

An Open Letter to The World Council of Churches

Philip Potter

Dear Mr. Potter:

Seventeen career missionaries and thirteen leaders of Third World Churches have been studying Theology of Mission Today for the past two months, reading many of the documents of the World Council of Churches, the Evangelical Movement and the Roman Catholic Church, and separating the two main strands of theological thought.

One of the documents we have considered is your report of August 1974 to Central Committee meeting in Berlin, printed in the October 1974 issue of the Ecumenical Review. It so well sums up the position of the World Council of Churches, that Church Growth Bulletin is using it as a basis for this open letter to the WCC. Our purpose is to increase understanding of what the World Council is doing and to urge that, out of respect for the Word, the fifth Assembly of the World Council meeting at Nairobi incorporate again a substantial emphasis on calling men from death to life and from darkness to light. Now, five months before Nairobi, the WCC can take action which much more truly represents the biblical revelation and the thinking of its constituent Churches - and we beg you to initiate such actions.

On the last page of your Berlin address you say, something with which we heartily agree: "We shall have to learn afresh the meaning of repentance, the turning away of ourselves from ourselves to our common Lord whose we are and whom we serve. This means that we must...relentlessly expose ourselves as a Council and as Churches to the purifying Word of the Cross, that we may be renewed...to real and costly commitment to one another and to the...unity of God's people, and of the peoples of the world whom he redeemed in Christ and whom he loves." That is, indeed, the process to which all Christians are called again and again.

As we study the theology of missions emanating from Geneva these days, read your report of August 1974, inspect the documents which have been issued to the churches to help them prepare for the Fifty Assembly, and listen to your telecast of a few days ago, we discern a tremendous concern with "the cries of the dispossessed, the powerless, the silent, the unrepresented, the struggle for social justice, changing the structures of society toward more justice and more community." As we read in your report (page 564 f) of the "wide range of studies and programmes" we come again and again to some fresh facet of this ever-arching concern. The Commission on Inter-Church Aid has been "unflinchingly active in meeting human need and seeing this need in terms of the struggle for social and racial justice." It has also "energetically carried out the Uppsala mandate to 'give the needs of development a high priority in the total programme'".

The whole Assembly has also "agonized" over two new programmes - to Combat Racism and to encourage Participation in Development. The Unit on Education and Renewal "responding to the cries of the dispossessed, the powerless...." has convened "consultations and conferences on...Liberation, sexism, the family...and youth as agents for social change".....The Office on Education has been awakening participants to their duty "to master their environment and social structures toward fuller life in justice and community".....

On page 568 you point out that the World Council has taken this direction quite openly because of the "acute consciousness of a world in which the inequities of the rich and the poor, the injustices meted out to people because of their race, sex or class, and the confrontation of nations in wars which threatened the whole human race had become intolerable". You declare "We hear him (God) say: 'I go before you. Now that Christ carries away your sinful past, the Spirit frees you to live for others.'" Bearing down heavily on the World Council, you say, is a world

situation (page 569) which "threatens the very future of international society.... Through indifference, greed, envy, fear, love of power, and short sighted stupidity, people have created or allowed to develop a demonstrably unjust economic order."

You argue that, toward this dangerous situation, three reactions are possible: They are actually four; but you mention three - a), b), and c) as follows:

- a) evade the issues by retreating into....mystical and religious escape.
- b) exercise the dangers by forcing them into the rigidities of a reassuring ideological or religious system which explains everything and explains it away.
- c) face the dangers head on, see them clearly, and discover new ways of overcoming them.

You maintain that the World Council's programmes are all grouped under c) and your considerable scorn on a) and b), which you say, you "have tried to avoid." (570) You say that "there is no way back for us into an escapism either of disengagement or of setting up ideological or dogmatic walls of defense."

Your report then continued on pages 572ff to paint out that Constituent Churches are not funding the World Council of Churches in the carrying out of its well considered programmes, as much as they ought. You feel that member Churches ought to back up what their representatives sitting on the Central Committee of the World Council have devised as the world programme. You wrote,

"The impression I have is that many of our congregations are engaged in styles of worship, Christian nurture, and programme activities which are so geared to maintaining a certain 'spiritual-security-at-all-costs' that they come perilously near to the first two reactions to the threats and challenges of our time." (573)

You say that member Churches have not found it easy to translate insights hammered out in ecumenical debate and frontier action into the life and thinking of the congregations. This involvement gap, you think, is widening. And you write that the Geneva Staff is "easily tempted to suffer from impatience and proud annoyance with our churches for not seeing what we see and not doing what we are endeavoring to do." (575Z).

At the grave risk of oversimplification, let me say that after some years of study of the conciliar position, I think you have stated that the case substantially as it appears to those of us in the Evangelical Camp. Let me set forth six aspects of the Evangelical position - a sixfold appeal which Church Growth Bulletin is making to the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

First, Evangelicals also live in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century and are parts of the distressed global village, whose this-worldly sufferings you describe so vividly. We have always been deeply concerned about physical suffering and oppression. Many of us have put in years of our lives with the down-trodden. I myself was superintendent of a Leprosy Home for many years. Mrs. McGavran and I were members of a black church in America for several years. Evangelicals are glad that WCC is concerned about the unjust social order and the grievous inequity in distribution of wealth. We are concerned too. What the Lausanne Congress said about socio-political involvement being a part of our Christian duty is for most of us rather elementary Christianity. We are descendants of Christians who fought for the abolition of slavery and for the outlawing of alcoholic drink. The Conservative Evangelical Missionary Societies usually spend more than half their income on social services - often they spend three-fourths of it in that way. This is not to say that we are all agreed on what to do in every particular case of oppression. For example, both Evangelicals and Conciliarists are divided as to what to

do in regard to oppression and injustice in Northern Ireland; but Evangelicals are troubled about it. We are substantially at one with the WCC on the vigor of its social concern.

Second, but we are amazed that Conciliar Christians achieve this emphasis on this-worldly improvements by neglecting and scorning eternal salvation. The Bible speaks so clearly about eternal salvation, about forgiveness of sin, about being saved through faith in Jesus Christ alone, about passing from death to life, about there now being no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, and on and on. We simply cannot understand how you and the Geneva staff so cheerfully consign eternal salvation to a footnote.

Indeed, we are gravely concerned lest in your scornful dismissal of reaction a) and b) you are really categorizing eternal salvation as "pie in the sky" no longer credible to man come of age. If this is really your position, if you believe that conversion is really a religious escape unless it leads men to vigorous social action of the sort you see as necessary, then it would account for the tremendous swing away from evangelism. Indeed the firm resolution with which Geneva has refused to give sinner converting, church multiplying evangelism any real place in your many programmes makes sense to us only if you have previously concluded that "sinner converting, church multiplying evangelism" is a treat into "a private world of...mystical and religious escape". Or that it is "exorcising the dangers we face by forcing them into the rigidities of a reassuring ideological or religious system which explains everything and explains it away". It would be helpful, if you would explain how these escape systems which you denigrate differ from historic Christian beliefs about salvation.

As we read the preparatory documents put out for the Fifth Assembly, your historic address to the Berlin meeting of the Central Committee, and dozens of other important Conciliar papers, we search for and do not find any department which has been "unflinchingly active in meeting the human need" of salvation from eternal condemnation. We would like to see the Assembly "agonizing" over new independent programmes to bring a hundred million nominal Christians into living relationship to the Lord Jesus, or to bring the secular urban masses in Sao Paulo into conscious joyous dependence on the Holy Spirit, or to bring even twenty thousand Chokosis in eastern Ghana into baptized obedient Bible-obeying discipleship to Christ in the next five years, and on and on. We look in vain for some "new and imaginative programmes" (566) having to do with multiplying churches among the 80 million largely landless Harijans in India of whom at least three million, searching for life, have renounced Hinduism and converted to Buddhism in the last few years.

Third, you say a few kind words about the ontological reality of salvation. For example, "God's justice manifests itself both in the justification of the sinner and in social and political justice" (565). But that is the last we hear about the justification of the sinner. The World Council seems to have spent no blood, sweat, toil and tears to help sinners realize their need for justification....On page 577 you write, "We must seek, under God's grace, to be free...to undertake the differentiated mission of God...in the power of our risen Lord." Good words!! But that part of the differentiated mission which has to do with the spread of the Christian Faith, the multiplication of Christian churches, the baptism of millions of penitent believers, is never mentioned. We find it difficult to understand this. Some of our number roundly declare that the only theological ground from which the Conciliar position is rational is a frank disbelief in the whole biblical affirmation in eternal salvation, a change of status achieved in the twinkling of an eye, through belief in the whole biblical affirmation in eternal salvation, a change of status achieved in the twinkling of an eye, through belief in Jesus Christ, and resulting in a gloriously more human life and an enormously tougher concern for our suffering brethren.

...In this connection, we commend to you a fourth reaction - that of historic Christianity - to the world situation. Somehow you seem to have overlooked this fourth position though it shines forth from the entire Bible and from 19 centuries of dedicated Christian life. The fourth reaction to the evil world which lies all around us is this: Recognize that fallen man's basic need is reconciliation with God through faith in Jesus Christ according to the Scriptures. And that consequently a major task of the World Council of Churches and of all Christians is to proclaim the Gospel and encourage men and women to accept the Saviour in the fellowship of the Church. At the same time man has numerous temporal needs and the Bible straightly charges Christians to meet these. Consequently, another major task is to heal the sick, feed the hungry, lift the fallen, change unjust structures of society, work for peace, and spread the light of learning.

Fourth, we are grieved that as between Christian brethren there should be this deep gulf. We want to propose a way of living in harmony. The Evangelicals at Lausanne have already said that both evangelism and social action are parts of our Christian duty. Evangelicals are already spending large parts of their budgets for bringing about this-worldly improvements in the populations where they serve. The salaries of most prominent advocates of social justice among Evangelicals are paid by Evangelical missionary societies. In short, Evangelicals are doing both. We invite the World Council to do both. Indeed, we believe that if you "relentlessly expose yourselves as a Council and as Churches to the purifying Word of the Cross" you will devote at least a half of your mighty resources to Gospel proclaiming, sinner baptizing, church multiplying evangelism. The alienation from your member denominations and congregations which you mention in your Berlin address would disappear if you would allocate 50 per cent of your income to programmes dedicated to serving God's justice which "manifests itself in the justification of the sinner" and 50 per cent of your income to programmes dedicated to serving God's justice which "manifests itself in social and political justice".

You write that "member churches have not found it easy to translate insights hammered out in ecumenical debate...into the life and thinking of the congregation". (574) I suggest the Geneva staff realize that God speaks equally truly to the missions of earnest intelligent Christians who live away from Geneva. The "insights hammered out in the ecumenical debate" are not all there is to the truth. Indeed, they may be somewhat warped by the vested interests which speak at Geneva. Truth may lie more with the common man in all six continents who accepts the Bible as God's Word and believes implicitly that the first task of the Christian is to beseech men to be reconciled to God.

Fifth, as we have studied the two theologies of mission today, this body of Christian scholars has come to the conclusion that two radically different systems of doctrine are battling for acceptance. The one believes that the Bible is the inspired authoritative, infallible Word. The Other believes that the Bible is the words of men through which God speaks on occasion. The one believes in eternal salvation as well as temporal improvements. The other believes that temporal improvement are about all that is certain. Beyond them we are in the realm of speculative opinions. The one believes that the Church is the Bride of Christ. The other, that the Church is one of God's many instrumentalities to bring about a juster human social order. The one believes that no man comes to the Father but by Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Bible and proclaims Him as divine and only Saviour. The other, that the Cosmic Christ has spoken and is speaking in all religions and that consequently dialogue among these religions is the correct way of mission. The one believes that the Kingdom of God will come only as God Himself destroys the enemies of mankind at the last day, and that until then only limited justice and righteousness are possible. The other believes that a new, just world order can be brought about by the cooperation of men of good will in all religions and is

obviously the first task of Christians. The list of contrasts is much longer. A division as deep and lasting as that which took place in Europe in the sixteenth century is in the making.

The fact that some Conciliarists imagine themselves to have the only position possible to intelligent men today, and are tempted to "proud annoyance" with the rather stupid Evangelicals who retreat into religious escapisms of one sort and another, confirms some Evangelicals in their opinion that the rift is final and complete.

Sixth, the Fifth Assembly of the World Council meeting at Nairobi may be the last opportunity for the World Council to take a truly ecumenical position, to declare fearlessly that the Bible speaks with final authority and utter clarity about eternal salvation, the soul, eternal damnation, and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. And also that it speaks with great clarity about "loving one's neighbors as one's self, and letting justice roll down as the waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Let the Fifth Assembly therefore reverse the Uppsala/Bangkok trend. That was a partial emphasis. It is tearing the Church apart. Unless reversed, it will tear it apart still more. What is needed is a world program equally devoted a) to church growth, that is to calling men and tribes and clans and nations from death to life, through faith in Christ alone, on the basis of biblical faith alone; and b) to practicing social justice and extending brotherhood. Let the Fifth Assembly propose great evangelistic programs for the extension of the Church and great programs of social action for the extension of humanization of various kinds. Then finally, let the Fifth Assembly encourage all its constituent Churches to allocate funds and personnel to each of the two main thrusts in accordance with their consciences.

The time is past when any bureaucracy, even that at Geneva, can dictate to member churches, declaring that all their giving must go to evangelism or to social action. Let the member Churches decide. In the ultimate analysis, the congregations will decide. No group of men, however wise and good, has enough wisdom and an exclusive enough access to God's presence to tell all the rest of the Church what is right to do. This issue our forefathers determined when they rejected papal authority. Let the World Council put before member Churches the main biblical options and then listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

October 22, 1968

The Rev. P. A. Potter
World Council of Churches
150 Route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 20
Switzerland

Dear ~~Dr. Potter~~ *Sm. U*

Just a line to let you know that the manuscript for the Third Uppsala Issue of the Church Growth Bulletin has been sent to press. It contained your fine contribution and *Dr. Smith's*, together with remarks by Dr. David Hubbard, Rev. John Stott, and myself. It also contained ^{your} the letter (sent me by Dr. Smith) and a very brief comment on it.

I want to thank both of you very sincerely for your thought-provoking and understanding contributions. We must have a good deal more plain speaking on both sides if we are to draw closer. Both parties must realize that it is only as we share our honest reservations, doubts, and oppositions, knowing that they will be heard with sympathy, that anything like a brotherly atmosphere can be established.

My contribution was on "Renewal in Mission, Subsection Two and Three" - in general, the program of missions proposed by the World Council at Uppsala. I need not tell you that I found this grossly inadequate at the point of the communication of the Gospel. I have said so frankly. It would help a great deal if sometime in the near future DWME could issue a statement to the effect that it is heartily in favor of all the programs of direct evangelization now being carried on by Churches and missions affiliated with the World Council of Churches. I think ^{the Council} your position really is that you favor these. It would be most helpful if you were to say this openly and forcefully.

I trust that no one will feel that these three issues of Church Growth Bulletin have been anti-MCC. If IFMA or EFMA had published a statement of mission as one-sided as that which came out of Uppsala, I would have devoted three Church Growth Bulletins to a discussion of the issue quite as readily.

With all good, kind wishes and asking God's blessing upon your important enterprises, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Donald McGavran

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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

DIVISION OF WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM

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Thanks to Phil + Eugene

Dr. Donald McGavran
Dean, Fuller Theological Seminary
135 North Oakland Avenue
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14th October, 1968

Dear Dr. McGavran,

Many thanks for your letter of the 4th which came on the 10th. I am glad that you find my short interpretative comments useful and eirenic. This is after all the tone that we should all adopt in dealing with matters too crucial and too vast for our small thoughts.

You ask me to drop my opening paragraph in which I refer to the comments you made in the May number. This is rather difficult because I do feel that you were unduly harsh and in places incorrect in your assessment of the Draft of Section II. Neither Gene Smith nor myself wish to prolong polemics on the matter. However, I think you owe it to us to defend the pre-Assembly Draft in some fashion, otherwise it will appear that it was "heretical" and that the final version was saved from "heresy" by the intervention of people congenial to your view. I therefore agree with Gene Smith that there be a letter to the editor making some of the points he made in his paper. In that case, I would agree to the sentences you indicate being removed.

It is possible that my colleague, Steven Mackie, will be in the Los Angeles area next January. He is responsible for studies in mission and evangelism and is preparing to set up a special study on "Missionary Participation in Human Institutions". He has also done a very valuable study on "Theological Education and Patterns of Ministry". I may add that he is looking after the evaluation of the World Studies of Churches in Mission, which include Tippett's work on the Solomon Islands. It would therefore be good if he could visit Fuller Theological Seminary. It does not appear that I shall have the time to come out to California this time, as I shall be spending a few weeks in the Caribbean. Please let us know whether he would be welcome at the Seminary. You met him at the Selly Oak meeting of missiologists.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely,

Philip Potter

cc: Dr. Eugene Smith
PAP/ei

Philip Potter

November 5, 1968

The Rev. P. A. Potter
150 Route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 20
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Potter:

Many thanks for your good letter of October 31st. I found it most helpful.

Let me put your mind at rest. John Stott wrote to the official, final version of Section Two as did all the rest of us. You should be getting your November Issue of Church Growth Bulletin in two or three weeks. I have not gotten mine yet.

It is true that we do not see eye to eye on the emphases which have to be made today. I am grateful for your current letter because it carries the process of growing together a step farther. When I contemplate the enormous resources of the Churches affiliated with the World Council of Churches which are being devoted to evangelization and church multiplication, I feel we are not really as far apart as we seem.

This letter of mine is written to your helpful fourth and fifth paragraphs, in the hope that I may lay bare the differences which seem to separate us and discover a formulation of purpose, of the theology and theory of mission, on which both renewalists and conservative evangelicals can stand.

You speak of "the appalling failure of the churches to meet the challenges of mission today." I worshipped in the main-line Church yesterday with a budget of \$160,000. The minister from the pulpit announced that nineteen-twentieths of the budget was spent in southern California (and, of course, most of it right here in Pasadena)! Money is not the main measure, but is a convenient indicator of the challenges each church is meeting. There has truly been appalling failure - I agree.

I agree with you also that the 'renewal' of the Church is of vital importance. I would use different terms, but I hope we mean the same thing. I would speak of multitudes within each church surrendering their lives to the Lord, repenting of their worldliness and sins, converting their priorities, and yielding themselves body and soul to God's purposes. I see no renewal without fantastic numbers of conversions of Christians to higher and ever higher apprehensions of God's will. Conservative evangelicals live for 'renewal' in this sense. WE agree with you.

Where then lies the differences between renewalists and conservative evangelicals? You speak of 'two groups' - one which despairs of the Church

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becoming fittingly missionary and forms societies of the devout to carry out God's will toward the two billion who have yet to believe; and two, which, despairing of the Church, acts justly and charitably outside it. The third group, I suppose, is the one DWME speaks for which says, "Let us arouse the Church of Jesus Christ to her divine mission. Let us turn the Church inside out. Let us make an association of those who care for others."

All of this, as you of course realize, is much too simple. The devout in a hundred thousand congregations not only undergird missions to the unbelieving world, but are also the backbone of the existing Churches. Even those who turn away from the Church to work with secular agencies, would never have had the conviction about justice and brotherhood, if they had not been formed in the matrix of the Church. And the third group, intent on "missionless" renewal, is also (as I have pointed out) carrying out a great deal of fervent evangelism and church planting. Simple though it is, the framework enables us to think about the whole subject.

Let us concentrate on group three, the renewalists, whose program was spelled out in Subsection Two and Three (in both the tentative and the final drafts.) To us conservative evangelicals it appears as if the renewalists were deeply concerned about every kind of renewal except renewal in fervor to communicate the Gospel, to persuade men to become His disciples, to baptize hundreds of thousands to Him. It is almost as if you were to say, "First let us become good Christians where we are, first be kind to our neighbors and friends, first meet the physical and social needs of mankind; then when we shine with goodness and forget about propagating the Gospel, God may say something through us about repentance of sins, faith in His Name, baptism and membership in His Churches."

The cause of renewal would win wide acceptance if it would dissipate this impression. It does not do it justice.

You see, the plea for renewal comes at a time when some influential voices within the Church are saying, "No more church planting. These are days to serve humanity." Others proclaim, "We have had too much vertical action, now is the time to act horizontally." Others say when men are becoming Christians outside the Church, or believing that secularity is the form Christianity takes today. Some are even denying the Deity of Christ and the authority and inspiration of the Bible. Some affirm that no need exists for Non-Christians to believe on Jesus Christ and be baptized. God will save them within the framework of their polytheistic or animistic or agnostic religions. You know what a battle it was to get sound theology written into Subsection One of the Final Section Two - and then only in the form of a compromise.

Perhaps what I am pleading for is this: cannot DWME take the lead in saying firmly and clearly, without ambiguity, "Renewal in mission must mean a) renewal of passion to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and to persuade men to become His disciples and responsible members of His Church in myriads of congregations throughout the world; b) renewal in service for others, renewal in dedication to changing the social order everywhere according to Christian values; and c) renewal in Christian fellowship everywhere."

No one but you at Geneva can remove the fear, the growing conviction, that under guise of talk about renewal, the real goal of renewalists is a turning of mission (propagating the Gospel) into mission (serving men regardless of what they believe about Christ).

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November 5, 1968

We all want renewal; but not truncated and one-sided renewal. We do not want renewal of merely one part of the 'general mission' of God. If renewal is to be truly ecumenical - i.e. truly to represent the whole Church - it must renew all parts of the Church for all parts of God's mission. It must therefore include as a major stress the salvation of the souls of the one billion and the two billion.

I have a feeling, Mr. Potter, that in these letters we are discussing great issues with frankness and an earnest desire for common ground. Perhaps this exchange will provide a part, at least, of a formula which, when woven into DWME pronouncements, will win warm acclaim on both sides of the deep gulf.

Most sincerely,

Donald McGavran

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Dr. Donald McGavran
Fuller Theological Seminary
135 North Oakland Avenue
Pasadena, California 91101.

31st October, 1968

Dear Dr. McGavran,

Thanks much for your letter of the 22nd October.

I note that John Stott is going to be one of the commentators on the final report on "Renewal in Mission". I do hope, however, that his comments will be based on the final report, which was adopted by the Assembly after he had left, and not on the first report which he criticised heavily in an article in the Church of England Newspaper. It would be unfortunate if he continued to attack the document for deficiencies which were corrected.

It is good to know that you have published, in addition to the comments of Gene Smith and myself, his own letter with regard to the earlier May number of the Church Growth Bulletin.

It is clear that we do not see eye to eye about the emphases which have to be made today. The Uppsala document does acknowledge that the Gospel has to be preached to all men everywhere. It does speak of the need for church growth. Its main accent is, however, on the need for the churches to be radically renewed if they are to meet the new frontiers of mission in every continent. I have just had to do another close study of our ecumenical documents on Mission and Evangelism from Tambaram to today. It is interesting to see how these documents increasingly draw attention to the appalling failure of the churches to meet the challenges of mission today - a failure which is due to their unwillingness to be turned inside out.

Now, there are two groups which tend to say: "So much the worse for the Church". One group would represent the heirs of the missionary tradition, i.e. those who went out as individuals and formed groups and societies for proclaiming the Gospel and planting the Church overseas. They despaired of the Church which would not participate fully in this mission. Another group would say that the Church is so bourgeois and introverted that the only thing to do is to leave it behind and identify with the hungry and the oppressed as agents of the Christ for others.

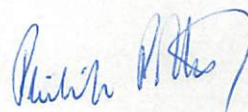
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CWME: Chairman: Rt. Rev. J. W. Sadiq. Vice-Chairman: Dr. John C. Smith. DWME: Chairman: Dr. Tracey Jones Jr.

What we are trying to say is that there can finally be no effective mission or evangelism without a renewed Church, both as the corporate agent of God's purpose in the world and as the community of the faithful into which the evangelised can be initiated. What we are struggling to find is the intimate connection between evangelism, eschatology and ecclesiology, which is so evident in the New Testament and which has so seldom been evident in church history.

With every blessing on your work,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Philip Potter', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Philip Potter

cc: Dr. E.L. Smith

PAP/ei



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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DIVISION OF WORLD MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Philip Potter

17th June, 1968

7/11

Dr. Donald McGavran
Dean,
Fuller Theological Seminary
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Pasadena, California 91101

My dear Dr. McGavran,

Many thanks indeed for your kind letter of the 8th June. I suppose you have already left for Japan. But I would like to respond to your letter before I leave this week for summer meetings.

I would say that the draft of Section II presupposes the world mission of the Church to make it known to all men that in Christ there is freedom to become new men and to fulfil the purpose of God for men made in his image and for whom Christ died. As I said in my earlier letter, we have used other than the current Biblical language, but we claim it is still biblical. I need only refer to the following passages to indicate what has dominated our thinking: The whole Epistle to the Ephesians and especially 2:11-22; 4:11-24; Colossians 3:5-11; Romans 5 and 6; Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:45-49. The Synoptic title of Jesus as Son of Man is significant here, as also the whole prophetic tradition of challenging the covenant people of God to be true to their created nature, summed up well in Micah 6:8. We shall have to make more explicit the biblical foundations of what we are trying to say.

Whether we finally come out with a statement which will be satisfactory to yourself and your friends is something I cannot predict. However, I am glad that you are prepared to concede that we are all devoted to the same ends -- that all mankind might come to know and accept Christ.

With every good wish,

Yours very sincerely,

Philip Potter

PAP/ei

BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

Aéogramme



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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
Division of World Mission and Evangelism
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June 8, 1968

The Rev. Phillip Potter
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Switzerland

My Dear Friend:

Your welcome letter of June 4th has arrived and I have studied it with care. Since I leave for Japan in a few days I am answering it at once.

The nub of the matter we are discussing lies in your answer to these questions.

1. In preparing Section 2 did DMIE assume that, of course, the mighty program of great commission missions would continue full force and, indeed, be augmented?
2. Confident in that assumption, did Section 2 simply omit proclaiming the Gospel, multiplying churches, and winning the world to unashamed open allegiance to Jesus Christ? These activities had been mentioned before, why mention them again?
3. Did DMIE argue, we should spend our time directing the churches to overcome the separation, introversion and ghetto mentality, because these greatly handicap us as we push on to our obvious goal - winning men to Christ?

If the answer to these three questions is "Yes", then, as I point out in my fifth paragraph on page 5 of the May issue of Church Growth Bulletin, Uppsala can easily set the record right. The anxiety of millions of Christians will be allayed and the unity of the Church strengthened. All that is necessary is for Uppsala's pronouncement on Mission strongly to affirm that the great, irreplaceable goal is for men to find salvation by believing on Jesus Christ, and then go on to be baptized and become unashamed disciples of His and members of His Church. After briefly exhorting the Church to press ahead with this urgent task, if Uppsala devoted most of Section 2 to urging the Church, as a means to the great end, to become more thoroughly Christian, and more thoroughly one with mankind, and more thoroughly conversant with non-Christian religions, you would find a great measure of agreement in all branches of the Church. These are all good ends, but none of them should displace the great goal of missions - that men become new creatures in Christ through intelligent faith in Him.

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June 8, 1968

If you answer "Yes" then do not, I beg of you, make the affirmation using obscure, double-meaninged phrases which some avante garde missiologists insist are "the same" as the clear Biblical terminology which the Church has used for 150 years for this process of "conversion, belief on Jesus Christ, surrender to Him, and living infilled by the Holy Spirit and under the ordinances of the Holy Bible". If Uppsala uses the obscure phrases it will simply reinforce the present tragic suspicion that her real intention is to depart from the true Gospel and to lead the Churches from classic mission to humanistic mission, from the spread of the Church to co-existence with many ideologies and faiths, from conversion to social action, and from one Saviour to the pleasant belief that men are saved by faith in faith. Some persons may consider the use of Biblical terms of classic missions too great a concession to "the unsophisticated". Nevertheless, do, please, see that Biblical terms are used in their simple New Testament meanings. Nothing else will do as much to unite the Church and set her singing on the road to life in Christ.

It is obvious that in any criticism and reply there will be misunderstanding - we misunderstand you and you misunderstand us. Let us not wait to unravel these, to justify our respective stands, and to prove that we are men of good will. Let us assume that we are. We at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Missions are sure that our friends at DMIE are. Let us then press ahead to get a statement from Uppsala on mission which will encourage the vigorous spread of the Church throughout the world, particularly among the two billion in all six continents who are not yet called by His Name, and do not yet believe on Him.

Very sincerely yours in a common faith in Jesus Christ,

Donald McGavran

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Potter

June 23, 1966

Dr. Philip Potter
Methodist Missionary Society
25 Marylebone Road
London, N.W.1
England

Dear Dr. Potter:

Your kind letter of May 17 about the Wheaton Declaration caught me in an end of year deluge of work. Please pardon the delay in replying.

You ask for my assessment of a) the Wheaton Declaration and b) the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association. I hesitate to write since I am sure DWME already knows a great deal about the American Mission scene, yet since you request it, I shall jot down some impressions.

1. The Evangelical Movement is much larger than its organized form. Each large denomination has its Evangelicals most of whom go uneasily along with the denominational machine which has been taken over by the "liberals." In many small denominations the machine is still managed by Evangelicals. Thus N.A.E. and its missionary arms of Evangelical Foreign Mission Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association. are made up a) of small denominations, b) their missionary societies, and c) interdenominational missionary societies.

The magazine Christianity Today with its 200,000 paid subscriptions, has welded the Evangelicals together (though there is still a wide spread - from "ignorant fundamentalists" to "scholarly conservatives"). Unless the Protestant mainstram softens, restrains the demands of its ultr liberals, takes the loud speakers out of their hands, and guarantees conservatives a substantial vote and an audible voice in church councils, I foresee division growing yearly deeper and more permanent.

2. The Evangelical Foreign Mission Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association are the missionary reflection of this division. A hundred and fifty years ago, missionary societies were formed out of the committed (a very small minority of the total membership of the great Churches). Today, as each missionary society swings back into church control and becomes a "Division of the Organized Church," societies of the committed, concerned solely with the evangelization of the world, - are again multiplying. And for the same reason. The Church usually throttles missions. Or more exactly, when church men get into control, they find so many good things the Church should

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do, that "discipling the nations" takes second, third or tenth place. Then societies of the concerned again arise, convinced that the will of God for them is to multiply converting discipling missions, regardless as to the budget restrictions of ecclesiastical establishments. They have been rather successful and will be more so. Evangelical Foreign Mission Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association in North America now send out 14,000 missionaries to DOM's 10,000

3. What the Evangelicals object to is the redefinition of mission which is going on - seemingly promoted by DWME, DOM, and WCC. My personal estimate is that these latter, being inclusive organizations, do not promote the redefinition - they simply allow it. The redefiners - up with making Christianity relevant; down with confession, propagation, and church growth - have captured the microphones. DWME's device - let us go back to the biblical base and see what the Bible says - does not work well either, for the redefiner happily goes back to the Bible and proves his point from it. He regards with scorn, the proof which Evangelicals adduce of their point of view!

4. You ask me to suggest "what may be done." Speaking as one who knows both sides, has spent 35 years in IMC-DWME camp, and appreciates the sound core of the old-line companies (I do not like to call them liberals), may I suggest the following. I realize DWME is already doing most of these, but think, it could perhaps emphasize them more.

a) Enthusiastically back the many good enterprises which both sides can do together. Assign some DWME secretary, for example, to assist an Evangelism in Depth campaign.

b) Give the Wheaton Declaration a favorable press. It has so many good qualities. Overlook its criticism of the old line companies. Warmly appreciate it. DWME is strong enough so it does not have to destroy its appreciation by adding derogatory phrases.

c) Treat the Wheaton Declaration as cordially and generously as you would if it had come from the Lutherans, Anglicans, or Roman Catholics - i.e. as if it had come from equals.

The Evangelicals are the best friends world mission has. The rapidly growing breach can perhaps be lessened by observing the same sensitivity toward the Evangelical Foreign Mission Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association societies that DWME would exercise toward the CMS or ABFMS, or the same courtesy toward these American societies that DWME would toward Indian or Japanese societies/

d) Give much publicity to the Ibersville Declaration (enclosed). When this was published in the Ecumenical Review and forgotten, DWME buried an ace.

e) For several years, for a change, let DWME champions tilt at a few of the interests which have displaced "discipling the nations." Do not let it appear that you are, first of all, for social action, secularization, rapprochement with Rome, church unity, dialogue with other religions, and devolution. Maintain that DWMEvangelism is really first of all for evangelism, interpreted as winning men to Christ, and multiplying churches. Send a strong delegation to Berlin October 26 to November 4, 1966.

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f) Devote a half of your next world conference to propagating the Christian Faith, reconciling men to God in the Church of Christ, and claiming whole populations for Christ and the Church.

g) Advocate your affiliated boards of world mission setting apart five percent of their budgets for Joint Action for Mission in discipling responsive tribes or castes or urban populations.

h. "Raise a holy row" over the fact that, in that most strategic land, Taiwan, the Presbyterian Church has (quite unnecessarily) almost stopped growing (while the Roman Catholics prove wide-spread receptivity by forging ahead at a great rate.).

In shore, Mr. Potter, in the above and other ways, let the Division of Evangelism out do Evangelical Foreign Mission Association and the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association in an evangelism which converts and propagates! In places join the Evangelical wing in church planting, and in places invite them to join you. Let us have much Joint Action for Mission (JAM).

I believe in the Old Line Companies' essential soundness. I think they would be glad to do this.

Sincerely,

Donald McGavran

DM:sb

Enc. Iberville Statement.

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METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

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PAP/HR

17th May, 1966.

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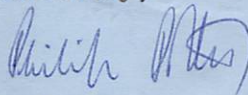
Dear Dr. McGavran,

Thank you for your letter of the 9th May. I have received recently a copy of the statement issued after the meeting of the "Congress on the Church's World-Wide Mission" held at Wheaton, Illinois on April 9-16. Apparently, this Congress was sponsored jointly by the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association and the Inter-denominational Foreign Mission Association, and it seems to me to be a document of far reaching importance. Two points prompt me to ask for your own assessment of this meeting. The first is that there is apparently a move to form one world body and to operate regionally as a parallel organisation to such bodies as the East Asian Christian Conference and the All African Conference of Churches. Secondly, the reference to what are called "Contemporary Protestant Movements" (the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches are not mentioned at all) is far from being flattering and would appear to attribute to bodies like the W.C.C. views which are held by individuals and groups within the various Churches and are the subjects of debate.

The document itself I find a most interesting one and shows great sensitivity to the movement of things in our world today and for the Church to be relevant to them. It also represents a mood of admission of failures and weaknesses and of the need for working out better relationships between mission agencies and indigenous groups. I think that it is a statement which could be a most valuable basis for future discussion. For this reason, I would greatly appreciate your comments as to what may be done. This request is a personal one and I hope you will treat it as such.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Philip Potter.



Dr. Donald A. McGavran,

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