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Alan Kolp

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## *The Biblical Basis for Evangelism and Outreach*

ALAN KOLP

Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk in it: "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind." (Isa. 42:5-7 RSV)

The evangelical endeavor is rooted in two presuppositional bases. The first precondition is that the individual has experienced in a transforming manner the gospel message of God's work through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. As Jesus told Nicodemus, so must each of us hear the words that we must be born of the water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom (Jn. 3:5). Like the Samaritan woman, each of us must encounter God in Jesus at the well and hear Jesus tell us that "every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:13-14). Experience teaches us to choose the real, everlasting water. Often, however, one drinks one's fill and returns to the routine of life's ways. To do so is to miss the call which comes through the experiential encounter with the source of living water. We must continually respond as did the Samaritans when they encountered Jesus. After that experience they said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world" (Jn. 4:42).

This idea of call leads to the second presupposition of the evangelical enterprise. There comes through every person's experience of the living God the commission to *share* the news with others, as one finds oneself in God's presence and agrees to become an instrument of God's creativity. One witnesses God's creative work in oneself and endeavors to carry the message to others that there is a God, that God has created men and women, and that God has created them for community... a community in the full and certain confidence that God "made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. 100:3). It is when one has experienced this God and the care of the divine support that one inevitably feels the evangelical commission to "sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples" (Ps. 96:2-3).

At this juncture one can attend to the evangelical theme introduced by the initial quotation from Isaiah. Particularly in the chapters from Deutero-Isaiah one finds the most clear anticipatory evangelical call to the reality in the New Testament. Israel's role as servant is developed along the lines which model the activity fulfilled in Jesus, as the early church interpreted his life and ministry. Israel, too, was God's instrument, but ironically an instrument of servanthood. It was a difficult role to fit and one not easily discerned. God queries Israel by asking, "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa. 43:19). Israel is God's servant because she has been *chosen*. What is true for Israel is true for every disciple who has been commissioned for the evangelical task: he or she must be chosen. God declares to Israel and to us that "you are my witnesses... and my servant whom I have chosen" (Isa. 43:10). Underlying Israel's particular experience of being chosen, one recognizes, is the general and universal human need to encounter and be delivered by the hand of God.

No one within the Judeo-Christian heritage can succumb to an optimistic humanism, because the biblical witness is clear that, left to their own working, human beings will fail.

The story of the fall memorializes both the human potentiality and the human predicament. On the other hand, the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt details the human predicament but also narrates the divine intervention; it is the story of human bondage and divine liberation. The story of Israel's liberation from Egypt is God's story of choosing. One cannot stop here, however, for one must understand that this is a choosing for discipleship.<sup>1</sup>

It is a story of a people being chosen and, in turn, choosing the role of servanthood. What is significant in God's choosing is that it is a choice for a people. God did not choose only individuals; God chose a people, a community. All too frequently Christians forget this corporate element and, more frequently, those most concerned with evangelism dismiss it. One needs to underscore that it is in the community that the evangelistic enterprise is most likely to be effective, that it is the community where the divine environment is most conducive to nurture the fruits of the good news. I have written elsewhere that

the community is the locus of the encounter with Him who created and Him who creates us. The community is *koinonia*: where fellowship is found and finds us. The community is where we can abandon all pretense to security by launching our fate into unknown and [uncharted] waters fully confident that our comrades will provide the encouragement and sensitivity to sustain us when ill winds blow.<sup>2</sup>

I want to focus particularly on the community as it was central for Israel's experience and as it was central in the early Christian experience, because I believe it still holds the key to any evangelical commission as that comes out of the biblical witness. The community is the place where the story of God's action is told and retold. The community is where one goes to hear that divine epic and with which one identifies after one has been encountered and redeemed by the living author of that epic. The community is where one learns along with one's Christian brothers and sisters to say "we" instead of "I."

The community of faith remains God's miracle. From it one learns to narrate one's own story of deliverance, which is simply a variation on the age-old model:

A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there became a mighty nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Dt. 26:5-9)

One must note that this cultic story is about God's people constituted as community. There are individuals, but not individualism. There are individuals, but they are subsumed under the "we" of the community's being. The story of the community is the narration of God's choosing and the community living out that choice as the miracle of faith. When one turns to the New Testament, the story is no different.

One could turn to many places to link the two testaments, but there are few New Testament authors as conscious of the wealth of the Old Testament as Paul. In addition, there is no one who more powerfully and compellingly reinterprets the Old Testament in light of the Christ event. However, there is no indication that Paul gives up the corporate character of the religious life. Indeed, one can suggest that apart from the corporate dimension of the Christian life, Paul's own evangelistic endeavors would have been hopelessly ineffective. It is in Paul's theology that the new emphasis upon faith as the medium for the divine-human encounter emerges, and that one can discern clearly the community implications for that encounter. In Galatians Paul writes that

now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as

were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:25-28)

One can pursue and develop this community theme and by so doing arrive at the very heart of the biblical basis for evangelism.

The defining characteristic of the community of faith, the church, is that it is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). In the church, through Christ it is possible once again to realize God's creative deliverance in redemptive terms. In one's redemption not only is the experience of one's own release from bondage into freedom realized, but the missionary call is heard to become a reconciler in one's own right. Again, Paul puts this forward with compelling weight when he writes to the community at Corinth:

If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:17-20)

Evangelism, simply put, is this message of reconciliation. Evangelism is the good news of reconciliation lived out by Christ's ambassadors.

In order to comprehend the content of the message of reconciliation and to determine how this is foundational for the evangelistic enterprise, it is necessary to focus on the essence of the Christian message. Once more the apostle Paul is helpful in his summary of the essential Christian message. In his epistle to the Romans he declares that "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9). This represents one of the earliest and simplest credal statements of the early church. Parallels can be cited in other

texts; perhaps the most significant comes in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, when he affirms that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Cor. 15:3-5). Paul continues with stories of other appearances until finally he reports having himself "seen" the risen Lord.

What is significant about both passages is that we have uncovered the earliest stratum of Christian affirmation, namely, an answer to the question, what must I believe to be a Christian? The answer is composed of three parts: Christ died, was buried, and was raised from the dead.<sup>3</sup> Werner Kramer calls such summary credal statements *pistis* formulae, from the Greek word *pisteuein* (to believe). What is crucial for the study of New Testament evangelism is that the content of the *pistis* formulae is uniform and is anchored in the three-part confession of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As Kramer states, "Christian *pistis* is identical with acceptance of the *kerygma* of Christ's death and resurrection."<sup>4</sup>

It has been important to uncover the *pistis* formulae because this suggests what is the content of the earliest church's preaching (*kerygma*). Like the husks of the ear, so can the kernel of Christianity be protected in the text. It is, however, the kernel which is central. The kernel is the essential, eternal Christian message. This is the message upon which all evangelism is based and from which all kinds of evangelistic methodologies are spawned, from the most fiery revivalist to the most quietistic contemplator. However, this is not a study in evangelistic methods, but rather a study in the biblical basis for evangelism.

In a sense, one must deal with the entire New Testament corpus. However, one also recognizes that the corpus has its own history, which reflects the growth of the nascent Christian community. If one wants to focus on the essence of that early community, one does not begin with the story of the birth of Jesus and then proceed through the gospel until one reads of the death and resurrection. Rather, one must center on the constitutive event of that Christian community, the Easter

event. One can go so far as to suggest that without Easter, the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth would not have been remembered, much less recorded. Indeed, Walter Künneth declares that "the Resurrection becomes the fulcrum of theology."<sup>5</sup> One can even add to Künneth's declaration and affirm that the resurrection is the fulcrum of evangelism.

I am firmly convinced that one must return to the central affirmation of the Christian proclamation, that Jesus is risen, to determine what the biblical basis for evangelism holds for modern men and women. The Easter event remains the foundation event, but not *only* foundational. The Easter story is the sustaining event as well. As Julian Hartt writes,

Resurrection is *actuality* as well as event or act, and therefore we are not thrown back into the past to get at its being and its truth. . . . The Spirit enjoins the people of the church to lay hold of the concrete actuality around and upon which the ongoing life of the church is woven. This actuality is an ongoing, everlasting community, and that community is solidly rooted in resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

Once more, the theme of community reappears. Resurrection constitutes the community; without Easter, Christianity remains a Jewish sect. Easter is not the end of the gospel, but the beginning of the new community under God. Any message of evangelism must commence here.

It is a fact that the most significant New Testament passages having to do with evangelism come in the Easter context of the risen Lord appearing to his disciples and followers. It is important that the twentieth century theology of evangelism recognize the inextricable relationship between Easter and evangelism. For that reason, it is necessary to center on the most forthright passage of all, the great commission in Matthew 28:16-20. In order to find the appropriate avenue into this text it is helpful to heed the words of Norman Perrin when he reminds us that

for far too long we modern readers of the gospels have allowed our attention to be diverted from the true intention of the gospel narratives by con-

stantly asking the historical question, What actually happened? instead of asking the evangelical question, What is it that the gospel writer is challenging us to accept or to deny by means of this particular narrative?<sup>7</sup>

The Matthean story of the resurrection is God's ultimate story; it is the story of the incarnate God's ultimate gift: the gift of himself. God's gift of himself comes with two foci, his death and his resurrection. Out of that arises the basic kerygmatic message of the church: God is *for you*. The evangelical task is simply the enterprise which communicates that news: God is *for you*. Hartt comments that

as Christians we cannot let go of the evangelical commission. As people of this time we cannot hope to face and to fulfill its demands unless we grasp anew that actuality upon which our Christian existence is established and which constitutes the inner life of the church. That actuality is everlasting. . . . Therefore, our task is not to conjure this actuality out of the past but to apprehend its presently real and everlasting character and its real demands upon us.<sup>8</sup>

One can concur with Hartt that people must apprehend the present reality of God's being *for us*, but realize that the present reality of God's being *for us* is but a trajectory of God's being eternally in and for the total human community. The closing words of the Matthean gospel indicate the enduring presence of the risen Lord in his community, the church. The last word of the risen Lord is that "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:20). Ironically, the close of the gospel is the assurance that the story is not finished! The death of the hero could mean disappointment and disillusionment, but the appearance of the risen Lord means excitement and new vision. To understand the great commission is to understand this possibility.

The great commission in Matthew 28 follows the story of the resurrection and appearance of Jesus. In standard form the text tells of the visit of the women (in Matthew's version, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary) to the tomb on Sunday



morning. There they are met by an angel who reassures them, saying, "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you into Galilee; there you will see him" (Mt. 28:5-7). This promise that the followers of Jesus would see him in Galilee is soon picked up again in the great commission which poignantly concludes Matthew's gospel:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Mt. 28:16-20)

The most significant detail to be grasped is that this commissioning of the disciples — in my words, this essential evangelical commission — is an appearance story. That is to say, the evangelical commission is rooted in the Easter story and presupposes the actuality of the presence of the risen Lord. The destiny of the disciples was determined by that experience of the appearance, and the destiny of the church in her evangelical thrust continues to be determined by the continual apprehension of that same risen Lord. Hartt perceptively comments that

the church's mission in and for the world roots in a concrete history. In this concrete history God shows himself forth as acting; and he acts therein in such a way that it becomes absolutely desirable and absolutely imperative that what he has done should be made known to the whole world. God acts; and whoever knows that he is grasped by this action becomes overpoweringly aware of the command, "Go and tell!" This is the fate of the church; it can be resisted, but it cannot be eluded.<sup>9</sup>

The injunction of the risen Lord to the eleven is, in effect, the injunction to all the successors of the eleven, to "go and make disciples of all the nations." The key to understanding this commission is to understand what is meant to be a disciple. The aim of evangelism is discipleship. In the text, the injunction to go and make disciples is grammatically an imperative. Theologically, the evangelical injunction remains imperative.

In order to understand fully the impact and meaning of the call to discipleship, we must journey from Jerusalem with the eleven back to Galilee and with them ascend the mountain to encounter the risen Lord. Just how one experiences the risen Lord is difficult to describe, but one is assisted by the earlier story in Matthew's gospel of the transfiguration of Jesus. In all likelihood this narrative is an appearance story of the risen Lord located now in a pre-Easter, anticipatory context. There we are told that Peter, James, and John were led to a high mountain and Jesus "was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light" (Mt. 17:2). Although it remains impossible to sketch the outlines of God's being, this transfiguration story is an attempt to suggest analogically what it is like to be in the presence of the risen Lord who was "in the beginning... with God and... was God" (Jn. 1:1). So it is when the followers of the eleven go with the disciples to the mountain in Galilee. They, too, can ascend that mountain and experience in the same fashion the transfiguration and know in the same way God's revealed presence.

In the face of the divine epic of creation and redemption, in the light of the call to discipleship, some hear the message clearly and respond in worship and obedience; others hear only a muted sound or, even worse, seem deaf to the intonations of the word and doubt the reality. However, it is too easy to dismiss those who do not hear the summons or respond negatively. Often we are like the unforgiving servant who had his own debt forgiven, but demanded full payment from his own servant who owed him a debt, and threw him into prison until full restitution could be made (Mt. 18:23-35). What Matthew affirms in the beginning of the great commission is

not that those who doubt are to be cast away, thrown back into the prison of life without concern or nurture from God's caring community. Rather, Matthew's note that some doubted in the face of the risen Lord on the mountain of transfiguration is simply an acknowledgment of the reality of the human predicament, and calls those of us who have believed back to the sober realization that our belief is yet the result of our having been chosen. Once more, like Israel, we recall that the human predicament of bondage is broken through the liberation of the divine intervention. We have responded to the intervention, but others are languishing in the fetters of doubt. As Christ's ambassadors, our evangelical mission is to provide the key to the cuffs, and with that evangelical instrument free for God's service the hands of the bound.

It is particularly important to deal with the question of those who doubt. Since the first ascent to the mountain in Galilee, no one has physically gone back to the mountain with the eleven. No longer is it possible actually to live and discuss theology with the historical Jesus who was also the Lord. Rather, our fate is to become God's detectives and discern for ourselves the footprints of the divinity in the sands of history and in the wake of the present — in the history of the communities of faith and in our own present existence. Once again, our discovery will be that the footprints of God lead from our own spirits. Our discovery is nothing more than that God has chosen us and has left marks of revelation by which the divinity is disclosed to us. "To 'reveal' is to make an intimate disclosure of oneself to another person — in human relationships revelation is always a person-to-person transaction. . . . A revelation is an authoritative and decisive disclosure-and-comprehension of a whole pattern, a whole life."<sup>10</sup> As disciples we learn by the revelation of God that we are chosen and liberated into divine service. In our life of discipleship the mist of doubt lifts with the warming of the sun's rays. Finding ourselves in the full light of day is like living into the full measure of God's grace. We become equipped with knowledge of ourselves and commissioned through the call to make dis-

ciples of all nations. It is the call of discipleship to deal with those who have doubted in the face of the divinity.

In what context one goes into the world to make disciples is suggested by Matthew when he records the words of the risen Lord. The first word to the eleven on the mountain is that "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt. 28:18). These are no longer the words of the crucified Jewish itinerant; they are the words of the exalted and enthroned Lord of the created world. He who was pressed down by the principalities of the world has now been exalted over and above those same principalities and exercises authority over them. The great christological hymn of Philippians declares the epic two-part movement of the divine intervention in the deliverance of God's children. Paul asks those Christians at Philippi to

have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5-11)

This story of Jesus is the story of every disciple; the story of discipleship is the story of the movement to the cross and from the cross to exaltation. The narrative of discipleship is the discovery of humility and through humility the life of obedience. To overlook the cross is to deny the contextual call to discipleship from the Easter experience. Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses it when he charges that

the cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of

this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death — we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.<sup>11</sup>

The cross is, indeed, the call to death. Jesus heard it and obeyed; the disciples saw it and despaired. As two disciples were walking to Emmaus the risen Lord appeared to them and they did not recognize him. The two disciples told the stranger about Jesus and of their frustrations. They said that they “had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Lk. 24:21). This is the situation of all disciples-to-be in those dark nights between the crucifixion and the resurrection, between death and new life. Unless one has been with those two disciples on the way to Emmaus, one cannot feel the joy and the release which comes from knowing that the frustrations to hope are blown away by the actuality of the experience of the risen Lord in the community of faith. For it is again in the community that one is able to hike up the mountain, often in company with fellow-sojourners in the faith. Upon reaching the summit, one can see the whole world beneath, and there have the experience of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: to realize that their companion was no stranger; he was the risen Lord! Having realized this, one can now comprehend the words of the Lord when he says, “all authority . . . has been given to me.” In recognition of that authority one knows clearly that one is ready for the great commissioning; one sits down to listen to the charge.

Having come clear of one's own bondage and having been released into the service of Christian discipleship, one is now ready to be commissioned to carry out the work of that service: to become evangelical and to reach out to all nations. The great commission is not the call to discipleship, but from discipleship. It is a call only those who are already disciples will understand and to which they alone can respond. Only those

who have experienced the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed can call others into that same experience. Disciples know that “the peace of the Kingdom impinges upon men first of all as the demand for repentance and then as the quite incredible promise of redemption from obedience to demonic powers. Israel expects the Kingdom to come; but the Kingdom that comes no one expects; and when it comes, it overcomes our alienation from God and our alienation from one another.”<sup>12</sup> Only those redeemed by God and no longer alienated from the author of their being can at the same time reach out to other human beings and be divine instruments in releasing them from their bondage and overcoming their alienation. To them Jesus gives the injunction to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20).

The real meaning of evangelism as the call of others to discipleship will come forth as this passage is examined in detail. Initially one can observe that the injunction to go and make disciples parallels the earlier injunction to the two women when they came to the tomb on Sunday morning. The angel had commissioned them to “go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead” (Mt. 28:7). In turn, the risen Lord now commissions those same disciples to go and make other disciples. “This indicates both an important aspect of Matthew's understanding of the resurrection — the risen Lord commissions people to a particular responsibility — and also the great significance he attaches to the appearance in Galilee.”<sup>13</sup> Contextually the passage is an appearance story; grammatically the commissioning entails a particular responsibility: to make disciples. To follow through on this suggestion even as it appears grammatically in the text will illustrate the clear focus on discipleship.

The grammatical structure of the great commission suggests much about the essence of the evangelical task and even the content of the evangelical message. Grammatically the commission is structured around four verbs: *go* and *make disciples* and *baptize* them and *teach* them. However, what is lost on



the reader of the English text is that three of these verbs are, in fact, participial — that is, verbal nouns which are grammatically dependent on the main verb, “to make disciples.” It is important to realize that the only independent verb in the commission is *matheteuein*, “to make disciples.” This verb in Greek has an active connotation; one is commissioned actively to “disciple” all nations. That is the call of the risen Lord, and the charge of discipling all nations is nothing other than the charge to evangelize the world, to bring all human beings into relationship with the redeemer. Hence, grammatically the focus of the great commission is clear: the call is the commission to make disciples. “Clearly Matthew thinks of the group of Jesus’ disciples as already the embryonic church, and certainly he thinks of the group of further disciples whom those disciples will ‘make’ as the church.”<sup>14</sup>

To perceive the evangelical commission as the commission to make disciples, and to see this clearly within the context of the church as Jesus founded it, is to understand the nature of the Easter story as it culminates in the great commission. “The effect of the resurrection narratives in the Gospel of Matthew is to make the story of Jesus the foundation myth of Christian origins.”<sup>15</sup> The story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the story of God working directly in history. The story of Jesus is the story of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (Jn. 1:14). The gospel is this piece of good news; the evangelical mission is the call to spread that good news of divine intervention. The divine intervention is not the story of God acting only and solely through Jesus, but God through Jesus founding once again a community — a community of chosen disciples in covenant. Hartt observes that

first of all, and above all, resurrection has to do with a community under covenant. By resurrection men are established in a community, and a community established in eternity is disclosed in history. In this community the enemies of life and spirit are overcome and the enjoyment of being in communion with God opens upon plains inexhaustibly fertile, nourished by the river of the water of life.<sup>16</sup>

The call of the disciple to make disciples is the commission to become God’s instrument in addressing men and women and inviting them into the community, the body of Christ. The commission to make disciples is the charge to involvement, and the invitation to involvement on the part of those who agree. The invitation to become a disciple necessarily demands a decision. The evangelical commission is to lead and encourage the other to come to that place of decision.

If grammatically the focus of the great commission is to make disciples, the other three verbal forms (actually participles: *proeuthentes*, go, *baptizontes*, baptize, and *didaskontes*, teach) modify the commission and give the disciples a clue as to *how* the process of discipling eventuates. Grammatically, the imperative mood is used to command the disciples to make disciples. However, the risen Lord did not simply command without heed to the mechanics of that command. The process of making disciples is the process of bringing them into the community, Christ’s body, by going to them, baptizing them, and teaching them.

The injunction to go to the disciples-to-be, to baptize them and to teach them, is singularly a function of the faith community. The method of baptizing is not important to discuss, but rather the reason and implications of that baptism. Baptism is the concrete community response on God’s behalf to the believer who has been moved by the good news of the evangelical message. When one has responded to the act of God’s choosing, and has chosen the life of discipleship, it is imperative that the baptismal act initiate one into the community. Again, it is important not to be led into the debate over the issue of water baptism, but simply to understand the injunction to baptize as the commission to bring into the community those who respond to God’s action in their lives. Our response must be like Peter’s when asked by the disciples-to-be, “what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God’s

presence; it is the gift of fellowship, *koinonia*, which supplants alienation with incorporation into the community of faith. To be baptized into such a community is to "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart" (Eph. 5:18-19).

The means of incorporation into this community is clear. One is to be baptized into the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Again, we must not be misled into a debate over the metaphysical character of the triadic nature of God. Matthew has an entirely different intention in mind. His concern is to demonstrate the personality of the divine being who creates, redeems, and offers the possibility for community through discipleship. When one has encountered this kind of loving God and has been baptized into those names, one can no longer see God "in isolation, as ultimate being or the principle of nature . . . but can only look upon him as one who acts, who comes to meet us, who seeks us out."<sup>17</sup> Matthew's use of the triune name is simply an indication that the transcendent creator became the incarnate redeemer and is present and spiritually sustaining. Baptism into the names of that God is baptism into the being of that God who is present historically in the community of disciples. This baptism is the means of identity with God's people. But the baptismal act of incorporation into this community is only half the story of discipleship. The act of identification with God's people must be sustained within the community by a process of support and encouragement.

With his admonition to teach, Matthew addresses the question of sustaining the disciple. The words of the risen Lord to the eleven were to teach them "to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). In reality, this is the key to understanding Matthew's perspective on the church, the community of disciples, and, I believe, the key to understanding the biblical basis for evangelism. If evangelism is the making of disciples, then discipleship can be learned only by being taught. Indeed, the term "to make disciples" could be translated "to be made students." Further, Matthew is quite explicit

that discipleship is not simply identity with the community of faith as a learner. More than that is required, as the words of the risen Lord imply: obedience to the commandments is the task. Disciples are to be taught to obey. God's character is not to *make* disciples obey, but rather to *teach* them to obey. Obedience is the only possible response to our deliverance by God's hand. "The step into the situation where faith is possible is not an offer which we can make to Jesus, but always his gracious offer to us."<sup>18</sup>

The evangelical mission of making disciples by teaching them is not an easy task, nor should it be hinted that the task of being a disciple is easy. To be a disciple means "to accept the privileges and responsibilities of a life lived in response to the new verbal revelation of God to his people, through Jesus Christ, as this revelation is authoritatively interpreted by the church specifically commissioned to this task by the risen Jesus himself."<sup>19</sup> The verbal revelation of Jesus is recorded in the good news we call the gospels. The evangelist, in the best sense of that word, is the bearer of the good news in his or her own person, who elicits a desire on the part of others to become involved in the work of reconciliation. The work of reconciliation is the work of the disciple for the disciples. In summary, the work of the disciple is the evangelical mission for the kingdom.

The work of the disciple for the kingdom is nothing else than the work which Jesus performed in his earthly ministry. We are told that the work of Jesus was preaching the gospel. The content of that good news (gospel) was that "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). As Jesus was the model for discipleship, so must his ministry of evangelism be the disciplic model. Even in our own time the content of the evangelical message is the proclamation of the kingdom. This may seem simple, but one needs to heed the insight of Hartt when he warns that

the nearness of the Kingdom is not to be so preached that it becomes one more anxiety to be added to the ever-growing heap of anxieties. The

appointment with eternity is not to be interpreted as though it were like all other appointments in this weird and reeling world. The preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not one more insurance salesman come to remind us with professional gravity and not entirely disinterestedly that someday — probably sooner than we think — we too shall die, and therefore that we must act *now*. Well, how does one act *now* in relation to death? The ready-made answers, whether of insurance specialist or evangelist too much his counterpart, have all a fatal flaw: we cannot act, really and productively, in relation to an abstract death. We act in relation to (toward) being, not toward non-being. Life is always defined by its ongoing relation to God, to whom we live and to whom we die.<sup>20</sup>

The message of the kingdom should not be anxiety-creating but life-giving. It is life-creating through the call to discipleship. "And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and my gospel's will save it'" (Mt. 8:34-35). The evangelist's task is instrumentally a life-giving mission. It is a mission to communicate what Jesus communicated, to teach what Jesus taught, to live as Jesus lived. In the life of discipleship one can truly hear the voice of the teacher, learn well as a student, and now go out as a teacher in one's own right, professing this to be eternal life: to "know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (Jn. 17:3). Teaching as the Master taught and supported by the Christian brothers and sisters, one can say liturgically with the early church

Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritu sancto  
Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula  
saeculorum.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to  
the Holy Spirit  
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,  
world without end.

## Notes

1. H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p. 52. Rowley says, "The purpose of the election is service, and when the service is withheld the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails."
2. Alan Kolp, *Participation is not a Spectator Sport* (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1976), p. 41.
3. Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, trans. Brian Hardy (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), p. 28. *Studies in Biblical Theology* No. 50.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
5. Walter Kunneth, *Theologie der Auferstehung*, 4th ed. (Munich: Claudius Verlag, 1951), p. 256.
6. Julian N. Hartt, *Toward a Theology of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), p. 34.
7. Norman Perrin, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 6.
8. Hartt, *Evangelism*, p. 11.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1963), p. 99.
12. Hartt, *Evangelism*, p. 28.
13. Perrin, *Resurrection*, p. 44.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
16. Hartt, *Evangelism*, p. 34.
17. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), p. 533.
18. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, p. 94.
19. Perrin, *Resurrection*, p. 53.
20. Hartt, *Evangelism*, p. 106.

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