

WHEATON'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR WORLD MISSION by Donald McGavran

In the rapidly changing world, what is the proper place and task of Christian missions? This question has faced the great missionary councils at Jerusalem 1928, Madras 1938, Evanston 1954, and New Delhi 1964, each of which has given its own answers.

The onrush of history has taken each set of answers and created new difficult situations requiring new answers. For example, the good change from control of African Churches by missionaries to control by nationals has unfortunately channelled most missionaries into institutional and specialized ministries. At the very time that populations are turning responsive, missionaries, becoming specialists, are abandoning evangelism, which is frequently not then taken up by national ministries. A kindlier attitude toward other Churches has been achieved, but often at the cost of a disquieting lack of certainty. The adherence of the Greek and Syrian Orthodox Churches to the World Council of Churches has led some to stigmatize sincere conversion of cold Christians of one Church by any other Church as hateful proselytization. The sound recognition that there are pagans in all nations has spawned the unsound judgement that foreign missions should cease.

The Evangelical Wing of the Church has been increasingly dissatisfied with the answers which the State Churches of Europe and the larger Churches of North America and their missionary societies have been giving. Evangelicals have watched with dismay as the proclamation of the Gospel has been successively weakened by new style theologies and the latest answers to pressing problems. Uncertainty as to the authority and truth of the Bible, the Deity of Christ,

the lostness of sinful man, and the saving work of Jesus Christ has eroded the will to propagate the Gospel. Ecumenical temper toward fellow Christians has overflowed toward non-Christian religions raising questions as to whether mission among them should be carried out, or even whether the era of church planting has ended. Religious relativism has infected many Christians, increasing belief that there may be many roads to God. The multitudinous physical needs of men demanding service have focussed the attention on providing loaves and fishes. Naked racism has reared its ugly head, and Christians have rushed to the defense of brotherhood.

Facing all this, Evangelicals have been studying ten crucial issues in world mission. At Wheaton, they have given ten ringing answers, squarely based on the Bible taken as a whole. Evangelicals scorn a proof texting, employed by some, which uses only those verses supporting positions adopted because they are agreeable to human reason. (Thus neo-universalism quotes an impressive number of passages to prove that all will be saved; but dismisses a larger number which declare the eternal lostness of those who do not believe on Jesus Christ.)

These ten issues constituted the main business of the great Congress on the World-Wide Mission of the Church, representing organizations which keep 16,000 missionaries at work in over seventy nations. Each day two issues were presented by competent scholars. Each was then debated and a statement about it framed - the issue, the Biblical evidence, and the Evangelical stand. The ten issues are: Mission and Syncretism, Mission and Neo-Universalism, Mission and Proselytization, Mission and Neo-Romanism, Mission and Church Growth, Mission and Foreign Missions, Mission and Evangelical Unity, Mission and Evaluating Methods, Mission and Social Concern, and Mission and a Hostile World.

The Wheaton Declaration, covering these vital matters, is as contemporary as tomorrow. It speaks to the real issues in missions. It wastes no time thrashing old straw. It scarcely mentions turning over authority to younger Churches or other housekeeping chores. The Declaration rescues mission from disappearing into a ten blue smoke of inter-church aid. It maintains that foreign missions out of all Churches - Afericasian as well as Eurican - are biblical and essential. It calls for Christian service but insists that salvation of souls has higher priority. It summons missionaries to know cultures in which they work, in order effectively to propagate the Christian faith in those populations.

Wheaton, like Jerusalem 1928 and Tambaram 1938, marks a milestone in mission history. It will influence direction of Evangelical and non-Evangelical Wings of the Church. The former will rally to the Declaration rejoicing in its biblical foundations, certainty, and vigor. The latter will quietly adopt many of its pronouncements and incorporate them into its policies. Younger and Old Churches will ponder it, use it, and set their courses by it. The Wheaton Declaration speaks to right issues in right words at the right time.

The Declaration devotes one of its ten main emphases to Church Growth; but more than that, the other nine voice unshakeable conviction that God, Himself, commands us to proclaim the Gospel in order to "bring all nations to faith and obedience" (Romans 16:26 N E B). From beginning to end the Wheaton Declaration will hearten and inspire Christians everywhere to press forward to discipling ta ethne (the peoples) and reconciling men to God in the Church of Jesus Christ. Where else can they be reconciled?

A merit of the Declaration is its straightforward clarity. Here is no sophisticated gobbledegook, no ecclesiastical doubletalk. Profound theological issues are set forth simply. The Declaration bases its case directly on the Bible and is willing to risk itself on the correctness of its

exposition. To those who differ, the framers of the Declaration would say humbly, "Brethren, prove your case from the Bible. We will obey whatever the Scriptures plainly command. Why quarrel? Why should schisms rent the Body of Christ? Let us agree to be guided by Scripture."

The Wheaton Congress started on Easter Day, 1966. The victory of the Resurrection infuses courage and faith in to the Congress pronouncements. Leaders of African and European Churches and missionaries everywhere should study the Wheaton Declaration, adapt it, adopt it, translate it, take courage from it, correct their direction by it, and change their policies to implement it.

The School of Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary will stock the Wheaton Declaration. So - probably - will your missionary society. Get it, read it, and send it to others to read.