

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 6

Volume 6 • Number 2 • October 1982

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews selected from publications
worldwide for an international readership,
interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary
living.*

GENERAL EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

value of revelation in Jesus Christ. Here, Chang I-ching's distinction between common and special revelation would help Wu Leich'uan to avoid the danger of cultural idolatry. And Wu had a hard time to answer the question: why choose Christianity if the Chinese sages already have the truth? To some extent, Wang Chih-hsin had to face the same question in his programme of cultural harmonization.

Thirdly, no culture is exempted from divine judgement although every culture has traces of God's work. Chang was right to urge for cultural repentance of all nations. And Chao Tzu-ch'en's argument that the Confucian sages were agents of truth is also well taken. Any recognition of truth, good, and beauty assumes the existence of an absolute, which may not be viable in the ambiguity of life. And it is this absolute reality that judges all cultural decisions made in existential contexts. p. 237

The Kingdom Strikes Back: The Ten Epochs of Redemptive History

Ralph D. Winter

*Reprinted from Perspectives on the World Christian Movement
(William Carey Library), with permission.*

Man has virtually erased his own story. Human beings have been pushing and shoving each other so much that they have destroyed well over 90 per cent of their own handiwork. Their libraries, their literature, their cities, their works of art are mostly gone. Even what remains from the distant past is fiddled with evidences of a strange and pervasive evil that has grotesquely distorted man's potential. This is strange because apparently no other species of life treats its own with such deadly malignant hatred. The oldest skulls bear mute witness that they were bashed in and roasted to deliver their contents as food for still other human beings.

We are not surprised then to find that the explanation for this strangeness comes up in the oldest, detailed, written records—surviving documents that are respected by Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, whose adherents make up more than half of the world's population. These documents, referred to by the Jews as "the Torah," by Christians as the "Books of the Law" and by Muslims as "the Taurat" not only explain the strange source of evil but also describe a counter-campaign and follow that campaign through many centuries.

To be specific, the first eleven "chapters" of Genesis constitute a trenchant introduction to the whole problem. These pages describe three things: 1) a glorious and "good" original creation; 2) the entrance of a rebellious, evil, superhuman power who is more than a force, actually a personality; and the result 3) a humanity caught up in that rebellion and brought under the power of that evil.

In the whole remainder of the Bible, we have a single drama: the entrance into this enemy-occupied territory of the kingdom, the power and the glory of the living God. From [Genesis 12](#) to the end of the Bible, and indeed until the end of time, there unfolds the single, coherent drama of "the Kingdom strikes back." In this drama we see the gradual

but irresistible power of God reconquering and redeeming His fallen creation through the giving of His own Son at the very center of the 4000-year period we are now ending. [p. 238](#)

This counter-attack clearly does not await the appearance of the central Person in the center of the story. Indeed, there would seem to be five identifiable epochs before the appearance of the Christ. While the purpose of this article is mainly to describe the five epochs following His “visitation,” in order for those to be seen as part of a single ten-epoch continuum, we will pause to give a few clues about the first five epochs.

The theme that links all ten epochs is that of the grace of God intervening into history in order to contest the enemy who temporarily is “the god of this world.” God’s plan for doing this is to reach all peoples by blessing Abraham and Abraham’s children-by-faith. This blessing of God is in effect conditioned upon its being shared with other nations, since those who receive God’s blessings are, like Abraham, men of faith who subject themselves to God’s will, become part of His kingdom, and represent the extension of His rule throughout the world among all other peoples.

In the first epoch of roughly 400 years, Abraham was chosen and moved to the geographic center of the Afro-Asian land mass. The story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph is often called the Period of the Patriarchs and displays only small breakthroughs of witness and sharing with the surrounding nations even though the central mandate ([Gen. 12:1-3](#)) is repeated twice again to Abraham ([18:18](#), [22:18](#)) and to Isaac ([26:4](#)) and Jacob ([28:14](#), [15](#)). Joseph observed to his brothers, “You sold me, but God sent me,” and was obviously a great blessing to Egypt. Even the Pharaoh recognized that Joseph was filled with the Holy Spirit. But this was not the intentional missionary obedience God wanted.

As we push on into the next four roughly-400-year periods: 2) the Captivity, 3) the Judges, 4) the Kings and 5) that of the second captivity and diaspora—the promised blessing and the expected mission (to share that blessing with all the nations of the world) often all but disappears from sight. As a result, where possible God accomplished His will through the voluntary obedience and godliness of His people, but where necessary, He does His will through involuntary means. Joseph, Jonah, the nation as a whole when taken captive represent the category of involuntary missionary outreach intended by God to force the sharing of the blessings. The little girl carried away captive to the house of Naaman the Syrian was able to share her faith. On the other hand, Ruth, Naaman the Syrian and the Queen of Sheba all came voluntarily, attracted by God’s blessings to Israel.

We see in every epoch the active concern of God to forward His mission, with or without the full co-operation of His chosen nation. [p. 239](#) Thus, when Jesus appears, it is an incriminating “visitation.” He comes to His own, and His own receive Him not. He is well received in Nazareth until He refers to God’s desire to bless the Gentiles. Then a homicidal outburst of fury betrays the fact that this chosen nation—chosen to receive and to mediate blessings ([Ex. 19:5, 6](#); [Ps. 67](#); [Isa. 49:6](#))—has grossly departed from that. There was indeed a sprinkling of fanatical Bible students who “traversed land and sea to make a single proselyte.” But their outreach was not so much to be a blessing to the other nations as it was to sustain and protect the nation Israel. They were not making sure that their converts were circumcised in heart ([Jer. 9:24-26](#); [Rom. 2:29](#)).

In effect, under the circumstances, Jesus did not come to give the Great Commission but to take it away. The natural branches were broken off while other “unnatural” branches were grafted in ([Rom. 11:13-24](#)). Even so, despite the general reluctance of the chosen missionary nation, many people groups were in fact touched: Canaanites, Egyptians, Philistines (of the ancient Minoan culture), Hittites, the Moabites, the Phoenicians (of Tyre and Sidon), the Assyrians, the Sabeans (of the land of Sheba), the Babylonians, the Persians, the Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites, the Romans.

And now, as we look into the next 2000 year period, it is one in which God, on the basis of the intervention of His Son, is making sure that the other nations are both blessed and similarly called “to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.” Now, for them, “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” Now the Kingdom strikes back in the realms of the Armenians, the Romans, the Celts, the Franks, the Angles, the Saxons, the Germans, and eventually even those ruthless pagan pirates, the Vikings. All were to be invaded, tamed and subjugated by the power of the gospel, and expected to share their blessings with still others.

But the next five epochs are not all that different from the first five epochs. Those that are blessed do not seem terribly eager to share those blessings. The Celts are the only nation in the first millenium who give an outstanding missionary response. As we will see, just as in the Old Testament, the coming of blessings brings sober responsibility, dangerous if unfulfilled. And we see repeated again and again God’s use of the full range of his four missionary mechanisms.

The “visitation” of the Christ was dramatic, full of portent and strikingly “in due time.” Jesus was born a member of a subjugated people. Yet in spite of her bloody imperialism, Rome was truly an instrument in God’s hands to prepare the world for His coming. Rome controlled one of the largest empires the world has ever known, [p. 240](#) forcing the Roman peace upon all sorts of disparate and barbaric peoples. For centuries Roman emperors had been building an extensive communication system, both in the 250,000 miles of marvelous roads which stretched all over the empire, and in the rapid transmission of messages and documents somewhat like the Pony Express on the American frontier. In its conquests, Rome had enveloped at least one civilization far more advanced than her own—Greece—and highly educated artisans and teachers taken as slaves to every major city of the empire taught the Greek language. Greek was understood from England to Palestine. How else could a few gospels and a few letters from St. Paul have had such a widespread impact among so many different ethnic groups in such a short period of time?

Jesus came, lived for 33 years on earth, confronted the wayward, missionary nation, was crucified and buried, rose again, underscored the same commission to all who would respond, and ascended once more to the Father. Today even the most agnostic historian stands amazed that what began in a humble stable in Bethlehem of Palestine, the backwater of the Roman Empire, in less than 300 years had taken control of the Lateran Palace of the emperors of Rome, a gift of Constantine to the church. How did it happen? It is truly an incredible story.

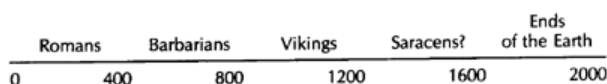
NO SAINTS IN THE MIDDLE?

Let us interrupt the story here briefly. We can do well at this point to confront a psychological problem. In church circles today we have fled, or feared, or forgotten these middle centuries. Let us hope evangelicals are not as bad in this respect as the Mormons. They seem to hold to a “BOBO” theory that the Christian faith somehow “blinked out” after the Apostles and “blinked on” again when Joseph Smith dug up the sacred tablets in the 19th century. The result of this kind of BOBO approach is that you have “early” saints and “latter-day” saints, but no saints in the middle. Many Protestants may have roughly the same idea. Such people are not much interested in what happened prior to the Protestant Reformation: they have the vague impression that before Luther and Calvin the church was apostate and whatever there was of real Christianity consisted of a few persecuted individuals here and there. In a series of twenty volumes on “Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching” only half of the first volume is devoted to the first *fifteen* centuries! In Evangelical Sunday Schools children are busy as beavers with the story of God’s work

from Genesis **P. 241** to Revelation, from Adam to the Apostles, and Sunday School publishers may even boast about their “all-Bible curriculum.” But this only really means that the children do not get exposed at all to what God did *with the Bible* between the times of the Apostles and the Reformers, a period which is staggering proof of the uniqueness and power of the Bible! To all such people it is as if there were no saints in the middle.

In the space available, however, it is possible to trace only the Western part of the story of Christianity—and only its outline at that, but to do that we must recognize certain clear stages that make the whole story fairly easy to grasp.

Note the pattern in the chart below:



In Period I, Rome was won but did not reach out with the Gospel to the barbaric Celts and Goths. Almost as a penalty, the Goths invaded Rome and caved in the whole Western part of the empire.

In Period II, the Goths were added in, and they briefly achieved a new “Holy” Roman Empire. But they also did not effectively reach further north with the Gospel.

Thus, in Period III, again almost as a penalty, the Vikings invaded the area of these Christianized Celtic and Gothic barbarians, and the Vikings, too, became Christians in the process.

In Period IV, Europe, for the first time united by Christian faith, reached out in a sort of pseudo-mission to the Saracens and pointed further East in the aftermath of the great abortion of the Crusades.

In Period V, Europe now reached out to the very ends of the earth. In this period reaching out has been the order of the day, but with highly mixed motives; commercial and spiritual interests have been both a blight and a blessing. Yet, during this period, the entire non-Western world has suddenly been stirred into development. Never before have so few affected so many, and never before has so great a gap resulted between two halves of the world.

What will happen before the year 2000? Will the non-Western world invade Europe and America like the Goths invaded Rome and the Vikings overran Europe? Will the “Third World” turn on us in a new series of barbarian invasions? Will the OPEC nations gradually **p. 242** buy us out and take us over? Clearly we face the reaction of an awakened non-Western world that now suddenly is beyond our control. What will the role of the Gospel be? Can we gain any light from these previous cycles of outreach?

WINNING THE ROMANS (0–400 A.D.)

Perhaps the most spectacular triumph of Christianity in history is its conquest of the Roman Empire in roughly twenty decades. We know very little about this period. Our lack of knowledge makes much of it a mystery, and what happened to Christianity sounds impossible, almost unbelievable. Only the early part starts out blazoned in the floodlight of the New Testament epistles themselves. Let’s take a glance at that. There we see a Jew named Paul brought up in a Greek city, committed to leadership in the Jewish tradition of his time. Suddenly he was transformed by Christ and saw that the faith of the Jews as fulfilled in Christ did not require Jewish garments, but could be clothed in Greek language and customs as well as Semitic. In this one decisive struggle it should have once more been clarified that anyone could be a Christian, be transformed in the inner man by the living Christ—whether Jew, Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, male or female. The Greeks

didn't have to become Jews, undergo circumcision, take over the Jewish calendar of festivals or holy days nor even observe Jewish dietary customs, any more than a woman had to be made into a man to be acceptable to God.

Paul based his work on the radical biblical principle (unaccepted by many Jews to this day) that it is circumcision of the heart that counts ([Jer. 9](#)), and that the new believers of a new culture did not have to speak the language, wear the clothes, or follow all the customs of the sending church. This meant that for Greeks, the cultural details of the Jewish law were no longer relevant. Therefore, to the Jews Paul continued as one "under the law of Moses," but to those unfamiliar with the Mosaic law, he preached the "law of Christ" in such a way that it could be fulfilled dynamically and authentically in their particular circumstances. While to some he appeared to be "without law," he maintained that he was not without law toward God, and indeed, as regards the basic purpose of the Mosaic Law, the believers in the Greek church immediately developed the functional equivalent to it, in their own cultural terms, and they held on to the Old Testament as well.

We may get the impression that missions in this period benefited very little from deliberately organized effort. But Paul apparently [p. 243](#) worked within a "missionary team" structure, borrowed from the Pharisees. Paul's sending congregation in Antioch did undertake a definite responsibility. But they sent him off more than they sent him out. Let no one suppose that every new Christian in those days opened his Bible to the Great Commission and dutifully turned over his life to this objective. There is good reason to suppose, for example, that the Christian faith expanded in many areas by the "involuntary-go" mechanism, that is, merely because Christians were dispersed as the result of persecutions. We know that fleeing Arian Christians had a lot to do with the conversion of the Goths. We have the stories of Ulphilas and Patrick, whose missionary efforts were in each case initiated by the accident of their being taken captive. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suppose that Christianity followed the trade routes of the Roman Empire, and we know that there was a close relationship and correspondence between Christians in Gaul and Asia Minor. Yet we must face the fact that the early Christians of the Roman Empire (as are Christians today) were only rarely both willing and able to take conscious practical steps to fulfill the Great Commission. In view of the amazing results in these early decades, however, we are all the more impressed by the innate power of the Gospel itself.

One intriguing possibility of the natural transfer of the Gospel within a given social unit is the case of the Celts. Historical studies clarify for us the fact that the province of *Galatia* in Asia Minor was so called because it was settled by *Galatoi* from Western Europe (who as late as the fourth century still spoke both their original Celtic tongue and also the Greek of that part of the Roman Empire). Whether or not Paul's Galatians were merely Jewish traders living in the province of Galatia, or were from the beginning Celtic Galatoi who were attracted to synagogues as "God fearers," we note in any case that Paul's letter to the Galatians is especially wary of anyone pushing over on his readers the mere outward customs of the Jewish culture and confusing such customs with essential Christianity. A matter of high missionary interest is the fact that Paul's preaching had tapped into a cultural vein of Celtic humanity that may soon have included friends, relatives, and trade contacts reaching a great distance to the west. Thus Paul's efforts in Galatia may give us one clue to the surprising early penetration of the Gospel into the main Celtic areas of Europe—comprising a belt running across southern Europe, clear over into Galicia in Spain, Brittany in France and into the western and northern parts of the British Isles.

There came a time when not only hundreds of thousands of Greek [p. 244](#) and Roman citizens had become Christians, but Celtic-speaking peoples and Gothic tribes-peoples as well had developed their own forms of Christianity both within and beyond the borders

of the Roman Empire. It is probable that the missionary work behind this came about mainly through unplanned processes involving Christians from the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In any case this achievement certainly cannot readily be credited to Latin-speaking Romans in the West. This is the point we are trying to make. One piece of evidence is the fact that the earliest Irish mission compounds (distinguished from the Western Roman type by a *central* chapel) followed a ground plan derived from Christian centers in Egypt. And Greek, not Latin, was the language of the early churches in Gaul. Even the first organized mission efforts of John Cassian and Martin of Tours, for example, came from the East by means of commune structures begun in Syria and Egypt. Fortunately, these organized efforts carried with them a strong emphasis on literacy and literature and the studying and copying of Biblical manuscripts and ancient Greek classics.

As amazed pagan leaders looked on, the cumulative impact grew to prominent proportions by 300 A.D. We don't know with any confidence what personal reasons Constantine had in 312 for declaring himself a Christian. We know that his mother in Asia Minor was a Christian, and that his father, as a co-regent in Gaul and Britain, did not enforce the Diocletian edicts against Christians in his area. However, by this time in history the inescapable factor is that there were enough Christians in the Roman Empire to make an official reversal of policy toward Christianity not only feasible, but politically wise. According to Professor Lynn White, Jr. at U.C.L.A., one of the great medieval historians of the world today, even if Constantine had not become a Christian, the empire could not have held out against Christianity more than another decade or two! The long development of the Roman Empire had ended the local autonomy of the city-state and created a widespread need for a sense of belonging—he calls it a crisis of identity. Then as now, Christianity was the one religion that had no nationalism at its root. It was not the folk religion of any one tribe. In White's words it had developed "an unbeatable combination."

Thus, it is the very power of the movement which helps in part to explain why the momentous decision to tolerate Christianity almost inevitably led to its becoming (over 50 years later) the official religion of the Empire. Not long after the curtain rises on Christianity as an [p. 245](#) Rome turns out astonishingly to be the strongest and most trusted man around. Why else would Constantine, when he moved the seat of government to Constantinople, leave his palace (the famous Lateran Palace) to the people of the Christian community as their "White House" in Rome? Nevertheless, it is simply a matter of record that by 375 A.D. Christianity became the official religion of Rome. For one thing, of course, it couldn't have existed as just another type of tolerated Judaism since it had so much wider an appeal. If it had been merely an ethnic cult, it could not have been even a candidate as an official religion.

More important for us than the fact that Christianity became the official religion is the fact that western Roman Christianity made no special effort to complete the Great Commission, not in this period. This is not because the Romans were unaware of the vast mission field to the north. Their military and political leaders had had to cope with the Germanic tribes people for centuries. We shall see how willingly those peoples became Christians.

WINNING THE BARBARIANS (400–800 A.D.)

Curiously, as the Barbarian tribes people became Christianized, they became a greater and greater threat to Rome. Somewhat unintentionally, they wrecked the network of civil government in the West long before they were to try to rebuild it. In fact, the only reason the city of Rome itself was not physically devastated by the invasions, which began in 410,

was that the Barbarians were, all things considered, really very respectful of life and property and especially the churches. Why? Because missionary efforts (for which Western Romans could claim little or no credit) had brought the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, and the Vandals into at least a superficial Christian faith. Even secular Romans observed how lucky they were that the invaders held high certain standards of Christian morality.

We are tantalized by the reflection that this much was accomplished by the informal and almost unconscious sharing of the blessings of the Gospel. How much better might it have been for the Romans had that brief hundred years of official toleration of Christianity (310–410) prior to the first invasion been devoted to energetic, constructive missionary efforts. Even a little Christianity prevented the Barbarians from that total disregard of civilization which was to be shown by the Vikings in the third period. Perhaps a little more Christianity might have prevented the complete collapse of the governmental structure of the Roman Empire in the West. Today, for [p. 246](#) example, the ability of the new African states to maintain a stable government is to a great extent dependent upon their degree of Christianization. (That is, both in knowledge and morality.)

In any case, we confront the ominous phenomenon of a partially Christianized barbarian horde being emboldened and enabled to pour in upon a complacent, officially Christian empire that had failed effectively to reach out to them. This may remind us of our relation to the present-day colossus of China. The Chinese, like the Barbarians north of Rome, have been crucially affected by Christianity. In the past twenty years they have adopted extensively and profoundly a kind of superficial faith which embodies a number of distinctly Christian ingredients—despite the grave distortion of those Christian elements in the Communist milieu. Just as a modicum of Christian faith in some ways strengthened the hand of the Barbarians against the Romans, so the Chinese today are awesomely more dangerous due to the cleansing, integrating and galvanizing effect of the Communist philosophy and cell structure which is clearly derived from the West, and in many ways specifically from the Christian tradition itself. You can imagine the Barbarians criticizing the softness and degeneracy of the Roman Christians just as the Chinese today denounce the Russians for failing to live up to Communist standards.

Whether or not the Romans had it coming (for failing to reach out), and whether or not the Barbarians were both encouraged and tempered in their conquest by their initial Christian awareness, the indisputable fact is that, while the Romans lost the western half of their empire, the Barbarian world, in a very dramatic sense, gained a Christian faith.

The immediate result was that right in the city of Rome there appeared at least two “denominations,” the one Arian and the other Athanasian. Also in the picture was the Celtic “church,” which was more a series of missionary compounds than it was a denomination made up of local churches. Still less like a church was an organization called the Benedictines, which came along later to compete with the Celts in establishing missionary compounds all over Europe. By the time the Vikings appeared on the horizon there were, up through Europe, over 1,000 such mission compounds.

Protestants, and perhaps even modern Catholics, must pause at this point. Our problem in understanding these strange (and much mis-understood) instruments of evangelization is not so much our ignorance of what these people did, as our prejudice that has been developed against monks who lived almost a thousand years later. It is wholly unfair for us to judge the work of a traveling evangelist like [p. 247](#) Colomban or Boniface by the stagnation of the wealthy Augustinians in Luther’s day—although we must certainly pardon Luther for thinking such thoughts.

It is indisputable that the chief characteristic of these “Jesus People” in this second period, whether they were Celtic peregrini or their parallel in Benedictine communes, was the fact that they loved the Bible, that they sang their way through the whole book of

Psalms each week as a routine discipline, and that it was they, in any case, who enabled the Kingdom and the power and the glory to be shared with the Anglo-Saxons and the Goths.

It is true that many strange, even bizarre and pagan customs were mixed up as secondary elements in the various forms of Christianity that were active during the period of the Christianization of Europe. The headlong collision and competition between Western Roman and Celtic forms of Christianity undoubtedly eventuated in an enhancement of common biblical elements in their faith. But we must remember the relative chaos introduced by the invasions, and therefore not necessarily expect to see, dotting the landscape, the usual parish churches that are familiar in our day. Under the particular circumstances then (similar to many chaotic corners of the world today) the most durable structure around was the *order*—a fellowship much more highly disciplined and tightly knit than the usual American Protestant congregation today. We must admit, furthermore, that these Christian communities not only were the source of scholarship during the Middle Ages, but also preserved the technologies of the Roman tradesmen—tanning, dyeing, weaving, metal working, masonry skills, bridge building, etc. Their civil, charitable, and even scientific contribution is, in general, grossly underestimated. Probably the greatest accomplishment of these disciplined Christian communities is seen in the simple fact that almost our total knowledge of the ancient world is derived from their libraries, whose silent testimony reveals the appreciation they had, even as Christians, of the “pagan” authors of ancient times. In our secular age it is embarrassing to recognize that, had it not been for these highly literate “mission field” Christians who preserved and copied manuscripts (not only of the Bible but also of ancient Christian and non-Christian classics as well), we would know no more about the Roman Empire today than we do of the Mayan or Incan empires, or of many other empires that have long since almost vanished from sight. As a matter of fact, Barbarian Europe was won more by the witness and labors of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon converts than by the efforts of missionaries deriving from Italy or Gaul. This fact was to bear decisively upon the [p. 248](#) apparently permanent shift of power in Western Europe to the northern Europeans. Even as late as 596, when Rome’s first missionary headed north (with great faintheartedness), he crossed the path of the much more daring and widely travelled Irish missionary Columban, who had worked his way practically to the doorstep of Rome, and who was already further from his birthplace than Augustine was planning to go from his. Thus, while Constantinople was considered the “Second Rome” by people who lived in the East, and Moscow was later to become the “Third Rome” to the descendants of the newly Christianized Russians, neither Rome as a city nor the Italian peninsula as a region was ever again to be politically as significant as the chief cities of the daughter nations—Spain, France, Germany, and England.

Toward the end of the second period, or at the end of each of these periods, there was a great flourishing of Christianity within the new cultural basin. The rise of a strong man like Charlemagne facilitated communication throughout Western Europe to a degree unknown for three hundred years. Under his sponsorship a whole range of issues—social, theological, political—were soberly restudied in the light of the Bible and the writings of earlier Christian leaders in the Roman period. Charlemagne was a second Constantine in certain respects, and his political power was unmatched in Western Europe during a half a millenium. But he was much more of a Christian than Constantine and industriously sponsored far more Christian activity. Like Constantine, his official espousal of Christianity produced many Christians who were Christians in name only. There is little doubt that the great missionary Boniface was slain by the Saxons because his patron, Charlemagne (with whose policies he did not at all agree) had brutally suppressed the

Saxons on many occasions. Then, as in our own recent past, the political force of a colonial power not so much paved the way for Christianity, but as often as not turned people against the faith. Of interest to missionaries is the fact that the great centers of learning established by Charlemagne were copies and expansions of newly established mission compounds deep in German territory, outposts that were the work of British and Celtic missionaries from sending centers as far away as Iona and Lindisfarne in Britain.

Indeed, the first serious attempt at anything like public education was initiated by this great tribal chieftain, Charlemagne, on the advice and impulse of Anglo-Celtic missionaries and scholars, such as Alcuin, whose projects eventually required the help of thousands of literate Christians from Britain and Ireland to man schools founded p. 249 on the Continent. It is hard to believe, but Irish teachers of Latin (never a native tongue in Ireland) were eventually needed to teach Latin in Rome, so extensively had the tribal invasions broken down the civilization of the Roman Empire.

The Celtic Christians and their Anglo-Saxon and continental heirs especially treasured the Bible. A sure clue to their chief source of inspiration is the fact that the highest works of art during these “dark” centuries were marvelously “illuminated” biblical manuscripts and devoutly ornamented church buildings; manuscripts of non-Christian classical authors were preserved and copied, but not illuminated. Through the long night of the progressive breakdown of the Western part of the Roman Empire, when the tribal migrations reduced almost all of the life in the West to the level of the tribesmen themselves, the two great regenerating ideals were the hope of building anew the glory that was once Rome, and the hope of making all subject to the Lord of Glory. The one really high point, when these twin objectives were most nearly achieved, was during Charlemagne’s long, vigorous career centered around the year 800. As one recent scholar puts it,

In the long sweep of European history, from the decline of the Roman Empire to the flowering of the Renaissance nearly a thousand years later, his [Charlemagne’s] is the sole commanding presence.

No wonder recent scholars call Charlemagne’s period the Carolingian Renaissance, and thus discard the concept of “the dark ages” for a First Dark Ages early in this period, and a Second Dark Ages early in the next period.

Unfortunately, the rebuilt empire (later to be called the *Holy Roman Empire*) was unable to find the ingredients of a Charlemagne in his successor; moreover, a new threat now posed itself externally. Charlemagne had been eager for his own kind to be made Christian—the Germanic tribes. He offered wise, even spiritual leadership in many affairs, but did not throw his weight behind any kind of bold mission outreach to the Scandinavian peoples to the north. What was begun under his son was too little and too late. This fact was to contribute greatly to the undoing of the empire.

WINNING THE VIKINGS (800–1200 A.D.)

No sooner had the consolidation in Western Europe been accomplished under Charlemagne than there appeared a new menace to peace and propriety that was to create a second period of at least semi-darkness to last 250 years: the Vikings. These savages further P. 250 north had not yet been effectively evangelized. While the tribal invaders of Rome, who created the First Dark Ages, were rough forest people who, for the most part, were nevertheless nominally Arian Christians, the Vikings, by contrast, were neither civilized nor Christian. There was another difference: they were men of the sea. This meant that key island sanctuaries for missionary training, like Iona, or like the off-shore

promontory of Lindisfarne (connected to the land only at low tide), were as vulnerable to attacking seafarers as they had been invulnerable to attackers from the land. Both of these mission centers were sacked more than a dozen times, and their occupants slaughtered or sold off as slaves in middle Europe. It seems unquestionable that the Christians of Charlemagne's empire would have fared far better had the Vikings had at least the appreciation of the Christian faith that the earlier barbarians had when they overran Rome. The very opposite of the Visigoths and Vandals, who *spared* the churches, the Vikings seemed attracted like magnets to the monastic centers of scholarship and Christian devotion; they took a special delight in burning churches, in putting human life to the sword, and in selling monks into slavery. A contemporary's words give us a graphic impression of their carnage:

The Northmen cease not to slay and carry into captivity the Christian people, to destroy the churches and to burn the towns. Everywhere, there is nothing but dead bodies—clergy and laymen, nobles and common people, women and children. There is no road or place where the ground is not covered with corpses. We live in distress and anguish before this spectacle of the destruction of the Christian people. (Christopher Dawson *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, p.87.)

Once more, when Christians did not reach out to them, pagan peoples came where they were. And once more, the phenomenal power of Christianity manifested itself: the conquerors became conquered by the faith of their captives. Usually it was the monks sold as slaves or the Christian girls forced to be their wives and mistresses who eventually won these savages of the north. In God's eyes, their redemption must have been more important than the harrowing tragedy of this new invasion of barbarian violence and evil which fell upon God's own people whom He loved. (After all, He had not even spared His own Son in order to redeem us!)

In the previous hundred years, Charlemagne's scholars had carefully collected the manuscripts of the ancient world. Now the majority were to be burned by the Vikings. Only because so many copies had been made and scattered so widely did the fruits of the Charlemagne [p. 251](#) literary revival survive at all. Once scholars and missionaries had streamed from Ireland across England and onto the continent, and even out beyond the frontiers of Charlemagne's empire. Thus the Irish volcano which had poured forth a passionate fire of evangelism for three centuries cooled almost to extinction. Viking warriors, newly based in Ireland followed the paths of the earlier Irish *peregrini* across England and onto the continent, but this time ploughing with them waste and destruction rather than new life and hope.

There were some blessings in this horrifying disguise. Alfred successfully headed up guerilla resistance and was equally concerned about spiritual as well as physical losses. As a measure of emergency, he let go the ideal of maintaining the Latin tongue as a general pattern for worship and began a Christian library in the vernacular—the Anglo-Saxon. This was a decision of monumental importance which might have been delayed several centuries had the tragedy of the Vikings not provided the necessity which was the mother of invention.

In any case, as Christopher Dawson puts it, the unparalleled devastation of England and the continent was “not a victory for paganism” (p.94). The Northmen who landed on the continent under Rollo became the Christianized Normans, and the Danish who took over a huge section of middle England (along with invaders from Norway who planted their own kind in many other parts of England and Ireland) also were soon to become Christians. The Gospel was too powerful. One result was that a new Christian culture spread back into Scandinavia. This stemmed largely from England from which came the

first monastic communities and early missionary bishops. What England lost, Scandinavia gained.

It must also be admitted that the Vikings would not have been attracted either to the churches or to the monasteries had not those centers of Christian piety to a great extent succumbed to luxury. The switch from the Irish to the Benedictine pattern of monasticism was an improvement in many respects, but apparently allowed greater possibilities for the development of the unchristian opulence and glitter which attracted the greedy eyes of the Norsemen. Thus another side-benefit of the new invasions was its indirect cleansing and refinement of the Christian movement. Even before the Vikings appeared, Benedict of Aniane inspired a rustle of reform here and there. By 910, at Cluny, a momentous step forward was begun. Among other changes, the authority over a monastic center was shifted away from local politics, and for the first time (as dramatically and extensively) whole networks of “daughter” houses were related [p. 252](#) to a single, strongly spiritual “mother” house. The Cluny revival, moreover, produced a new reforming attitude toward society as a whole.

The greatest bishop in Rome in the first millenium, Gregory I, was the product of a Benedictine community. So, early in the second millenium, Hildebrand was a product of the Cluny reform. His successors in reform were bolstered greatly by the Cistercian revival which went even further. Working behind the scenes for many years for wholesale reform across the entire church, he finally became Pope Gregory VII for a relatively brief period. But his reforming zeal set the stage for Innocent III, who wielded greater power (and all things considered, greater power for good) than any other Pope before or since. Gregory VII had made a decisive step toward wresting control of the church from secular power—this was the question of “lay investiture.” It was he who allowed Henry IV to wait for three days out in the snow at Knossis. Innocent III not only carried forward Gregory’s reforms, but has the distinction of being the Pope who authorized the first of a whole new series of mission orders—the Friars.

Our first period ended with a barely Christian Roman Empire and a somewhat Christian emperor—Constantine. Our second period ended with a reconstitution of that empire under a Christianized barbarian, Charlemagne, who was devoutly and vigorously Christian. Our third period ends with a pope, Innocent III, as the strongest man in Europe, made strong by the Cluny, Cistercian and allied spiritual movements which together are called the Gregorian reform. The scene was not an enlarged Europe in which no secular ruler could survive without at least tipping his hat to the leaders in the Christian movement. It was not a period in which European Christians had reached out in missions, but they had at least with phenomenal speed grafted in the entire northern area, and had also deepened the foundations of Christian scholarship and devotion in the Europe of Charlemagne. The next period would unfold some happy and unhappy surprises. Would Europe now take the initiative in reaching out with the Gospel? Would it sink in self-satisfaction? In some respects it would do both.

WINNING THE SARACENS? (1200–1600 A.D.)

The fourth period began with a spectacular, new evangelistic instrument—the Friars, and it would end with the greatest reformation of all, but was meanwhile already involved for a hundred years in the [P. 253](#) most massive, tragic misconstrual of Christian mission in all of history. Never before had any nation or group of nations launched as energetic and sustained a campaign into foreign territory as did Europe in the tragic debacle of the Crusades. This was in part the carry-over of the Viking spirit into the Christian church. All of the major Crusades were led by Viking descendants. Yet while the Crusades had many

political overtones (they were often a unifying device for faltering rulers), they would not have come about apart from the vigorous sponsorship of the Christian leaders. They were not only an unprecedented blood-letting to the Europeans themselves and a savage wound in the side of the Muslim peoples (a wound which is not at all healed to this day), but they were a fatal blow to the cause of Christian unity east and west and to the cultural unity of eastern Europe. In the long run, though they held Jerusalem for a hundred years, the Crusaders by default eventually gave the Byzantine inheritance over to the Ottoman sultans, and far worse, they established a permanent image of brutal, militant Christianity that alienates a large proportion of mankind to this day.

Ironically, the mission of the Crusaders would not have been so successfully negative had it not involved so high a component of abject Christian commitment. The great lesson of the Crusades is that good will, even sacrificial obedience to God, is no substitute for a clear understanding of His will. It was a devout man, Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom are attributed the words of the hymn *Jesus the Very Thought of Thee*, who preached the first crusade. In all this period two Franciscans, Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull, stand out as the only ones whose insight into God's will led them to substitute the gentle words of the evangel for warfare and violence as the proper means of extending the blessings God committed to Abraham and his children of faith.

At this point we must pause for reflection. We may not succeed, but let us try to see things from God's point of view, treading with caution and tentativeness. We know, for example, that at the end of the First Period, after three centuries of hardship and persecution, just when things were apparently going great, invaders appeared and chaos and catastrophe ensued. Why? This is the period that could be called the "Constantinian Renaissance"—that is, it was both good and not so good. Just when Christians were translating the Bible into Latin and waxing eloquent in theological debate, when Eusebius was editing a massive collection of previous Christian writings (as the official historian of the government), when heretics were thrown out of the empire (and became, however reluctantly, the only missionaries [p.254](#) to the Goths), when Rome finally became officially Christian ... then suddenly God brought down the curtain. It was now time for a new cluster of people groups to be confronted with the claims, blessings, and obligations of the expanding Kingdom of Christ.

Similarly, at the end of the Second Period, after three centuries of chaos during which the rampaging Gothic hordes were eventually Christianized, tamed and civilized, when Bibles and biblical knowledge proliferated as never before, when major biblical-missionary centers were established by the Celtic Christians and their Anglo-Saxon pupils, when, in this Charlemagnic (actually, "Carolingian") renaissance, thousands of public schools led by Christians attempted mass biblical and general literacy, when Charlemagne dared even to attack the endemic use of alcohol, great theologians tussled with theological/political issues, and the Venerable Bede became Eusebius of this period (indeed, when both Charlemagne and Bede were much more Christian than Constantine and Eusebius), once again invaders appeared and chaos and catastrophe ensued. Why?

Strangely similar, then is the end of the Third Period. It only took two and a half centuries for the Vikings to capitulate to the "counterattack of the Gospel."

The flourishing period was longer than a century and far more extensive than ever before. The Crusades, the cathedrals, the so-called Scholastic theologians, the universities, most importantly the blessed Friars, and even the early part of the Humanistic Renaissance make up this outsized 1050–1350 outburst of a Medieval Renaissance. And then suddenly, a new invader appeared, more virulent than ever, and chaos and catastrophe greater than ever occurred. Why?

Was God unsatisfied with incomplete obedience? With the blessings being kept by those who received them and not sufficiently and determinedly shared with the other nations of the world? The plague that killed one third of the inhabitants of Europe killed a much higher proportion of the Franciscans (120,000 were laid still in Germany alone). Surely He was not trying to judge their missionary fire. Was He trying to judge the Crusaders, whose atrocities greatly outweighed the Christian devotional elements in their movement? If so, why did He wait so long to do that? And why did He inflict the Christian leadership of Europe so greatly rather than the Crusaders themselves? Why didn't the Crusaders die of the Plague?

Perhaps it was that Europe did not sufficiently listen to the saintly Friars; that it was not the Friars that went wrong but the hearers who did not respond. God's judgment upon Europe then, was to take the Gospel away from them, to take away the Friars and their message. [p. 255](#) Even though to us it seems that it was a judgment upon the messengers rather than upon the resistant hearers, is this not one impression that could be received from the New Testament as well? Jesus Himself came unto His own, and His own received Him not, and *Jesus* rather than the people was the one who went to the cross. God's judgment may often consist of the removal of the messenger.

In any case, the invasion of the Bubonic plague, first in 1346 and every so often during the next decade, brought a greater setback than either the Gothic or the Viking invasions. It first devastated parts of Italy and Spain, then spread west and north to France, England, Holland, Germany and Scandinavia. By the time it had run its course 40 years later, one third to one half of the population of Europe was dead. Especially stricken were the Friars and the truly spiritual leaders. They were the only ones who stayed behind to tend the sick and to bury the dead. Europe was absolutely in ruins. The result? There were three Popes at one point, the humanist elements turned menacingly humanistic, peasant turmoil (often based in justice and even justified by the Bible itself) ended up in orgies and excesses of violence. The poverty, confusion and lengthy travail led to the new birth of the greatest reform yet seen.

Once more, at the end of one of our periods, a great flourishing took place. Printing came to the fore, Europeans finally escaped their geographical cul de sac and sent ships for commerce, subjugation and spiritual blessings to the very ends of the earth. And as a part of the reform, the Protestant Reformation now loomed on the horizon: that great, permanent, cultural decentralization of Europe.

Protestants often think of the Reformation as a legitimate reaction against the evils of a monstrous Christian bureaucracy sunken in corruption. But it must be admitted that the Reform was not just a reaction against decadence in the Christian movement. This great decentralization of Christendom was in many respects the result of an increasing vitality which, unknown to most Protestants, was as evident in the return to a study of the Bible and to the appearance of new life and evangelical preaching in Italy, Spain, and France as in Moravia, Germany, and England.

In the Reformation, the Gospel finally succeeded in allowing Christians to be German, not merely permitting Germans to be Roman Christians. Unfortunately, the emphasis on justification by faith (which was preached as much in Italy and Spain as in Germany at the time Luther loomed into view) became identified with German nationalistic hopes and thus was suppressed as a dangerous doctrine by political powers in the South. But it is merely a typical Protestant [p. 256](#) misunderstanding that there was not as much a revival of deeper life, Bible study, and prayer in Southern Europe as in Northern Europe at the time of the Reformation. The issue may have appeared to the Protestants as faith versus law, or to the Romans as unity vs. division, but popular scales are askew because it was much more Latin uniformity vs. national diversity. The vernacular had to eventually

conquer. Paul had not demanded that the Greeks become Jews, but the Germans had been obliged to become Roman. The Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians had at least been allowed their vernacular to an extent unknown in Christian Germany. Germany was where the revolt would have to take place. Italy, France, and Spain, formerly part of the Roman Empire and extensively assimilated culturally in that direction, had no nationalistic steam behind their reforming movements, which became almost lost in the shuffle that ensued.

However, despite the fact that the Protestants won on the political front, and to a great extent gained the power to formulate anew their own Christian tradition, they did not even talk of mission outreach, and the period ended with *Roman* Europe expanding both politically and religiously on the seven seas. Thus, entirely unshared by Protestants, for at least two centuries, there ensued a worldwide movement of unprecedented scope in the annals of mankind in which there was greater Christian missionary presence than ever before.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH (1600–2000 A.D.)

The period from 1600 to 2000 began with European footholds in the rest of the world. Apart from taking over what was almost an empty continent by toppling the Aztec and Inca empires in the Western hemisphere, Europeans had only tiny enclaves of power in the heavily populated portions of the non-Western world. By 1945, Europeans had virtual control over 99.5% of the non-Western world. Twenty-five years later, the Western nations had lost control over all but 5% of the non-Western population of the world. This 1945–1969 period of the sudden collapse of Western control, coupled with the unexpected upsurge of significance of the Christian movement in the non-Western world, I have elsewhere called “the twenty-five unbelievable years.” If we compare this period to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire’s domination over its conquered provinces of Spain, Gaul, and Britain, and to the breakdown of control over non-Frankish Europe under Charlemagne’s successors, we can anticipate—at least by the logic of sheer parallelism—that by the year 2000 the Western world itself will be dominated by non-Westerners. **P.**
257

Indeed, ever since the collapse of Western power became obvious (during the “twenty-five unbelievable years”), there have been many who have decried the thought of any further missionary effort moving from the West to the non-Western world, perhaps confusing the absence of political control for the absence of the need for foreign missions. The true situation is actually very different. Rather, the absence of political control for the first time in many areas has now begun to allow non-Western populations to yield to the Kingdom of Christ without simultaneously yielding to the political Kingdoms of the Western world. Here we see a parallel to the Frankish tribespeople accepting the faith of Rome only after Rome had become politically powerless, and the continued relative acceptability of the Roman faith among the Anglo-Saxons, Germans, and Scandinavians up until the point where the emergence of strong papal authority mixed with power politics became a threat to legitimate national ambitions, and led to a Reformation which allowed nationalized forms of Christianity.

The present spectacle of a Western world flaunting the standards of Christian morality in more obvious ways than ever is not as likely, therefore, to dissuade others from embracing the Christian faith in non-Christian lands as it is to disassociate the treasure of Christian ideals from a Western world which has, until this age, been their most prominent sponsor. When Asians accuse Western nations of immorality in warfare, they are appealing to Christian values, certainly not the values of their own pagan past. In this

sense, Christianity has already conquered the world. No longer, for example, is the long-standing Chinese tradition of skillful torture likely to be boasted about in China nor highly respected anywhere else, at least in public circles.

But this world-wide change has not come about suddenly. Even the present, minimal attainment of world Christian morality on a tenuous public level has been accomplished only at the cost of a great amount of sacrificial missionary endeavor (during the four centuries of period five) labors which have been mightier and more deliberate than at any time in 2000 years. The first half (1600–1800) of this fifth period was almost exclusively a Roman show. By the year 1800, it was painfully embarrassing to Protestants to hear Roman missionaries writing off the Protestant movement as apostate simply because it was not sending missionaries. But by the year 1800, Roman missionary effort had been forced into sudden decline due to the curtailment of the Jesuits, and the combined effect of the French Revolution and ensuing chaos in the cutting of the European economic roots of [p. 258](#) Catholic missions.

However, the year 1800 marks the awakening of the Protestants from two and a half centuries of inactivity, if not actual slumber, in regard to missionary outreach across the world. Now, for the first time, Protestants equipped themselves with structures of mission comparable to the Catholic orders and began to make up for lost time. Unheralded, unnoticed, all but forgotten in our day except for ill-informed criticism, Protestant missionary efforts in this period, more than Catholic missions, led the way in establishing all around the world the democratic apparatus of government, the schools, the hospitals, the universities and the political foundations of the new nations. Rightly understood, Protestant missionaries along with their Roman brethren are surely not less than *the prime movers* of the tremendous energy that is mushrooming in the Third World today. Take China, for example. Two of its greatest modern leaders, Sun Yat Sen and Chiang Kai-shek were both Christians.

If the Western home base is now to falter and to fail as the tide is reversed by the new power of its partially evangelized periphery (as is the pattern in the earlier periods), we can only refer to Dawson's comment on the devastation wrought by the Vikings—that this will not be a “victory for paganism.” The fall of the West will be due in part to a decay of spirit. It will be due in part to the pagan power in the non-Western world emboldened and strengthened by its first contact with Christian faith. It may come as a most drastic punishment to a Western world that has always spent more on cosmetics than it has on foreign missions—and lately ten times as much. From a secular or even nationalistic point of view, the next years may be a very dark period for the Western world, in which the normal hope and aspirations of Christian people for their own country may find only a very slight basis for optimism. But if the past is any guide at all, even this will have to be darkness before the dawn. While we may not be able to be sure about our own country, we have no reason to suppose—there is no historic determinism that assures us—that the Christian faith will not survive. The entire Western world in its present political form may be radically altered.

For one thing, we can readily calculate, in regard to population trends, that by the year 2000 Westerners will constitute less than half as large a percentage of the world (8%) as they did in the year 1900 (18%). This does seem inevitable. But certainly, judging by the past, we cannot ultimately be pessimistic. Beyond the agony of Rome was the winning of the Barbarians. Beyond the agony of the Barbarians was the winning of the Vikings. Beyond the agony of the Western [p. 259](#) world we can only pray that there will be the winning of the “two billion” who have not yet heard. And we can only know that there is no basis in the past or in the present for assuming that things are out of the control of the living God.

If we in the West insist on keeping our blessings instead of sharing them, then we will, like other nations before us, have to lose our blessings for the remaining nations to receive them. God has not changed his plan in the last 4,000 years. But how much better not to lose but to use our blessings, without reserve, in order “to be a blessing to all the families of the earth”? That is the only way we can continue in God’s blessing. The expanding Kingdom is not going to stop with us. “This gospel must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all people groups, and then shall the end come” ([Matthew 24:14](#)).

Dr. Winter is the founder and now General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, California, a co-operative centre focused on people groups with no culturally relevant church. Dr. Winter has also been instrumental in the formation of the movement called Theological Education by Extension, the William Carey Library publishing house, the American Society of Missiology and the Institute of International Studies. He served as a missionary in Guatemala and on the faculty of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. p. 260

Righteousness and Justice

Sidney Rooy

*Reprinted from Justice in the International Economic Order (1978),
with permission.*

The stark drama of suffering, uncertainty, and indifference unfolds before a conscience-stricken world. Many clamor for justice. Others say it is too late. But it is no new story. Man’s history is shot through with the power of evil and its tragic consequences. Let me give two examples.

Jeremiah laments the sorrows of captive Zion. Judah is gone into captivity; she finds no rest. Her gates are desolate, her virgins raped. Her sons are slaves, her faith laughed at. All her people sigh; they seek bread. And to slowly realize, after all is said and done, that no one really cares is just too much. She cries aloud: “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?” Comes the great doubt: Has God forgotten too? Is all this his anger upon my sin?

Behold and see if there be any sorrow
like unto my sorrow
Which God has brought upon me ...
in his fierce anger.

([Lamentations 1:12](#))

Whole peoples today are victims of another captivity. Like Israel, some are God’s people. Before the crushing weight of what others call progress they often stand alone. Their world is coming apart. Many of them tend to see organized religion as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda writes:

I did not purchase property in heaven
Sold by priests, nor did I accept