or service, was considered to be the fruit of the Gospel.

Diakonia is not mission "proper" but the true fruit of the preaching of the Gospel about him who gave himself for us and who came to serve rather than to be served. But the *diakonia* should not be thought of simply as a fruit but *the* fruit of the Gospel. The whole Gospel is a witness to God's self-sacrificing love in Christ and the purpose of the preaching of the Gospel is that Christians should be able to live in his *agapé* (love) and serve all who are in need, whether it be physically or spiritually.

But the Gospel proper remains the good news that he loved us first and that therefore we must love each other. But while our love is always to be understood as a fruit or a gift of the Spirit given when we believe in the Gospel, springing out of our thankfulness to him, we always practise it imperfectly and mix it with all sorts of other motives. When we analyse the fruit in our lives empirically and psychologically, I wonder whether it would not be more correct to call it "slag products" than "fruit". At the best it is an indication that Christ touched us with his love, but it is also an indication that he has met us in all our weaknesses, sins and impurities. It follows, however, that the fruit, if such it may be called, cannot itself create faith or give men new life, for it is the pure Word of God who alone is able to create faith. And Christians should never forget this as they practise their mission: their missionary responsibility is to preach, and our only motive in *diakonia* should be, as an expression of love, to assist the needy person because he is in need.

In the New Testament, *diakonia* always has its natural beginning in the Church amongst the believers, but it is never limited to them; they provide the beginning but not the end. This seems now and then to be forgotten in modern mission, where we find a certain tendency to institutionalize and internationalize Christian service. This raises the question as to how far institutionalized *diakonia* may be considered a living expression of faith. Beside the temptation to make these institutions instruments of proselytization, such institutionalization may also result in the local church and congregations becoming divorced

from Christian service, and therefore becoming passive and introspective. It is my opinion that we have, in modern missionary practice, too often succumbed to the temptation to make these institutions means of influence or of evangelization; I believe our Muslim brethren have a right to blame us for this; dependence upon these as means of evangelization is also a sign that we lack faith in the Word of God and in the power of his Spirit.

When mission institutions have been used in this way, they degrade medical, educational and Christian service in general: these institutions are fully justified in themselves by the very existence of the need which they meet. If we have any ulterior motive for our service, however good, *diakonia* is no longer an expression of *agapé* but becomes a propaganda instrument.

When the Church confesses the crucified and risen Jesus to be God and Saviour, it confesses the faith of the New Testament that God is what the self-sacrificing, serving love we see in Jesus of Nazareth declares Him to be: *agapé*. The very essence of God upon which his divinity rests is *agapé* (I John 4 : 8-10) and therefore the Church does not feel it to be impossible that God the Son in his love suffers for us. And if *agapé* really is his essence, then God is completely and fully revealed for us only on the Cross. If we fail to perceive this, then the incarnation and crucifixion remain only a scandal or foolishness.

From this it follows that the purpose and meaning of the life of the Church is to live in his love and to try to live it out in service in the Church and outside. To be compelled by his love is therefore empirically the gift of salvation — saved from self-centredness and self-consciousness. To serve those who are in need of service is therefore a necessary activity within the life of the Church, but it should not be misused as an instrument of influence or propaganda, and thus be degraded. Therefore, we should welcome the new trend where Churches, organizations and mission agencies are taking part in social/economic programmes without any evangelistic purpose or intention. My only concern is that the local churches should be drawn into this, not only with personnel but also with locally-raised funds. The undertaking of such work together with non-Christian bodies is also a development which should be welcomed.

When we remember the affluence of most of the so-called Christian countries, we should pray and work for a much greater involvement in all sorts of economic and social projects in the suffering world. However, my personal conviction is that the word "mission" should not be used in this connection, for there is, as I have argued from the New Testament, a proper scriptural distinction between evangelism and service.

In this connection it is important that we do not forget the eschatological aspects of the New Testament. The Church is not here to save the world nor to remain in the world forever. The Church is in the world and is called to serve the world but she is not of the world. The Church is a people walking towards a goal, looking forward to Christ's coming again. This can so easily be ignored in our eagerness to serve and improve man's situation here and

now. Such eagerness is entirely proper, provided always that we remember that the real Gospel is not development or progress but the proclamation that He loved us first and that we only attain real life through faith in the crucified and risen Lord.

What, then, should we say in positive terms about the practice of mission? What form should mission take in principle? The New Testament is quite clear that it should be the proclamation of the good news about what God the Father has done for us in Jesus Christ. The proclamation of the good news in Jesus through preaching to all men (and the giving of its fruits in the sacraments) is the instrument by which the Holy Spirit creates faith. As we read in Paul's letter to the Romans (10 : 14, KJ): "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" The apostolate to preach, the proclamation of the good news about Christ, is given to the Church not only for formal preaching but that the whole life of the Church should be a witness to the love of God as it meets us in Jesus Christ. As a reaction against the too narrow definition of preaching in some Protestant mission circles, we are today inclined to stress that the whole life of the Church should be a witness to Christ, including its liturgical life, *diakonia*, and all the many different ways by which the life of the Church is expressed in and to the world. But if we are to take the New Testament as the normative source regarding the practice and form of mission, we cannot escape the fact that the proclamation of the Gospel is seen to be the main expression of the apostolate of mission.

The main task of the twelve disciples and of the other apostles (Barnabas, Paul, etc.) was to evangelize. The very meaning of this word is to proclaim the Good News. The content of the message is handed over to the evangelist. He does not primarily present his own experience, although he may want to share it, but is commissioned to deliver a message. The main task of the twelve was to proclaim the *kerygma* or preaching about Christ. "The apostle", it has rightly been said, "does not have any personal influence on the inner form of his commission".

The characteristic mark of the office of the twelve disciples and the apostles was that they were evangelists, called to deliver a message. It goes without saying that they believe absolutely in the message, and they themselves witness that it is truth and life, but they do not have any influence over its content; that is given. The content is Jesus, his incarnation, his suffering, his death and resurrection. Moreover the interpretation of the meaning of the message was given to the original apostles as a gift from the Lord himself, through the Holy Spirit. They were not free to change the interpretation according to the circumstances. The Gospel is the proclamation of what happened in Jesus Christ and what the real meaning of this happening is and what its consequences are for mankind. The content of the Gospel is not open for discussion. The official evangelization by the Church must be, in principle and

practice, the proclamation of a certain given message. This would seem, in my opinion, at least, to exclude dialogue as a proper form of evangelization and therefore of mission. What individual Christians may do in their private capacity is a different thing. Dialogue, together with the modesty and respect for other religious experiences which dialogue properly implies, may here have a rightful place. Everyone with some knowledge and experience of the piety and the expression of religious experience in non-Christian religions, in our case Islam, will of course admit that they are subjectively as good as anything in Christian piety and experience, and we as Christians must respect them as much (or as little) as we respect our own piety and experience. Some of us, indeed, may doubt if our own piety and experience as such is really worth sharing, but while it may be very right to be modest in this regard, the evangelist, as herald, is not called to be modest on behalf of his Lord or on behalf of the Gospel.

A quite different issue is that the Gospel we are called to proclaim is to be translated not only into different languages, but also into different cultures, different thought patterns and different religious worlds. Here dialogue is definitely necessary for practical and hermeneutic reasons — in order that we can be sure that the listener understands anything at all. Often the evangelist may feel that everything he says is understood in quite a different way from that which he intends. Paradoxically, this may especially be true in the case of Islam, because there are many religious ideas, terms and structures which seem so similar whereas in fact their specific meanings and context are often quite different from those of the Christian.

Here we face what I regard as the major practical theological difficulty in the Christian apostolate to Islam, and I believe that the *da'wah* of Islam to Christians in some way must meet the same problem. In this context dialogue might prove to be a practical necessity for both parties. But on the other hand, it should be clear that Jesus Christ has commissioned his Church to proclaim a message given by him and we are not at liberty to change this message as it may be deemed necessary or expedient in the dialogue situation.

We do not enter dialogue with an open mandate to modify the message we bring if need may arise. Christians are bound, today as always in the past, by their obedience to the apostolic witness to Christ as recorded in the Scriptures. As the content of the Gospel is given, according to the New Testament, we may also say that in principle the form is given. It is proclamation and more specifically proclamation which has the form of a promise. This is especially clear in the writings of St Paul as evidenced particularly in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Romans. The Gospel is not our word but God's own creative Word, because it has a promise for those who hear that he will save them through that which has been achieved in Christ.

The apostle or evangelist, indeed any preacher, has not only to preach the good news of Jesus Christ, but as part of the good news which he preaches to proclaim God's promise of absolution. It is this which invests the preaching

with God's own authority, and where the promise is absent the preaching is reduced to words about God and it is no longer God's own Word. And precisely because the evangelism contains both proclamation and promise, the Holy Spirit can use this word to create faith. In the end it is God himself who speaks, in the proclamation of the Good News, and it is this which we in a Christian sense call the "Word of God", of which the Scripture is a trustworthy record and Canon by which we judge.

He who commissioned the apostles is still the head of the Church, living and present with us where the word is preached and the sacraments administered, where two or three are gathered together in his name. In certain practical situations this may outwardly take the form of dialogue but in principle it is something quite different. It is God himself addressing sinful man with a word of forgiveness, a promise, a word of life to one who is dead.

It is through this promise, God's own Word to me, that the Holy Spirit creates faith. Faith is God's free gift of grace and not something which is the result of argument, persuasion or propaganda. Therefore the Church should not use any means other than proclamation for its evangelization. Man does not in himself have power to believe or to trust that in God's grace and mercy his sins are forgiven here and now, and that God is his merciful Father in Jesus Christ.

The use of any external means to proselytize only shows a false confidence in man and a lack of faith in God's Word. It is God himself who, through his own Word, God the Son, can alone reveal God. And it is God himself who can alone perceive God; God can only be perceived through God the Holy Spirit, and therefore faith is entirely dependent on the free gift of the Spirit. The issue of natural revelation — whether there can be any knowledge, true or perverse, about God outside Jesus Christ — is in the end irrelevant, for it is a quite different kind of knowledge of God about which the New Testament speaks.

In conclusion let us return to the first question discussed in this paper: Is there anywhere in the New Testament where every individual Christian is expected to witness to and confess Jesus Christ? It seems that the earliest Christian confession "Jesus is Kurios, Jesus is Lord" (I Cor. 12 : 3) was the confession which every Christian who had received the Holy Spirit was expected to make in time of persecution, as Oscar Cullman has shown us in his *The Christology of the New Testament*.

It is only in the power of the Holy Spirit that Christian can confess Jesus to be Lord. "Lord" must here be understood with the same meaning as in the confession of Thomas referred to above, "Lord God". And this remains the confession of all the Churches, and the very purpose of their mission both in concept and practice: to confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Apostolic witness as recorded in the Scriptures.



Dr al-Faruqi initiated discussion upon Bishop Rudvin's paper with the following points: (Editors)

al-Faruqi: The basic difficulty with Bishop Rudvin's paper is that it oscillates between being a historical statement and a statement of his personal faith. It commits the error of taking Matthew 28 : 14 as the historical evidence for the origin of the missionary command. Biblical criticism has shown that this verse belongs to a later stage of Christian development and could not have been said by Jesus. Equally, although baptism was known in those days, it was not institutionalized as a Christian sacrament in Jesus' time; nor had the "trinity" then become integral to Christian doctrine. On the other hand, the paper's claim that since the content of the Gospel has been given and since mission is dependent upon the Gospel, neither is open to discussion, strikes me as contradictory to the historical standpoint altogether. Such statements of personal faith cannot serve as basis for discussion in this conference convened precisely in order to discuss mission, Christian as well as Muslim.

Bishop Rudvin's claim that Jesus' "mission" was addressed to all men runs counter to Jesus' own statement as reported by the same authority (viz. Matthew) that he was sent only to the lost tribes of Israel. He also underrates the reformatory character of Jesus' mission, namely, to combat the specific issues of ethnocentrism and legalistic externalization of religion which had arisen among the Jews. Jesus spoke to an acute problem among his own people. This is not to deny that Jesus' mission later led to a universalist stand by Christians in consequence of his spiritualizing, internalizing and personalizing call. But his objective was to break Jewish aberration.

Instead of a paper on the nature of mission, the Bishop has given us a paper on Christology, which is not the subject of this conference. Abuse of the missionary's vocation is discussable without reference to the doctrinal content of his preaching. The missionary stands here indicted with moral and political abuses of his vocation, which are condemnable whatever the religious doctrine in whose name he claims to preach. If Christian mission to Muslims has helped to reopen the old Christological question thought to be settled once for all by the Council of Nicaea, Muslims welcome the development.

If the Christological question is to be raised at this conference, this necessarily implies reconsidering all the christologies of the ante-Nicene fathers as well as that of Islam as standing on a par with that of catholic Christianity. No discussion of the Christological question will be beneficial if one Christology is to be raised above the rest and made arbiter of all.

However, questions of methodology have to be raised and agreed upon before any christological matter is discussed. I would suggest that Christians wishing to enter into dialogue with Muslims eschew the "personal", "experiential" basis on which the Bishop based religious knowledge as epistemologically precarious. Any prejudice or hallucination can then masquerade as "religion" and claim authority on that basis.

All the arguments which the Bishop gave in support of his Christology strike me as those of a mind not acquainted with the poetical bent of the Semitic mind which belonged to Jesus as well as his disciples. Statements such as "I am the truth, the way, the life", "I and my Father are one", "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father", "lord and master", which can be repeated today by any mystic; the plural form "We" of Genesis which is still an agreeable convention of politeness — all these are common in Semitic parlance where they do not at all mean what Christians take them to mean. Like the ancient Hellenes', the Western mind does not seem to have the capacity to take Semitic anthropomorphisms, figures of speech, allegories and the like, poetically. The Semitic notion of transcendence was lost to the Christian tradition because transcendent truth can be expressed only in poetical language.

There is the even more serious side of religious and moral content. The claim that Jesus is God is the consequence of two assumptions: first, that all mankind is necessarily and hopelessly fallen (the "peccatist" thesis); and second, that God has saved them by suffering death as price of their fallenness (the "saviorist" thesis). The first is a warped view of human nature which is always as capable of doing the good as the evil. It is a non-empirical, psychopathic view of history. The second, by its emphasis on vicarious suffering, is repugnant to moral sense and cognition and destroys God's transcendence, the divine ultimacy, on the metaphysical and axiological levels. It denigrates man, flouts his moral responsibility, and renders not only *diakonia*, but religion itself, meaningless.

The separation of *kerygma* (proclamation) from *diakonia* (service) is welcome. But this elevation of *diakonia* to the place of first Christian duty is unacceptable, and precisely for the reasons Bishop Rudvin has given.

Rudvin: Several of your comments are addressed to the main point of my paper, and I must reaffirm the fact that the central proclamation of the good news of the Gospel is that Jesus is Lord, for which the Gospel in Greek used the word *kurios*. Now the early Church used the word *kurios* of Jesus in the same way as the Jews used *adoni* (Lord) in place of the holy name of God, *yaweh*, in the Hebrew of the Old Testament. In this way the early Christians could attribute to Jesus, *kurios*, all that the Jews had attributed to *yahweh*. *Kurios* in the New Testament means nothing less than *rabb al-'alamîn* (Lord of all Being) in the usage of the Qur'ân. The earliest confessions of faith in the New Testament are Christological rather than trinitarian, as Oscar Cullmann has shown in his study *Early Christian Confessions*, the thesis of which still stands despite criticism. Indeed, the whole New Testament is a Christological confession, summed up in the confession of Thomas recorded by John, "My Lord, my God" (Jn 20 : 28) which in Hebrew would be *yahweh elohaini*. The mission of the Church is to make real for mankind Jesus as *kurios*, in whom there is salvation and eternal life. I believe this is the only justification for mission, and without this conviction I would never have dared to try to bring the Gospel to Muslims.

al-Faruqi: But your use of the term “Lord” is loaded with ambiguity, and assigning to it your specific meaning has led to a great deal of trouble.

Rudvin: But the New Testament must be taken in the light of the Old Testament. Take, for example, St John who, in chapter 8 : 58, records Jesus as saying, “Truly I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am”. Here Jesus is claiming the Divine Name “I am” precisely in the Old Testament sense. Did John corrupt it? You may think so. But if we accept the New Testament as an authentic witness, then we are bound to interpret it in the light of Old Testament meanings.

al-Faruqi: But it is precisely the identity of “scripture” which is here in question, as well as the methodology of understanding and interpreting it. Knowing that the early Christians had no “scripture” except that of Judaism, that the twenty-seven books of the New Testament we know today were not canonized by the Church as “scripture” until the third century of the Christian Era, at which time there were countless apostolic epistles and “Gospels” in circulation, how can you be sure that the “Gospel” as we have it today (27 books), and as interpreted in Lutheran theology, contains the truth about God? Are not other reports about God worthy of some scholarly scrutiny? Take the word *kurios* which you claim Jesus applied to himself with a meaning similar to the *rabb al-‘ālamīn* in the Qur’ān. The meaning you give it is based upon the report by John, a century after Jesus, that a certain Thomas confessed Jesus as his Lord and God. In those days there were many people attributing divine status to all sorts of men. How can you take this as evidence that Jesus called himself God? Then you say that in addition to this so-called “evidence”, you experience Jesus as the living Lord. This is a reflection upon you, as much as Thomas’ confession — even if proved historically — is a reflection upon him, not Jesus. It is indeed to be regretted that we have no documents from Jesus. But this ought to make us all the more careful as to what we ascribe to him *in absentia*.

Rudvin: Let me make one thing clear. By the word “Gospel” — in Greek “*Euangelion*” — I do not mean at all what the Muslim means by “*Injil*”, and I want to clarify this point to avoid Muslims interpreting the Christian Gospel in Muslim terms. “Gospel” means “proclamation of the good news”, good news about the Christ event, about Jesus in whom and through whom the Kingdom of God comes into being. The Gospel is something living, and though its proclamation has been recorded in the books of the New Testament, these are not themselves the Gospel. The Gospel is good news proclaimed to the Church, which the Church in turn proclaims, and semantically in Greek it excludes the meaning of a “Book”.

Hajjar: I very much appreciate the way that Bishop Rudvin has dealt with the concept of Christian mission, although there are many other and fundamental emphases within the Christian tradition which would have to be included in order to make of it a comprehensive, ecumenical statement on the

“why” of mission. But given the nature of this meeting, I would have liked to have seen a more specific, more direct addressing of particular Muslim concerns. For example, there is the difficulty which Muslims experience, at the conceptual level, of appreciating why Jesus Christ is so fundamental to Christian teaching and activity, there being no point of human comparison in Islam; or again, the Muslim’s difficulty of appreciating how Christians see the motive of mission in Christ’s death on the cross, their view of the crucifixion as being for the salvation of all mankind. Here, again, there is no point of comparison with the Islamic understanding of either man or of “salvation”. To avoid any ambiguity for the Muslims, could you elaborate the idea of redemption in mission and the significance it has for witness?

Rudvin: By salvation I mean having a personal relationship with God; God declares himself in a loving and forgiving relationship to man in Jesus Christ. Mark, for example, records how Jesus, seeing the faith of those who carried the paralytic to him, said, “My son, your sins are forgiven”. The Jews responded by accusing him of blasphemy: “Who can forgive sins but God alone” (Mark 2 : 5-8). But for Mark it is clear that Jesus brings salvation, forgiveness, in this world — which is what the Kingdom of God is all about: God establishing a personal relationship with man, through the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. And for this reason I am sympathetic towards the Orthodox idea of man being drawn into the divinity of God. All this shows that the real meaning of the nature of God is forgiving love, expressed in Greek by the word *agapé*. And this calls us away from any form of Christian religious intolerance towards the very heart of the Gospel.

al-Faruqi: Permit me to remove some ambiguity regarding the term “salvation”. In its general sense, Islam does of course hold that salvation is man’s deep religious need. Allah is the Saviour Who forgives man his sins and saves. In Christianity, however, “salvation” has another meaning, that is, pulling man out of the sinful predicament into which he is “fallen”, by nature of his very existence on earth as man, and from which he can never extricate himself by his own effort, no matter how great or moral he be. It’s true, such “salvation” does not exist in Islam’s vocabulary.

Now it seems to me that the Christian claim that Jesus is God is based on two assumptions: that all mankind is necessarily and hopelessly fallen — what I call “peccatism”, and that God has rescued men by paying the price for their fallenness. But if men were thus fallen, why should God have rescued them anyway? To argue that it is an expression of God’s *agapé* is to argue in a circle, because his *agapé* would more logically be the consequence of his having rescued them and to argue some kind of cosmic justice is a Manichaen view. Moreover, the crucifixion, as vicarious suffering, is opposed to our moral sense.

With these issues still in the air, Dr Castro introduced a further suggestion about the "why" of mission: (Editors)

Castro: In your paper, do you show with sufficient clarity the relationship between the "why" of mission and the Christian response to the love of God in witness? When we speak to Muslims about the Gospel, should we not emphasize that we do so, as the Apostle Paul said, because the love of Christ constrains us? What about mission as the Church's expression of *agapé*, the natural consequence of the treasure of the Church's faith?

Rudvin: This is fine for the personal life of the individual Christian, but not for the evangelism of the Church. As the motive of mission I find it too individualistic, too Protestant an interpretation of the Gospel. What the Apostle was actually describing in II Corinthians 5 : 14 is the motivation of his own apostolate — being constrained by love in his divine commission. But we should not as individuals identify ourselves with Paul's apostolate; our identity is rather with the congregation in Corinth to whom Paul spoke these words.

You see, I believe we must distinguish sharply between the proclamation of the Gospel, or evangelism, and Christian service, *diakonia*. Service is a very important part of Christian life and has its justification in the needs of the people who are served. But it should never be used as an instrument of mission. There should be no persuasion in mission, and to use service persuasively as an instrument of mission not only prostitutes the service but also shows a lack of faith on the part of the missionary.

al-Faruqi: I welcome Bishop Rudvin's separation of *kerygma* and *diakonia*. But what are the criteria for *diakonia*? It must have its rules and priorities, first among which is the consent of the served. In the Muslim world I believe there is no consent for the Christian *diakonia*. And even if you want to carry the Muslim to heaven on your shoulder, you must still acknowledge his priorities — and today his spiritual and political needs are more urgent than his developmental or economic ones. And before any further Christian *diakonia* takes place in the Muslim world, there is an enormous backlog of dirt in our relationship which needs to be cleaned.

Cragg: I agree with Bishop Rudvin upon the need to separate proclamation from service and compassion, if the latter is used as any sort of inducement. The accentuating problems of human poverty — in Calcutta, for example — and the structures that are involved in this are quite clearly problems confronting national governments, far beyond the private philanthropy of missionary hospitals, Red Crescent, Red Cross, etc. But at the same time, these are all problems which should bring together men of religious faith. The issues of how to serve human need in the context of the state and different religious cultures is common territory in which religions ought to generate a quality of compassion and a sense of devotion.

Dr Sanneh turned the discussion toward the problem of trans-cultural communication: (Editors)

Sanneh: Your paper gives a moving and succinct outline of Christian faith and belief, but it throws up many questions of contemporary struggle with the Christian tradition. One of those questions, for example, is: How does the Gospel help Christians to relate meaningfully to others? The confession "Jesus is Lord" is set within a certain semantic context, but translated into different African languages, for example, it raises different ideas. And the proclaimer must face the reality that part of his message is his own personality. The creed of Christianity is bound up, to greater and lesser degree, with the biography of the proclaimers, so that the listeners have to relate to the proclaimer's context as well as to the proclamation. How should we tackle this problem?

Rudvin: I agree that the translation of the Gospel into different cultural contexts is tremendously difficult and important, and it has been throughout all Christian history from the very beginning. It's for this reason that the pure Gospel could have been lost when it was transplanted into the Greek context. How then, after that, can we surely identify the Christian Gospel? Well, I believe that Jesus was not only a man in history, at a particular time and place, but that we know him also as the risen Jesus, living inside his Church as an objective ontological reality. I believe that he is now even more incarnated than before. And we know this reality through the Holy Spirit which creates faith as a gift which is given again and again.

The way we relate the Gospel to a new cultural context, such as Africa, for example, is by the new commandment (Jn 13 : 34) which lies at the heart of the Gospel. This new commandment is not just that we should love one another — this is to be found in many other religions, including Islam. The new commandment is that we must love one another "as I have loved you" — that is to say, love our neighbour, whoever he is instead of loving ourselves, in the manner of the self-giving love of Jesus. It is just the historical fact of the Cross, which was God's own act of love, which makes it possible to translate and relate the Gospel to every cultural context. So when John talks about being in God he's not talking about mysticism, *tasawwuf* (sufism), but about *agapé* which means self-giving love for all men. And here I believe we have a tremendously important point of practical and ethical content which can lead to a co-operation with other religions at a much deeper level than that of metaphysical discussion.



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