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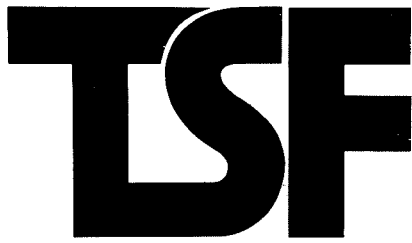
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# BULLETIN

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# Evangelization and Social Ethics —Some Reflections

by Mortimer Arias

I was at the beginning of my temporary exile in Brazil when I learned of the gracious invitation to participate in this symposium. I am very grateful to my friends here at Perkins for the golden opportunity to see them again. I wondered if they were trying to cheer me up a bit and help me to heal my wounds from the recent experiences in prison. I was inclined to accept immediately and gladly, though I was not able at the time to make a formal commitment. Only God knew where I would be by this time of the year! But I was strongly attracted to the attempt of bringing together social ethics and evangelism, long a concern of mine since my days as a bishop of the little and dynamic Methodist Church in Bolivia, and to share what I can from my particular perspective, a sort of Third World-Latin American perspective, infected with quite a bit of ecumenical experiences and a long year's association with North American Christianity.

These are just "some reflections" (as it has been suggested in the program) made along the way as an evangelist practitioner and an amateur theologian, as any Christian is supposed to be.

## I. My Evangelical Struggle and Our Common Problems

Let me begin, candidly, confessing my evangelical hang-ups and my struggle to get beyond them towards a holistic understanding of the gospel, more fully biblical and better rooted in the social realities of our world.

I have nothing to regret about my evangelical experience and I gladly remain an evangelical at heart, in terms of my personal experience of Christ, my fundamental trust in the witness of the Scripture, the basic roots of my piety, and the joyous thrust to share the good news with others. But I cannot share the favorite dichotomy of some American evangelicals separating themselves from liberal Christianity and the ecumenical movement. And I believe that not a few of us would like to call ourselves "ecumenical evangelicals" or "evangelical ecumenicals"!

### Evangelical Struggling

Anyway, I must recognize that it has not been easy for me to incorporate in a meaningful way the social dimension of the gospel and to relate coherently social ethics and evangelism. My Protestant-Puritan-Pietistic-Evangelical heritage (to use K. S. Latourette's characterization) has been enough for my personal faith, my inner life and my individual ethics guidance, but it has not helped me very much to understand the structures and the dynamics of society and how to relate them to the gospel. We Latin American Evangelicals found some help at some stage of our pilgrimage in the Reformed tradition with its encompassing view of history and God's sovereignty in human affairs, and the unfailing inspiration of John Wesley's compassion and social concerns. But we were not enabled to see society except as a conglomerate of individual units: social evils were seen as the consequence of individual sins and vices, and the only response to social dilemmas and powers was personal conversion and personal virtues. David O. Moberg in his *The Great Reversal* says that this has been the effect of American individualism, a case of thorough accommodation of the gospel to the American culture!<sup>1</sup> If this is so, then it has been exported, David Watson was suggesting,

and it has effectively circulated around the world, almost as effectively as the American cowboys and the westerns watched in awe by Hong Kong, Japanese, German or Italian audiences!

Experience is showing, however, that this individualistic-spiritualistic-other-worldly reductionism of evangelization is too small. It doesn't do justice either to the realities of our world, as Francis Ringer was pointing out, or to the fullness of the biblical gospel, as Richard J. Mouw has effectively demonstrated (see *TSF Bulletin*, January/February, 1982).

Timothy L. Smith and David O. Moberg have demonstrated that the evangelical individualistic and spiritualistic reduction took place in the 1920s and 1930s, during the fundamentalist-liberal controversies and as an over-reaction to the social gospel, in a "Great Reversal" of the evangelical tradition of compassion and social concern present in the Wesleyan movement and in the first Awakening period in America.<sup>2</sup> David O. Moberg, for instance, tries to recover the biblical understanding of social sin and he bravely tries to point to some relevant ways through which Christians can express today their social concerns as part of the gospel proclamation and witness.<sup>3</sup>

It is my impression, however, that this attempt cannot go beyond the accepted concepts of social service and personal philanthropy; maybe it will lead to some community, but without the necessary analysis of the macro-structures and the dynamics of our contemporary society, like social classes, racist and sexist trends, military-industrial complexes, the omnipresent and omnipotent transnational corporations, the power and functions of cultural myths and ideologies, in one word the contemporary version of the "powers and principalities."

What we are doing—and here I include myself—is to act by aggregation, adding up, incorporating into our dominant understanding of the gospel and "evangelism" some social concerns. Sometimes reluctantly, as an appendix, or as "social implications," or "social duties," but not as an essential component of the gospel and of evangelization. The Lausanne Congress has gone a step forward in this process, recognizing, with Dr. John R. W. Stott, that social action and human liberation are part of Christian mission, but on a parallel line with "evangelism," considered as the primary mission of the Church.<sup>4</sup> But there was an eagerness (to which it might be healthy to apply the hermeneutical principle of suspiciousness) to keep and protect a special province for what is called "evangelism," defined mainly as verbal proclamation and restatement of the apostolic kerygma or a particular moment of the tradition of the Church. There were, however, at Lausanne, some interesting and challenging inputs from the Radical Discipleship group, who pointed to the need of prophetic evangelization, and the relevancy of the issues of liberation and oppression for a consistent proclamation of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> It is not by chance that the leading evangelicals in this group were from the Third World or those in the First World tuned to Third World and minority concerns in their own society.

### Catholic and Ecumenical Struggling

It may be a consolation for us to discover that the Catholic family is also facing similar problems, even coming from different historical experiences and formulations of evangelization. A whole Synod of Bishops was called in Rome in 1974 to deal with "The Evangelization of the Modern World."<sup>6</sup> The bishops were not able to come to

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<sup>1</sup>David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, Holman Books, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 30f.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 120ff, 172ff.

<sup>4</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1974), pp. 15ff.

<sup>5</sup>Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, eds., *Mission Trends No. 2: Evangelization* (New York: Paulist Press; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 249–252.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 259–267.

an agreement, particularly on the issue of the place of human liberation in the Christian concept of salvation and, consequently, of evangelization. One year later, Pope Paul VI was able to put together a remarkable document, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an apostolic exhortation on Evangelization in the World Today.<sup>7</sup> Recognized then is the intimate relationship between liberation and evangelization, but the kind of link between the two is not spelled out, and after numerous and notable concessions to contemporary understandings of liberation, it ends up with an untouchable nucleus of good old Catholic doctrine on spiritual and eternal salvation, with some historical aggregations.

On the other hand, in the ecumenical movement the struggle comes from the other side. They have been strong in recovering the prophetic dimension of Christian faith and in committing themselves as Christians to the world and its problems. And though there is an evangelistic dimension in what the churches and other Christian

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***In the Kingdom of God you cannot separate history from eternity, or the individual from society, or the social from the spiritual.***

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groups are doing, there is a lack of intentionality, an ingrown allergy towards verbal proclamation and specific evangelistic activities and methodologies, which is only gradually receding. The Nairobi Assembly came a long way towards a holistic evangelization through its document II on "Confessing Christ Today."<sup>8</sup> The CWME is constantly struggling inside the structures and programs of the WCC to point to the missiological meaning of all the other programs: the social dimension of the gospel, yes, but also the evangelistic dimension of social involvement! And the latter is not so obvious to many who still have a syndrome reflex against the stereotype of "evangelism."<sup>9</sup>

True, as it has been said in this symposium by Dr. W. Richey Hogg, the Melbourne Conference has not come to specifics in evangelization; or, as Father Stransky put it: Melbourne should have had the Pattaya agenda and Pattaya should have had the Melbourne agenda. However, I have tried myself, in preparing our Monthly Letter on Evangelization in Spanish, to go through the Melbourne documents and bring up all the relevant guidelines for evangelization, and what I was able to put together was very impressive indeed, and could be very stimulating for our concern here and our ongoing evangelistic task and reflection.

After this confessional recital let me move to the next point, precisely related to the Melbourne theme: "Your Kingdom Come."

## **II. The Kingdom Perspective**

I have a hunch to share with you. Since I began to reflect on the Kingdom theme, long before the Melbourne Conference, I have had the hunch that the Kingdom perspective might be what we were needing and what I had been looking forward to for a long time. Might it be that the biblical vision and the theological foundation of the Kingdom of God is the rallying center where Evangelization and Christian (Social) Ethics come together where they belong?

### **Jesus' Evangelization: Announcing the Kingdom**

We are aware of the need for a definition of evangelization for the sake of clarity in our dialogue. How about trying Jesus' own definition of evangelization for a change? Nobody would deny that there was only one theme, one message, in Jesus' proclamation, and this was no other than the Kingdom of God, as it is witnessed overwhelmingly in the synoptic gospels. He came *preaching* the kingdom. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news." He came *teaching* on the Kingdom of God; this is what his parables are all about. He came *healing* and pointed to his works of healing as the evidence that the Kingdom was in their midst to his contemporaries. He denounced the powers like the Pharisees' and Sadducees' systems of Law and Temple with all their economic implications—from the perspective of the Kingdom. His enemies

were well aware of this; they perceived the subversive nature of his preaching, teaching and acting, and decided that he had to die, and executed him as a subversive between two Palestinian guerillas of that time. The process was a fraud; they did not understand Jesus' message and the disciples didn't, but in another sense they understood what he was talking about when they put the title of the execution: "Jesus of Nazareth *King* of the Jews." This is not all. According to Luke's witness in the book of Acts, there was only one subject the resurrected Lord had to talk about with his disciples:

For forty days after his death he showed himself to them many times, and in ways that proved beyond doubt that he was alive; he was seen by them, and talked with them *about the Kingdom of God* (Acts 1:3).

In the synoptic gospels and in the book of Acts evangelization is *announcing the Kingdom*. No less and no more. Jesus came announcing the Kingdom. His disciples—the twelve and the Seventy and the women from Galilee—went around announcing the Kingdom, by word and deed. Jesus called his disciples to *enter* into the Kingdom, to *follow* him, and to *go out* announcing the Kingdom. We make a great fuss about the so-called Great Commission as the charter for evangelization, particularly in its Matthean version: "Go out . . . and make disciples." All right, but what is the content of the message to be delivered? Disciples in what? "Everything I have commanded you." And what is it but the Kingdom of God? John R. W. Stott perceptively has pointed out that we cannot separate the Great Commission from the Great Commandment; the first one does not stand alone.

How come, then, that we have lost track of the Kingdom of God in our evangelization message and approach?

### **Translations of the Kingdom**

It is a long story of *translation* and *reduction* of Jesus' message of the Kingdom. It began with the apostolic generation and its concentration on Jesus Christ—the Kingdom in person, *Auto Basileia* as Origen called him—and the salvific events of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Pentecost, all of which could be seen as the revelation and manifestation with power (as Jesus predicted) of the Kingdom of God, including the emerging of the church, as anticipation and privileged sign. Jesus the King became Jesus is Lord (*Kyrios*) and the consummation of the coming Kingdom became *Parousia*, the appearing of the Lord. In Paul the Kingdom is translated as salvation, its present dimension becomes the life in the Spirit (or "in Christ"), and the future consummation of the Kingdom is expressed in the faith in the resurrection, in the expectation of the Day of the Lord, and in the groaning with the whole creation in the birth pangs of the final liberation. In John the Kingdom is translated as eternal life. In the last book of the New Testament the message and the hope of the Kingdom is translated in the apocalyptic key, displaying the vision of the King of Kings, the Lamb of God, ruling over kings and powers and dominions, and the Dragon and the Anti-Christ, and calling the servants of the King to be faithful in the midst of captivity, persecution and oppression. This is a message coming from the one who is, who was and who is to come, through John, a brother sharing with them "in suffering, and in his Kingdom, and in enduring."

### **Reductions of the Kingdom**

This process of translation and contextualization went on during the centuries up to our days. But in the process of translation the gospel of the kingdom has been reduced to one of its dimensions. The Kingdom of God in the biblical witness is multidimensional and all-embracing (including the individual, the community of believers, society, the powers and kingdoms, the cosmos, history and eternity), and it is a dynamic reality that was, that is and that is to come. But in our effort to appropriate what is meaningful to us and our times we make it unidimensional, and absolutize the part we perceive or appropriate as if it were the whole: the *transcendent* kingdom of

<sup>7</sup>Published by the United States Catholic Conference (Washington, D.C., 1976).

<sup>8</sup>David M. Paton, ed., *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975*. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November–10 December, 1975 (London: SPCK; Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 41–57.

<sup>9</sup>*Christian Mission*, p. 29.

the Fathers, or the *ecclesial* kingdom of the Catholic Tradition, or the *inner* kingdom of the evangelical witness, or the *euphoric present* kingdom of the charismatic experience, or the *cataclysmic* kingdom of the apocalypticists, or the *new social order* of Christendom, the social gospel or the last revolutionary scheme.

In our evangelistic tradition of the last two hundred years we have reduced the Kingdom of God to a soteriological kingdom of individual salvation of souls for eternity, with a few reluctant concessions to present life and society. The Wesleyan tradition is richer and much more inclusive (Catholic, in the true sense of the term) than the common revivalistic mini-theology. But, in our effort to recover the totality of the gospel of the Kingdom and relating evangelization and social ethics, it will not be enough to go back to Wesley's tradition or to the Reformation tradition. Justification by Faith or Sanctification are very important reference points in our tradition, but they should not be a straitjacket for our own appropriation and proclamation of the gospel. What we are called to do is not mere re-statement and modernization of a frozen tradition defined once and for all, in the 16th or the 18th centuries, but a new encounter with the original tradition in the Scriptures, an ongoing dialogue with different strands of our traditions (and theology today cannot be but ecumenical), and a reformulation from our own historical context. Tradition and translation must go hand in hand.

### A New Perspective

It is here that I ask myself if it is not the time to look at evangelization from a new perspective: and it seems to me that social ethics is already moving in this direction. After one century of scholarly work and discussion about the historical Jesus, the Kingdom of God, eschatology and history, we are coming to some constructive efforts both in theology and ethics to translate the meaning of the original message of Jesus on the Kingdom. Wolfhart Pannenberg is definitely committed to found Christian ethics on the Kingdom as "the power of the future," followed in America by Carl Braaten with his *Eschatology and Ethics*.<sup>10</sup> Paul Ramsey himself, thirty years ago, in his classic work on *Basic Christian Ethics*, already was pointing to what he called "the two sources of Christian love," namely, God's righteousness and love and the reign of his righteousness in the Kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> He continued: "Never imagine you have rightly grasped a biblical idea until you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of one or the other of these motives, or of the idea of the Covenant between God and man from which both stem."<sup>12</sup> I feel tempted to sign up on that and imitate him, in reference to evangelization, saying: "Never imagine you have grasped the biblical gospel and content of evangelistic message until you have succeeded in reducing it to a simple corollary of the motive of the Kingdom of God!"

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### ***The challenge to follow Jesus in the Kingdom is not a call to academic learning or orthodoxy, but a call to engaged faith, to what some are calling orthopraxis.***

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Now, this is what I would also like to happen in our evangelistic renewal and strategy. It is coming gradually and fragmentarily. The Melbourne theme has helped not only in its final documents but in the reflections that it has started and stimulated around the world.<sup>13</sup> There are a couple of books on evangelism in the United States (of which the most remarkable, as it has been said, is Alfred Krass's *Five Lanterns at Sundown*) which are pointing to a Kingdom evangelization.<sup>14</sup>

### III. A Few Hints and Some Suggestions

At first sight we can already see the tremendous potential of the Kingdom perspective for bringing together evangelization and social ethics. In the Kingdom of God you cannot separate history from eternity, or the individual from society, or the social from the spiritual. I don't mean that there is no hierarchy of values or historical priorities. Nor do I mean that evangelization and social ethics are the same

thing. There is difference in focus, but they belong together. There is no way to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom leaving out social ethics for some later stage of Christian growth. What are Jesus' requirements for discipleship in the Kingdom? If you take out what is thoroughly ethical in Jesus' message, what is left? A religious salvationism with only a partial soteriological content, a docetic reduction of the gospel.

### Hints from the Gospel

Jesus challenged his disciples to go and *announce* the Kingdom. And he invited his listeners to *seek* the Kingdom of God. How about summarizing evangelization as *announcing* the Kingdom and ethics as *seeking* the Kingdom of God and his righteousness?

Or take the Lord's Prayer. "Your kingdom come" might be the evangelist's prayer, while the ethicist's prayer might well be its equivalent translation in the same prayer: "your will be done on earth as in heaven."

Or take the inaugural message at the synagogue in Nazareth. Should it be the foundational charter for the churches' mission and evangelization task, or should it be the signpost for Christian ethics? Or both?

Or take conversion, the center of the evangelistic task. When you understand conversion in the perspective of the Kingdom, as it happens in the gospel story, turning to the Kingdom present in history in the person and movement of Jesus and his ministry, it is both conversion to God and to neighbor.

When Jesus demanded that the young ruler forsake his riches and use them for the sake of the poor, was he putting an evangelistic call or just an ethical demand of perfection? In any case, it was put right away in the first encounter with the would-be disciple, without waiting for a future course on Christian education. Or Zacchaeus' commitment to rectify his economic dealings with neighbor and society and make social reparations and start a new style of life; was it a conversion testimony or just a "social implication" or an advance pledge of Christian duty? Jesus called it "salvation" and he said that through this conversion he had been re-integrated into the covenant community of Abraham. (How do we compare this with our decisions for Christ and conversion stories in our evangelization?)

And, as there is no conversion to God without conversion to the neighbor, there is no vertical reconciliation without horizontal reconciliation according to Jesus. "If you come with your offering to the altar and there you remember that your neighbor has something against you . . ." <sup>15</sup> And there is no forgiveness from God if it is not shared with others. And no love of God without love of neighbor. And no service to the King in his Kingdom without serving him in the "least one of these," and that is what counts for final salvation in the inherited Kingdom. What about thinking on the soteriological meaning of the neighbor? John Wesley had something to say on this: "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social, no holiness, but social holiness."<sup>16</sup> Or, take the clue Jesus gave to point to the presence and action of the Kingdom in his own ministry: "'To the poor' is announced the good news."<sup>17</sup> Was it the motto of Jesus' evangelization campaign or was it another instance of ethical teaching? If you pick poor you have ethics, if you pick good news you get evangelization. Is the poor an ethical category or has it also a missiological meaning in God's strategy? Is poverty a social ethics burning issue or is it also intimately related to human sin to be denounced and to the good news to be announced?

Why is it so difficult for us to put together what belongs together?

Certainly, we have to do our job in order not to put asunder what God has put together, and this is why I have been looking forward

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<sup>10</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Kingdom of God and the Foundation of Ethics," in *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 102-126. Carl E. Braaten, *Eschatology and Ethics: Essays on the Theology and Ethics of the Kingdom of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).

<sup>11</sup>Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Emilio Castro and Jacques Matthew, eds., *Your Kingdom Come*. The Official Report of the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, held in Melbourne, May 1980 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981). See also *International Review of Mission* 69:276-277 (October 1980-January 1981).

<sup>14</sup>Alfred C. Krass, *Five Lanterns at Sundown: Evangelism in a Chastened Mood* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1978).

<sup>15</sup>Matt. 5:23.

<sup>16</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 14:321.

<sup>17</sup>Luke 4:18.

to this symposium with such expectation and hope.

There is no time here to develop this point further. I have been trying to do my homework and to imagine how evangelization would look from the Kingdom perspective. I am still struggling with it.

### **Announcing the Kingdom as Gift, as Hope and Task**

For instance, if we start from the fact that the Kingdom has already come in Jesus Christ and his ministry, and in the subsequent events of crucifixion, resurrection, Pentecost, and the emerging of the new community of the church, how do we announce the Kingdom? In this case we are announcing the Kingdom of God as a fact, as a given, as an accomplished reality, *as a gift*. As the early church in the New Testament, we point to Jesus Christ—the presence of the Kingdom—who came, who lived, who died, who was raised, who lives. And we point to the signs of the Kingdom in the words and deeds of Jesus' ministry, in the power of life that was manifested in him, in the good news announced to the poor, in the open table for sinners, in the forgiveness of sins that he brought and makes available today, in the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Church of yesterday and today. Jesus himself said that the Kingdom is a gift: "It is our Father's good pleasure to *give* you the Kingdom."<sup>18</sup> This is a Kingdom to be received, not to be built by the effort of humanity. And, as Jesus taught, it has to be received simply, unassumedly, without any pretension, as children, as "the least one of these."

How do we announce the Kingdom as a gift? Just like the apostolic church did: by *telling* the story in the preaching and teaching of the church; by *enacting* the story in sacrament, particularly in the

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### ***How about summarizing evangelization as announcing the Kingdom and ethics as seeking the Kingdom of God and his righteousness?***

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breaking of the bread; by *incarnating* the gospel of the Kingdom in the *fellowship* of the believing community and the *service* to the outside community.

This has been the strong point in the evangelical tradition: the kingdom has been announced as available salvation through Jesus Christ to be received by faith. We announce the Kingdom as "the rule of grace," to refer to the theme of Albert Outler's powerful address at our luncheon yesterday. This is what we might call evangelical evangelization! But it is good for us to remember that, even announcing the Kingdom as a gift, it takes more than verbal proclamation; it demands a holistic ministry, as David Watson reminded us, of *kerygma*, *didache*, *koinonia* and *leiturgia*, according to the apostolic precedent (see *TSF Bulletin*, January/February, 1983 and March/April 1983).

Now, if we take the eschatological or future dimension of the Kingdom, then we have to *announce it as hope*. No matter what our eschatological school may be, we will have to come to grips with the fact that Jesus pointed to the future consummation of the Kingdom of God through his parables of growth, his crisis of Parousia parables, and through apocalyptic dressed utterances. "Be like people who wait," he told his disciples, while he taught them to pray saying: "Your kingdom come."<sup>19</sup>

How do you announce the Kingdom as hope today? By hoping, by inspiring hope, by criticizing false hopes, by supporting hope. Here is where I believe our particular Latin American experience has been most meaningful and creative (as there was a creative period of the ministry of hope in this nation in the shaping up of the American Dream). We are recovering *prophetic evangelization*, the full ministry of hope in history. First by *annunciation*, the raising up of visions and dreams, developing the utopian function of Christian faith, awakening the hope for a new tomorrow, a new humanity, stirring the passion for things yet to be, inspired by the glowing visions of the messianic kingdom in the prophets and the New Testament. Second, by *denunciation*, the pointing out of the contradictions, the injustices, the oppressions of our day, unmasking and naming the idols, discerning the times, uncovering self-deception and illusions, confronting the powers. Third, we have discovered, in the midst of terrible repressive situations of persecution, prisons, concentration

camp, tortures, exiles, executions and disappearances, the ministry of *consolation*: healing of the broken-hearted, helping the needy, supporting the suffering, rescuing the victims, sustaining hope against hope: the ministry of *martyria*: living and dying by faith, putting life on the line as the final gesture of hope in the coming Kingdom. We have come back to the catacombs; the church of the martyrs has come to life again, and we are discovering the old and costly method of evangelization of the Roman circus. To be an evangelist in Latin America today—a true evangelist of the Kingdom—is to be the servant of hope, and to pay the price for it.

And then, we have the Kingdom *as task*, as present dynamic reality, inbreaking in our lives and societies. As in the times of Jesus, the presence of the Kingdom is a sign of contradiction: it is an attracting and repelling center. Today as yesterday, the Kingdom "suffers violence" and "forces its way" among men and women and powers. It is a "dividing sword" and as a "fire cast upon the earth." To enter into the Kingdom is to take sides, to cross the line, to make an option: for life or against life with the powers of death, for the oppressed or for the oppressor, for the poor and powerless or against them.

To announce the inbreaking present Kingdom in a sinful world means a call to repentance and conversion, to change persons and institutions and structures of sin. It means to turn to God, turning people to God's movement in history. A very risky step. Conversion to Christ in the neighbor, both the "near," personal neighbor, and the "distant," impersonal neighbor in the oppressed masses, classes and races. It means also a call to discipleship, which is much more than a gentle invitation to personal development, which means enrollment in the struggles of the Kingdom, and the embracing of some painful disciplines and priorities. The challenge to follow Jesus in the Kingdom is not a call to academic learning or *orthodoxy*, but a call to engaged faith, to what some are calling *orthopraxis*.

In this orthopraxis of faith not only a theological reflection and spirituality is coming up but also new forms of the Christian community, like the Base Christian Communities, small cells at the grass roots, not structurally dependent on the institutional churches, but free and creative responses to the situation, where Christians come together to study the Bible on their own, letting it speak and open up the message of hope and liberation; celebrating their faith in prayer, in song, and sacrament; and bringing with them the concerns and the problems of the community, trying to respond in very specific ways from their contextualized faith. These small "*comunidades de base*," spread all over by hundreds of thousands, are renewing the church, are becoming the reservoirs for the renewing of society, and they are already centers of true holistic evangelization in the perspective of the coming Kingdom: communities of the poor, evangelizing the poor and from the poor. In the midst of these small Christian communities there is no problem of keeping together evangelization and social ethics. They don't even know the difference!

Sure, I know what you are going to say: that this is nothing new. These were the Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire for three centuries at least. That this is what John Wesley's class meetings and bands were all about. All right, we have the precedent in our own tradition. The question is how do we respond to the present challenge and situation in the place where we are. Because there are no blueprints; and just an imitation of what is happening somewhere else or a reproduction of the past models will not do. We have tried it and it didn't work.

How are we doing to raise and become part of the contemporary expressions, partial incarnations and anticipations of the Kingdom in our midst? Because to announce the Kingdom incarnationally demands from us not only *to speak*, and *to do*, but also *to be*.

No wonder. After all, the church, like the woman in Revelation 12, carries in its womb the Messiah, the evangelist's Savior and the ethicist's Lord—but the same One, Lord and Savior, who was, who is and who is to come. History is also pregnant, in the beautiful concept of the Brazilian Ruben Alves, waiting for tomorrow's child, for full and final liberation. It is the task of the Church to inseminate the world with the seed of the Kingdom (and Jesus said that the children of the Kingdom are the seed of the world) and to groan with the whole creation for its final liberation and redemption. To the glory of the one King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Savior and Lord.

<sup>18</sup>Luke 12:32.

<sup>19</sup>Matt. 6:7ff.