

UPPSALA'S 'PROGRAM FOR MISSION' AND CHURCH GROWTH by Donald McGavran

Since John Stott and David Hubbard have spoken to subsection one, my comment will be largely confined to the second and third subsections, which comprise the great bulk of "Renewal in Mission." For brevity I shall call these 'two and three' or 'the program of mission.'

The telegram from Eugene Smith which started the assembling of this issue read: "Section Two contains important implications for church growth which need to be pointed out. In fairness to WCC and DWME, as well as to your readers, you will want this to be done." I acceded to his proposal and in September wrote, "The November Bulletin will carry two articles by World Council Staff on Implications For Church Growth in Section Two and two by the editors of CGB."

Despite the telegram, Philip Potter and Eugene Smith have said very little about church growth, confining themselves instead to an exposition and defense of Section Two. In fairness to the readers of this Bulletin, however, I feel I must discuss the meaning for church growth of Uppsala's "program for mission."

First, comes the sentence, "The Church ... has an unchanging responsibility to make known the Gospel of the forgiveness of God in Christ to the hundreds of millions who have not heard it." The sentence is brief but, if the will is there can be made to carry much freight. Much church growth will occur if this unchanging responsibility is taken with life and death seriousness by African and European Churches. Since Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of mankind, an atonement made effective through faith in Him, the program for mission must begin here and emphasize this.

After this one sentence, however, nothing further is said in the whole of Uppsala's "program for mission" as to how this all important duty is to be carried out. How such an oversight could have occurred is difficult to imagine. While one must not argue that such a summary dismissal of the proclamation of the Gospel means that Uppsala had no faith in evangelism, it is legitimate to conclude that Uppsala considered it very much more important at this time to help people and with them engage in the multitude of things that need to be done in every community and nation than it is to proclaim Christ and persuade men to become His followers and dependable members of His Church. When Eugene

Smith and Philip Potter defend the document, they do so on the ground not that it will lead to much evangelism and much finding of eternal life, but that the thousand and one activities 'two and three' propose are necessary in today's needy world. The fact is that implications for church growth in Uppsala's program are few indeed. My position is that the proportion between evangelism and service displayed in 'the program of mission' is totally unacceptable to Christians.

Mind you, it is not as if Uppsala, after penning this one sentence, had gone on to say, "All Churches are now carrying out a great program of evangelism to men both within and without the Church. The Gospel is being preached by word and deed, multitudes are being brought to commit themselves to the Saviour and become dependable members of His Body. Hundreds of thousands of earnest Christians, laymen and ministers, in innumerable ways are beseeching men to be reconciled to God in Christ. We urge the Church to continue and augment this essential program. However, there is another emphasis to which the Church should be giving some of its attention during the decade ahead and we devote the rest of our 'program for mission' to this." CGB proposed that such a statement be inserted. It would have united the Church and made 'two and three' a much better and truer document. Even now the Evangelical world would welcome a clear statement from Geneva that such a statement has all along been assumed.

Section Two does the World Council a grave injustice. The great Churches which make up the Council with few exceptions are carrying out vigorous programs of conversion mission. Unless they do in fact intend to phase these out, Section Two misrepresents them. They had a right to expect from the World Council a 'program of mission' which would include a vast array of activities by which multitudes in tens of thousands of societies might hear of the Saviour, put their trust in Him, and become His disciples.

One reason why the propagation of the Gospel has been so seriously slighted is that while in places at least subsection one defines the New Humanity biblically, the program which 'two and three' set forth aims at a New Humanity which is a Humane Order or a Just Society. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the drafters of 'two and three' intended to subordinate evangelism to service. The New Humanity of 'two and three' is concerned chiefly if not solely with the relationship of men with men. It sees Matthew 25 and is blind to John 3. 'Two and three' would be an excellent description of the mission of the Church if there were no Saviour, no cross, no "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Truly, part of mission should be to the physical, social, educational and political needs of the world. At this point, Uppsala's program serves the two billion well. But the mission of every congregation should also be to the spiritual needs of lost men. Men are, to be sure, bodies, but they are also immortal souls who, if they truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and abide in Him are saved and if they do not, are lost. Every congregation, which as Philip Potter says is the basis of mission, has a "soul saving" mission, which can never be omitted, to Euricans and Afericans, rich and poor, born Christians and born Non-Christians. At this point, 'Uppsala two and three' short changes both the hundreds of millions and the nominal multitudes of the Christian billion, too.

Mr. Potter says 'two and three' set forth "illustrations of people in different situations who have to be challenged to commitment to Christ within these situations." I have searched 'two and three' and fail to find where anyone is challenged to commit himself to Christ. Maybe committing oneself to Christ (believing on Him, being baptized in His Name, being united to His Church) was intended, but to a simple man like me what 'two and three' talk about exclusively and at length is justice, welfare, interrelatedness, and the like.

Again Mr. Potter, explaining the document, says, that the whole purpose is "so to change the structures of churches and missionaries societies that the whole people of God can be mobilized, equipped, and deployed for effective mission." If this "effective mission" is invariably to include offering the Water of Life to multitudes perishing of thirst, I heartily agree with the purpose. But, alas, 'two and three' say nothing about assuaging anyone's thirst through joyful following of the Lord Jesus.

Uppsala betrayed biblical mission specially by implying that, when the Church engages in great commission mission, "it is preoccupied with its own numerical and institutional strength." This is to distort the truth. Self aggrandizement has seldom indeed been the motive of mission. Tens of thousands of missionaries who gave themselves to advance the Gospel and tens of millions who prayed for and supported the work had no thought of advantaging their Churches or themselves. Planting churches brings no strength but anxiety and weakness. Daughter Churches are noted for not bringing wealth, peace, comfort or "institutional strength" to their parents.

An odd aspect of "Renewal in Mission" is that 'the program' does not fit the real situation in Africa. It assumes that Churches and missions there are too largely concerned with an other worldly evangelism and should instead be concerned with relevant "outreach and service". How comical! The fact is exactly the opposite. For example, of the \$200,000,000 going annually out of North America for mission in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, at least \$150,000,000 already goes to service highly relevant to the situation and not into evangelism. Have the drafters of 'two and three' never heard of the enormous mission effort devoted to leprosy, literacy, primary education, secondary education, colleges, universities, seminaries, agricultural demonstration centers, dispensaries, hospitals, medical schools, heifer projects, rescue homes, orphanages and the like? The WCC affiliated missions are particularly likely to spend most of their resources in such truly "relevant aid." Tragically they are also the very ones most likely to head the Uppsala Line and substitute service for evangelism even more rigorously.

How could the honorable Christians who drafted 'the program', so thoroughly concerned with men's horizontal relationships, have failed to stress the tremendous need of sinful men through faith in Christ to be born again? An answer which I fear some will give is that, in the theology of the drafters, God is dead and the two billion (Animist, Hindu, Marxist, Moslem) need justice, brotherhood, peace and plenty rather than the supposed benefits of repentance, faith, confession, baptism and living in Christ. This is not my answer. A more plausible answer, it seems to me, is that these good men have been swallowed up by Eurica, and see most vividly the inadequacies of the Eurican Churches. They assume large Christian populations. Reading, seeing, thinking, breathing Eurica, they see powerful and numerous Churches who "really ought to do something about the terrible conditions in the world today." The program they propose makes

sense when I consider the revolution which Christians in North America ought to make within their own orbits and responsibilities. There 'two and three' describe practical and reasonable actions.

Why then find fault? Simply because, in addition to 'doing good to all men' Christians and Churches are commanded to give every living person a real chance to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. As St. Luke and Dr. t'Hooft have emphasized, there is "No Other Name." Therefore, in addition to all efforts to improve man's relationship with man, it is incumbent on Christians ceaselessly and lovingly to press the claims of Christ on all who do not believe in Him. Since Uppsala's program in 'two and three' devotes itself almost entirely to improving horizontal relationships and apparently considers of minor importance that men develop vertical relationships with God, it must be said that at the point of the greatest need of the masses and in the hour of their greatest hunger, Uppsala misled them by so largely substituting the flesh for the Spirit.

As I read 'two and three' I am reminded of what some selfish Christians used to say in the churches across America when I pled for their cooperation in the world-wide mission. "We have too much to do 'at home,'" they said, "to go half way round the world. First, let us convert the heathen here, first build this hundred thousand dollar church, first raise our own budget and feed our own poor, and then, if anything is left, we shall give you a few dollars." Are we hearing a similar refrain in 'the program'? Under the cudgelling of contemporary crises in Eurica, are the leaders of mission urging all churches to pay more attention to Christians than to Non-Christians, to the one billion than to the two, to their own neighborhoods where the poor ride in automobiles than to other lands where the poor cannot even buy shoes, and to those 'of no faith' who pass the doors of a dozen churches every day rather than to those who never see a church, a Christian, or a Bible?

Under these circumstances, what should ministers and missionaries of the Gospel and their supporting Churches and boards do during the decade ahead? I counsel four actions.

1. Refuse to accept this ambiguous truncated document from Uppsala as an adequate guide line for mission during the seventies.
2. Press ahead with the program of service and evangelism which God has blessed in the past, adjusting the amounts of service and evangelism so that the greatest good of mankind and the maximum discipling of the nations occurs. No one proportion will fit all cases. The "mix" which fits European State Churches will be poison for large younger Churches whose illiteracy amounts to more than fifty per cent. It will be virulent poison for hundreds of younger Churches numbering a few hundred or thousand communicants.
3. In determining the proportion, hold fast to the example of our Lord. He regarded temporal needs as real and urgent, but also said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And He stopped feeding and healing men after a short ministry and went to the cross as the propitiation for sins, to be appropriated "through faith in His blood."
4. Let us help the next Assembly make a pronouncement on mission which better represents the whole Church, avoids the confusion inherent in defining mission as 'everything which Christians ought to do', and takes seriously both the

salvation of men's souls and the healing of their bodies and societies. In the next few years when the World Council writes a new document on mission, we hope this exchange of opinion will help bring forth a balanced pronouncement which will preserve the values of classical biblical mission, while adjusting it to the vastly more receptive populations of today and their vastly increased physical and social needs.

Our discussion of Section Two, which began with the May issue ends with this November issue. We have gladly given Dr. Potter and Dr. Smith space so that the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the document could be perceived. They have spoken frankly and so have we. Since we honestly think Section Two has grave weaknesses, we have said so. We may be mistaken. Readers have been given Section Two - the final official version - and will have to judge for themselves. They will be considering one of the most important issues in modern missions.

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Dear Dr. McGavran:

October 15, 1968

You are performing a very useful service by publishing in the Church Growth Bulletin the text of the statement of the World Council of Churches, "Renewal in Mission." I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the written discussion.

At the same time, there is need to express concern about some of the statements in the article, "Will Uppsala Betray the Two Million?", published in your May issue. With much of what you wrote, I agree. Some misunderstandings, however, you would want me to correct.

The article quotes a heading in the draft statement, "The World's Agenda -- Our Business," and then states, "In plain English this means that the mission of the church is to meet needs of which the world is conscious." No document of the World Council of Churches has ever so interpreted that phrase. "The World's Agenda" refers to the needs of the world -- and for those needs Christ died. Those needs are the business of the Church.

The article states, "Section II neglects the plain meaning of the Cross and of the resurrection." The reader, who saw only the analysis and not the draft, was disadvantaged in not being able to read the statements in that draft, "He died, yet lives among us." "He brought hope by dying on an ambiguous Cross." ("Ambiguous" means the fact that the world sees the Cross as a disgrace; while we in the light of Christian faith see it as a supreme symbol of God's love.)

Other illustrations of misunderstanding in the article could be cited without denying weaknesses in the draft. It is notable, however, that every misunderstanding was on the negative side. In many conservative evangelical circles there is today a seemingly eager exaggeration of the negative in any discussion of the World Council of Churches. The conciliar movement has its weaknesses, and the World Council of Churches its faults. Pointing out these failings is a useful function. It will be done much more convincingly, and more usefully to all on all sides, when there is freedom from exaggeration of the negative.

Love rejoices not in unrighteousness, or the semblance of it, but in the truth. It will be a great gain for all interested in the truth of Christ when more conservative evangelical publications report the contributions of the conciliar movement with an enthusiasm equal to that with which they now point out any apparent sign of weakness.

Very truly,

signed: Eugene L. Smith  
Executive Secretary  
World Council of Churches  
New York

ELS:mo

Note: I am happy to publish this courteous letter from Dr. Smith, noting merely that in discussing a document of the importance of Section II, concerning which Christian brothers have such deep conviction on both sides, it is not remarkable that there should be disagreement. I see no profit in defending any of my particular phrases. The main thing must be kept in mind, namely that Christian mission, its theology and its program, must serve the two billion at the point of both their physical and social needs and their eternal salvation. Though these two are not co-equal, the Church has resources to meet them both.

Donald McGavran

## BOOKS

I have recently been reading a luminous book of the Church in Africa which I want to commend to you. It should be in each one of your mission stations in Africa.

The author is DAVID BARRETT. His book, an Oxford University Press Publication is, SCHISM AND RENEWAL IN AFRICA. Dr. Barrett is an Anglican whose understanding of the church scene in Africa is profound. His attitude toward Africans is what one would hope every missionary's might be. He has seen Africa and the Church there whole--as a result of continent-wide travels and investigations.

You will find it stimulating and informative. Missionaries and mission executives, concerned with Asia and Latin America also, will profit by reading this volume. See enclosed announcement.

-- Donald McGavran