

The Mission of the Kingdom

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Pasadena, CA. After serving ten years as a missionary among Mayan Indians in the highlands of Guatemala, he was called to be a Professor of Missions at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. Ten years later, he and his late wife, Roberta, founded the mission society called the Frontier Mission Fellowship. This in turn birthed the U.S. Center for World Mission and the William Carey International University, both of which serve those working at the frontiers of mission.

Most people interested in missions are staggered by the unusual span of concern and mission strategy reflected in Carey's pioneering ministry in India. The very breadth of Carey's classical outreach leads us to ask what Carey might "see" today as the full range of God's concerns in mission. That kind of *sight* is something our optic nerves do not handle. "The eyes of the heart" (Eph 1:18) are quite apparently not the eyes of our heads. To what extent did Carey's breadth reflect *the mission of the Kingdom*?

With his kind of special insight, the Lord's Prayer itself may very well suddenly take on new and unusual meaning: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). What does "Thy Kingdom come" mean? Ponder, if you will, how different it seems to be from a conventional evangelistic activity in which people are "invited to accept Christ." Only when we emphasize that He is Savior *and Lord*, do we add an element of authority and governance that draws in the Kingdom concept.

We note that in an instance where Jesus is accused of calling on the powers of Satan's domain, He claims rather the coming of God's Kingdom: "If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). Apparently a Kingdom "not of this world" (John 18:36) is still a powerful presence that can "come," that can physically banish the powers of Satan.

Later, Jesus said, "This Gospel of *the Kingdom* will be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the Gentiles and then the end shall come" (Matt 24:14). He may have been talking about the *coming* of the Kingdom in the same sense—that is, the coming of the power and presence of God into and "upon" human situations dominated by Satan.

Let us not suppose that our modern cities represent the final form of the kingdom of God. It is righteousness that exalts a nation, not skyscrapers. William Carey's activism in so many directions is more indicative of Carey's sense of God's righteousness and glory than it is of any kind of secular utopia. William Carey cared more about the restoration of justice, the concept of right and wrong, a sense of God's creative good, an expression of His love and the reestablishment of His good name. This is less and more than building a city, a school or a hospital. Medical missions are not primarily a "bait" to attract people to Christianity but a concrete means of portraying more accurately the true nature of a loving God.

Thus, Evangelicals are justly suspicious of assumptions that human efforts can successfully “build the Kingdom of God” on earth. Even Hitler might have claimed to be doing just that. (The Nazis, in fact, were the first to detect a link between smoking and cancer and actually do something about it.) To make the world a safe place for either fascism or democracy is not exactly what Jesus meant when he talked about the the fortress of Satan being unable to resist the advance of the church (Matt 16:18). More likely He was talking about Gospel triumph over evil rather than a social/political achievement of earthly prosperity.

John said, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose: that He might destroy *the works of the devil*” (1 Jn 3:8). We don’t think much about precisely what are *the works of the devil*.

According to Gregory Boyd (see Chapter 16), one reason is that our Christian tradition imbibed some harmful paganism in Augustine’s time, a perspective rendering the salt and light of the Christian mission “strangely passive” in the presence of evil. This syncretistic strand in our tradition may explain how a medieval Mother Superior could leave untouched a worm burrowing into her forehead. One day, when it fell out as she bent over, she returned it because her theology urged her to believe that God is behind all suffering and that suffering calls for *resignation* rather than *resistance*. Protestant ministers once opposed smallpox vaccination on the same grounds—that it would interfere with Divine Providence. Some Hindus (and Americans) will not kill any form of life no matter how evil or destructive to other life. Is the Kingdom of God an active, aggressive, expanding, conquering power that does not merely endure evil but is set to “destroy the works of the devil?”

If so, we must think more clearly about what those “works” actually are. This won’t be quick and easy since, it would appear, the Evil One is more successful at working unseen and unnoticed than in withstanding frontal spiritual warfare. William Carey knew nothing about germs, good or evil. He did not live in “a world of largely invisible predators” as someone has said. Can Carey guide us now?

A major hurdle exists partly because our

theological tradition emerged before we had become aware of the world of vicious and destructive microbes. Are they the work of Satan? Modern Christians have finally dared to insist that nature reveals “intelligent design.” Are we also prepared to recognize “intelligent *evil* design” and risk our lives to kill off—totally eradicate—evil-working parasites that drag millions down in terrible suffering and death? *Is our God misrepresented if we don’t?*

Jonathan Edwards died experimenting with smallpox vaccine. Did that kind of vision die with him? Do our missionaries tell people (their actions speaking louder than their words) that God’s Kingdom has no power over tiny evil? Or, that we can give people beds to lie on while they die but we cannot fight the *source* of their disease? Would Carey have fought back at the microbial level, had he known what we know?

Until recently I have never thought much about the growth or non-growth of world population and the degree to which Satanically inspired “war and pestilence” has depressed it. In the 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ world population increased from 27 to 200 million—.1% per year. *Horrendous war and pestilence must have held the growth rate down to that!*

Shortly before A.D. 2000, war and pestilence had been greatly reduced—though not banished—such that the global population rate was 1.7%, growing 17 times as fast as the ancient rate. At that point, in order to slow global growth to the ancient rate, 96 million people would have to die per year—in *addition* to all the people already being killed off by genocide and disease and all other factors. Thus, by A.D. 2000, “the works of the devil” in the form of war and pestilence had been significantly reduced. But, is the total eradication of evil microbes part of, and essential to, the task of winning souls and reaching unreached peoples? *Is the mission of the Kingdom* that broad? If so, is it not ominous that neither our sermons nor conventional missiology seriously reflect this dimension of the task? Do we know what it means to “destroy the works of the devil?” Is that a mission frontier? 🌐