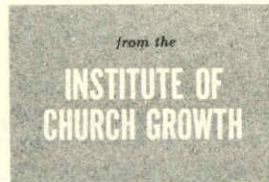


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WILL UPPSALA BETRAY THE TWO BILLION?

by Donald McGavran

By Uppsala I mean, of course, the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches which is to be held at Uppsala, Sweden, in July, 1968. By "the two billion" I mean "that great number of men, at least two billion, who either have never heard of Jesus Christ or have no real chance to believe on Him as Lord and Saviour." These inconceivable multitudes live and die in a famine of the Word of God, more terrible by far than the sporadic physical famines which occur in unfortunate lands.

The Church, to be relevant, to discharge her humane duty to the masses of mankind, to act with justice, and to manifest compassion, must plan her activity, marshal her forces, carry on her campaign of mercy and liberation, and be faithful to her Lord with the two billion in mind. If the sufferings of a few million in Viet Nam, South Africa, Jordan, Buchenwald, or the slums of Rio de Janeiro or Detroit rightly excite the indignation and compassion of the Church, how much more should the spiritual sufferings of two thousand million move her to bring multitudes of them out of darkness into God's wonderful light. The Church to be relevant must augment her program to carry the bread of life to starving multitudes and to dig wide, deep channels through which the water of life may flow to "the two billion" perishing of thirst.

By "betray" I mean any course of action which substitutes ashes for bread, fixes the attention of Christians on temporal palliatives instead of eternal remedies, and deceives God's children with the flesh when they long for the spirit. By "betray" I mean planning courses of action whose sure outcome will be that the two billion will remain in their sins and in their darkness, chained by false and inadequate ideas of God and man. Uppsala will betray the two billion if she, to whom God has given the leadership of such a proportion of the Church, plans a program which leads her affiliated Churches away from the precise issues on which Christians need to speak today, away from spreading the knowledge of their Saviour to as many of the two billion as it is possible to do.

Will Uppsala betray the two billion? Why is it necessary to ask the question? Why suppose that Uppsala will do anything else but plan a strategy for

for the seventies which will meet the world's deepest needs, which will assuage the thirst of the two billion? The answer is clear. Because, as the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches meets, its agenda says nothing about the two billion. Its agenda in the form of a 136-page book called DRAFTS FOR SECTIONS UPPSALA 68 has been published and is being studied by thousands of congregations, boards of mission, study groups, and others. This book is available from the World Council of Churches through the Geneva, New York, or London offices.

It should be clearly understood that these "drafts for sections" are not pronouncements made by the World Council of Churches. They are study documents drawn up by committees. In his Foreword, the General Secretary, Eugene Carson Blake, says that these committees have been directed to set forth "the precise issues on which we need to speak today. . . the relatively few subjects which we find most relevant to the contemporary situation and tasks of the Ecumenical Movement." The papers thus prepared were subsequently "twice subjected to discussion by widely representative groups of persons involved in World Council work." These six preparatory drafts then are sent out to be earnestly and prayerfully studied by participants and churches. This article in the Church Growth Bulletin is part of that study process.

Church Growth Bulletin is concerned with Section II (the second Draft) only--that on mission, prepared for the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. The Church, enormously concerned with her mission to the two billion, should study Section II Renewal in Mission. Christians everywhere should be asking themselves: did those who prepared this draft rightly discern "the precise issues" concerning the unsaved world on which the Church needs to speak today? When the Division of World Mission and Evangelism meets in Uppsala it may depart entirely from this study document and draw up a new statement to guide the Churches as they consider their mission during the seventies. Indeed this article is written in the hope that Uppsala will write another draft germane to the real issues of the day.

On what grounds can we judge this preparatory document a betrayal of the two billion? First, according to the clear teaching of the New Testament, it is necessary for men to believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in order to be saved. How can they believe if they have not heard? And how can they hear without messengers carrying the word of life to them? Section II says nothing about the necessity of faith, nothing about the two billion, and nothing about sending messengers.

In the place of this, we are treated to about 600 words of involved theological dicta like the following: "We long for our personal life to be renewed. Nations and families, fishes and birds, trees and flowers also yearn eagerly for the day when the new man will be revealed." The strange passage, Romans 8:19-22, concerning whose meaning there is no common agreement among Christians, is used as the biblical justification for this nonsense that fishes and flowers and trees (and why not rocks and volcanoes, white dwarfs and neutrons?) yearn eagerly for the day when the new man will be revealed.

Section II neglects the plain meaning of the cross and of the resurrection amply testified to by dozens of clear passages. He that believes shall be saved and he that does not believe shall be damned. He who has the Son has the Father and he who does not have the Son does not have the Father. . . That whosoever believeth on Him should not perish. . . No man cometh to the Father but by Him. . . Therefore we are justified by faith. All these passages and many more are strange absent in the theological system set forth as the basis for renewal in mission. The entire draft says nothing about the two billion unbelievers, the need to believe on Jesus Christ, or the mandate to disciple the nations. Not a sentence, not a line, not a word. Nothing!

Second, from beginning to end the document is studded with the word mission. It is titled Renewal in Mission. Its first sentence reads, "God has set out on His mission to men in Jesus, the man from Nazareth." Its second main sub-section is entitled Freedom for Mission, and affirms that "Renewal for mission is the work of the Spirit." But, while the word mission is repeatedly used, its meaning is nowhere that of communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ to unbelieving men in order that they might believe and live. Classical mission has been the carrying out of the Great Commission. Most missionary societies today have constitutions in which this classical purpose is specified. The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has a statement which begins as follows: "The supreme and compelling purpose of the Christian Mission to the world is to proclaim Jesus Christ as divine and only Saviour and to encourage men to become His disciples and responsible members of His Church." Section II sets forth a sophisticated theory and theology of mission which the vast majority of Christians and biblical scholars will not accept as the clear will of God toward the world of unbelievers.

Third, a deliberate purpose to divert attention away from men's need to hear about Christ, to confess Him as Saviour, to obey Him as Lord, and to proclaim Him as Redeemer and King marks the document in all the critical passages. For example, sub-section 5 is headed "Communicating the good news implies dialogue." Its emphasis is that the Christian must "listen to artists and scientists, to men of other faiths, and to agnostics to learn what news Christ has for him through them." Let us agree for the moment that the Christian is a courteous listener and can learn much from his fellow men. But is communicating the good news exhausted in listening? Suppose dialogue is one mode of communicating the good news to some kinds of men. Suppose it comprises one-tenth of all gospel proclamation. This preparatory document was supposed to devote itself to "the precise issues on which we need to speak today." What about the responsive millions who cannot wait for the tedious processes of dialogue, who want to be told about the Gospel at once that they and their children may enter into life now while they yet live. The real issue of today is not dialogue with the resistant, but encouragement of the responsive to accept the Lord as their personal Saviour and enter at once into abundant and eternal life.

Fourth, the chief thrust of Section II of the Uppsala Drafts is concerned not with mission but with renewing existing churches and getting them involved with all of life in points of tension, revolutionary movements, critical points of society and "the agenda of the world" (to use a bit of current ecumenical jargon).

To be sure, about 150 words are devoted to "Dialogue with Non-Christians." But if one hopes that here the spiritual thirst of the two billion will be assuaged, he will be sharply disappointed. "Dialogue with Non-Christians" asserts that "Christians can (through dialogue) affirm their common understanding of man which will lead to a fuller apprehension of truth. Such dialogue also involves a deeper understanding of our relation to our own culture, or to the different cultures to which we belong." That seems to say, that, in dialogue with Non-Christians, the Christian may be benefitted. He will realize that he too is a man and may receive some cultural development in himself. To the authors of Section II dialogue seems to be not feeding those dying in the great famine of the word of God but cultural improvements of Christians.

Fifth, in the Draft for Section II, Uppsala will have its sole opportunity to consider the impartation of the Gospel to the lost. Other Drafts, prepared for other sections (such as those for the World Economic and Social Development, Justice and Peace in International Affairs, and the Worship of God in a Secular Age) present other aspects of the human scene with which the Church should deal. We rejoice in the wide scope of the Church's business. We are proud to belong to a Church which meets humanity's need at so many places. But, without forgetting leprosy, disease,

illiteracy, race pride, poverty, war and other temporal scourges, an obedient Christian walking according to his great Head, must remember the salvation of his two billion brothers. It makes an eternal difference whether a man believes on Jesus Christ or not, and two billion do not know enough about Him to believe on Him. Section II is the only section which can deal with the two billion--and Section II has apparently resolved to say nothing about them or about their need to know Jesus Christ and be found in Him.

Instead, Section I systematically uses the old words, which for a hundred and fifty years have meant one thing to the Church, with a radically new meaning. The procedure cannot be attributed to chance. The preparation of this draft, dealing with the enormously important subject of mission, it seems to me, has fallen into the hands of a small band of men determined to change the course of mission. They employ the simple expedient of using the classical words, heavily freighted with emotion, with an entirely new purpose. These men do not point out the changes they are making. They do not inform the Church that they are launching a radically new system and are directing mission away from the two billion into new channels. Whether this amounts to perpetrating a pious fraud or not the reader will have to judge.

For example, on Page 32, the Commentary on the Draft has as its first heading "The Missionary God." In three substantial paragraphs about the "missionary" God, not a word is said about the two billion who have no knowledge of Jesus Christ God and Saviour according to the Scriptures. Instead, the reinterpretation proposes that the missionary God "in the person of Jesus is present with power. His words and deeds bring unrest into the world (Matt. 13:33, Mark 2:22). They bring a new movement; they introduce a new beginning in a dynamic way. This change has two aspects: it has already taken place--the old order has gone and a new order has already begun (11 Cor. 5:17) and it is still taking place--history is experienced as change....Participation in God's mission is therefore entering into partnership with God in history.....The central question then becomes to what extent is what we have inherited still serving the mission of God?"

Quite on the contrary, for DWME and all Christian Churches, the central question is: How many of the lost are we bringing back to the fold? How obedient are we to our Lord's command to disciple the nations? How faithful are we to the mission of God, the mission to which our Lord gave His life?

Section II has not been thrown together hurriedly or by accident. During the last twenty years, a new theology has been forged which apparently intends to have no place for mission from the Church in one land to Non-Christians in other lands. It intends to divert the whole missionary movement into the movement toward Christian unity on the one hand and Christian behaviour toward one's close neighbors on the other. In the latter, Christianizing the social order is also included. Christian unity and Christian neighborliness are good ends, to be sure, but they are not mission and should not masquerade as such. Granting that new light does break out of God's Word from time to time, still is it not remarkable that none of the great leaders of the Church, none of the devout students of the Bible, none of the great theologians glimpsed this theology till these wise men discerned it after 1948?

The attempt on theological grounds to direct the missionary enterprise of the Church into channels not even remotely connected with bringing the nations to faith and obedience (Romans 1:5 and 16:25) or reconciling men to God in the Church of Jesus Christ (11 Cor. 5:18ff) must excite the suspicion and will earn the rejection of Christians everywhere. It affirms that, "The central question is to what extent is what we have inherited (existing missionary societies and their

goals of world evangelization) still serving the mission of God." It asserts that they "are transitory forms of obedience to the missio Dei." It proposes that Christians must be "ready to abandon them and replace them with new ones."

Christians should, of course, be ready to abandon any instrument which ceases to serve the mission of God in the salvation of the two billion. But this is not what this Draft proposes. It proposes that the two billion do not need redemption at all and that mission must be concerned about other things which God is at work doing, "in history," of course!

Again and again this Draft insists that the Church must be concerned with the World's Agenda. Indeed one heading is The World's Agenda - Our Business. In plain English this means that the mission of the Church is to meet needs of which the world is conscious. Since it is not keenly conscious of the need to believe on Jesus Christ, proclaiming the Gospel should be dropped from the tasks of the Church. This is not said, mind you; but it is a legitimate deduction for everything else is stressed and proclamation of the Gospel is not even mentioned.

Does this mean that those who prepared the Draft for Section II intended to capture the institutions and machinery of present day missions, together with the treasury which has an annual income of well over two hundred million dollars a year? Do they intend to direct the whole complex enterprise away from discipling the nations, away from the preaching of the Gospel, away from the multiplication of churches of baptized believers, and into various forms of revivifying the Church? By this last phrase do they mean getting the Church to act more like the Church in every aspect of its being--except the persuasion of men to become disciples of the Lord of Life?

If I am wrong in this assumption, all Uppsala needs to do is to introduce into the official World Council of Churches statement, which will be drawn up, a strong section which calls on all Churches to augment proclaiming the Gospel, to increase discipling receptive peoples, to answer the calls from all Macedonias, and to multiply churches of Christ everywhere, in order that God may be glorified, His will may be done and thanksgiving to the glory of God may increase (11 Cor. 4:28). Church Growth Bulletin will rejoice in such revision and give it special coverage.

What shall we say if some one were to object as follows? "Dr. Blake's Foreword specifically says that these Drafts for Sections are not to go on repeating 'what past Assemblies have said,' but should instead concentrate 'on the relatively few subjects which are most relevant to the contemporary situation.' Past Assemblies spoke of the need for winning the multitudes of mankind to Christian Faith. The Church will, of course, proceed with that kind of mission. At Uppsala we are simply adding a new factor, which needs to be stressed during the seventies."

The answer is two-fold. First, the committee which drew up this statement was straightly charged to formulate a draft concerning "the precise issues on which we need to speak today." The salvation of two billion children of God is the precise issue on which the Division of World Mission and Evangelism needs to speak. Nothing is more precise or more contemporary. Second, the whole tenor of Section II is not a cordial acknowledgement that the discipling of the nations is a chief and irreplaceable purpose of Christian mission. The clear intent of Section II is to substitute a totally new concept of mission for the old concept which Section II considers out-worn.

The committee which drew up this draft is apparently unaware of the fact that today in many lands of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, an unprecedented receptivity to the Gospel exists. Much greater receptivity exists than would have

deemed possible twenty years ago. According to the World Christian Handbooks, the Christian population of Africa south of the Sahara increased from twenty million in 1950 to fifty million in 1968. It is likely to increase to a hundred million by 1990. The precise issue in 1968 when the World Council will meet at Uppsala is this: how can the Christian Church carry the Gospel faster and better to the multitudes who want to become Christians? The chief issue is not dialogue with hostile Non-Christians. In the days of His flesh, our Lord instructed His disciples to by-pass indifferent and hostile villages and hurry on to the receptive. Such days have again come. This is a time to emphasize discipline, not to turn from it. This is not a time to betray the two billion but to reconcile as many as possible of them to God in the Church of Jesus Christ. For the peace of the world, for justice between men and nations, for advance in learning, for breaking down hostilities between peoples, for the spiritual health of countless individuals and the corporate welfare of mankind this is a time to disciple the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them whatsoever our Lord has commanded us.

Throughout history, the mission of the Church to Non-Christians in other lands has been carried forward by companies of the concerned, not by the whole Church. It was not Jerusalem that dispatched Barnabas and Saul on the first missionary journey, but a group of specially concerned men in the church at Antioch. The evangelization of north Europe, depended on monastic orders. Bands of the devout, the specially concerned, i.e. the orders, furnished Rome's missionaries. Among Protestants too, the missionary movement was launched not by the whole Church but by bands of specially concerned Christians--who often carried on their mission against the active opposition of the Church.

Of recent years, missionary societies have been so prospered by God and have so well fitted the era of European dominance, that some Protestant Churches as Churches have espoused missions. During the last fifty years many missionary societies have appeared to be church societies. If the denomination had only one missionary society, it was difficult for it to appear like anything else but "the missionary division of the whole denomination." It is significant that scarcely has this process gotten under way, scarcely has mission appeared to be the business of the whole Church, than the Church has begun to subvert the mission to her own service. Mission to carry the Gospel to the two billion is becoming any good activity at home or abroad which anyone declares to be the will of God. Phoning lonely old ladies of the Church was recently given as a meaningful contemporary form of mission! And now the great quadrennial gathering of the World Council of Churches sends out a preparatory draft on mission (Section II of Uppsala 68) which concentrates its entire attention on renewing existing churches in mission. By which Section II does not mean renewing churches so that they will proclaim the Gospel both here at home and abroad.

Church Growth Bulletin cannot believe that Section II represents advanced missionary thinking of the great Churches affiliated with the World Council of Churches. We cannot believe that the renowned and honored missionary societies which together make up DWME will allow any such draft to be set forth as expressing their 1968 purpose in mission. We cannot believe that this great missionary planning session can neglect so completely both Vatican II on Mission and the Wheaton Congress of 1966.

We prayerfully hope that more Christian counsels will prevail and the two billion will not be betrayed. We shall look forward with hope and support Uppsala with prayer, confident that Section II is not the will of God and will be rejected, or revised, modified, and brought more into harmony with the experience and understanding of the universal Church, the clear intent of the Bible, and the express statements of Jesus Christ our Lord.