

The Principles of Apostolic Mission in our Eschatological World

by Peter P. J. Beyerhaus

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ! We are assembled here in Moscow for a meeting to which all of us have been looking forward with great expectations. In the invitation this congress has been announced as “historic”, because it is marked by three significant features: *Firstly* it highlights the emergence of a new force in World Evangelization: The dynamic launching of the Missionary Movement from the “Two-thirds World”, especially from Asia. *Secondly* it celebrates the political and spiritual opening of the “Iron Curtain” that released oppressed Christianity in the former Soviet Union to assume their active share in the church growth movement, both inside and outside its geographical borders. *Thirdly* it calls for a joining of hands between the East and the West to form a strong partnership in mission to meet the challenge of today’s global situation.

Therefore the biblical motto of our conference strikes a jubilant key note:

Arise and shine!

In such a historic moment it is appropriate not to be swept away by enthusiastic sentiments or to rush into ambitious programs. Let us rather take some time for a serious theological reflection on the biblical foundation of world evangelization. This is consistent with the tradition of AMA. At its inaugural convention held in Seoul (Aug. 27- Sept. 1, 1975) it elaborated a *Declaration of Christian Mission*. In it both the past and the present reality of Protestant Christian Mission was reflected “in the light of biblical principles... in order to clarify our task and direction”. When in preparing this lecture I re-read that Seoul-Declaration of 1975, I was impressed how thorough the founding fathers of AMA and particularly its first chairman, Dr. David Cho, had done their theological work. This is evident both in their analysis of current missiological trends and in their defining the biblical view of World Evangelization. Most of what was affirmed and refuted then can be re-stated by the same formulations even today, three decades later.

The theme given to me for this lecture is:

The Principles of Apostolic Mission in our Eschatological World

I want to divide my presentation into four parts:

- I. The Classical Motive of World Mission
- II. The Modern Crisis in the International Missionary Movement
- III. The Present Situation of World Mission: Opportunities, Challenges and Threats
- IV. The Eschatological Incentive to World Mission

I. The Classical Motive of World Mission

What was the central motive that inspired the Apostles of Jesus to take upon themselves the seemingly impossible task assigned to them by their Risen Lord? How could they dare to go out into every part of the then known earth to evangelize all nations? It was their insight into the deepest reason for Christ's own coming into the world. We find it embodied in the weighty statement recorded in John 3:16:

“So God loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

By sending his own Son and later on the Holy Spirit, God revealed himself as a *sending God*. He, thereby, designed the mission of the Apostles and that of the Apostolic Church to share in his own Trinitarian mission, the “*Missio Dei*”. This fact used to be recognized theologically in contemporary missiology. At the International Missionary Council's Willingen Conference in 1952 the famous definition was accepted:

“The missionary movement in which we participate has its origin in God. Out of the depth of His love for us, the Father has sent his beloved Son in order to reconcile all things to himself.”

The deepest source of truly apostolic mission is an eternal one. It lies in God's mysterious counsel that He would fulfill His purpose for His beloved creation finally to be wholly transformed into His kingdom in glory. In spite of the disastrous consequence of the fall, God would accomplish it by implementing His master plan of redemption. In a history of revealing and saving interventions God would liberate mankind from the bondage of spiritual blindness, sin, demonic captivity, illness and finally even death.

The way on which God proceeds in this history of redemption is marked by divine acts of *electing* and *sending* human beings: individuals and communities, to become His messengers and instruments of salvation. This starts already in the time of the Old Testament: God calls **Abraham** to leave his country and his people to go to the land which He would show him (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham is the prototype in God's world mission, because finally through him and his descendants all people on earth would be blessed. By his obedience Abraham became the father of all believers, Jews and Gentiles likewise.

The first corporate offspring of Abraham and the other patriarchs are the twelve tribes of **Israel**. With this tiny nation God enters into a unique relationship. After showing to her his redemptive power, he dignified her to be called his own, elect people, a holy nation (Ex 19:4-6). He entrusted to Israel the historic mission to become a *kingdom of priests* to all nations. This

mission was to be carried out by publicly declaring his wonderful deeds and by demonstrating Israel's holy call through being an outstanding model in perfect obedience to God's commandments.

The historic Israel as a whole did, however, not prove worthy and capable to execute her divine mission. As his answer to this failure God disclosed to the prophet Isaiah that he had found a substitute for His disobedient people. It is the "Servant of the Lord" (*Ebed Jahweh*) who in his own pastoral ministry will act as the true Israel. He takes upon himself the task to bring God's justice to the nations (Is 42: 3 f.). In performing this ministry, the servant will have to suffer a sacrificial death; but thereby He will gain a real victory: God "will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong" (Is 53:12).

Who is this mysterious Servant of the Lord, the embodiment of the true Israel, the messenger of God's revelation to the world of nations, the vicarious victim to bear God's punishment for our sins, the future King of kings? The answer to this riddle is given in the New Testament: It is nobody else but *Jesus of Nazareth*, who in perfect obedience to his heavenly Father fulfills His plan of salvation. (*Matth. 8:17; 1 Peter 2:24*) Time and again Jesus speaks about his *being sent* by the Father, both in the synoptic Gospels and more explicitly in John's Gospel. His whole life from His birth up to His ascension can be viewed as steps of one redemptive mission, as we have seen in John 3:16. In the following verse 17 we read:

*"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world,
but to save the world through Him."*

Initially, however, the universality of Jesus' mission was not disclosed yet. For he purposely restricted it to the "lost sheep of Israel" (Matth. 15:24; 10:6), thereby reminding his people of her original commission. Again Israel as a whole does not heed God's renewed call. But Jesus prepared an alternative answer: Out of the midst of the Jewish people he elects twelve men to be the core of the new Israel that would be obedient to her missionary call. He establishes a close personal relationship between himself and them; he confides to them the mystery of the Kingdom; he trains them for their future role; he invests in them some of His own authority to preach, to heal and to cast out demons (Matth 10:1.7-8). He calls them his "Apostles" which means His personal envoys who are commissioned to become His representatives as instruments to extend His own mission both to the Jews and, eventually, to all the other nations as well.

In his eschatological speech shortly before his departure, Jesus anticipates that the final stage of world history will be marked by a universal preaching of the Gospel in the entire world (Matth 24:14; Mk 13:10).

But Jesus will not perform this worldwide mission in his personal earthly ministry. Instead, he concludes it by laying the soteriological foundation for world evangelization to Jews and Gentiles alike: In accordance with Is. 53 he sheds His blood at the cross as an atoning sacrifice for the guilt of all mankind. Everyone who will repent from sin and believe in Christ now will have access to the *New Covenant of Salvation* which the Father establishes in His Son Jesus Christ (Matth 26:27; 1 Cor 11:25; Hebr 8:6.13). The earthly mission of Christ culminates in His glorious resurrection from the dead through which he is manifested to be the One to whom all authority is given, both, in heaven and on earth. In this authority Christ now pronounces to the Apostles His *Great Commission*:

“Go, therefore, in all the world, preach the Gospel to the whole creation and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matth 28:18-20 and Parallels).

But this final address to the Apostles does not only contain a commandment; the commission is born up by an equally impressive *promise*: the personal presence of Christ, the ascended Lord, amongst His sent ones until the end of the age (Matth 28:20). The form of this presence of Christ in His Church is her endowment with the gift of the Holy Spirit, sent to the Apostolic Church on the day of Pentecost.

When we ask: What is the core of the apostolic principle in mission?, the answer is evident: Apostolic mission consists in faithfully proclaiming the message of God’s redemptive work in Christ’s death and resurrection to all nations by establishing communities of baptized believers which are instructed in the commandments of Christ. This work is facilitated by a threefold encouragement of Christ himself: 1) He has invested his messengers with a share of his own authority; 2) He makes them conscious of His personal presence through the witness of the Holy Spirit; 3) He makes them confident that He Himself will conclude His and their mission when he returns and visibly sets up his messianic kingdom in power.

II. The Modern Crisis in the International Missionary Movement and the Evangelical Answer

1) Defeatist Reactions to Rising Afro-Asian Nationalism

When I look back to the beginning of my own missionary involvement in the late fifties and early sixties, I remember how much talk there was about the “**crisis in world mission**”. The end of the colonial era marked the disestablishment of Western mission domination in newly independent countries of Africa and Asia. The spirit of nationalism provoked strong reactions

against European influence even within the indigenous churches. There was the anti-Christian threat of Communism and the renaissance of non-Christian religions. Many mission agencies lost their sense of direction, and frustrated missionaries returned to their Western homes. Some prophets of doom sounded the end of the era of Christian missions or even of the Christian religion in Third World countries in general.

2) Spiritual Decline in Europe

The modern crisis in missions was not only caused by external factors, but also by *internal* ones. One was the progress of *secularism* that poisoned the Christian roots of Western culture. Science and faith had fallen apart because the former one became totally controlled by rationalistic principles. Politics came under the influence of ideologies that were pervaded by an atheistic humanism. They attributed the highest dignity and authority to man instead of God, his Creator. The public lifestyle was marked by hedonistic slogans that replaced ethical values by materialistic ones. This development had already begun at the time of the European Enlightenment, but it was accelerated when Western nations recovered from the wounds of the World War II, and a booming economy provoked consumerist attitudes. It went together with a scandalous dissolution of sexual morality.

Sadly enough the churches, too, were not immune against these influences. After a short period of revival following the horrid experiences of the war, spiritual concerns faded away. Church attendance dropped by alarming rates. The formerly so-called “Christian Occident” did not deserve its epithet anymore. This was observed with amazement by visitors from African and Asian churches. Usually they would come with high expectations to make a deep personal experience when seeing the cradles of the Reformation and the Evangelical Awakening. But they were badly disappointed by the discovery that their mother churches were tiny minorities in a secular society. They worshipped in poorly attended cathedrals which likened more museums than temples of the living God! How many of you may have experienced this shock yourselves?!

Another, equally fatal development in Western Christianity was the succumbing of the academic theology to the skeptical presuppositions of rationalistic philosophy and to the tenets of humanistic ideologies. The former found its expression in the “historic-critical method” of biblical exegesis and in the program of “demythologization”. Here the sacred texts of the Bible are treated as merely historical documents. Consequently all supra-rational elements were eliminated, including the miracles performed by Jesus and even his own divine nature, his resurrection and ascension. It is obvious that a “demythologized” Gospel has little

in common with the message of salvation once preached by the Apostles. In fact, such missionaries whose trust in the authority of the Bible is shaken by their hermeneutical training usually are incapable to preach the Word of God to a non-Christian audience with convicting force.

The vacuum left by the destructive effects of biblical criticism deprived Western Christianity of a coherent theology, without which a church or a mission agency cannot survive. A substitute had to be found. Indeed, very soon a changing variety of substitutes were discovered by Western theologians. They found them in the intellectual offers of current philosophies and ideologies. Not the Apostles Paul and John, nor the ancient Church Fathers, the Reformers, the famous evangelists of the classical revivals or contemporary biblical scholars were consulted for exegetical guidance. Instead, modern philosophers and ideologists like *Hegel*, *Marx*, *Freud* or *Rosemary Ruether* became the modern authorities, in the light of whose ideas the biblical message was re-interpreted. This led to the emergence of *en vogue* theologies that stressed social-political liberation and human emancipation as relevant expressions of the soteriological concern of the biblical authors. Through the agency of the WCC they were also exported to the churches in the Two-thirds World and accommodated by ecumenical Third-World theologians under the flag of “contextual theologies”. Typical examples are *Liberation Theology* in Latin America, *Black Theology* in the USA, *Minjung Theology* in Korea, and *Feminist Theology* world-wide. At a closer look all of these currents must be understood as a new theological form of syncretism, blending the apostolic gospel with humanistic ideas of non-Christian origin.

3. The Breakdown of the WCC's Evangelistic Concern

Conservative theologians who have followed the history of the ecumenical missionary movement from the year 1960 onwards have made disturbing observations. The spokesmen of the World Council of Churches and the missiologists consulted by them more and more have yielded to the widely spread opinion that the age of World mission in the classical sense of the word has expired. The reason given is that together with their nations, the churches as well, in Africa and Asia, have become autonomous and do not need the activities of Western missionaries anymore. They concluded that the task of the Church in relation to people that live in other religious cultures or in areas which are exploited by Western capitalism need to be redefined. The answers that were elaborated at ecumenical congresses and consultations pointed partly in the economic direction (giving financial aid in development), in the political, and partly in an universalistic direction: supporting the struggle for liberation, engaging in

inter-religious dialogue. This can be shown by an analysis of the proceedings and findings of ecumenical assemblies from 1961 (New Delhi) until 1998 (Harare), and of World Missionary Conferences from Bangkok (1973) to Salvadore/Bahia (1996).

4. The Evangelical Protest

The new direction in mission by the Conciliar Movement soon disturbed those Christians who faithfully remained within the traditional stream of Christian missions. Many of them had been involved in the Ecumenical Movement as well, regarding it to be a genuine fruit of a long-standing interdenominational cooperation in the cause of World Evangelization. Believing Christian leaders in America and Europe felt compelled to voice their concern in a series of theological manifests. The most spectacular ones were the *Wheaton Declaration* (1966), the *Frankfurt Declaration on the Fundamental Crisis of Christian Mission* (1970), the *Berlin Declaration on Ecumenism* (1974) and the *Lausanne Covenant* (1974). On the latter two documents mission leaders in the Two-third world had made their impact as well. The first purely Asian manifesto voicing the same concern was the *Seoul Declaration on Christian Mission* (1975) to which we have referred already. In this way it became evident that the call back to the classical understanding of Christian mission was not a concern nearly of some tradition minded European theologians – as it was alleged in Bangkok 1973. Rather it articulated that faithfulness to the Apostolic principles which had given coherence and dynamics to the universal missionary movement throughout its history. Those theological statements served as important catalysts of a growing fellowship between evangelical leaders and mission bodies on all six continents. Thus they also prepared the way for meetings like our present one in Moscow, where we try to embark on a joined East-West-venture in promoting a “*New Global Partnership for World Mission*”.

5) Re-Alignment of the Evangelical Movement

In contrast to the conciliar demise of evangelism there was a new gathering of evangelical forces, a new sense of spiritual vocation. This led to the formation of a mighty movement with the renewed desire of the classical student volunteer movement to “*evangelize the world in this generation*”.

A leading role was taken by *Billy Graham*. He became instrumental in convocating two International Congresses for Evangelization, one in Berlin (1966) the other in Lausanne (1974), which was followed by ICOWE II in Manila (1989) and supplemented by a number of

regional assemblies on similar lines. They all contributed to bring about and to strengthen a new evangelistic vision and the readiness to cooperate towards its implementation.

III. The Present *Kairos* of World Mission: Opportunities – Challenges – Threats

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

When we accepted the invitation to this conference we were quite aware that our purpose was not only to thankfully commemorate the founding of the Asia Mission Association 30 years ago. We knew that we were summoned jointly to pray for and to design strategic plans for the completion of the Unfinished Task. As we analyze the situation in which this task is tackled today, we realize that there has hardly ever been a more appropriate time for bold missionary ventures in world mission than the present one. For we are facing exciting opportunities, important challenges and also new obstacles to be overcome by faith. Let me briefly deal with these three aspects of our *kairos*, i.e. the decisive hour in world evangelization.

A. Encouraging Opportunities

1. Revivals and Mass Movements

In several countries of the world there have been remarkable revivals and mass movements towards Christianity in recent years. This happened partly also in some Eastern European countries after their liberation from Communism: Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic countries, Rumania. In other countries there is a great openness or even hunger to listen to the Word of God.

During the last decades, non-Western churches have grown so much that the center of spiritual gravitation has moved from North to South and from West to East. The statistics of *David Barret* tell us that at the beginning of this 20th Century there were 560 million Christians in the world, 84% of whom were living in the West. At the beginning of the 21st Century there were an estimated number of 2 billion Christians, of whom only 29% lived in the West.

The main problem is that church adherence is growing much faster than church leadership can care for the spiritual needs of these new converts. Whilst in the USA you have one academically trained leader for 1.300 Christians, in some Two-Thirds World countries one such leader has to serve 10 or even 20 times that number of church-members and inquirers.

2) The New Mission Movement from the Two-Third's World

One of the most exciting features of the modern world missionary movement is the emergence of a new missionary force from such churches which formerly were regarded as “receiving” churches. In the last three decades of the 20th century this new factor has become so ostentatious that by now missionaries from the Two-third’s world outnumber those from the West. In 1999 31% of the worlds 138.000 missionaries came from non-Western churches. The total number of the Third World missionary force has risen from 5.000 in the year 1980 to 37.000 in 1990, and to 115.000 in 2002.

It is not only this numerical strength which is exciting. We also may rejoice about the fact that these African, Asian and Latin American missionaries do not meet with major resistance to their service because of cultural clashes. Sometimes their acceptability even grows with the distance of their native home. There are many countries – especially in Muslim areas – where Asian Christians can move quite freely, whilst Westerners are met with distrust for historical and political reasons.

At the world conferences of the Lausanne Movement (in 1974, 1980, 1989) a gradual shift of the spiritual center of gravity from “Eurica” to “Latfricasia” (D. McGavran’s terminology) could be observed by the number of participants representing the six continents. Most significant was the responsible share which some church leaders from these continents took in conducting those conferences: *Philip Teng, Thomas Wang, Minora Okuyaman, Bong-Rin Ro, David Cho, Samuel Escobar, Festo Kivengere, Tokunboh Adejemo, Gottfried Osei-Mensah, Petrus Oktavianus and Samuel Kamaleson*. We are glad that some of them take a leading share in this AMA conference as well. Strong impulses from them are adding greatly to the vision and dynamics of the Evangelical Movement for World Mission.

3. The “AD 2000 and Beyond Movement”

When responsible leaders of the international missionary movement began to realize that the third millennium after the birth of Jesus Christ was approaching, they were inspired to conceive gigantic plans through which the Gospel should become known to all humanity and our Lord really be worshipped in all nations as Savior of the world. It is remarkable how church and para-church agencies of various confessional backgrounds became involved in these schemes – ranging from Pentecostalism up to Roman Catholicism. Although most of these plans were conceived independently from each other, a growing mutual consultation and cross-fertilization developed during the last decade of the 20th century that allows us to speak collectively about the “AD 2000 Movement”. The ideas and designs have been presented at a number of congresses. One of them, the Global Consultation on World Evangelization

(GCOWE 95), met in Seoul in October 1995, with 4000 participants from 186 nations. It coined the motto: “*A church for every people and the Gospel for every person*”, and challenged all participants to pray especially for the unreached peoples of the world. Particularly they mentioned the *10/40-window*, i.e. the geographical belt between the 10th and the 40th latitude stretching from the Atlantic East-Coast to the Pacific West Coast, an area in which more than 2 billion people are living, the majority of them still unreached by the Gospel. They include the large blocks of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Meanwhile, the Third Millennium has commenced without these schemes having been fulfilled completely. But the involved missions remained eager to cling to this vision which they now extended by the clause “*and beyond*”.

Seen in a flexible attitude, the program still appears to be not utopic, if we consider that our Evangelical movement commands over powerful broadcasting companies. The biggest of them were amongst the first evangelistic agencies that geared themselves into the AD 2000 vision. At the Lausanne II ICOWE in Manila 1989, they announced that their combined networks already covered the entire surface of our globe. In their manifold programs the Gospel is preached in 142 different languages, and every year additional ones are included either by them or by regional Christian radio stations. Thus theoretically speaking the goal as set forth by the “AD 2000 and Beyond”- program appears at least feasible.

4. Opening of formerly closed areas

There was a time when international mission leaders used to divide up the present world between so called “open” and “closed” areas. The former ones were located mainly amongst Animistic tribes in Africa, Oceania, parts of Indonesia and India as well as in Latin America. Even then, bold pioneer missionaries like Brother Andrew reminded us that in view of Rev 3: 7 it is biblically illegitimate to speak of “closed” areas. For not even the fiercest adversary is able to entirely shut off his dominion to the entrance of the Gospel. It is the Risen Christ “*who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*” Thus at any time of modern history, too, there have always been courageous Christians who in spite of persecution assembled for prayer meetings and even witnessed about the Gospel to their neighbors. And there were always evangelists and mission agencies who developed ingenious designs to support these underground churches in their daring ministry. This was especially the case in the *Soviet Union*, in *Red China* and in other countries of the Communist bloc. The churches in the “free world” knew very little about them and thought that the Christian communities in those countries were about to be exterminated. But it was

exactly during this period that the Lord in mysterious ways did a marvelous work. He did not only save His people from destruction and being silenced. More than that, He even prepared them for a time of spiritual resurgence that, when delivered from their bondage, they would evangelize freely, plant new local churches and rejoin the Universal Church in her venture for world evangelization.

In *China*, this became evident in the period initiated by Nixon's "Ping Pong Diplomacy" during the later 1970ies. To our amazement we discovered that in form of the "House Church Movement" Protestant Christianity had grown by leaps and bounds, having multiplied thirty times beyond their size in 1950. Today it is estimated and confirmed by the Beijing government that the total number of churches (both registered and unregistered) reaches about 60 millions. They still cannot be joined by Western missionaries; but missionaries from Korea are already at work amongst them, and some of their needs can be met also from other agencies outside China, as e.g. theological literature to be used in training Chinese workers. – A similar spiritual miracle has happened to our fellow Christians in the former *Soviet Union* (now CIS), as we joyfully witness at this Moscow Conference. As a German citizen who's parental home is in Berlin, the once divided city, I can appreciate personally what a tremendous relief was felt by our fellow Russian Christians when the incredible happened and the Iron Curtain was pulled down in 1990. Since then, surviving churches have been strengthened; through an indigenous church growth movement more congregations were added to the Christian community, new ministers have been called, and a growing number of them is trained for leadership in pastoral, missionary and theological services. It is a great joy to all of us foreign participants to meet many of them here, share in your spiritual experiences and join hands to establish global partnership for evangelizing the East and the West!

B. New Historic Challenges

As we have entered into the third millennium we can observe how mankind is rapidly changing in its social composition. I can only mention **four major trends** which all are significant for world evangelization:

1) Population Growth; 2) Urbanization; 3) Predominance of the young generation 4) Poverty.

1) Population Growth:

Mankind is growing in amazing speed. This constitutes a terrific challenge to the work of world evangelization if we do not want to fall back in our race to enlarge the proportion of people who have been won for Christ. In **1968**, *Donald McGavran* referred to the Mission

Decree of the II. Vatican Council and spoke about the 2 billion people who never have had an opportunity to listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In **1974** at Lausanne, we were challenged to make plans for the 2.7 billions still unreached people, and by AD **2000**, the world population had grown to 6 billions, out of which one half still live in unreached areas. This calls for a drastic increase of the missionary task force and - more important - its re-deployment to move from fairly evangelized to quite un-evangelized areas. One of them is *Inner Mongolia*, a country officially closed to organized Christian preaching; but its local authorities are tolerant over against religious plurality. A former disciple of mine is the only trans-cultural witness (he does not call himself a missionary!) within a large area, with a distance of 600 kilometers to his nearest European colleague!

2) Urbanization

More and more people move from their ancient rural culture into the modern civilization of the city or even the megapolis. Here they enjoy or at least hope to find a multiple choice of professional careers, associations, amusements and consumer goods. But at the same time they are losing the familiar bonds of their native community. Thus they risk to get lost in loneliness and anonymity. However, the dissolution of those former social ties also constitutes a liberation from religious sanctions. That opens a chance more freely to consider the Gospel as a potential spiritual option. A mission program must be sensitive to the new needs, hopes and dangers and adapt the mode of presenting the Gospel and shaping the Christian fellowship according to the cultural context. The challenge of urbanization is ranking highly in the evangelical mission agenda. For the trend is irreversible. Whilst in 1900 just 5,5 % of mankind had settled in cities larger than 100.000, by the year 2000 the proportion had grown to 40 %. Most of all metropolises are already or will be sited in the Two-thirds World. If we cannot find new forms of witnessing and ministering to the life of people in the cities, the church might easily become marginalized.

Fortunately, many Christians in Asian countries have been able to cope with the socio-economic transformation. They have established strong and well organized city churches which are attractive to their surrounding. They have experienced remarkable growth and developed pastoral and evangelistic programs in which members can serve with their talents and are trained for leadership. Quite a number of the city churches are responsible even for sending and supporting missionaries to other parts of the world. Here the Pauline city-based strategy finds a re-iteration under modern conditions.

3) The predominance of the young generation

In many countries in the Two-Thirds World, the young people under 18 years constitute half of the population. At that formative period of their biography young people are still very open to a variety of influences. Our missionary programs must be tuned into their emotional wave length and try to answer their vital questions! At the same time, it is important to discover the different talents amongst our Christian youth in order to prepare them for active responsibility in the church-life. Some churches do not grow because they cling too much to the ancient principle of senior authority. The true solution will be a combination of both, senior wisdom and junior dynamics.

4) Widening gap between the rich and the poor

Most of the present population explosion takes place amongst people who are living below the existential minimum income. They are harassed by poverty, sickness, homelessness, crime and political suppression. The poor are calling upon us to develop an approach sensitive also to their social needs. If we fail to do so, we shall become inhuman in our preaching to them. But let us not forget: The deepest need even of persons living in utter poverty is to get reconciled to God and reconciled to their neighbors. When people have found a new confidence that they are not lost but precious in the sight of God, new hope can be kindled in them, and they will be more ready to cooperate in social schemes which are directed towards strengthening their own initiative and their sense of communal solidarity.

At the same time, the utter failure of the secular authorities and agencies to cope with the constant increase of tribal fighting, economic depression and devastating epidemics like AIDS reminds us that we are living in a fallen world heading for its final self-destruction. It is true: We are charged to exhibit the mercy of Christ by enhancing our message of faith with deeds of love. In this way we can ameliorate the miserable conditions of our suffering fellow human beings. The radical change, however, can only come when God himself will transform his first creation into the messianic Kingdom of peace.

C. New Threats to the Missionary Movement

We still have to consider a third factor conditioning our missionary movement in the 21st Century: We have to be mindful of the counter-actions of Satan who tries his utmost to impede the world-wide witness to the nations. For the devil knows that his time is short and that the Second Coming of Christ will mean the final destruction of his own dominion on earth. He cannot stop the course of the Gospel, but he can delay it, and he constantly

mobilizes new forces to do so. I cannot analyze all the manifold strategies of the Enemy but want to mention some of the most dangerous counter-forces meeting us today. They are working not only from outside but have intruded even into the churches.

1) Fundamentalist Islam

Firstly: The most fierce force from outside today is the advance of **fundamentalist Islam**, the religion of the False Prophet Mohammed. Most of the present day persecution of Christians happens in totalitarian Islamic countries, especially in the Sudan and in Iran. These countries strictly forbid an open practice of the Christian faith. Yet even there the witness for Christ cannot be silenced completely, although the price for it will be martyrdom.

The shock of the 11th September 2001 has alerted the world to the risk that fanatical Islamism can instigate its followers to acts of **terrorism**. One unpleasant result is that many Christians tend to equate Islam as such with murderous forms of “*jihad*” (holy war) and to suspect each Muslim to be a potential terrorist. – On the other hand, the recent Anglo-American war in Iraq had the opposite effect that in many Islamic nations Christianity is equated with a crusading mentality, and a wave of solidarity is preparing a pan-Islamic alliance against both, the state of Israel and the Christian religion.

The evangelical movement for world evangelization can never share an anti-Muslim attitude, for we regard the Muslim people, too, as fellow human beings, sinners though, for whose salvation Jesus Christ has shed his blood on the Cross. In the countries from which the delegates at this conference come, there exist at least Muslim minorities, in some cases even majorities. Here our fellow Christians witness to them about God’s sacrificial love to all people created by Him. Therefore we should share our experiences how work amongst Muslims is carried out properly, neither in an aggressive nor a timid mood, but rather in truly sympathetic spirit.

2) Renascent Eastern Religions

In addition to Islam there is the counter-force of **East-Asian Religions**. In some of them there are fundamentalist movements, too, hostile to Christianity.

This is true especially within **Hinduism** in parts of India and within **Buddhism** in Sri Lanka. The greater dangers which these religions constitute to the Christian Church, however, come through the subtle influence of Eastern spirituality. **Syncretistic cults** are spreading in Western countries as well, even here in Russia. 14 years ago already, when I visited St.

Petersburg, I watched outside the Winter Palace a group of orange clothed Russian disciples of the Hare Krishna cult, dancing to their drums and shouting the praise of the Hindu gods Hare and Krishna! We may also think of the many advertisements for *Yoga* and *Meditation* practices! They are part of the s. c. *New Age-Movement* which is spiritually poisoning our young generation. The spiritual vacuum left after the downfall of the Marxist-Leninist state ideology in the Soviet Union was only partly filled by the Christian message. Many young Russians were seduced by Eastern sects. Therefore, together with our Russian colleagues, we should search for ways how to cope with them by an authentic Christian witness.

Shamanism, too, is making inroads into the churches. It has been openly advocated and presented at the last Assembly of the WCC in Canberra 1991 by the Korean female theologian *Chung Hyun-Kyung*. At the same time, Shamanism is invading even into Pentecostal and other evangelical churches by being confused with the work of the Holy Spirit. Shamanism is one of the sources of "Prosperity Theology" which substitutes material blessing for spiritual re-generation. I am afraid that Shamanism even belongs to the background of the new Charismatic mission strategy of "Power Evangelism" that openly attacks the so-called "territorial spirits". Conforming with the Lausanne Committee, I do not find sufficient Scripture warrant for such practices. – Shamanism is also the nature of some spiritualistic sects which are spreading rapidly in China today and try to infiltrate and pervert the evangelical House Church Movement.

3) Secularism

Probably the most effective counter-force which the devil mobilizes against world evangelization is **secularism**. At present, it constitutes the greatest threat to the Christian church; for secularism diverts the souls of her members and even of her ministers from the spiritual to the material.

Some time ago a good friend of mine in Seoul, the Presbyterian theologian Dr. Kim, Myung-Hyuk, sent me a document called "The Nature of the Church". Dr. Kim had sent out a questionnaire to some leading ministers in Korea and other Asian countries. In this paper he enquired their opinion about the spiritual condition of their churches today. All respondents were unanimous that the former strength of the church has suffered severely on account of secularism. The standard of living has risen high in Korea and in some other Asian countries. Consequently, many Christians are more concerned with external values like prestige and possession than with spiritual upbuilding through the means of grace. The earlier interest in prayer meetings and Bible classes is diminishing. Even church growth theories are often

based upon secular marketing strategies. They might temporarily attract some people by their interesting offers. But no spiritual growth can be expected mainly from such practice. To many Korean ministers the intruding secularism appears to be the main reason why right now for the first time in history the Protestant churches in Korea have ceased increase in membership. Another, related reason is that some of them are torn apiece by personal rivalries, dissensions and faction fights.

Dear brothers and sisters:

In former times the Korean church did remarkably manifest the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The same could be observed also in other Eastern churches. It would be a great tragedy in the history of Christianity in East Asia if she now would lose her spiritual beauty and evangelistic vigor. Let us implore the Lord that Asia's churches might not resemble the lukewarm attitude of the worldly minded church of *Laodice*, but rather the faithful church of *Philadelphia*

IV The Eschatological Incentive of World Mission

A. The need of biblical clarity in our eschatological concept of mission

When in the first part of this lecture we reconsidered the Apostolic principles of mission, we found as an outstanding mark the dynamic eschatological orientation. The Apostles performed this evangelistic ministry in view of the approaching end of the present age: Satan's final defeat, Christ's judgment on the nations and the establishment of his Messianic Kingdom in power (Acts 1:8). Jesus himself had imparted that view to them when he prophesied that the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come (Matth 24:14; Mk 13:10).

Paul, the first Apostle to the Gentiles restlessly hurried from one province to the next, expecting that he would encounter the Second Coming of the Lord already in his own lifetime. Particularly he held the view that the entrance of the fullness of believers from the Gentile world will be the prelude to the final corporate conversion of Israel. This will happen at the appearance of their "*Deliverer from Zion who will turn godliness away from Jacob*" (Rom 11:26).

This eschatological view also became one important incentive of many evangelical missionaries, e.g. Hudson Taylor, and it is maintained by them, at least principally, still today.

In contrast to the abandonment of biblical eschatology by the WCC, the motif of Christ's return was reaffirmed by the Evangelical Movement in its theological statements and its conferences on world evangelization. Remarkably the theme of the II Lausanne Congress at Manila (1989) was "*Proclaim Christ Until He Comes*". Unfortunately, however, the missiological significance of this motto was not really explored in Bible studies and lectures in the Plenary, maybe because it was taken for granted. But in fact, not even Evangelicals themselves are fully unanimous in their understanding how the progress of God's Kingdom in the present age is related to its consummation by the returning Lord himself. Severe distortions of the Church's missionary enterprise have occurred in history because its leaders did not have a clear biblical view on the connection between mission and eschatology. The *European Confession Congress*, therefore, at its gathering in March (5-7) 1990 in Frankfurt/Germany found it necessary to evaluate the findings of the Manila-Congress critically, that is, from the standpoint of the original view held in world missions. Our statement "World Mission following San Antonio and Manila 1989" expanded on the issues voiced already in the first Frankfurt Declaration 20 years before. Since I was commissioned to draft this second Frankfurt Declaration, let it be permitted to me to include a substantial quotation from this document¹:

1. The Prospects for Mission

Our Lord's messengers should know that while spiritual fruit is indeed promised for their faithful service, there can be no guarantee for full success within the present order (John 15:16). Rather we have to be prepared to meet increased spiritual struggles and persecutions as well as to suffer rejection (Mt. 10:16-25; John 15:18-21). According to Jesus' prophecy, his return will not be preceded by a Christianization of the world, but by a great falling-away (Mt. 24:9-13). Therefore a readiness for sacrifice and martyrdom, together with an active brotherly sympathy for those who suffer because of their witness to Christ, will be the positive proof of our own faithfulness (1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 2:10; 12:11).

2. Christ's Church, God's Kingdom and Mission

By mediating the Lord's own Gospel of the Kingdom (Mk. 1:15) missions prepare the way for God's sovereign rule which He will set up when He returns in glory (Mt. 24: 30f.). His Church gathered together throughout the world represents the new humanity (Rom. 5:14; 2 Cor. 5:17f; Eph. 2:14-16) and constitutes already in this passing age the merciful dawning of that kingdom of Christ. As a truly alternative fellowship – that is, a fellowship which has been renewed by

¹ The complete text is found in the homepage of International Christian Network: www.institut-diakrisis.de

the Holy Spirit – the Church provides a foretaste of the coming kingdom of peace (Isa. 2:2-4) through its activity of love (Rom. 13:8-10; 2 Pet. 1:7) and justice. In this way, by the power of God's act of reconciliation in Christ, the Church contributes to a social transformation in the world from within (Mt. 13:33; Philemon; 1 Pet. 2:9f; Jas. 2:14-17).

3. The Temporary Nature of the Social Achievements of Mission

With respect to the role that we as Christians are commanded to fill in the bringing about of more human standards of living (Jer. 29:7; Mt. 5:13-16), missions soberly recognize the limited and temporary nature of all efforts which have as their goal the preserving and improving of humanity's living conditions (Mt. 26:11). Missions are aware of the inevitable end of the first creation, as a result of sin and the power of death which have invaded it (2 Pet. 3:7-10). The promise of a „holistic salvation” will not be realized until the future redemption of our bodies (Phil. 3:20f); in connection with the eschatological renewal of the entire creation which „groans until now” (Rom. 8:18-25).

4. The Urgency of Mission

Missions are spurred on by a sense of holy urgency precisely because they await the complete fulfilment of the biblical promises of salvation at the return of Christ (Heb. 9:28b). Jesus linked his second coming, for the completion of his redemptive work, with a preceding testimony to his Gospel among all peoples, including Israel (Mt. 24:14; Acts 1:6-8; Rom. 11:25-27; 1 Cor. 9:16). At the same time mission is carried out in the awareness of the particular seasons of salvation history – „*the times of the Gentiles*” (Lk. 21:24b; Acts 16:9f) – which God has set for the proclamation of the Gospel and for its saving effects in those who receive it. At the time when the full number of the Gentiles have entered into salvation, then all Israel will be saved and God's purpose will have reached its triumphant goal (Rom. 11:11-15; 25-36).

5. Confidence in Mission

Missions take place in the joyful confidence that Jesus Christ, on the basis of the victory he has already won (Col 2:15; Heb. 2:14-16) and of his approaching final victory at the consummation (1 Cor. 15:25f; Rev. 19), will guide the work of his commissioned messengers step by step toward the fulfilment that God has prepared (Phil. 1:6). There is no human or superhuman adversary who can thwart this victory (Isa. 46:9f; 55:8-13; 1 Cor. 15:57f)!

As I said, this exposition in our Second Frankfurt Declaration was published in 1990 as a theological reminder to the Evangelical Movement at large, because the II. Lausanne Congress in Manila 1989 had neglected to clearly unfold the significance of its own

eschatological main theme. Therefore the AMA Advisory Committee when planning the program for our Moscow conference acted very wisely by giving such a central position to the eschatological context of world mission. For success or failure of this new venture to promote an East-West partnership in world mission will depend entirely upon whether we are guided by a deepened understanding of the eschatological orientation of Christ's Great Commission to his Apostles.

B. How shall the World Evangelization Movement proceed?

On the basis of what we have gathered from the Bible and from our present situation, I want to conclude my message by seven exhortations:

- 1) As we set out for a joint East-West venture in world mission, let us devote much diligence to studying the Bible as the authoritative Word of God as it relates to the West and the East. Unless we have biblical clarity and base our mission theory on the whole counsel of God, we will lose the sense of orientation and become the victims of Satanic confusion.
- 2) Let us seek spiritual renewal of our churches in general and of your pastors, workers and missionaries in particular. It is not the technical know-how of communication methods or church growth strategies that guarantee a fruitful ministry. It is first of all Christ himself who works through a human messenger fully dedicated to him in prayer and life-style.
- 3) Let us watch out with expectation and follow the guidance of Christ. He himself is the Lord of his Church and of secular history as well. A church attentive to his call will always discover new doors which he opens even into seemingly closed areas.
- 4) Let us be driven by the love of the Saviour. Let our mission motive be the "little Bible" in John 3:16: "So God loved the world that he gave His only son ..." Jesus performed his ministry with a heart full of compassion, and so he attended to the real needs of the souls and bodies of the peoples. Today, we must look at the world with the eyes of Jesus, discerning the physical misery and the spiritual suffering hidden behind it.
- 5) Let us do our work with great urgency. We are messengers of the coming King. The signs of our time clearly indicate that Christ wants to speed up the evangelistic efforts of his Church. Like himself, we too must work the works of Him who send us while it is day; night comes when no one can work (John 9:4).

6) Let us be watchful, discern the devices of the enemy and get strong in the Lord to resist the devil. It is not Christ alone who works, Satan is working as well. Let us not be seduced by false prophets in the secular world or in the church who prepare the way for Antichrist. Satan can pose as an angel of light. It is by the word of God we will discern the spirits, whether they are of God (1 John 4:1-3).

7) Let us be ready to suffer and to sacrifice. Jesus sent his apostles like sheep into the midst of wolves. The message of Christ being the only Saviour and Lord of the world is not acceptable to our pluralistic society. Even Christian theologians might brand us as "fundamentalists" who are obstacles to the process of dialogue. If we do not open ourselves to the spiritual offers of non-Christian religions, we might soon be regarded as threatening the peace of humanity. Persecution could be the consequence. In this way, the true Church the 21st Century might come to resemble the first century Church where Christians were martyred because they did not bow to the religious claims of the Roman emperors. All Asian churches and the churches in Russia have their own heroic history of martyrdom. Jesus did not guarantee either earthly reward nor great external success to his workers. But he encouraged them, as the Exalted Christ who calls Himself the First and the Last:

"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10).