

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 10

Volume 10 • Number 4 • October 1986

**Evangelical
Review of
Theology** p. 295

Theological News, October, 1986). Due both to the unusual length of some of the articles as well as to the need of making room for the Consultation's papers, the usual format of the periodical could not be retained (as in similar cases in some earlier issues). The papers and the findings of the Consultation will be published in the form of a book early next year. Hence some selections from the Consultation are published in this issue and the next.

The first two articles were plenary papers presented at the Consultation by Gerhard Maier and Ron Sider respectively, and touch the nerve-centre of the Consultation's theme, JESUS CHRIST OUR REDEEMER AND LIBERATOR—namely, the Kingdom of God. The scope of each is more complementary to the other than contradictory. The third article, by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali was written for Group Study at the Consultation in the area of Community—its role in redemption and liberation. Unfortunately it could not be discussed, due to the lack of time. The fourth is an important document of the Commission as well as of the WEF, and is the result of more than two years of study by the Commission's Task Force on Ecumenical Issues, headed by Paul Schroetenboer. The last article by Peter Chang shows how TEE comes of age in a third-world way—to equip blue collar ministers!

In one way or the other, these articles emphasize the crucial role Church renewal plays in reaching out to the world in proclamation and service. This precisely was the theme of the last General Assembly [p. 297](#) of the World Evangelical Fellowship, also held at Singapore in June 1986: RENEW THE CHURCH—REACH THE WORLD. We trust that the Consultation's papers published in this issue prod us a bit to do both—thus taking us a little step further in Evangelical thought and action.

Editor [p. 298](#)

The Gospel as Judgment and Hope for the Nations

Gerhard Maier

Printed with permission

I. THE GOSPEL AS JUDGMENT FOR THE NATIONS

Every preacher of the Gospel speaks also of the imminent kingdom of God. He wants to bring salvation from a world which is marked by death and degeneration into the eternal life of the coming world ([Acts 2:40](#)).

But what does this mean in the light of hope, life and righteousness of the peoples?

1. The Gospel is no human projection of the future. Perhaps some preachers of the Gospel give the impression as if they are thoroughly disgusted with the contemporary world and have fallen prey to a hopeless scepticism. The Gospel has nothing to do with such a *scepsis*, neither can it be compared with any human projections such as that of 'the Club of Rome'. The Gospel rather comes alive because of the revelation which God gave the prophets and apostles of old all of which has been inscripturated in the Bible.

Therefore, anyone who wants to know what will happen to the world must have his knowledge by the revelation of God—and by nothing else. Everything else collapses and does not last.

2. The Gospel speaks clearly and unambiguously that the sinner has no future. He lives under the wrath of God and will receive the judgment of condemnation at the end. Significantly, [Romans 1](#) speaks not only of righteousness before God as the content of the divine revelation, but specifically also as ‘the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all the Godlessness and wickedness of men’ ([Romans 1:18](#)). Should a preacher keep silent over this aspect, then he would be preaching no Gospel that the Bible portrays, because the biblical type of evangelization (which can be seen at its best in the ministry of Jesus) takes place neither at the level of emotion nor of intellect, though both participate. Primarily it takes place at the level of the will and deliberation. It takes up the question, ‘What shall we do to be saved?’ ([Acts 2:37, 16:30](#)). But this question can be posed only when it is clear that the old way of life leads to death. Man must know where he is heading when he continues in the old way. Precisely, therefore, *must* the Gospel—the Gospel itself—protect the sinner from the wrath of God (cf. [Romans 1–21](#)). Unfortunately, both the Lutheran p. 299 distinction between the Law and the Gospel, as well as Karl Barth’s distinction between ‘the Gospel and the Law’ in practice have sometimes had the effect of making the affirmation of the wrath of God as being contradictory to the Gospel.

3. The Gospel unambiguously affirms that the individual peoples and kingdoms have no eternal future. Assyria is sunk, Babylonia has disappeared and the kingdom of Alexandria is no more. There is the assurance of durability only for the people of Israel so long as this *aeon* lasts. From this perspective the life of peoples (nations) is relativized most emphatically. He who dedicates his life to politics can no doubt significantly serve the neighbourly love, but he is labouring for something which is short-lived. Only from such a biblical point of view can it be explained as to why the early Christians prayed, ‘May thy kingdom come, may this world pass away.’

4. Not only the individual peoples and kingdoms, but also the systems and religions of the peoples have no eternal future. Since 1789 the occident lives in the spell of the French Revolution. Millions of people have died for the sake of freedom and equality. Since 1917 all over the world we are living in the spell of the Russian Revolution. It has produced innumerable martyrs who have given their lives for the ideal of Communism. Who knows what revolution we will experience yet! But all the systems are condemned for death ([Matthew 24:7](#)). The same holds good also for religions and the peoples. Here by religion I understand a system created by man, such as Buddhism, materialism, animism and the like.

5. The Gospel affirms unambiguously that the creation as it is now is doomed for destruction: ‘The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken’ ([Matthew 24:29](#)). ‘Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them’ ([Revelation 20:11](#)). The present creation is like a burning building: the walls, the roof, the rooms and the furniture are still intact, but the fire is discovered and one knows that in a very short moment all this will collapse ([II Peter 3:10f.](#)). The details of such a destruction belong to eschatology and do not interest us here. Actually the only detail which interests us here is that the guilt-intoxicated earth and the universe which are desecrated through the rebellion of man give way and make place for ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ ([Revelation 21:1f.](#)).

So we must ask once more: What does the judgment upon the sinner, the sinful humanity, its systems and the fallen world mean concerning the life, hope and righteousness of the nations?

Here the answer concerns only the dimension of the judgment. It [p. 300](#) will be good for us to remember that we must also sketch the dimension of grace. This shall be done in Part II.

6. The Gospel still comes as a blessing to the peoples even under the banner of judgment, since it gives to all men a valid norm, a measuring rod. Here we have, to use expressions out of the history of theology, not 'the human thoughts over God, but God's thought over man' before us (Karl Barth). This makes us free from all strivings to find the affirmations of the Gospel upon the scientific and other affirmations, projections, etc. On the contrary, the Gospel becomes the norm with which all that can be said about the Word must be tested. This one norm brings all Christians under one single community. The new humanity grows from among the hearers and doers of the Gospel, the *tertium genus*, the coming generation which is already here beyond all earthly possibilities.

7. There is a second way in which the Gospel as judgment becomes a blessing to the peoples; namely, that it reveals the truth. 'Thy Word is truth' ([John 17:17](#)), says the Son of God and the cross-bearing Saviour. Paul calls his message 'The Word of truth' ([II Corinthians 6:7](#)). Today this truth is more urgent, more necessary, and more relevant than ever before because there would be few periods in history which are richer in illusions than the present one. Who can bring disillusionment in such a situation if not the Gospel? For, only by waiting on God can one get clarity. Many of our contemporaries are under the illusion that peace is humanly achievable. They have taken over the illusion of the Atlantic Society that anything can be achieved. A religious version of such a wishful thinking is the idea that world peace can be evolved through a coalition of unity of all religions. Innumerable congresses meet for this purpose. It is in the face of all this that the preachers of the Gospel have the necessary service of producing the truth. Lasting peace, including its external aspects, comes only through the return of Jesus. Therefore, only a turning to Jesus Christ can bring an age of grace and, hence, of peace. A godless peace movement—perhaps with some successes at the beginning—can only strengthen dissension in the world. In fact, there is also an anti-Christian peace through the antichrist which may last for a short while.

The truth reveals that even the best designs of the sinner, his highest idealism and his burning zeal for sacrifice, can only stabilize the system of sins.

Therefore, the Gospel also becomes a necessary critique of all idealism, be it capitalistic or Marxistic.

Many of our contemporaries live under the illusion that a better, more just world can be created through liberation movements and [p. 301](#) specific 'humane' revolutions. In the last few years I have noticed in Germany a sobering process. If one spoke of a 'more just' world earlier, nowadays one speaks only of a 'somewhat more just' world. From our side we should in no way underestimate the drawing power of such goals, especially for the youth. Wherever we hear the resounding of the passwords 'grab', 'you can do it', 'together we are unconquerable', we should ask back quite plainly: Who is actually speaking here, is it a man of Christ, born again, or is it the old man with a lot of pluck? Is it the man who wants to liberate himself or is it the one who hopes on God alone? All earthly revolutions can be compared to a wheel whose axle stays immovable, but what is above, sooner or later comes down, and what is under before long will come above—it does not stay there long. No doubt this kind of revolution indeed gives the world another face, but the heart is not changed; the axle of the wheel doesn't move up or down. Of course, the disillusionment which the Gospel brings here is painful, but it is also necessary because, if not the Gospel, what else can testify to the great overthrow that took place at Golgotha and the truth that God's revolution is coming upon us which does away with the old heaven and the old earth but inaugurates a new creation?

8. The Gospel as judgment has a further significance: it shows how and where co-operation with individual non-Christians and with political and social institutions is possible. It keeps the Christians in what can be called 'a merciful distance' from these.

In that it says to the nations and the kingdoms of this world that they as such (without the fellowship of God) have no future, the Gospel denies that the Church is ever bounded by a particular nation or kingdom. As such, the Gospel is neither the Gospel of the Europeans nor of the Asians nor of the Americans. It glorifies no nation, it demands no definite political structure. That is its distance.

On the other hand, the New Testament forbids us from 'keeping off the world' ([1 Corinthians 5:10](#), compare [John 7:15](#)). The limited and the timebound mandate of a nation can also be a help for a bearable co-existence in this world. Therefore Christians give 'to the Caesar what is Caesar's' ([Matthew 22:21](#)). That means they try to be loyal to the existing nation and society to the extent that they are not forced to take up another religion ([Acts 4:19](#), [5:21f.](#)). They do so especially because of their knowledge that the kingdoms, peoples and nations are only forerunners and they dare to keep the burning till it collapses. What the Russian priest Dudkov wrote after great humiliation, viz., 'We struggle not against the officers ...' has made a great impression on me. p. 302

9. The Gospel as the preaching of judgment offers (though very seldom it may so appear) a help for overcoming disappointment. Ideologies and religions, time and again, lead to frustration and doubt, because their claims are bigger than their realizations. The 'real existence' is never what one had originally wished. And exactly here, where the Gospel brings the word of judgment to all these autonomous movements, it preserves itself from falling prey to them. It directs one's hope on what lasts and enables one to do the best in the given situations in a sober way and without illusions. Gabriel Marcel called hope 'the substance of the soul', but false hope must be broken in order that 'the substance of the soul' may be won.

10. As seen above, the gospel as judgment announces also the end of this world. Here again the aspect of judgment has a constructive effect. It brings a consciousness of temporariness in which we live. But this 'temporary consciousness' must bring also the dimension of eternity at least as a question, and exactly this clear announcement of the end of the world helps men to pose the question concerning eternity. Such an announcement is an answer to a creaturely condition which is given to man irrevocably. 'My heart, O God, is restless until it finds rest in Thee', said Augustine. All human quests and longings, all human aggressiveness and passivity can be understood as an attempt to bring back the lost eternity. If the church gives the impression that this world itself is eternal, then she only strengthens these strivings which in the end can only mean an escape from true eternity. She will then become a deceiver of men rather than a comforter; but if she proclaims the true Gospel, then she prevents an escape movement. Then the true eternity, the incorruptible new creation, including the new humanity, will become the criterion for personal and suprapersonal history. What kind of validity has this step in the light of eternity? What remains of this deed? These are the questions which become necessary for man. Death will no more be the touchstone for life, but the incorruptibility will be the touchstone for the corruptible. The question which was once written on the walls of the Tübingen University building has a deep meaning: 'Is there a life before death?' If the dimension of eternity is taken away from man, then perishes his humanity, too.

So far we have considered the foregoing under the aspect of judgment. It is time now that we turn to the second part.

II. THE GOSPEL AS HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

The kingdom is at hand! At hand! Till now it has begun, but it has not **P. 303** yet finished yet. We are pilgrims to the kingdom. What does it mean for the nations in which we live?

1. *The Gospel sets signs of hope.* The Gospel is a powerful word ([Jeremiah 23:29](#), [Hebrews 4:12](#)). Converted people change their lifestyles. He who stole must steal no more ([Ephesians 4:28](#)). He who told lies must no more tell lies ([Ephesians 4:25](#)). All these are the visible signs of the hope. All need not be so corrupt and degenerated as it is until now. Where earlier doubting and resignation ruled, there is now visible improvement. It is definitely a sign of hope when the new President of the Philippines explained at the beginning of April that she would forgive her enemies, basing it on the Gospel demand, 'As Christians we are taught to forgive'.

Signs of hope are also those promised in [Mark 16:17f.](#) which follow the missionary mandate. Men can experience protection, they can experience healing. We know, however, that innumerable believers still continue in sickness or become martyrs. Yet, throughout church history, wonders and signs are taking place through which God confirms His actions. These signs are, as in the times of Jesus, signs for a comprehensive physical, psychological and spiritual healing at the end, when the kingdom of God is to be established in its full power.

The great English historian, A. Toynbee, once said, 'The world history cannot continue without a vision of God'. Where the Gospel is present there one sees not only transformed nations and the wonders of God, but he sees more: a God who holds all the threads of world history in His hands. We do not indeed see Him with our physical eyes but with spiritual eyes and with our love ([1 Peter 1:8](#)). But we see him at work with ever newer certainty, and that is the greatest sign of hope: to see God at work, to understand the whole world as being in His hand.

Here I would like to add one further point. The gospel makes us priests and kings ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). By that is not meant a kind of caste or clergy of our churches. It is rather an expression which includes every Christian. Therefore one speaks of a 'universal priesthood of all believers'. Also, universal priesthood is not limited to working together in worship services, counselling Bible study and the like. Rather, it includes the whole activity of a Christian, whatever the profession. From such a standpoint flow many far-reaching consequences which, as far as I can see, have not yet been adequately thought through. A Christian who exercises his political duty and his profession with a full trust in God yielded to His will becomes a blessing for everyone around him. A famous example is that of the Christian, William Wilberforce, who persevered in the English parliament for the removal **p. 304** of slavery. A further example is that of Auguste Herman Franke who in Germany in the 18th Century formulated the fundamentals of education. We need such burning lights. All these rays are also the signs of hope. We should only note that the universal priesthood of all believers and clericalism are two fundamentally different concepts. One of them, clericalism, makes the church a lobby and leads to ever newer 'genitive theologies' as, for example, 'theology of liberation' or 'theology of feminism', etc. Such a process is false according to the Bible. Otherwise the church will be unquestionably swallowed by social responsibility and become a prey to the intellectual or activist fashion of the time. Instead of that we as a church should encourage the members of our congregations to be responsibly active in every field according to their best knowledge and conscience, so that the church and the world are not mixed up. And precisely here it becomes a blessing for all nations, including the non-Christians. This indeed is the universal priesthood at work.

2. *The Gospel gives freedom from pressures.* We live in a world where evil plays a powerful role. Enlightenment expected a time of perfection. Instead there came a time of external (ecological degeneration, wars) and inner (moral) destruction. We have a very

high material progress only at the cost of the destruction of the traditional morality. Jesus and New Testament prophecy foretold precisely this aspect ([Matthew 24:3f.](#), [Revelation 12:12](#)). The Bible has rightly held its ground against the Enlightenment and its over-optimism.

One of the most terrible aspects of evil is this, that man is forced to do evil in spite of his good will. This is to be seen primarily in the spiritual sphere as [Romans 7](#) shows us. But it holds good also at many other levels of our existence. He who fears for his life must do things which otherwise he would not have done, or sacrifice his conscience for the sake of his career. But the Gospel has greater power than that of the pressures of evil. As I visited Korea earlier this year I was deeply impressed by the martyrdom of Rev. Soon in the Korean War. Many times he was offered security for his life as the Communist troops advanced, but he rejected because he wanted to suffer with his sick ones. So he died a martyr's death. I think also of the example of the Polynesian Catholic priest Maxmillian Kolbe. In a concentration camp of the Nazis, for some reason every tenth person was shot. When the turn came for a man who was the head of a family, Kolbe volunteered to take his place and was shot instead of the man.

Perhaps our daily lives may pass insignificantly and dully. Normally fear of man originates out of such situations. It is a wonderful gift of the Gospel that it enables men all over the world to stand against such a [p.305](#) pressure of the evil. The Gospel educates one to its own standpoint and towards an opinion for which one is personally responsible to God. People who are independent and who are responsible to God are urgently sought after in all nations. Precisely because of their Christian liberty can such people make the love of God transparent to mankind.

I want to emphasize that what is said thus far is essentially related to the theological streams of our times. We should not go with the theological majority or with extremes which are theologically attractive or the way of least resistance. But as men liberated from God, we should testify to the biblical truth concerning these problems where 'the Gospel is preached in its purity' (Confesio Augustana, 1530 Article 4), there freedom comes to birth. Such liberated men can do the service of divine love in their nations, a service which every nation needs urgently. In this connection I would consider it a catastrophe if our biblical evangelical message is watered down or becomes more like liberal theology, such as, for example, in the World Council of Churches. This way leads to a levelling of all theologies to a grey common denominator.

3. *The opportunity of an external christianization of the nations.* In this third point we touch a very ticklish matter because it was precisely the biblical evangelical movement which became a front against a pure traditionalism and against a nominal Christianity. So long as there were movements like Pietism, Methodist revival, evangelical missions and the like, it was emphasized that an external Christianity does not save. It was demanded time and again from our side that a conversion is necessary. That is the reason why an external christianization of the nations is considered with greatest scepticism.

Such a point of view cannot naturally be given up, but it needs to be enlarged. The power of the Gospel is so great that even in an external christianization of the nations there is still a help for them. Such a help comes first of all out of a study of the biblical writings. The repentance of the Ninevites in the third chapter of Jonah had certainly not made all Ninevites the followers of the living God. Yet God has placed a blessing on that repentance. Jesus considered it positively ([Matthew 12:41](#)). The book of Esther shows that conversion to the Jewish had positive effects upon the Persian kingdom. Even though the motives of such a conversion were not always spiritual ([Esther 8:7](#); [10:2f.](#)).

The history of our churches also shows in the same direction with respect to the christianization of the Roman Empire. Slavery gradually disappeared, justice became

more charitable, and the care for the poor more intensive. In the middle ages the christianization of the European peoples made possible the so-called 'peace of God' (*treuga p. 306 dei*); that is, there were times when battles were stopped and weapons rested. Till today this Christian custom has a healthy moral responsibility and the restriction of evil drive as a consequence. Conversely, rejection of Christian norms in Europe means a total change with many negative moves. Families will be destroyed, egoism and hate increase, etc. It is now usual to denounce all Christian morals as hypocrisy. It is high time we return to a proper evaluation of these things. Christianization obviously had also negative and damaging effects. Yet I affirm that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. I want to assert the same also for the Brazilian Red Indian tribes who accept the Gospel. They stop buying alcohol and living in strifes. Numerically they increase while other tribes die out over the years.

To repeat for the sake of clarity, we should not sell the Gospel as a cultural or political medicine, but we shall also not close our eyes to the fact that nations which allow a free hand for the Gospel or have Christian majority do have a blessing. This gives us the right, even on a human plane, to demand freedom of religion everywhere and to appeal that in all nations the suppression of Christian witness may be stopped.

4. *The Gospel creates a new man.* The quest for a new man is ancient. It plays a vital role in the Indian doctrine of incarnation which builds its teaching upon the possibility of a better, higher, 'newer' man. It also plays a role in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, who likewise considers the possibility of a 'superhuman' new man. The 'superman' of Friedrich Nietzsche is a further example. Religious dedication was understood as the 'birthday' of a new man. In the Hellenistic mystery religions at the time of Jesus the blood of sacrificed animals was poured over men in order to enable them to become new men filled with the divine.

Later ideologies have taken up this quest. It is moving to study the new humanism, such as that of Lessing; to consider the dream of Marxism, of the new man in Karl Marx's communist manifesto of 1847, and, finally, to compare it with the reality of the so-called 'real existing socialism'.

Must all this dream remain an unreality? No, for the Gospel creates the real new man. It becomes effective with those who 'accept' Jesus Christ, who 'believe in His name' ([John 1:12](#)). It takes place as a miracle of God through baptism and new birth ([John 3:5](#); cf. [1:13](#)). This new man is a child of God. We must emphasize this point especially. Biblically speaking indeed all of us human beings are the creation of God, but the children of God and the people of God are only those who accept Christ in faith as Saviour and Lord and have experienced the miracle of rebirth. This is the 'new man' according to the [p. 307](#) gospel. Theologically speaking it is sometimes affirmed that there is a hidden Christ in all religions, or even a 'hidden Christianity', but we do not see how such affirmations can be harmonized with the Bible.

The new man is first a citizen of the kingdom of God. Paul says, 'our citizenship (*politima*) is in heaven' ([Phil. 3:20](#)). That is why in early times Christians were called 'tertium genus', 'the third(=the new) generation' besides male and female. It is this aspect which makes all the nations, especially those who emphasize the state, distrust Christians. But the other side of the matter is that the new man is a visible part of the kingdom of God, of the new creation, and so embodies in himself in a most intensive way that hope. The kingdom is invisible until now, but its members are already visible. As Christians we have the duty to make transparent this new man as the launching pad of hope for all nations ([Ephesians 4:22f.](#)).

4. *The Gospel enables to share a new community.* Just now we spoke of the new man. This new man is no isolated individuality; rather from the beginning he is incorporated

into the body of Christ. Here we enter into the secret of the church of Jesus Christ as a new fellowship to which the Gospel gives access. In connection with our theme we would like to bring out three aspects of this fellowship.

Firstly, this fellowship is an order of the coming visible kingdom of God. This fellowship possesses an unquenchable fountain of love which comes from God ([Romans 5:5](#)). It does not follow the human norms, of the orders of authority and rulership. Not power but service to others is its criterion ([Matthew 20:26f.](#)). It lives in a free communication with God. Further it lives in the assurance of eternal life which triumphs over death. Its distinctive characteristic is the freedom of the children of God. Trust is its atmosphere.

Secondly, such a fellowship carries with it as before the earthly aspects. The law of sin is still at work among the members of the fellowship ([Romans. 7:25](#)). It does still experience the shatter of good purposes and errors in its knowledge. We are, as Luther said, justified and sinners at the same time, we exist 'in the penultimate, not in the ultimate', to express the same truth in the famous formulation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Therefore, we must strictly warn against the separation of the driving power of the Gospel from the credibility of the Christian church. The reverse also is true; despite the lapses of the Christians, despite the painful lack of their trustworthiness, the glory of the Gospel shines through in the world. What is decisive is that God is trustworthy.

The third aspect of this fellowship is an answer to the question, To what extent can this new fellowship co-operate with other religious or p. 308 social fellowships and movements in this world? Such a co-operation is thinkable only in one form; namely, the form which allows the church of Jesus Christ to retain its freedom and uniqueness. It cannot allow a servile yoke to be forced upon it. Even through such alliances it cannot tread the path of the works of the law in the hope of pleasing either God or man. The fellowship must reach all decisions through faith, it must never forget the distance which the cross of Jesus Christ has created from all the spiritual—be they secular or religious—movements. It must reject every kind of adaptation. Its way is determined by the Gospel: not only in the diagnosis, but also in the treatment. So, for example, it is impossible for the fellowship to take up either the Marxist or humanist or capitalist or sociological analysis. In these spheres, a limited co-operation is thinkable, for a short period which does not deny the Gospel in principle ([Luke 9:59f.](#)).

The Gospel limits the time of wickedness. The fact that 'the kingdom of God is near' is an essential part of the Gospel. Such affirmation explains at the same time that the time of wickedness is limited but, is such an explanation really something special? Are there not numerous religious as well as secular affirmations which likewise speak of the end of wickedness?

There is a threefold particularity in the Gospel. Firstly, the Gospel is neither competitive nor unexpected; rather, it is a result of divine prophecy (cf. [Jeremiah 31:31ff.](#)). Its message as well as the coming of the Saviour has been announced over centuries. Thus, it manifests fulfilled prophecy, but its affirmations have a completely different driving power and credibility, in contrast to those of the vague hopes which are present outside the Gospel. Through burdens and sufferings it encourages one to take a glance at the already near and certain redemption.

Secondly the Gospel is based upon immovable historical facts. Jesus lived; He lived and acted in the way the Gospels describe Him. He died factually for the sake of our redemption on Golgotha. The Holy Spirit, 'the other comforter', was factually poured down at Pentecost. All these facts which are the historical characteristics of the Gospel are insolvably bounded up with Christian faith and history and increase our trust in the affirmation that the period of the evil is actually run out.

Thirdly, the Gospel couples mission with the end of wickedness. When the Gospel is preached to all nations according to God's will, then comes the end ([Matthew 24:14](#)).

As such the preaching of the Gospel itself is a contribution to end the evil. In this sense we can therefore say 'the Gospel limits the time of evil'. p. 309

7. *The Gospel frees one for indescribable joy.* Among the heroes of Greek-European legends, Sisyphus takes a special place. He must continuously roll a heavy stone up a steep incline as a punishment for his lapse. When he has arrived almost at the peak the stone falls down and Sisyphus must again start at the beginning. Since then Sisyphus has become a symbol for most intensive striving which is, after all, useless in the end.

The fear of vanity of human activity weighs upon the nations as a terrible curse. Yet paradoxically nations feel themselves bound to most diverse forms of achievement: traditional, moral, religious, economical and others. Moreover, there enters a fear of emptiness which in any case in the western world is producing even greater numbers of neurotics. To be sure, here we find only a modification of this fear of emptiness, in which the beyond is forbidden in human thoughts by the sheer striving of the will. As such the statement of Confucius holds good for many: 'We do not understand this world itself, why should we think about the world beyond?'

Here the Gospel opens fully new dimensions, for it is the Gospel of grace which 'without the works of the law' (which also means without human achievement) leads one into harmony with God. It is a Gospel also of truth which is offered and not just grasped in bits after hard struggles. It is a Gospel which precisely through the destruction of all human illusions—that means also of religious illusions—leads us into freedom. It is a Gospel which precisely through one's relationship with Jesus Christ introduces a liberation from all coercions. It is a Gospel which gives meaning to human life because it makes men the children of God. It is a Gospel which need not neglect death and the beyond, but transforms death into an entry into eternal life.

This zeal of the Gospel for liberation cannot perhaps be better expressed than through a small well-known anecdote. At the end of the conversation between two people, one explains to the other, 'We have two different religions; your religion consists in the word "do" but my religion consists in the word "done".' Do—that is the basic model of all those appeals which excite humanity to unfold its own powers. Do—that is the basic plan of all-too-human religions and ideologies which want to transform the world. But done—that is the joy which the Gospel brings with itself. Since the joy is gifted and not achieved, no human effort can destroy it, as well as 'no one shall take away your joy from you' ([John 16:22](#)).

This joy remains with those whom the Gospel has grasped. Such joy is neither hidden nor monopolized; rather it converts the disciples of Jesus into fountains of joy and light in their nations, and time and again p. 310 breaks through the darkness which has covered the nations and individuals in guilt and suffering throughout human history. So the Gospel once again becomes the hope of nations through liberation for indestructible joy.

Rev. Dr. Gerhard Maier is the Rector of the Albrecht-Bengel Haus in Tübingen, West Germany. p. 311