
A Platform for Charismatic Co-operation?

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At the Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelisation in Manila in July 1989 charismatics and non-charismatics tried to find a formula for co-operation in the task of evangelising the world. Dr J I Packer's contribution was his seminar on 'The Kingdom of God and Evangelisation' which is reviewed here.

Dr Packer began by distancing himself from the view of the Kingdom currently espoused by the World Council of Churches. This he identified as God by-passing the church in his dealings with mankind, re-defining evangelism in this-worldly terms, marginalising church-planting as an optional extra and denying that neighbour-love requires us to seek reconciliation with God as man's primary need.

His brief section on the **Nature of the Kingdom** traced some inadequate views previously popular before indicating that contemporary scholarship accepts that the Kingdom has both a present and a future dimension, seeing it as God's gracious action and man's response in accepting his rule. He used the term *inaugurated eschatology* to indicate that the first instalment of the Kingdom is here already. In the light of some equivocal statements on the subject, it was encouraging to hear him insisting that those who refuse the rule of Christ will not only be banished from the future re-integration of heaven and earth under his Kingship but will suffer *eternal* misery.

I will pass over his sections on the **Signs of the Kingdom** and the **Task of Evangelisation** not because they were unhelpful but because they contained little distinctively important for this present enquiry. One note of interest was his reminder that Matthew 5:16 calls for a testimony of both works and words so that relieving the aching physical needs of the world is often necessary as 'pre-evangelism' to overcome some of the prejudices men have against the church.

The seminar consisted of a consideration of **Four Theses**.

1. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must call for the universal acknowledgement of God as Saviour and King by all human beings.*

This thesis was used to answer those who deny the need to evangelise people of other religions because they are *Anonymous Christians* or Jews because of the so-called *Two-covenant Theology*.

2. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must exhibit the signs of the Kingdom which it announces.*

It was here that Dr Packer outlined the *five planks in his platform* from which a bridge might be built towards co-operation in evangelisation with charismatics. As a corrective to assumptions commonly held they are all expressed negatively.

a) It is not necessary for anyone to deny the reality of 'signs and wonders'.

There is no *dogmatic* necessity. The reports should be listened to and then tested by Scripture, looking for maturing in faith and love in those on whom the signs took place. Because Satan tries to spoil reality by imitation we should reject as spurious anything which leads to pride or error. He observed that such 'tests' could not, by definition, be applied merely on the occasion of the evangelism as they call for the consideration of long-term effects.

b) It is not necessary to reject either of the views of 'signs and wonders' current among evangelicals today.

The difference is over hermeneutics. One sees the 'signs' as authenticating the ministry of Christ and the Apostles, so there is no warrant for us to expect them after the era of NT revelation. Others expect all the phenomena of the NT to be experienced today. As all agree that God grants his gifts in answer to believing prayer, it is not surprising that God gives no 'signs' to those who do not ask for them. I understand Packer to be saying that whatever hermeneutic we adopt we are under obligation to *review* any 'signs' which may appear as Satan is also able to work supernaturally.

c) It is not necessary to view 'signs' as the primary source of gospel credibility. The *primary* source is the transformed life of the evangelist. Every genuine conversion is a *power encounter*. Historically this is why *testimonies* have been used during evangelistic meetings. It also shows the harm done to our credibility by the much-publicised scandals of the tele-evangelists. Other 'signs' will have some credibility but we must notice that not all those who saw the abundance of NT miracles came to faith as a result.

d) It is not necessary to accept all the claims made for miracles and the renewing of sign gifts of the NT to acknowledge that what is happening in charismatic circles may be of God.

It is Packer's view that *none* of the alleged instances of restored gifts is equal to those seen in NT times. He speaks of similarity without identity. All NT healings were direct and infallible. Modern 'tongues' do not have the structure of languages which he believes to have been the case in Acts and I Corinthians. He believes, however, that much that is happening is real and that we should not be found dowsing any fire God is giving.

e) It is not necessary to affirm the superiority of evangelism accompanied by 'signs and wonders' over evangelism without them.

The well-known instances of Whitefield, Wesley, Billy Graham and Leighton Ford were given. (Leighton Ford is the Chairman of the Lausanne Committee!) This crucial point went without comment during the discussion as no one insisting on such superiority had chosen to attend Dr Packer's seminar.

3. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must not secularise the Kingdom it announces.* This was used to discredit Liberation Theology which appears to suggest that the Kingdom is no more than a change in external circumstances.

4. *Evangelism under the Kingdom must retain the perspective of the Kingdom it announces.*

The doctrine of the Kingdom requires that we define the church from the centre out, ie in terms of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Roman Catholic

theology *cannot* do this as it defines the church from the circumference in, ie a person is a Christian if they are in an outward relationship with the church, being in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Packer would not reject an individual RC who wishes to join him in evangelism, suggesting that 'your church is your problem, not mine'. *Prior agreement on the doctrine we preach* is necessary for joint evangelism, he said, but formalised church structures are not. He suggested that we should be praying for the break-up of the Roman church into national churches and that the grotesque papacy should be abandoned.

My general observation of the Lausanne Congress was that the sincere attempt made by Dr Packer to treat this issue *theologically* was not matched by a similar approach from the other side of the chasm. It was more than disappointing that the leading charismatic advocate, Jack Hayford, did not grapple with the hermeneutical issues but suggested that those differing from him were suffering from an emotional problem, ie fear of what might happen to them if they 'open themselves up to God'. Is it really adequate to insist, as Hayford did, that, 'A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument.'?

A bridge cannot be built with a platform only on one side.

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God the Evangelist

The Scriptures declare that God himself is the chief evangelist. For the Spirit of God is the Spirit of truth, love, holiness and power and evangelism is impossible without him. It is he who anoints the messenger, confirms the word, prepares the hearer, convicts the sinful, enlightens the blind, gives life to the dead, enables us to repent and believe, unites us to the body of Christ, assures us that we are God's children, leads us into Christlike character and service and sends us out in our turn to be Christ's witnesses. In all this the Holy Spirit's main preoccupation is to glorify Jesus Christ by showing him to us and forming him in us.

All evangelism involves spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil, in which only spiritual weapons can prevail, especially the Word and Spirit, with prayer. We therefore call on all Christian people to be diligent in their prayers both for the renewal of the church and for the evangelization of the world.

Every true conversion involves a power encounter, in which the superior authority of Jesus Christ is demonstrated. There is no greater miracle than this, in which the believer is set free from the bondage of Satan and sin, fear and futility, darkness and death.

Although the miracles of Jesus were special, being signs of his Messiahship and anticipations of his perfect kingdom when all nature will be subject to him, we have no liberty to place limits on the power of the living Creator today. We reject both the scepticism which denies miracles and the presumption which demands them, both the timidity which shrinks from the fulness of the Spirit and the triumphalism which shrinks from the weakness in which Christ's power is made perfect.

We repent of all self-confident attempts either to evangelize in our own strength or to dictate to the Holy Spirit. We determine in future not to 'grieve' or 'quench' the Spirit, but rather to seek to spread the good news 'with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction' (1 Thess 1:5).

Section B, THE WHOLE CHURCH, Para (5) of The Manila Manifesto, an affirmation received by a majority at the Congress for study and response.