I am happy to provide a short response to Ralph Winter’s piece, “The Future of Evangelicals in Mission.” One could comment on many aspects of his article including the details of his historical overview. But that is not my concern here.

What I want to underline—and celebrate with Ralph Winter—is the historic shift in the modern evangelical world in the last forty or so years. Forty years ago, most evangelical leaders would have agreed that the primary mission of the church is “saving souls”—i.e., evangelism is our primary mission. Only if we have a little time and money left over can we devote a little of each to social ministry.

Ralph Winter rightly celebrates the fact that things have changed dramatically. Today, almost all evangelical leaders agree that we are to do both evangelism and social action. They are both parts of a biblically shaped mission.

Many persons, documents and movements have contributed to this significant change. John Stott, Samuel Escobar and René Padilla all contributed to the historic affirmation in the Lausanne Covenant (1974) that evangelism and social responsibility are both part of our biblical task as Christians. Vinay Samuel, the International Fellowship of Evangelical Missions Theologians and Transformation magazine all played key roles. So did John Perkins and his national network in the U.S. of over seven hundred holistic ministries in the Christian Community Development Association—every one of which combines evangelism and social ministry in helping poor folk escape poverty.

Ralph Winter is also right to warn against losing the balance of evangelism and social ministry. I do not see how one can read the Gospels and not see that Jesus combined word and deed. But history shows that it is so easy to so emphasize one side or the other that one loses the other crucial component. It would be possible for evangelical social activists in the next twenty years to become so preoccupied with social action that they neglect evangelism. That dare not happen. We must renew and strengthen our commitment to inviting persons who do not now confess Jesus as Savior and Lord, to accept the Gospel and come into a living personal relationship with the Savior. We need more evangelism, not less.

But we also need more evangelicals enthusiastically engaged in social and societal transformation. And we need millions of Christians and hundreds of thousands of congregations who understand concretely how to combine evangelism and social action.

The central importance of Ralph Winter’s article, I believe, is this. As someone who has for many, many decades been powerfully identified with the evangelistic task of sharing the Gospel with those who have never heard, he shouts clearly and loudly toward the end of his long fruitful career what he has often said before: word and deed belong together. Evangelism and social action are not the same thing, but they belong inseparably together in the mission of faithful Christians.

This essay is both a significant measure of how much progress the evangelical world has made in embracing holistic mission and a clarion call to the next generation to get on with the biblical task of following Jesus our perfect model in combining evangelism and social action in the power of the Spirit.