

"INTO ALL THE WORLD"

The Great Commission:
A Vindication and an Interpretation

by

Samuel M. Zwemer
Professor Emeritus of The History of Religion and Christian Missions,
Princeton Theological Seminary

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CHAPTER TWO

THE FINALITY OF JESUS CHRIST

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:13-18).

At two of the most solemn moments in the life of JESUS CHRIST, His self-consciousness, His self-assertion and the utter audacity of His claims are such as to prevent His classification with other men. We refer to the prayer in Matthew 11:25, beginning, **"I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent . . ."** and the statement in John 14:6: **"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."** Such words imply absoluteness, aloofness and finality. To those who accept the New Testament as GOD's Word and at its face value, the finality and all-sufficiency of JESUS CHRIST is self-evident and indisputable. He is the Alpha and Omega of revelation.

Even Unitarian theologians, such as Channing, while denying CHRIST's deity, place Him at the apex of all spiritual leadership, admit the absolute character of His ethics, and confess that He is the Saviour and Leader of men.

But the world at large demands other proofs than Bible texts. In our day, rival faiths, new religious cults and totalitarian governments contest the claim of CHRIST's finality. They profess to supplant or supplement the revelation of JESUS CHRIST by new teaching of their own.

At home and abroad (and even in certain Christian circles) some have lost the sense of CHRIST's supremacy and sufficiency and therefore have lost the note of urgency in their message. There is confusion of tongues and blasphemous arrogance in some of these recent pronouncements.

The latest is that of Alfred Rosenberg in his proposal to substitute a Reich Christianity for historic Christianity which, as he says, "was imported into Germany in the unfortunate year 800."

Bible Christianity, he says, conflicts with both the heart and mentality of Nazi Germans. The Swastika is to replace the Cross, and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is to replace the Bible on every church altar. All the sacraments are to be abolished and the deification of the Fuehrer made complete (see editorial in New York Times, Jan. 2, 1942).

Wilhelm Hauer, the spokesman of this new religion, writes:

"The Ten Commandments laid down in the Scriptures do not suffice for the building up of present-day Christianity. The Semitic character of Christianity is undoubted, but is also its condemnation. JESUS said, '**Salvation is of the Jews,**' but He was mistaken. Belief in the Resurrection is not the heart of Christianity, but is a worldly doctrine.

"Many of JESUS' words and deeds touch a chord deep in our hearts. But we protest against His being imposed on us as a leader and pattern. We must not allow our native religious life, which grows immediately out of our own genius, to be diverted into foreign tracks."

But, you say, these are the words of fanatic, irresponsible Nazi leaders driven to desperation by the war against civilization.

Well, here are the words of Mahatma Gandhi - the religious leader of the Hindus, the idol of his political and social devotees:

"I cannot set Christ on a solitary throne because I believe God has been incarnate again and again" (*Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas*, p. 66).

"I believe that all the great religions of the world are more or less true and that they all have descended to us from God" (*Young India*, pp. 40, 74, 807).

How different is his attitude from that of the great Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-shek, who said to me at Kuling in 1933: "It is CHRIST or chaos for China."

In Christian America there are also strange voices.

(We pass by the well-known fact that such cults as Christian Science, Unity, Mormonism, etc., do not give JESUS CHRIST the supreme place of authority and ignore His finality as Redeemer).

Within the Protestant Church itself there is confusion of tongues.

Professor Case of Chicago University wrote in his book, *Jesus Through the Centuries*: "Jesus' way of life is not necessarily to be our way of life. There are clear evidences in the historical records that He held opinions and entertained attitudes that do not approve themselves to us as suitable for our day. Creative religious living must strive not to imitate but to transcend all past and present standards, not excepting even the example and precepts of Jesus. [1]

Kirby Page, a leader of youth, writes in his book, *Christ or Christianity*: "One of the most tragic blunders of Christendom has been the placing of such emphasis upon the uniqueness of JESUS that *an unbridgeable gulf has been created between Him and the rest of mankind*. If all human beings were created in the spiritual image of GOD and if there is only one kind of personality, then the only difference between JESUS and other men is one of maturity." Surely this is not the finality of JESUS.

Biography of the Gods, by A. Eustace Haydon of Chicago University, and the recent volume of Professor Hocking of Harvard University, *Living Religions and A World Faith*, are both based upon a similar philosophy of relativism.

"As we put off the discreditable fears begotten by the conception of the Only Way [that is, the finality and sufficiency of Christ] our eyes are opened for the recognition of identities of meaning under different guises."

The net result in Hocking's case is the emergency of a new world faith apparently without the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection and even a firm belief in immortality!

"If there is anything on which we might claim emerging agreement among men, it might seem to be the rejection of interest in immortality as not merely irrelevant but inimical to the serious business of mankind (pp. 219, 220) . . . Yet the soul that contemplates eternity and works for eternity must somehow participate in permanence; this conviction also belongs to the emerging World Faith" (p. 222). A rather lame conclusion!

It is of these Hibbert Lectures by Professor Hocking that Professor James Pratt of Williams College says in a review: [2]

"If I understand him correctly, Professor Hocking does not look forward to a time when there will be no more separate religions. Certainly he does not think that any religion in its present form, not even Christianity, could qualify as a 'World Faith,' or should oust all its historical rivals. Rather he seems to hold up as the goal a group of steadily approximating, and no longer hostile, religions, each persistently purifying itself and each co-operating with the others in a common task. These religions will retain their local qualities and their resulting local appeals, but the central philosophical content of each will be increasingly illuminated; and, as this takes place, the difference between the world's great faiths will be seen to have a relatively minor importance."

It is this relative view of CHRIST and Christianity which we propose to discuss on the basis of the historic character, the influence and the content of Christianity - over against the non-Christian faiths.

No student of non-Christian religions, least of all a missionary, can deny that these faiths and philosophies have certain elements to commend them; that in a sense they have some spiritual values, or rather, values for the human spirit. But each and all of these values are surpassed in Christianity.

Confucianism emphasizes the sacredness of the family and the debt to our ancestors. But so does the Old Testament, and in a far better way.

Buddhism lays stress on the unreality of the present life and its vanity. So does the book of Ecclesiastes; and Paul does so on a far higher plane in his Epistles, where he compares the life here and that beyond.

Hinduism is based upon a philosophy of the immanence of the divine and the law of Karma, "**Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.**" But this great law is more clearly enunciated in the New Testament, and is zealously guarded from misuse.

Islam asserts the transcendence of God and His sovereign will which is irresistible. But Allah is not the GOD and Father of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. [3]

Many other minor truths are held in common by all religions and one can only admire the zeal and devotion on their part for what they think is the way of salvation. Yet it is not difficult to show where and why these religions have failed, and that in ten particulars CHRIST and His Gospel stand unique and alone:

I. CHRIST's Bible (the Old Testament) and our Bible (the New and Old Testaments) teach the unity and solidarity of the race.

No other sacred book has this characteristic. From the creation in Genesis to the vision of John on Patmos the whole race is the subject and object of the redemption story. "**God hath made of one blood . . .**" The Old Testament horizon is not racial but universal, not tribal but cosmopolitan; e.g., the sixty-seventh Psalm and the promise to Abraham.

Contrast this with the caste-system of Hinduism even in the Bhagavad-Gita; with the intolerance of Islam toward non-Moslems and Buddhism's pessimistic conception of the origin and the destiny of man through a long series of reincarnations.

II. CHRIST is the only one Who came to destroy race-barriers and class hatreds.

He is not only adequate for all races but all races have found in Him their ideal. His Cross is a bridge across every chasm. He gave womanhood her place, childhood its rights, the slave his freedom, and the barbarian welcome.

The life and teaching of JESUS contain the germ of all this progress of which Lecky speaks in his History of European Morals. The history of missions gives evidence of the growth and gradual development of this true humanism and universalism.

Paul's Magna Charta reads: "**In Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free, Roman nor barbarian.**" After nineteen centuries we are still far behind these lofty standards. JESUS CHRIST is a rebuke to all Nordic or Anglo-Saxon pride - and to all our petty race prejudices. The sarcastic poem entitled "Anglo-Saxons," published in Harper's Weekly some years ago, could have been written only by a Christian:

We are the chosen people - look at the hue of our skins!
Others are black and yellow - that is because of their sins.
We are the heirs of the ages, masters of every race,
Proving our right and title by the bullet's saving grace,
Slaying the naked red men; making the black one our slave,
Flaunting our color in triumph over a world-wide grave.
Indian, Maori and Zulu; red men, yellow and black
White are their bones wherever they met with the white-wolf's pack.
We are the chosen people - whatever we do is right,
Feared as men fear the leper, whose skin, like our own, is white!

III. JESUS CHRIST the founder and the very center of Christianity was not the son of any nation - but the Son of Man.

This was His favorite title - what does it mean? Apart from its evident eschatological reference to "**the son of man**" in Daniel, it obviously means also the ideal of humanity - the son of mankind.

Mohammed was an ideal Arab, in thought, language, life and outlook. Confucius was a true Chinese, the scholar and gentleman of his age and of all China. Buddha was an Indian ascetic and mystic. His pathway is wholly Asiatic, and is based on its pantheistic ideology. Socrates was the greatest philosopher of Greece - but he was rooted in Greek thought and remained a Greek in his outlook.

But CHRIST (in the Gospel records) is neither Occidental nor Oriental, neither Jew nor Greek in His outlook. He is the Alpha and Omega of true manhood. He has all the virtues of both Occident and Orient.

For example, the three supreme virtues in Western ethics are truth, honesty and moral courage. To call a man a liar, a thief and a coward robs him of character. JESUS in the Gospels is the incarnation of truth and outspoken honesty and moral courage.

But to the Oriental mind these three are not the supreme virtues.

For sainthood they demand three other virtues not always found in Occidentals: namely, patience, courtesy and hospitality.

Yet in these very Oriental virtues JESUS CHRIST also shines forth in the Gospels. He prayed for those who nailed Him to the Cross. He spake as never man spoke - to men, to women, to children, to the rich and to the poor. And His hospitality was extended to five thousand at once in the breaking of the bread!

Search the literature of all nations across the seven seas for such a full-orbed character that satisfies the ideals of manhood, womanhood or childhood - it is found only in CHRIST.

No mortal can with Him compare
Among the sons of men;
Fairer is He than all the fair
Who fill the heavenly train.

IV. Still more astonishing in the man CHRIST JESUS is the fact that His life-purpose. His command and His promises are world-wide.

Adolf Harnack and other liberals have stated that JESUS was not conscious of a world-mission; that His horizon was limited to Jewry. But a scholar, Max Meinertz, of Munich, in his book, *JESUS und die Heidenmission*, has shown the folly of such a theory. Contemporary Judaism had a world-outlook. So has the Old Testament. And both the character of CHRIST's teaching and His last command are of universal import. He is the light of the Gentiles - of the world. That which was done to Him at the feast by a woman - when the odor of the ointment filled the house is (so He stated) to be recorded and read in all the world! We have only to read the Great Commission in its fourfold form to realize that CHRIST's marching orders are universal.

His triumph is to be absolute. Every nation is to stand at the last before CHRIST as Judge (Matthew 25:31), and finally every knee shall bow before Him, and His enemies shall lick the dust.

This is in absolute contrast to all other religions and philosophies. By crossing the ocean one ceases to be a Hindu. Zoroastrianism never was and is not now a missionary faith. Japan was a hermit nation until its exclusiveness was broken by the West. The watchword of youth in Christendom, "The evangelization of the world in this generation," is inconceivable when applied even to Buddhism or Islam. They, too, have become world-religions, but not by the concept or command of their founders. We return to this point in Chapter III.

V. CHRIST's laws and kingdom are intended for all humanity, everywhere.

His ritual and worship exclude no one but the impenitent. His arms are extended to welcome all. "**Come unto me, all ye that labour . . .**"

Christianity has no local shrine of merit, no sacred river or mountain or city. "**God is a spirit.**" When missionary leaders selected Jerusalem as a specially sacred place for a missionary convention or when people have children baptized in Jordan-water, they are alike going back to primitive animism. "**Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem,**" said JESUS (John 4:21).

Prayer and sacrifice in all other religions are hedged about with rules and regulations that exclude many from the privilege; e.g., prayer in Islam has its particular place, its postures and special ablutions. Christian worship is possible at all times and all places for all. Catacombs, cathedrals, conventicles or concentration-camps are places where men can lift up holy hands without wrath or doubting.

Again CHRIST is the only one who could ever have said, and who said: "**Suffer the little children to come unto me . . . for of such is the kingdom of heaven.**"

Christianity is the religion of childhood.

- Philosophy ignores the child.
- Greek and Roman religions neglected the child.
- The Brahmin teaching degrades the child by marrying little girls to the gods of lust.

Mohammed married his second wife, Aisha, when she was eight years old. Of such is not the kingdom of Mohammed!

VI. CHRIST's Gospel has been translated or can be translated into all of the languages of mankind. Its message is for all humanity.

Other sacred books are not translatable. They are sacred in their native tongue. This is due either to their style or their contents.

The sacred book of the Shinto faith is the Kojiki. Dr. Robert E. Hume of Union Theological Seminary says it is the most indecent of all religious writings. An accurate English translation is only possible with Latin footnotes. [4]

The same is true of the second, the thirty-third and the sixty-sixth chapters of the Koran.

In 1816, Captain Matthews of Calcutta was bold enough to translate a standard and authoritative collection of Mohammedan traditions, the Mishcat, into English, but no publisher today would reprint it. The Bible retains its eloquence and the simplicity of its pure message in all languages.

The fourteenth chapter of John is as beautiful and comforting in Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian as it is in the English version.

Most of the sacred books of the ethnic religions were translated into English by Max Muller and his associates - but it was a work for scholars and it has no wide circulation in this or any other language. There are portions of the New Testament in more than 1,020 languages. It is the best printed, the cheapest and yet the costliest Book in the world. You may buy it for a sixpence, and the British Museum bought a manuscript copy of it from the Leningrad Library for \$250,000.

VII. Once more, JESUS CHRIST has already begun to occupy the central and dominant place.

In the world of law, the world of culture and the world of morals. Pilate's inscription over the Cross was a prophecy. JESUS of Nazareth became King of the Latin world of law, the Greek world of culture, the Hebrew world of ethics. He is King of international law as the ideal of peace treaties and leagues of nations. Witness the monument of the CHRIST of the Andes and the basic principles of international law found by both Hugo Grotius and Woodrow Wilson in the New Testament.

Without dispute, JESUS is King in the world of culture.

All the fine arts - music, sculpture, painting, architecture, poetry - have laid their finest tributes at his feet.

- There are no cathedrals of Milan in Arabia;
- No Beethoven symphonies nor Hallelujah Choruses to Buddha and Krishna;
- No Rembrandt has ever painted the early life of Zoroaster or Mohammed.

The moral character of JESUS rises like the highest peaks of the Himalayas in untrodden whiteness and glory - above all the dark foothills of human attainment. All the world has gone after Him - no one has ever reached Him!

His ethics are today (in the midst of chaos and bloodshed) the yardstick by which we measure and are ourselves measured - and all the world found wanting!

Strange to say, by the suffrage rights of humanity, JESUS of Nazareth is already elected King of Hearts. His love is winning the world. According to recent statistics [1943] the number of those who profess and call themselves Christians is twice that of any other religious group in the world: viz., Zoroastrians, 100,000; Shintoists, 24,000,000; Taoists, 43,000,000 (in China); Buddhists, 137,000,000; Mohammedans, 240,000,000; Confucianists, 250,000,000; Hindus, 217,000,000; Christians, 588,000,000.

(You say many of these are only nominal Christians; yes, but they are nominal Christians).

VIII. Christianity stands unique and alone in its concept and revelation of GOD.

That concept as given in the New Testament is the highest and most comprehensive.

The belief in a Triune GOD - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - unites in itself the idea of GOD's transcendence (emphasized to excess in Islam) and GOD's immanence (distorted in pantheism) and GOD's Incarnation, which is the idea that led to polytheism and idolatry.

The doctrine of the Trinity is the watermark in every book of the New Testament. No other religion or philosophy rises to a similar height. **"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."** **"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."** CHRIST is the Alpha and Omega of all we can know about GOD. All other conceptions of deity are nebulous, vague, distant, or distorted.

I once heard Dr. Charles Ogilvie, with whom I traveled in China, say, "A child in our Sunday schools knows more about GOD than all you can find in all the analects of Confucius."

James Freeman Clarke (although a Unitarian) declared: "Mohammed teaches a God above us; Moses teaches a GOD above us and yet with us; JESUS CHRIST teaches GOD above us, GOD with us, and GOD in us."

That is to say, in fuller language, GOD above us, not as Oriental despot, but as Heavenly Father; GOD with us, Immanuel, in the mystery of His Incarnation; GOD in us through His Spirit renewing the heart and the will into a true Islam of obedient subjection by a living faith.

IX. JESUS CHRIST combines in Himself the highest ideal of character and of redemption.

What He was during the days of His flesh, and what He did, stands by itself on the pages of history utterly without a parallel. In his recent volume on Christian Doctrine, Dr. J. S. Whale remarks: "The very existence of a Christology is profoundly significant. There is no Mohammedology so far as I know. Nor have I ever heard of a Socratology. JESUS is inexplicable just because He cannot be put into a class. His uniqueness constitutes the problem to be explained."

But He Himself is the only explanation. "**Behold the Lamb of God!**" How spotless, how perfect, how sufficient He is for all! No other religion has caught this idea of the just dying for the unjust, of the Son of GOD who loved us and gave Himself for us.

There is sacrifice (even human sacrifices) in all religions, yet none rise to the height of John 3:16.

"Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace."

What the mind and heart of man groped after, we now have revealed in CHRIST.

I quote once more from Dr. Whale: "The Cross is a place where one long road ends and a new road begins; it is a monument to two abiding facts. The first is that man's age-long effort after reconciliation through sacrifice was no meaningless phantasy. It was a schoolmaster leading him to CHRIST. That there is no atonement without sacrifice is a principle running through all great religions. It comes to its climax and fulfillment in the Cross. But the second fact is that the Cross reveals an old truth in a new, victorious and final way: namely, that atonement must be and is the work of GOD alone" (pp. 76, 77).

This statement of the heart of the Gospel makes that Gospel final, for the finality of JESUS CHRIST is never so evident, so certain and so glorious as when we stand at the Cross. It pours contempt on all the pride of the non-Christian religions, and on all our own religious pride. GOD forbid that we should glory save in that Cross. In the noble words of Dr. Lynn Harold Hough in *The Expository Times* (December, 1933):

"It is clear enough that Paul could never regard the religions of the world as somehow upon a level, each with some contribution to make to the final religion which is in some sense a synthesis of them all. The thing of which he was perfectly sure was that there had been a divine invasion of human life in the Person of JESUS CHRIST, and that the Christian religion was not an aspect of man's quest for GOD, but was GOD's quest for man, GOD in action in JESUS CHRIST for the remaking of human life, for the salvation of the individual and the achievement of the kingdom of GOD in the life of men.

“It was the conviction that he was the bearer of a unique and finally significant message from GOD to men which was the secret of Paul's life. And in Rome, in the prison Epistles, his thought of CHRIST took the loftiest flights. He saw Him as the very secret of the life of the universe of which we are a part, the very principle by which all things cohere, the very actuality of the divine in human life. And the Church of twenty centuries is essentially with Paul at this point.

"The type of hospitality which emasculates the Christian religion for the sake of friendly contact with the ethnic faiths would have made impossible the whole history of the triumphs of the Christian religion in the world. Granted that there are golden threads in all the fabrics which represent the ethnic faiths, granted that the light which has lighted every man coming into the world has lent illumination at some point to one after another of the great religions of the world; it remains true that there is a distinction between the Christian religion and the ethnic faiths which is best expressed by saying that they represent man in action searching for GOD, while the Christian religion represents GOD in action for the salvation of man.

"If the Christian Church should ever forget that in CHRIST, GOD comes into human life as He comes in no other person, in no other place, and in no other way, the day of creative power for the Christian religion would come to an end. At this point there must always be - we must not be afraid of the words - a noble intolerance."

And so, finally -

X. CHRIST Himself offers the strongest proof for the finality of His Person and His message.

"Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in."

That is the proof of Christianity. It is not authority, tradition, force or argument, but experience - experiment, if you will.

- Judaism and Hinduism rest on an age-old tradition. They appeal to the sanctions of the past.
- Confucianism appeals to the authority of a great philosopher.
- Islam has its doctrine of surrender, its sword and history of conquest - a totalitarian religion.

But CHRIST, although He fulfilled the Jewish tradition, and had all authority in heaven and on earth, based His claim on experiment, that is, experience.

- **"Come unto me . . . I will give you rest."**
- **"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find."**
- **"Believe on me . . . life everlasting."**

Here we enter the laboratory of the soul and JESUS is willing also to enter it, if we open the door.

George Romanes, the scientist, in the days of his skepticism, we are told, discovered a Bible text that changed his thought and life (John 7:17). "**If any man will do his will, he shall know.**"

That appealed to his scientific mind. He tried to do GOD's will. He discovered his spiritual bankruptcy as everyone does who tries - and then he found help in a mighty Redeemer.

Other religions make the pathway easy. CHRIST demands all and then forgives all and gives all. The religion of the New Testament has never gone off the gold standard. "**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**"

CHRIST has never been blacked out or blotted out. In the darkest period of history and in the darkest corner of humanity, He is THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD!

In the words of Professor MacIntosh of Edinburgh, in *The Originality of the Christian Message*:

"Any faith which challenges the finality of Christianity must produce the equivalent of JESUS CHRIST. He . . . embodies the Gospel in Himself, and in Him its own finality, if real, must be found. To call Christianity the absolute or final religion, therefore, is to contend not merely that in JESUS CHRIST, GOD is presented in a form higher and more spiritually satisfying than elsewhere, but that the relationship to the Father on which believers thus enter is such that it cannot be transcended."

Furthermore, as Pascal declared in his *Thoughts on Religion*:

"JESUS CHRIST is the center of everything and the object of everything; and he who does not know Him knows nothing of the order of the world and nothing of himself. In Him is all our felicity and virtue, our life, our light, our hope; apart from Him there is nothing but vice, misery, darkness, despair, and we see only obscurity and confusion in the nature of GOD and in our own."

And that is the finality of JESUS CHRIST for each one of us.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Quoted by Speer, *Finality of JESUS CHRIST*, p. 48.
2. *Review of Religion*, March, 1941.
3. See Dr. Macdonald's article "Allah" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*.
4. *The World's Living Religions*, pp. 148-9.

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