

JOURNAL OF THE  
ACADEMY FOR  
EVANGELISM IN  
THEOLOGICAL  
EDUCATION

Volume Three  
1987-1988

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**The Journal of the Academy for Evangelism**

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The Journal (ISSN 0894-9034) is published annually, and is supplied free of charge to members of the Academy. Copies may be purchased at a cost of \$7.50 per single issue, or \$25.00 per subscription for four issues, and ordered from the Circulation Editor.

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## Editorial Introduction

This is an important edition of the *AETE JOURNAL*, and for several reasons. First of all, we are privileged to publish some reflections on evangelism by the guest of honor at the fifteenth annual meeting of the Academy held at Candler School of Theology. President Jimmy Carter is one of the most influential Christian laymen of our time. Not only did he bring signal honor to the highest political office in the land, but through his continued Christian witness, and especially through the work of the Carter Center in Atlanta, he is bringing powerful influence to bear for peace throughout the world. His thoughts on evangelism would be noteworthy for these reasons alone. But in fact, he has given us some of the best theology we have had on the subject. Those of us who teach evangelism should mark it well.

Another reason for the significance of this edition is its focus on evangelism and universal grace. This is a surprisingly explosive issue — a sure sign that it needs to be more thoroughly discussed — and was the theme of the meeting at Candler. The keynote speaker, Carl Braaten, gave us an excellent springboard for further debate, suggesting that the appropriate stance for evangelism is one of universal hope: God may yet manage to bring everyone back home. We can avoid this issue in our teaching of evangelism; but we cannot ignore it.

Papers by Charles Taber and Francis Ringer develop the same theme in different contexts. Taber argues that religious change as the condition of Christian discipleship is too limiting. God's grace is at once more universal and demanding, and requires us to identify our cultural idols so that we might truly reject them. Ringer reminds us that the gospel of Jesus Christ is deeply and richly incarnational. We must always expect God's grace to meet us in those whom we evangelize.

At the center of this edition is a very important paper by Jim L. Waits, Dean at Candler School of Theology. Presented as the 1987 banquet address to the Academy, it states both the potential and the challenge of incorporating evangelism into a theological curriculum. Correctly perceiving this to be a critical juncture in the development of the field, Waits offers encouragement, but warns that acceptance by the academic community will be earned only by solid evidence of rigorous disciplinary standards.

The contributions of Woody Davis and Samuel Schutz complement the earlier papers with practical research and applicable models. Davis asks why men are now in a clear minority in the life and work of the church. His data is well researched, and his conclusions are stimulating. Schutz presents a helpful model for discipleship. It is a thought-provoking approach to incorporating effective evangelism into the life and work of the church, and an excellent basis for further dialogue.

## Introduction of President Carter

David Lowes Watson  
President, Academy for Evangelism

First of all, let me extend a warm welcome to those who are joining us for this part of the fifteenth annual meeting of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education. We are deeply grateful to the Candler School of Theology for the opportunity to meet in this very fine chapel, but in particular to Dean Waits for so graciously offering us hospitality, and to my friend and colleague, Professor George Morris, for all that he has done to make us feel so very much at home.

This will be a memorable meeting of the Academy, because of the guest of honor who will shortly address us. There were so many Americans who, like myself, found ourselves catching our breath as we saw the election of Jimmy Carter come to pass. It was a breaking-in of Shalom as few of us had dared to hope, symbolized so powerfully by the peace which the peoples of Abraham found at Camp David. We did indeed taste the firstfruits of the Kingdom of God, and history will surely acknowledge the work of your administration, Mr. President, in preparing for that Kingdom, on earth as in heaven.

But if I may, I would like to introduce you with some personal remarks. It was clear from the very beginning that a great strength of your presidency would be your knowledge of the American people. In a word, Mr. President, you practice political courtesy — taking seriously how ordinary people think and feel and live. Shortly after your election, you visited my home town of Newcastle upon Tyne in England. I watched the news reports of your speech in the Haymarket, and saw you win over an entire city with your opening words which, as I should point out for the rest of us, consisted of the local football cheer. I am told that Prime Minister Callaghan, who was there with you, complained afterwards that no one had told *him* to say something like that. But it came naturally to one who is politically courteous. I gather that your welcome when you returned to Newcastle earlier this year was just as enthusiastic. The people of the north of England never forget a good man.

This past July, some of us who attended the Eighth Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies heard an address by Dr. Mercy Oduyaye of Nigeria, in which she said that the statesmen of her country, following ancient tribal custom, are honored because they look after their people. To look after people, one must know them. And on both counts, Mr. President, you are worthy of high honor. You always will be. Which is why the Academy for Evangelism is privileged to add its tribute to you, as a statesman, and as a fellow Christian disciple, by asking you to address us this morning. We eagerly anticipate what you have to say.

## THE TASK OF EVANGELISM

Jimmy Carter

I would like to thank Dr. Watson for his kind introduction. I already felt at home, because this is where I teach. It was from this same podium that I was honored with an award, presented to me by Bishop Cannon, who is in the audience today. The bishop is one of my heroes. But to be welcomed by a "Geordie" from Newcastle upon Tyne is an unexpected pleasure. All of you know that Presidents have certain prerogatives when they are in office which quickly dissipate when they leave the White House. However, as an Honorary Freeman of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne, I have the right to graze my sheep and pitch my tent on the town moor for the remainder of my existence on earth.

I must confess to some apprehension at addressing a gathering of evangelism professors. But I was a little more at ease after reading this morning's *Atlanta Constitution*. This is something I make a habit of doing whenever I am scheduled to teach. I am now in my sixth year as University Distinguished Professor at Emory, and I have found that it always pays to be ready for some very interesting questions in class. So almost invariably I get up quite early, take a three or four mile run, then read the morning papers very carefully, because I know that the students are reading them just as carefully to prepare their questions.

Today, on the front page of the *Constitution*, was a column about a famous evangelist who is running for President. It turned out that he was meticulously going down the list of claims he had made as a TV evangelist and correcting them in the more pristine and demanding world of politics. It was reassuring to note that the standards of truth and honesty he had found in the political arena were much higher than those to which he had been accustomed in the religious and evangelical field.

The substance of my remarks this morning will be the recounting of my journey as a Christian layman, beginning in 1966, when I ran for Governor and was defeated. This left me very distressed, and I had a heart-to-heart talk with my sister which transformed my attitude towards Christianity. As a result of that for a few years I volunteered as a Southern Bap-

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This is an edited transcription of an address which President Carter gave as University Distinguished Professor at Emory University. In addition to members of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education, the audience included faculty and students of the Candler School of Theology, and participants in Evangelism 87, a Seminar for church leaders sponsored by the School.

tist layman to go on what we call "pioneer mission field." We would go to different places and minister to families, none of whose members ever went to church of any kind. Volunteers would do telephone calls ahead of time, to Lockhaven, Pennsylvania, and communities in Massachusetts, and to the southern part of Atlanta, and would identify maybe a hundred families who had no connection with any church. I would go into those families and minister, witness; I practiced and went with competent people. I was fairly successful with the help of my associates and with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Later when I was getting ready to run for Governor again, I was invited to go to a nearby church to give a talk to the local brotherhood. I went up to my front room and began to write my speech. I was very proud of myself that they had recognized the sterling performance of mine in the evangelical field. I was writing down my achievements. I computed that in all of these visits around that I had been able to lead 140 people, previously not believers, to accept Christ. I wrote down 140. I guess the Lord must have been looking over my shoulder because I immediately had the memory of a 1966 political campaign when my wife and I had gone throughout the state and personally had shaken hands and asked six hundred thousand Georgians to vote for me. The startling difference between six hundred thousand efforts on my own behalf in the political field and 140 over a lifetime for Christ was a startling realization of how little I had done compared to the potential of my life.

I think one of the aspects of successful or proper evangelism is the realization that no matter what we have done, no matter how esteemed we are, no matter what our achievements might have been even measured numerically, that we fall far short of the expectations of God. The realization of this fallibility, this incomplete life as a Christian, ought to be a sobering thought for us all and precipitate prayer.

### Building Bridges

We have a tiny church at home, the Maranatha Baptist Church. A fine young missionary family from there, Jerome Ethridge and his family, have been in Togo now for eight years. I think—just to illustrate what I think evangelism ought to be (a very presumptuous statement to me)—Jerome Ethridge and his wife fulfill that commitment. Jerome is a layman who specializes in agronomy. He worked on the Plains experiment station just a half-mile out of my hometown and volunteered to be a missionary because of his deep Christian faith. He has drilled almost a hundred wells in the arid area of Togo. The region where he lives was totally separated from the mainland and from all market capabilities, from medical care, etc., during the rainy season. So, over a period of the first five years Jerome Ethridge, helped by some Christians from North Carolina, constructed a bridge over one of the largest rivers in Togo and now there is unimpeded access between his people and the mainland. His wife teaches health care, prenatal and postnatal care to families there. She has organized the immunization program for that region of Togo.

The point I am trying to make is that the crucial skeleton of preaching to people is a foundation for the Ethridge's work. But what brings people to church, what gives them faith in Christianity, what forms an alliance or friendship and mutual confidence and support is the work that Jerome and his family do to make those people have a better life. The visitation of those incarcerated in prison, the giving of bread to those who are hungry, the giving of water to those who thirst, and the visiting and care for those who are ill; to me these demands of Christ, followed by him in a vivid and unforgettable way during his own lifetime, are an integral part of Christian evangelism. But too often we forget about that.

### Sharing Life

Too often we think about evangelism as only preaching the gospel. I think there has to be ministry for the alleviation of suffering, the reaching out in harmony and respect and partnership, and sharing of life. There are many churches who can measure their achievements in numbers of baptisms, members, and maybe the total budget during the year, but who do not do anything of significance in actually ministering to the people in need in the community. I certainly would include in that need, the need to know about Christ. But words are not that persuasive, and nice clothes and a beautiful church building are not that persuasive, with people who are destitute, or lonely, or abandoned, or hungry, or who despair.

I will have a group of men my age in a Sunday School class and see them sit around, fervent Christians, dedicated Christians enjoying the harmony and the fellowship of a community of various similar souls. Thanksgiving rolls around, and they say, Why don't we do something of a generous nature? Let us take up a collection and we will buy food, turkeys, etc. We will take this to some poor families and help them have a nice Thanksgiving. The next question is, who knows a poor family? Generally the answer is, nobody in this class knows a poor family. Well, we will call the welfare office and get the name and address of a poor family. I think ministers ought to demand as a measure of character and achievement and status from their congregation, an active reaching out.

### Evangelistic Outreach

Rosalynn and I have cast our lot with Habitat for Humanity as kind of a special program. Habitat is not a charity. It is an ecumenical group, with chapters in two hundred and five American communities and eighteen foreign nations. We form local committees, multi-denominational, almost always Christian, both Protestants and Catholics, and a few Jews have helped as well. The local committee decides where homes might be built, where they are most needed, what families ought to get the first homes and that sort of thing. The families are called "homesteading families" and Habitat builds homes in partnership with them.

We have six Habitat projects in Nicaragua. The last time I went to Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega and I and his vice-president and his foreign secretary along with Rosalynn and their wives traveled up to the north-western corner. We made a few bricks and Spanish tiles and we laid the blocks and we hammered some nails. This is not an endorsement of the Sandinistas; Habitat for Humanity is an effort that transcends political boundaries. Quite often these families take on a new attitude toward life, and in a few years the families will say, what do you think about the house I built? Not that Habitat built for me, but what do you think about the house I built? Quite often families whose parents are totally illiterate and who had never dreamed of any higher educational achievement for their children will be talking to us about which college their child should attend.

In Habitat for Humanity, we require the monthly payments to be made because we use the monthly payments to build more homes. Families learn a trade. They learn how to make Spanish tile or concrete blocks, how to run a sawmill in the jungle areas, how to pour concrete, to erect a stud wall and build a roof truss. When Habitat moves on somewhere else we leave behind us a corps of skilled workers who have never before in their lives done anything of which they could be truly proud.

We do not require the families to be Christians. But to me this is one example of evangelism that really works, because almost invariably the families do accept Christ. Whenever we dedicate a house anywhere in the world, the house is delivered along with a Bible in the language of the family involved. Everything that is done is done ostensibly, ostentatiously I should say, in the name of Christ.

## THE MEANING OF EVANGELISM IN THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S UNIVERSAL GRACE

Carl E. Braaten

### I The Biblical Foundations of Evangelism

The classical expression of the evangelistic task of the church is given in the Great Commission of the risen Lord, recorded in Matthew 28:19-20: "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." This trinitarian formula is not only a baptismal confession of the early church, it also offers a comprehensive setting for understanding the universal intention of God in his covenant with Israel, the coming of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus, and the preaching of the apostles in the power of the Spirit. The roots of world evangelization are deeply embedded in the entire history of God's revelatory activity set forth in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures and they give us a number of starting points for reflecting on the church's role in the universal scheme of God's grace.

The evangelistic activity of the early church did not start from scratch. It was a continuation of what God had already announced through the prophetic history of Israel. The call of Abraham, the father of faith, was God's way of initiating a new relationship between himself and all the nations. Here is the nucleus of the promise which the New Testament announces as the salvation to be extended to all peoples through Christ Jesus. God's purpose in setting Israel apart from other nations was to prepare the way for the coming of God's rule throughout the whole world. The purpose of election was not to shower Israel with special favors for the sake of its own salvation, but strictly for the sake of witnessing to the lordship of God over all the nations of the world. It is clear that God's special relationship with Israel was not an end in itself but a means to bring about a universal relation between God and all peoples.

The root of this universal perspective of Israel's place among the nations lies in her radical monotheism. In Deuteronomy 4:39 we read: "Know

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therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven and on the earth beneath; there is no other." If Israel's task is to witness faithfully to Jahweh as the one and only Lord of the nations, the universal horizon is clearly implied. The book of Isaiah speaks of Israel's role in terms of bringing forth "justice to the nations," (Is. 42:1) of being a "light to the nations." (Is. 42:6) In the book of Jonah it is apparent that Israel's vocation was not to be confined to itself, but included the task of proclaiming the infinite love of God among the heathen nations.

Connected with the universal scope of Israel's mission was her expectation of salvation through the future coming of the Messiah who has the power to redeem the world. Even though the time of this salvation lay in the future, Israel became engaged in direct witnessing activity. Particularly during the time between the two Testaments, the Jews of the diaspora made efforts to convert pagans and to gain followers of the Torah. This means that when the apostle Paul and the early missionaries preached the gospel to the Gentiles, there was a considerable constituency of Gentile converts providing points of contact in the major cities of the Roman empire. The universal thrust of biblical faith had already been put in motion by the Jewish diaspora prior to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah and the rise of the Christian community. It is noteworthy, too, that the Greek translation of the Old Testament — the Septuagint — became the great document of Jewish mission, and thus placed a ready-made tool at the service of Paul's preaching to the Gentiles.

The Gospels picture Jesus of Nazareth as one who confined his mission to the "house of Israel." Matt. 15:24 quotes Jesus as saying: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This is illustrated by his order to the disciples: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 23:15) Jesus went further; he attacked the conversion efforts of the Jews of his time: "Alas for you, lawyers and Pharisees, hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to win one convert; and when you have won him you make him twice as fit for hell as you are yourselves." (Matt. 23:15 N.E.B.)

On the other hand, Jesus is never pictured as one with narrow religious or nationalistic attitudes. He broke through Jewish particularism by freely demonstrating his openness to the Samaritans, both in his actions and in his parables. Furthermore, Jesus' proclamation of the coming kingdom embraces a future that includes Gentiles along with Jews. Matt. 8:11 states "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." Salvation in the kingdom is open to all people, Jews and Gentiles; yet, meanwhile, Jesus and his disciples restricted their preaching to the people of Israel. But at the end of time the nations will make their way to Jerusalem, feast on Mount Zion, and worship the true God. In continuity with the Old Testament, the expectation of salvation in the Gospels is universal and eschatological. The future kingdom of God includes all nations of the world, and the special role of the Jews is to be God's chosen people serving that end.

In summary, we can say that we have not yet reached a full biblical theology of evangelism with the materials from the Old Testament, nor even with the coming of the Messiah and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Something radically new was required to raise the evangelistic consciousness of the people of God to another plane. This new element broke through in the suffering, death, and the resurrection of the Messiah Jesus.

The apostles were authorized by Jesus to be the first Christian evangelists because they were witnesses of his resurrection. As representatives of the risen Christ the apostles were commissioned to proclaim God's salvation to the uttermost parts of the world. As apostolic emissaries of Christ they became founders and leaders of new ecclesial communities. Thus, the church as the new people of God, the new community gathered around the presence of the risen Christ, is founded forever on the faith and witness of the apostles.

The church is not identical with the kingdom of God which Jesus proclaimed. Rather, the new community gathered around the name of Jesus exists in order to proclaim the good news of God's kingdom to all the nations, and to be a sign of its activity in the world. The apostles preached that Israel's hope for the coming of God's rule and kingdom was realized in the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, but not in the usual nationalistic and political terms. Instead, the coming of God's righteous rule took place in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and therefore the apostles proclaimed Jesus as the focal point of God's continuing activity in world history. The apostolic preaching of Christ became the primary means of access to the mystery of the kingdom. The great christological titles were applied to Jesus to designate the absolute meaning of his person and work. Jesus is Messiah, Son of Man, High Priest, Prophet, King, Lord, Savior, Son of God, and finally connected with the significance of all these titles, the New Testament designates Jesus as the Word of God, indeed, addresses him as "God." Jesus is the core of the apostolic message.

In the New Testament the accounts of the resurrection of Jesus and his commission to the apostles to go with the gospel to the nations appears intertwined in the same context. The gospel is the good news of what God has done to death in raising Jesus from the grave; that is the heart of the message of the apostles to the nations. "Christ is risen!" Death has been conquered at Easter and a new ruler has been enthroned in the world. "Christ is King." The effect of this event is absolutely decisive, uniquely authoritative, and universally valid. As Matt. 28:18-20 states the matter: "All authority" has been given to Christ; "all nations" are to be made disciples and baptized in the name of the Triune God; they are to be taught "all that I have commanded you;" and Christ promises to be with his followers "always, to the close of the age." There are no qualifications, no limits bearing on time or space, geography or chronology, that could plausibly relativize the Lord's mandate for the proclamation of the Gospel to all peoples, everywhere, until the end of time.

But the apostles were not given a worldwide mandate to accomplish under their own power and direction. Easter was followed by Pentecost.

The apostolic witness to the risen Christ became charged with power by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, authorized by Christ himself: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Here we have the beginnings of world evangelization in a nutshell: the commission to preach the gospel of the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem and then going to every part of the world until time runs out. The direct result of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel was the creation of a new kind of community transcending the usual distinctions between Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, etc. This new community is the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the new people of God, called and commissioned to preach the gospel, cross all frontiers, and to witness to the realities of the new age that has dawned.

The apostolic pattern of being called and sent by Christ to the world continued to be valid for the generations of Christians following the apostles. Christian identity and gospel proclamation were inseparable. Christians who existed among Jews and Gentiles understood that it was the gospel that made the difference, and that belief in this gospel meant the privilege and obligation to make it known to all others. The successors of the apostles had to continue doing what the apostles had begun. How was this to be done? Through the ongoing proclamation of the word and witness of the apostles to the crucified and risen Christ. "Faith comes from what is heard," said Paul, "and how are people to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14-17) All baptized believers are preachers in the sense that they are called to bear witness to the full and final revelation of the world's reconciliation through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## II The Abiding Evangelistic Task

The church in history exists between the times: the *kairos* of salvation in the person of Jesus and the final *parousia* at the end of history. As long as the kingdom of God has not yet arrived in its full power and glory, the church is called to continue in the apostolic line to spread the good news of the gospel to all people. The memory of God's victory in the death and resurrection of Jesus keeps alive the hope for history to reach its final goal, the basic transformation of the conditions of life as we know it, especially the defeat of death, and at last eternal life in communion with God forever. In the end the world of creation will be set free from its bondage and decay and will obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. The final consummation will spell the removal of all evil, the overthrow of Satan and his power of destruction, and the conquest of sin and all its consequences.

But the kingdom of God is not merely future; it is also present as an offer of mercy to sinners, restoring humanity's broken relationship with God. This new relationship is experienced through repentance and faith, as the forgiveness of sins, a new life in Christ, and receiving the gifts of

the Spirit, with far-reaching implications for life in all its daily aspects. This new relationship with God cannot be confined to the private sphere of life or matters of personal piety. Jesus' ministry of the kingdom showed signs of breaking into every dimension of life, healing physical illness, exorcising spirits, feeding the hungry, speaking out against corrupt officials and religious authorities, and caring for the poor and neglected.

Correspondingly the church is to be a Christ-like medium of the kingdom of God in this world, bringing its mission to the frontlines of struggle on behalf of human beings, including the battles being fought in the political, social and economic areas of life. Through missionary service the gifts of the kingdom of God are offered to the world and distributed here and now. Yet, Christians must not be carried away into a kind of utopian enthusiasm, as though they could expect the ultimate victory over physical death, disease, destruction, and deprivation under the present conditions of existence and history. All solutions to human problems on this side of the final consummation remain partial and preliminary.

A church committed to continue the apostolic mission in the world must believe that entry into the kingdom of God is mediated by the church's proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by its administration of the sacraments. This constitutes the primacy aim of the church's existence everywhere in the world. Those who are incorporated into the church through faith and baptism are ordained by the Spirit to convey the gospel of the kingdom of God to all who do not yet believe. The church continues in history under the original mandate of Jesus: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." (Matt. 24:14)

God's plan of salvation includes all the nations. Until this plan is consummated the Christian church is engaged in a task that bears on the meaning and destiny of the present history of the world. Meanwhile, Jesus Christ represents the "Yes and Amen" for all the promises of God, and sets the church in motion in the power of his Spirit to proclaim and pioneer the hopes opened up for all peoples, nations, cultures, and religions. The evangelistic imperative to go and tell fades away whenever the church turns in upon itself and loses sight of the universal horizon of God's all-embracing kingdom. If the gospel has not already been preached to all nations, the church has no choice but to bring its witness wherever the name of Jesus Christ is not yet being confessed.

The church today must strive assiduously for a comprehensive view of the kingdom: the vertical dimension of the gospel which mediates the unconditional grace of God as well as the horizontal dimension in which we meet Christ in the persons of our needy neighbors; the depth dimension which deals with the universal human condition of sin and estrangement as well as the breadth dimension which struggles with demonic forces in everyday existence; the personal dimension which lifts up the absolute significance of every individual human being in the sight of God as well as the political dimension bearing on the quality of justice and liberty that prevail on earth. The comprehensive symbol of the kingdom of God includes all these dimensions, and the church is right to work for

their realization as an expression of its faith in Christ in the power of the Spirit.

No matter what the social, economic, or political circumstances may be, the church still has the indispensable task of witnessing to the ultimate meaning and goal in life in Jesus Christ, thus bestowing on individuals here and now a sense of absolute worth in the eyes of God. Witness to individual persons with the hope of conversion — repentance and faith — is an inalienable priority of the church's total mission. Avoiding this aspect of personal evangelism is always a sign that the church has forgotten the way of the kingdom in the ministry of our Lord who touched and changed the lives of forgotten individuals, and who made God's love for the world manifest in behalf of all sorts of individuals, children, women and men, rich and poor, sick and sinful, crippled and blind.

Some Christians have wearied of the evangelistic task altogether. They may view Christianity as an appropriate religion for Western culture, but with no right to claim universal validity for all other cultures. The twin concepts of religious pluralism and historical relativism make it seemingly difficult to see how that which has occurred in one time and place can possess final meaning for all peoples and ages. Perhaps we can engage in a dialogue between religions or faiths, and benefit from the cross-fertilization of ideas. Then the aim of the church's evangelical outreach would be more like cultural exchange than religious conversion. Others would make a case for recoiling from evangelical activity because of its recent association with Western imperialism and expansionism. Western missions allegedly became colonial outposts of the divided churches of Europe and America. Missions supposedly became propaganda organs by which the denominations reduplicated themselves in Africa and Asia. These charges have been told over and over again, and people hold varying opinions on the success or failure of the Western missions.

Regardless of all that, theologically viewed the apostolic mission of the Messiah and God's kingdom is a continuation of the biblical history of promise, proceeding beyond the limits of Israel, reaching in principle absolutely universal dimensions. In the New Testament no limits are set to the universality of God's redemptive will. "God would have all to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth." In an ultimate sense we are not even speaking of the mission of the church and its evangelistic task. For the mission belongs to the one God, unfolding a plan for the world that emanates from the Creator of the world, the Lord of history, and the Savior of all humanity. The unique thing, however, about this biblical kind of universalism is the way it is mediated through particular events of history, beginning with the election of Israel, so that the eschatological goal of world history is carried as a promise within the concrete history of God's missionary people. In contrast, there is a gnostic type of universalism which trusts in a spiritual or mystical essence common to all religions ultimately void of all concrete symbols and historical events. What makes biblical faith into a global missionary movement is that the universal promise looks to concrete history for its future realization, and following the apostles the church believes it has been summoned and commissioned

by God to serve as a particular means to that universal end.

### III The Final Hope of Biblical Universalism

Today, there is a trend in both Protestant and Catholic theology to restrict the scope of biblical universalism, and to make Christ small and unimportant. The christocentric emphasis is under attack, at least among the deans of modern liberal Protestant and Catholic progressive theology. Our biblical evangelical reformation christology is too exclusivistic. On account of historical relativity and religious pluralism, many are challenging the place of Christ as the goal of things. Is Christ really that final, definitive and normative?

John Hick represents a liberal Protestant view which allows Christians to hold to Christ as their unique Savior without necessarily claiming as much for others. Christ may be my personal Lord and Savior, but this does not mean that he is the only Savior or the only Lord for all other religions. To hold Christ as the final and normative Word of God is branded as "theological fundamentalism." There is room, after all, for other savior figures in other religions, at least enough to go around for everybody. To be sure, Jesus is one of the ways in which God meets the world of human experience, but it is arrogant bigotry to claim that Jesus is God's unique way of dealing with the salvation of the world.

Other voices in modern theology like Tom Driver, Rosemary Ruether, and Dorothee Sölle are claiming that the uniqueness, normativity, and finality of Jesus Christ account for the sins of Christianity, its sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism. The scandal of particularity that insists on a once-and-for-all Christ is supposedly the breeding ground of intolerance, supremacy, imperialism, and what these theologians call "Christofascism." As Tom Driver says, "The infinite commitment of God to finitude in Jesus does not indicate something done once and once for all time."<sup>1</sup> What these theologians are asking for is a "paradigm shift" from a theology wherein Christ is the center to one in which he is one of the satellites in a galaxy of religious superstars. John Hick calls it a "Copernican revolution," contrasting it with the old Ptolemaic system of geocentric thinking, which imagines that the incarnate revelation of God in Christ stands at the center of the universe of the world religions. Paul Knitter, a progressive Catholic, speaking in favor of this new trend, states: "We are in the midst of an evolution from christocentrism to theocentrism."<sup>2</sup> James Gustafson continues the attack on christocentricity, demanding that the homocentric view that focuses on God's humanity in the earthly Christ must give way to a theocentric perspective that fits a post-Copernican view of the universe.<sup>3</sup>

I agree with Paul Knitter's assessment that there is "growing endorsement" of a "nonnormative christology" both among Protestant and Catholic theologians. They are holding ranking positions in the prestigious divinity schools. However, there is a counter-offensive going on in contemporary theology sparked by interest in Karl Barth's christocentric trinitarianism. Diametrically opposed to the anti-christological trend is a movement to continue the Barthian initiative toward a new affirmation

of the Trinity on the basis of christology. There are new books on the Trinity by Eberhard Jüngel, Jürgen Moltmann, and Robert W. Jenson.<sup>4</sup> They represent a significant advance to a new conception of the Trinity, precisely at a time when most other theologians have raised the white flag of surrender.

When we stress, as we have done, a christocentric trinitarian perspective, the liberals charge "archaism," and when we emphasize universalism some evangelicals cry "heresy." How can we have our cake and eat it too? Do we need to restrict the confidence born of hope and prayer that God will get his wish in the end that all will be saved. May we share the hope of Karl Barth? He said: "There is no good reason why we should forbid ourselves, or be forbidden, openness to the possibility that in the reality of God and man in Jesus Christ there is contained much more than we might expect and therefore the supremely unexpected withdrawal of that final threat, i.e. that in the truth of this reality there might be contained the super-abundant promise of the final deliverance of all men. To be more explicit, there is no good reason why we should not be open to this possibility. . . of an *apokatástasis* or universal reconciliation."<sup>5</sup>

We would teach a highly nuanced and qualified evangelical universalism. It is not a dogma, not a piece of knowledge, not something to which humans have a right and a claim. Yet, it is something for which we may cautiously and distinctly pray and hope, that in spite of everything that seems to point conclusively in the opposite direction, God's mercy will not cast off his world forever. Alternatives to a christocentric universalism are Arminianism and double predestination. It should come as no surprise that a Lutheran is comfortable with neither. For us the doctrine of election means at least that those who come to faith in Jesus Christ are elected through God's grace and love. God's justice and wrath have already taken their toll in the rejection of Jesus Christ on the cross. (Shades of Barth) God's love is not limited. It is limited neither by human freedom nor by divine wrath.

We cannot hold a universalism of the unitarian kind. People are not too good to be damned. There is no necessity for God to save everybody nor to reject anyone. God is not bound by anything outside of himself. He is not bound to give the devil his due. If we take into account God's love, he would have all to be saved. If we reckon with his freedom, he has the power to save whomsoever he pleases. This does not lead to a dogmatic universalism. But it does mean that we leave open the possibility that within the power of God's freedom and love, all people may indeed be saved in the end. This follows as a possibility from the fact that God is free from all external factors in making up his mind. Not even the human predicament, the *need* of salvation, is the primary motive of God's love in Jesus Christ. God loves because it is his nature to love, as Anders Nygren emphasized so powerfully in *Agape and Eros*, not first because there are people in need of his love.

The other side of the possibility of universal salvation is that of reprobation. We cannot rule out the possibility of divine reprobation to those who remain in unbelief and disobedience to the end. If this is a possibility in

principle that cannot be ruled out, the moment one contemplates the atonement of Jesus Christ the threat of eternal rejection is seen in a new light. The threat of eternal condemnation is real for all people. Nevertheless, there is no basis to assert that God will necessarily in the end actualize this possibility. Christians may hope and pray that all might be saved, that the distinction between those who already believe and those who do not yet believe will ultimately be destroyed by the Word of God who "is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham." (Matt. 3:9)

The scale is tilted decidedly toward the hope of universal reconciliation on account of Christ. We agree with Barth that it cannot be denied that eternal reprobation is a possibility, but in the light of God's verdict in the victory of Jesus Christ, it becomes an "impossible possibility." Barth says, "No aversion, rebellion or resistance on the part of non-Christians will be strong enough to resist the fulfillment of the promise of the Spirit which is pronounced over them too. . . or to hinder the overthrow of their ignorance in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. . . the stream is too strong and the dam too weak for us to be able reasonably to expect anything but the collapse of the dam and the onrush of the waters. In this sense Jesus Christ is the hope even of these non-Christians."<sup>6</sup>

In a still more explicit passage, Barth states that the justification of the world of sinners in Jesus Christ is the content of predestination. "The exchange which took place on Golgotha, when God chose as his throne the malefactor's cross, when the Son of God bore what the son of man ought to have borne, took place once and for all in fulfillment of God's eternal will, and it can never be reversed. There is no condemnation — literally none — for those that are in Christ Jesus."<sup>7</sup> Then he says, more boldly still, that after the coming of Jesus Christ unbelief becomes "an objective, real, ontological impossibility. . . Faith, however has become an objective, real, ontological inevitability for all, for every man."<sup>8</sup>

#### IV Then, Why Evangelize?

It is the task of the Christian community to announce to the world what God has accomplished for its salvation in Jesus Christ. The good news is that all people have been united with God in Christ. One chief difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is that the one knows and the other does not yet know. That difference, of course, makes a lot of difference. The point, however, is that the Christ-event is full; there is no void which has to be filled up by the church or the world. The evangelistic task of the church is to bear witness to the word and deed of God in Jesus Christ. Christ alone is the true minister, the true missionary of God par excellence. All of us are more like acolytes assisting in the priestly and prophetic ministry of Christ.

What is the relation between Christian evangelism and the eternal destiny of all people? Evangelicals are concerned to ask whether in the end the unbelieving heathen are really saved? Barth's doctrine of justification is radically objective. "There is not one for whose sin and death he did not die, whose sin and death he did not remove and obliterate on the

cross. . . There is not one who is not adequately and perfectly and finally justified in Him. There is not one whose sin is not forgiven in Him, whose death is not a death which has been put to death in Him. . . There is not one for whom he has not done everything in His death and received everything in His resurrection from the dead."<sup>9</sup> In the face of literally hundreds of such beautiful passages, evangelicals understandably ask: "Then what is the point of evangelism?" If the heathen are already saved in Christ, and nothing more needs to be added, then where is the urgency in world evangelization?

We are all fully aware that the majority of the world's billions do not know and believe in Christ. We also believe that what God has done objectively in the reconciling work of Christ must be subjectively appropriated in order to bear fruit in the lives of individuals. This subjective appropriation is the work of the Holy Spirit through his witnesses who indeed do call for existential decisions of faith. Those who proclaim Christ do intend to evoke a response of faith in the hearts of those who hear the gospel. How can this paradox be resolved? God's will to save all is subjectively appropriated by only a few. The solution lies in God's hands. Meanwhile, we all live in the shadow of death. We all stand under the threat of being damned. The danger of condemnation hangs over us like a sword.<sup>10</sup> Haven't we all said from time to time, "Well, I'll be damned!" But Barth says, "It is God's affair whether or when He will take seriously and put into effect this insane desire."<sup>11</sup> God's final condemnation has not yet been pronounced on each one of us. The threat has not yet been fulfilled; the sword has not yet fallen. "The falsehood of man may be only an undertaking which finally proves impracticable."<sup>12</sup>

We would also end our speculation on a hopeful note. Ours is a universalism of hope and prayer, not a matter of gnostic speculation or pantheistic metaphysics. The whole sinister stream of historical events and human falsehood cannot have a meaning and a future of itself apart from the determination of God to deal with his world according to his gracious word in Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that Barth is the only theologian in the history of Christianity who has dared to say a cautiously hopeful word for poor Judas who betrayed Jesus and destroyed himself.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Tom Driver, *Christ in a Changing World, Toward an Ethical Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Knitter, "Towards a Theocentric/Nonnormative Christology: Growing Endorsement," p. 11. Paper given at the American Academy of Religion at the "Currents in Contemporary Christology Group."

<sup>3</sup>James Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup>Eberhard Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity, God's Being Is In Becoming* (Grand Rapids,

MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, first half, p. 478.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 355-356.

<sup>7</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, II/2, p. 167.

<sup>8</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, p. 747.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 638.

<sup>10</sup>*Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, first half, pp. 464-465.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 465-466.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 466.

## GOD VS IDOLS: A MODEL OF CONVERSION

Charles R. Taber

Paul, writing to the Thessalonian Christians about their conversion, said that people everywhere were reporting "how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9, RSV): It is the purpose of this paper to develop from this verse a model of conversion, or at least of that aspect of conversion that constitutes sufficient evidence of genuineness to justify baptizing a convert and incorporating him or her into the church. Along the way, we will discuss some dimensions of the debate about this in missiology; what it means to know and serve God; how one may identify and forsake idols; and how all of this can be used to characterize authentic Christian conversion and to avoid spurious or misdirected conversion.

### The Missiological Debate

The debate about conversion within missiology has a number of aspects, and could be approached from a number of directions. I would like to approach it by examining the controversy between Donald McGavran and some of his critics, chiefly from the Mennonite tradition.

Several decades ago, McGavran became very impatient with the missionary approach that appealed for individual, one-by-one conversions, and that was extremely cautious and demanding in accepting converts into the church. He argued passionately that this approach was putting the cart before the horse; that it was demanding of new converts achievements that could only be expected of mature Christians; and above all that it slowed or even arrested the rapid growth of the church, which could be fostered by an open-door policy. He developed his church growth theory in order to reverse this situation. The central emphasis of this theory is that the goal and criterion of missions is the numerical increase in the number of churches established and the increase in membership of each one, and that approaches and methods in missions should be ruthlessly evaluated by this criterion, used if effective, and discarded if ineffective.

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The rest of the theory — homogeneous units, people movements, and the like — exists as supportive apparatus to further this preeminent purpose.

Specifically with respect to conversion, McGavran propounded a sharp distinction between what he called "discipling" and what he called "perfecting." On the basis of Matthew 28:19-20, he applied the term "discipling" to the initial process by which a people first heard the gospel and large numbers of persons were converted and incorporated into the church; and the term "perfecting" to all that followed, whether it came immediately, after a few years, a few generations, or several centuries.<sup>2</sup> Missions ought to pursue discipling first, and to allow perfecting to wait for a later time. Doing things the other way around, he argued, would arrest thriving "people movements" as surely as a shift in focus from evangelism to social service.<sup>3</sup>

### Discipling

Exactly what does McGavran mean by "discipling"? It is a unique moment in the history of a people when, if the process is handled properly, there will occur a "people movement." In a short space of time there will be a large number of "multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversions."<sup>4</sup> The criteria by which such a process is recognizable as authentic Christian conversion are spelled out in a number of passages in McGavran's writings. Consider first a paragraph from *The Bridges of God*:

Negatively, a people is disciplined when the claim of polytheism, idolatry, fetishism, or any other man-made religion on its corporate loyalty is eliminated. Positively, a people is disciplined when its individuals feel united around Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, believe themselves to be members of His Church, and realize that "our folks are Christians, our book is the Bible, and our house of worship is the church." Such a reorientation of the life of the social organism around the Lord Jesus Christ will be followed by ethical changes. . . . But these changes are not a necessary part of discipling. . . . *The removal of distinctive divisive sinful gods and spirits and ideas from the corporate life of the people and putting Christ at the centre on the Throne, this we call discipling.*<sup>5</sup>

In *How Churches Grow*, McGavran underlined the same points, arguing against those who feared that rapid discipling would bring into the church masses of unconverted people:

Nations where large majorities are now Christian, started on the upward trail with what we would count today a deplorably low degree of Christianization. They could have started nowhere else. That is the meaning of "babes in Christ" . . .

No church population is homogeneous and equally advanced

in the things of the spirit. In the most backward groups there are gloriously perfect Christians. It is worth taking in 100,000 to get 5,000 mature Christians, even if the rest remain for some time babes in Christ. So take them in. Wheat comes wrapped in chaff. Winnowing belongs to God. . . .

There are millions on the march. They are going somewhere, Buddhism, Islam, Communism, Hinduism, Roman Catholicism, or Evangelical Christianity. There is much more chance of their becoming true born-again Christians out of Evangelical Faith than out of any other system. So take them in and, as soon as possible, teach them whatsoever things He has commanded us.<sup>6</sup>

McGavran qualified this position in *Understanding Church Growth* without explicitly recanting it. Under the rubric "Some Wrong Methods," he wrote:

Nominal conversion of great numbers of the masses might appear to be a solution. . . . Nevertheless this method is unacceptable. It creates great hordes of pseudo-Christians. It accepts ignorant, unspiritual multitudes as permanent parts of the Church of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

And in the same volume, we find two significant definitions:

*Conversion* means participating in a genuine decision for Christ, a sincere turning from the old gods and evil spirits, and a determined purpose to live as Christ would have men live.<sup>8</sup>

Since God as revealed in the Bible has assigned the highest priority to bringing men into living relationship to Jesus Christ, we may define mission narrowly as *an enterprise devoted to proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and to persuading men to become His disciples and dependable members of His Church.*<sup>9</sup>

In short, the necessary and sufficient components of authentic discipling/conversion for McGavran are three: a repudiation of one's former gods and/or religion (these being viewed as the same thing); a confession of Jesus Christ as Lord; and incorporation into the church by baptism.<sup>10</sup>

### *Perfecting*

We move now to the concept of "perfecting", a very comprehensive process. It includes the growth in understanding, character, and conduct of the earliest converts; the conversion of holdouts from the early period, and of successive generations of children of believers; growth in the corporate understanding and life of congregations; and the increasing impact of the church on society. But the description of perfecting in McGavran is not

always unequivocal. On the one hand, he states that "the Church lives faithful to her Master when she disciples and perfects in a single continuous motion,"<sup>11</sup> yet he also cites cases in which perfecting was indefinitely delayed, and argues that if perfecting and discipling cannot be pursued simultaneously, perfecting should be deliberately postponed.<sup>12</sup> He insists that if discipling is emphasized, perfecting *will* eventually follow;<sup>13</sup> yet he also insists on the cruciality of post-baptismal care, and points to instances in history (e.g. in northern Europe during the Dark Ages) when perfecting never occurred at all.<sup>14</sup> He recognizes that in the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles placed the accent on perfecting, since discipling was going on spontaneously; but argues that today these priorities must be reversed.<sup>15</sup>

Some trenchant criticism of McGavran's theory at this point has come from the Mennonite tradition. John H. Yoder, for example, has focused on the dichotomy between discipling and perfecting, asking how one can justify making demands later that are not at least in principle made clear at the beginning. He specifically cites the context of a racist society. If converts are not told immediately that racism is wrong, will they not justifiably feel cheated if they are told so later?<sup>16</sup> But perhaps for our purposes the most cogent criticism comes from Robert L. Ramseyer, who sharply questions the view that "becoming a Christian is a 'religious' change." If this is the case, he suggests, then "conversion is, of necessity, not a resynthesis of one's basic orientation to self and the world, but rather the adoption of some new patterns in one limited aspect of that orientation."<sup>17</sup>

The point is well taken. If one has forsaken one's *idols*, has not one thereby necessarily launched a "resynthesis of one's basic orientation"? But I suspect that McGavran and his critics are in part talking past each other because they have in mind quite different situations relating to quite different societies.

The examples McGavran and Tippett cite most convincingly are largely drawn from the history of small-scale societies, those which for lack of a better term are sometimes called "tribal" or "primal." In such societies, cultural anthropologists — at least since Malinowski — have tended to find a high degree of cultural integration around a small, coherent set of overarching symbols which are often religious in nature.<sup>18</sup> In such societies, the objects of ultimate devotion seem relatively easy to identify, at least in their external manifestations; one can, if one wishes, call them "idols" or "fetishes," and one can demand that converts forsake them.

But the societies from which Yoder, Howe, and Ramseyer draw their best examples are almost all modern societies, in which the different systems and institutions are quite distinct and compartmentalized and autonomous. In particular, as Berger, Bellah, and others have documented, religion has for many people been relegated to a private domain of individual and family life and to specific occasions when religion as such is highlighted. Religion, in other words, is just one institution among others, and for most people by no means the dominant one. In such a society, the assumptions McGavran makes may be quite invalid. For it may be the case that the *real* objects of ultimate allegiance and devotion, the *real* idols, are not religious

in nature; they may arise in one or other of the "secular" domains of life, and when religion is brought into effective contact with these other domains, religion is clearly the subordinate, auxiliary domain.

What I am suggesting is that one's idols are whatever *in fact* is ultimate as the source of one's identity, worth, and values; whatever one is willing to sacrifice anything else for; whatever wins in confrontations between the disparate value systems people live by in their diverse cultural compartments. In such societies, people are often invited to join the church without abandoning their idols, simply because these have not been identified as such. It is not enough, in other words, to demand that people forsake their idols in coming to Christ, *unless one has specifically and accurately identified the idols in question.*

### The Knowledge of God

It may seem like a detour to deal at this point with the question of the knowledge of God; but, since the biblical writers insist that the knowledge of God is available to all human beings, and that idolatry represents a rejection of God (Rom. 1:19ff; John 1:9; *passim*), it seems important to establish this base against which to consider the nature of idols.<sup>19</sup>

The Bible presents an active, self-revealing God. God is creator, the one who sought communion with the creatures made in God's image, the one who refused to give up on them when they rebelled, the one who ever since the fall has wanted to reestablish communion, to overcome the alienation caused by sin.

God's self-disclosure, according to the Bible, comes to human beings through four channels. There is, first, the evidence of God's handiwork in natural creation (Rom. 1:19ff; Ps. 19:1ff). This reveals a God who is powerful, wise, orderly, and transcendent. The evidence, however, is not so compelling that unbelief is impossible. In fact, perhaps because of the disorder caused by sin, it is ambiguous; nevertheless it is there, discernible to the eye of faith. There is, second, the evidence of human conscience (Rom. 2). This inner voice expresses spontaneous, intuitive judgments on actions and events; and though its specific contents are shaped by culture, at bottom it represents, in however attenuated a way, the sense of a moral law basic to human existence. Behind the moral law, is it not plausible to posit a moral creator? Again, the evidence is not ineluctable, especially in these days when the diversity and vaunted relativity of morals are so much emphasized, but it is there.

The evidence of creation and conscience are by definition available to all human beings. This may be the ground of John's assertion that "this was the true light, which lights every person, coming into the world" (John 1:9, *lit.*), especially if one attaches the participial phrase, as is syntactically quite legitimate, to "every person" rather than to "light." This was expressly the foundation of the doctrine of the *logos spermatikos*, cherished by Justin Martyr in the second century. It will be remembered that he insisted that great "pagan" thinkers (the ones he had in mind, of course, were the classic Greeks, especially Plato) had genuine if incomplete in-

sight into the nature or reality and even of God, insight that needed only to be fulfilled by the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

A third avenue of revelation is the prophets (Heb. 1:1). These persons, seized by God and compelled by the pressure of the divine imperative to speak on God's behalf, brought to ancient Israel a word from God.<sup>20</sup> The ultimate and complete revelation of God came, according to the Bible, through the unique Son (Heb. 1:2-4; John 1:1-18; *passim*). Because of Christ, human beings are in principle no longer left to make do with lesser degrees of light. In Christ, we encounter God in human form, God experiencing the human condition, God taking on the sin of the world, God dying and arising again. One has only to look at Jesus — with the eye of faith, of course — to see God (John 14:6-11).

This encounter with God remains "in principle," however, because many persons, through no fault of their own, lack knowledge of the unique intervention of God in history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Information about this genuine historical event is subject to the same limitations as information about any other historical event. It has to be reported; news of it has to be disseminated. This is, of course, the point of the Great Commission. But neither the Great Commission nor any other biblical passage to my knowledge suggests that the messengers who bring the Good News of Jesus are at the same time bringing people their first awareness of God.

The question which is surely determinative of the ultimate destiny of human beings, therefore, is not how much light they have had (they had no control over that), but what they have done with the light they had. How have they responded to the light of creation, of conscience, perhaps of prophets? If we label as *religion* all that can be identified as more or less formalized human response to divine revelation, whether it is positive or negative, whole-hearted or half-hearted, sincere or insincere, then the validity of any religious response becomes an empirical question rather than one which can be answered *a priori*. How, in fact, have all these people responded to the divine initiative? Is the predominant note "Yes" or "No," or perhaps "Yes, but?" Is the response to God central in their lives, or peripheral? Is it integrated into all of life, or is it in a separate compartment? In these, and doubtless in many other dimensions, there are wide variations. Certainly it would be gratuitous to assume homogeneity in any religion.

This has two implications: on the one hand, Christianity as an empirically describable religion has no privileged position; on the other hand, one cannot make *a priori* negative judgments about the eternal destiny of the adherents of other religions.

It is one thing to affirm that Christianity is a religious response — or rather, a family of responses — to the greatest and fullest degree of divine self-disclosure, since it is by definition response to Jesus Christ. But it is a quite different thing to affirm that Christianity, whether as systems of doctrine, or as religious communities, or as institutions, is *ipso facto* the fullest or best response. It all depends on what specific persons or groups have *done* with the light of Jesus Christ. Insofar as any particular Christianity faithfully represents the free and joyous "Yes" of faith, repentance,

and obedience, it is indeed a "true religion," and as such a sign of the coming reign of God. But insofar as any particular Christianity has evaded or perverted the truth by religious legerdemain, it stands even more under the judgment of God than other religions, on the ground of proportionate responsibility (Luke 12:48). Which groups, institutions, and persons might represent these opposite tendencies is, on solid biblical grounds, an empirical question: "You will know them by their fruits. . . . Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 6:16, 21).<sup>21</sup>

The other implication is that persons who adhere to any other religion may exercise the kind of faith that is acceptable to God, even though their conceptions of God may be inadequate, inaccurate, or crude (Acts 10:34f; Heb. 11:6). They are in the same position as believers in the Old Testament, of whom the paradigm is Abraham. It was not the possession of much information about God that made Abraham great, but the faith that led him to stake his life on the promises of God. There is no biblical or logical reason why people who today have not heard of Jesus should not be in the same position as Abraham, i.e. "knowledgewise B.C.," to use Charles Kraft's awkward but suggestive phrase.<sup>22</sup> Insofar as people, however ignorantly or naively, cry out to the God who made them, even if they cry nothing more than "Occupant!," they are addressing the only God who is there (Acts 17:23). It seems to me to be just as wrong to assert that someone who has not heard the facts about Jesus is *thereby* condemned, as to assert that everyone who has affirmed a Christian creed or joined a Christian church is *thereby* justified. For no religion, not even Christianity, has ever reconciled anyone to God. Only Jesus Christ has done that, and he did it for Abraham and people like him as well as for those of us who have heard of him. Religion can be a help or an obstacle to the faith that receives the saving grace of God, but it is not itself the saving agent.<sup>23</sup>

It is for the same reason simplistic to say that Christianity is the fulfillment of the potential of any religion, even the religion of the Old Testament. It should rather be specified that the most authentic elements of other religions are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and that they are in a secondary sense expressed more fully in the most authentic forms of Christianity.

Sometimes for lack of better knowledge, however, and more often because of fear and rebelliousness, many groups and persons who have said "Yes" to God devise strategies to escape the terrifying immediacy of God — the "Yes, but" response. People may, as is sometimes done in African traditional religions, relegate God to a conveniently remote region, from which distance God benignly surveys the creation, while God's creatures conduct their day-to-day religious lives via explicitly lesser intermediaries such as spirits or ancestors. Or they may, as in some versions of Buddhism, so emphasize the ineffability of God that they lapse into radical agnosticism. Or they may, as in some forms of Hinduism, so emphasize the mystery of God's being that they use multiple, cryptic, even contradictory images of deity — images which in other forms of Hinduism become multiple divinities. Or they may, as do many Christians, reduce God to a more manageable size.<sup>24</sup> Or, finally, they may relegate God to a particular

sphere of life, while assigning other powers to other spheres.

Now in all of these evasive strategies for coping with the awesome holiness of God and perhaps negotiating a better deal with God, there is either the potential or the reality of idolatry, i.e. the creation of objects of ultimate allegiance and devotion which are not God at all. Persons and groups whose basic response to God is "No" almost by definition resort to idolatry.

## The Identification of Idols

We are thus led at last to consider the nature of idolatry and the identification of idols.

Idols are of many sorts. In the ancient world, the divinities worshipped were often personifications of the major objects, forces, and processes of nature, represented in turn by material images and shrines: heavenly bodies, the ocean, great mountains, fertility, and the like. In other words, people worshipped the creation rather than the creator (Rom. 1:19-23). It was precisely against such religions that the inspired author wrote Genesis 1, with its unrelenting insistence on the "otherness" of the God who spoke the worlds into being. It was also against such religions that the prophets thundered (e.g. 1 Ki. 18).

It is often asserted that contemporary tribal societies practice idolatry. Such terms as animism, fetishism, and ancestor worship are widely if imprecisely bandied about. But it is necessary, if the thesis of this paper is correct, to investigate each instance rather than make sweeping *a priori* generalizations. When people are cultically involved with sacred beings — spirits, ancestors, etc. — it is not self-evident that they are in every case offering to these beings the ultimate allegiance and devotion that are due to God alone. If in some Christian traditions it is possible to maintain a distinction between worship and veneration, why not in African religions as well? A number of knowledgeable Africans have pointed out that in their societies the creator God is explicitly recognized as ontologically unique, while lesser beings, often playing a mediating role, are venerated or feared, but not worshipped. It is heuristically necessary to avoid making generalized or categorical statements in this area, to study the matter as much as possible from the insider's point of view, and to do this separately for each group and even for each person. There is nothing intrinsically improbable in the idea that within the same community and family, practicing the same religion, one person may address to creatures the worship due to God, while another may simply reverence these creatures but worship God alone.

But since I suggested that the problems raised by McGavran's critics arise chiefly in modern societies, it is time to turn to them. What might be the idols of these societies, including those in which the predominant religion is Christianity? I have already characterized these societies as compartmentalized, and suggested that idols might arise in other domains and institutions than the religious one. Without in any way claiming to be exhaustive, I will now describe five types of idols which seem to be widely

adored in modern societies. Many churches do not address these idols at all; or they address them in inappropriate ways, and even contribute to their worship. To each type will be assigned a name from antiquity.

Two idols which many churches have attempted to deal with are Eros, god of unrestrained sexual expression, and Dionysos, god of wine, and hence of self-indulgence and excess. Even a casual glance at the data about drug use and illegitimate births and television commercials should convince us of the prevalence and danger of these cults. Unfortunately, many churches try to deal with them via legislation or other coercive means without seriously addressing their deep significance.

A third idol is much talked about but seldom to much effect because the churches are often deeply compromised. This is Mammon, the divine personification of wealth. For centuries, the church considered greed one of the seven deadly sins; but today, not a few churches are openly proclaiming a message of God-and-Mammon.

A fourth idol may be called Prometheus, after the Titan who, in defiance of Zeus, gave human beings fire, and by extension the arts and sciences of civilization. In other words, this is the god of autonomous human achievement, of science and technology and all forms of human expertise.

Finally, there is Mars, the Roman god who, significantly, combined the roles of ethnic ancestor (he was the father of Remus and Romulus), lord of the soil, protector of Rome, and god of war. Mars is thus the god of race and land and nation, the god who sets group against group in hostile and often violent conflict. He is at the origin of all arms races and other manifestations of mutual hate, fear, contempt, and aggression between groups.

Several things should be noted about these idols.

First, their roots are in realities which, as they came from the hand of God, were wholly good and useful: the enjoyment of God's gifts, the responsible use of resources, the creative expression of our god-likeness in obedience to the creation mandate, and the love of family, community, and land. It is only when these replace God as ultimate, rather than serving God and humankind, that they become idols and hence evil and destructive. But we can see the extent to which they have in fact usurped God's place or — what amounts to the same thing — been associated as co-equal with God, by observing the suffering they cause in the world, not least in ostensibly Christian societies.

Second, it can be shown that they are idols because people do worship them. That is, people find in them the ultimate source of identity, meaning, and values, and they willingly sacrifice anything — even human beings — to them. When, for instance, miners or chemical workers die because a corporation "could not afford" to create safe working conditions, they are human sacrifices on the altar of Mammon. When generations of young men die on battlefields "for the glory of the fatherland," they are human sacrifices on the altar of Mars. When star athletes die of cocaine poisoning, they are human sacrifices on the altar of Dionysos. When seven people died in what the Rogers Commission called an avoidable catastrophe, they were sacrifices jointly to Mammon, Mars, and

Prometheus. The fact that in some cases people die willingly, and in other cases cause their own deaths, in no way negates the fact that they are human sacrifices to idols. For self-sacrifice is the ultimate gift to a god.

Third, behind the facade of the various idolatries, below the surface, idolatry is human self-worship. All of it, elaborate and complex as it is, is at bottom the fulfillment of the unholy ambition that prompted human rebellion in the first place: "You will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). At the individual level, this can be seen in the cults of Eros, Dionysos, and Mammon; at the collective level, in the cults of Prometheus and Mars (there is in fact a great deal of cross-over between levels).

Finally, the Challenger II diaster illustrates a fourth fact about these idols: though they from time to time compete with one another, they readily make alliances among themselves and reinforce each other's claims. The only God who radically refuses alliances is the God who said, "You will have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). Nevertheless, people constantly try to make God *one* of the gods in their pantheon rather than the only one. This is all the easier when the institutions and systems of society, including religion, are parallel and autonomous; then theoretically a distinct god could arise in each institution and system, none subject to any other. But this is not only a feature of modern societies. In ancient Israel, from the time of the Judges to the exile into Babylon, the cult of Yahweh was seldom if ever totally abandoned. It was sometimes prominent and prosperous, sometimes in decline. But it was often one among others. This in spite of the First Commandment, in spite of Joshua's "Choose this day" (Josh. 24:15), in spite of Elijah's challenge (1 Ki. 18:24). It seems to be a constant temptation, even for people who worship God, to worship other gods also. It was to people who had finally and painfully learned that they could not serve God and Baal that Jesus had to say, "You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Note that this is not the language of moral prohibition ("you must not" or "you ought not") but the language of ontological impossibility ("you cannot"). Even allowing for hyperbole, Jesus is surely asserting a basic incompatibility between worship of God and worship of any other divinity. Yet today it seems almost the norm, in compartmentalized modern societies, for people to worship God and Mars, God and Prometheus, God and Mammon, even God and Eros/Dionysos. It is not unheard of for people to try to make God serve the ends of the idols.

The existence of idolatry is thus an empirical question which needs to be raised in the case of each group and person addressed with the gospel of Jesus Christ, because the nature of authentic conversion depends crucially on what is discovered. We are now also in a position to sharpen our understanding of the ground of Yoder's critique of McGavran regarding racism: racism is indeed an idolatry of the Mars type, and to convert without forsaking it is to be guilty of syncretism.

## The Nature of Conversion

We suggested earlier that, at least hypothetically, one might discover instances in which people worship idols prior to hearing the gospel, and

instances in which they do not. Since many existing studies have not been undertaken with this question in mind, and in fact have often been done on the basis of an assumed *a priori* answer, it is impossible to predict what one will find in any given situation, or to make plausible estimates of how many people one may find in each category. So we must deal with the question hypothetically.

For persons who have, on the basis of available light, exercised true faith, conversion seems to entail chiefly seeking for and eagerly accepting new light, and the reorientation of one's life to the demands of the new light (e.g. Cornelius, Acts 10). If persons in this situation reject new light authentically offered and absolute their prior level of knowledge, they thereby lapse into idolatry.

For persons who worship idols, whether exclusively or in combination with the worship of God, conversion entails, in the words of Paul, both a radical turning *from* and a radical turning *to*. This requires that the idols be *named* and *forsaken*. Let no one imagine that this can be untraumatic, the mere substitution of one label for another. Forsaking an idol is forsaking that which was the core of one's existence, the ultimate point of reference for belief and behavior.

This was invariably the approach to Jesus: to demand the forsaking of the most important thing in each person's life. Of Nicodemus, he demanded the forsaking of smug confidence that he knew God and God's ways; of the rich young man, the forsaking of Mammon; of the Samaritan woman, the forsaking of Eros. In each case, Jesus unerringly put his finger on the idol, and the person could either forsake the idol and follow Jesus, or cling to the idol and leave Jesus. There was no middle ground, there were no easier steps leading by gradual stages to the hard choice.

So we come to the question with which we began: how can we determine that a conversion is genuine? The answer: not by demanding conformity to an arbitrary list of religious shibboleths, but by the empirical evidence, the "fruits" of a total shift of ultimate allegiance from idols to God.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This paper had already been written before I read Koyama's masterful *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), which deals powerfully and at length with idolatry. In the end, I decided to leave the paper as it stood, since my approach is at several points different from Koyama's. Though my effort is obviously much briefer, it may be considered to supplement Koyama's much more complete book.

<sup>2</sup>Donald A. McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1955), pp. 13ff.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15, 86. See also Donald A. McGavran, *How Churches Grow* (London: World Dominion Press, 1959), ch. 13.

<sup>4</sup>McGavran, *Bridges*, pp. 13-16, ch. 3. See also Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), p. 340.

<sup>5</sup>McGavran, *Bridges*, p. 14. Italics in original.

<sup>6</sup>McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, p. 100f. One of McGavran's critics notes contradictions in this passage: "Yet these 'discipled' though not yet 'born-again' Christians are apparently 'real Christians.'" (Allan H. Howe, "The Church: Its Growth and Mission," in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk [Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973], p. 52.)

<sup>7</sup>McGavran, *Understanding*, p. 300.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26. Italics in original.

<sup>10</sup>Heavy stress on the first of these, obviously based on 1 Thessalonians 1:9, is found in many places. A similar emphasis also characterizes the writing of Alan R. Tippett, McGavran's long-time colleague. See, for example, *Verdict Theology in Missionary Theory* (Lincoln: Lincoln College Press, 1969), p. x; and *Church Growth and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup>McGavran, *Understanding*, p. 172.

<sup>12</sup>McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, ch. 13.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.* Also McGavran, *Bridges*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>McGavran, *Understanding*, pp. 364ff.; *Bridges*, pp. 38f.

<sup>15</sup>McGavran, *How Churches Grow*, p. 95. See also *Understanding*, pp. 174, 364ff., where McGavran's criteria for Christian growth focus almost exclusively on religious practices and prohibitions. As Allan Howe observes, "the nearest [McGavran] comes to elaborating these fruits [of the Spirit] looks far more like a Puritan moral code than like Galatians 5 ("The Church: Its Growth and Mission," p. 52).

<sup>16</sup>John H. Yoder, "Church Growth in Theological Perspective," in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973).

<sup>17</sup>Robert L. Ramseyer, "Anthropological Perspectives on Church Growth Theory," in *The Challenge of Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973).

<sup>18</sup>More recent anthropologists, working from quite different philosophical premises and with quite different methods, suggest that Malinowski may have exaggerated the functional coherence and cohesiveness of "primitive" cultures, but for our purposes functionalism remains provisionally valid.

<sup>19</sup>In this and following sections, I will be developing personal concepts in essay form. These concepts are not, of course, without antecedents; but my dependence on others is here neither focused nor specific, and the overall construct is, to the best of my knowledge, original. Bibliographical notes will therefore be scarce.

<sup>20</sup>There is disagreement as to whether prophetism in this sense was unique to the history of Israel, or whether equally authentic prophets spoke for God among other peoples. It is not necessary to my argument, however, to take a position on this point.

<sup>21</sup>This is not intended to open the door to glib judgments on fellow-members of the church worldwide, especially with respect to their ultimate destiny, which in any case remains in the hands of God. But it does mean: (a) not all forms of empirical Christianity are equally faithful to the taproot of the faith; (b) empirical signs ("fruits") are valid criteria for making evaluations; and (c) all parts of the Body must be open to the critique of other parts with respect to the authenticity of the outward signs they exhibit in the name of their faith.

<sup>22</sup>Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), pp. 230ff. See also Paul G. Hiebert, "Conversion, Culture and Cognitive Categories," *Gospel in Context*, I.4 (October 1978):24-29. Also Charles R. Taber, "When Is a Christian?" *Milligan Missiogram*, III.3 (Spring 1976):1-4.

<sup>23</sup>I am not suggesting that anyone can be reconciled to God without the intervention of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross. The manner in which the work of Christ might be efficacious for the salvation of persons who have not heard of him (either because they lived chronologically B.C. or, by extension, because they are "knowledge-wise B.C.") has been the subject of a large literature. Nor do I see this paper as a denial or a diminution of the evangelistic mandate. The Great Commission remains the specific and unique command of Christ to the church after his resurrection. More light is always desirable, and people who

are groping toward what light they have normally welcome more light eagerly. Further, it is quite conceivable that persons who have been insensitive to a little light may respond to stronger light. Finally, I emphatically reject universalism in the sense that all human beings will be saved in the end, regardless of how they have responded to God's revelation. What my argument does is to cut the ground out from under a triumphalistic proclamation of the doctrine or of the institution rather than Christ.

<sup>24</sup>J.B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan, 1953).

## WHAT KIND OF CHRISTIAN DO WE SEEK TO MAKE THROUGH EVANGELISM?

Francis E. Ringer

### Introduction

I do not believe we should intend to make any particular kind of person as a Christian. That is Christ's prerogative, not ours. We may not legitimately intend to make persons over any given pattern and then call that *Christian*, but there is something we must do or else Jesus would not have given us a commission. To understand my position it may be helpful to share some pertinent biography.

I came by a devious route to teach evangelism at Lancaster Theological Seminary. I was initially engaged to work in the field of Christian Ethics. Ours is a small school and professors must diversify to provide a variety of courses. Dutifully, therefore, I quickly took some additional work, read appropriate books, attended medical school workshops, and began teaching in the area of human sexuality, with special reference, of course, to ethical implications. Along with this, the faculty discovered another interest of mine, and pushed me to capitalize on it. I have for years been an Hispanophile, and an activist in the support of liberation causes. I had worked in the inner city of Philadelphia in the troubled sixties. I had travelled in Latin America and had contacts there. I often read liberation material before it was available in English. I therefore became the in-house liberationist-revolutionary, adding a course in liberation theology and ethics. Before accepting a seminary post I had spent twenty-three years working in parishes and/or on the streets, from open country to ghetto to college town. My colleagues concluded that I should know something of the problem of evangelism within the life of the local church. I became overnight the in-house expert on evangelism. Naturally, I taught a course on evangelism and the ethical implications thereof! In time I discovered that this diverse mixture was fascinatingly interwoven. Each part had something positive to contribute to all the other parts. Evangelism became enlivened and broadened when the dynamics of human sexuality and of liberation theology became involved, and testing evangelism against the

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norms of Christian ethics alerted me to nuances easily overlooked. Let me share insights with which I wrestle as I ask what we intend to do with people in and through the process of evangelism.

### An Ethicist's Approach

"Getting right with God" is a frequent motto of evangelists, but what are the ethical dimensions of the term *right*? The Great Commandment of Jesus linked inseparably the love of God and the love of neighbor. "Getting right with God" means also getting right with other humans. "Getting right" involves as well the serious matter of behaving with integrity towards oneself before God, towards the neighbor before God, and towards God before the neighbor. Jeremiah had to prophesy or burn within, and Christians with integrity have to evangelize in one manner or another, but few Christians burn within if they fail to witness and to disciple. What is *my* integrity before my brothers and sisters in the world if I am not concerned about *their* integrity before God, about *their* fulfillment as children of God, about *their* coming to know and serve the Lord with us of the household of faith? I may lack integrity if I present to the world a God who cares so little for the creation that those who profess a commitment do not show zeal for God's sovereignty. In short, the indifferent Christian who does not get around to evangelism, or, worse yet, claims to have scruples against evangelism in the life of the Christian church may be unethical and lack integrity.

Of course, we immediately encounter the problem of perspective. Persons see everything from various points of view. To our dismay we realize that fewer see the world from our point of view than we desire. Since others may not have our insights into truth, we need to spend time determining our perspective as we undertake evangelism with ethical integrity. Since evangelism is God's concern, we may choose the perspective of God, who surely hungers and yearns for all children to accept the Kingdom. Beware! Here there is risk of arrogance in presuming to know both the mind of God and the hearts of humans. From this presumed knowledge have arisen countless attempts at evangelism which have been characterized by paternalism and by depreciation of the intrinsic value of those who are objects of the evangelistic enterprise. Both God and humans are losers in this venture because God is presented as less than God truly is, and our brothers and sisters are considered to be less than God intended.

How else shall we look at the world and its inhabitants in a devotion to God's cause if not from the perspective of God? There is the possibility of the viewpoint of humans, but which humans? We could be content to look at the world from the viewpoint of those of like mind. Then we would perceive the world and the people of the world from our collective perspective within the church of Jesus Christ. To do so would lead us to an evangelism comfortable with outreach to one's own kind and apt to overlook or evade all others. Strong is the tendency to look for people who already live by our standards and styles. To evangelize these may place less demands upon our energies and less challenge to a review of our own

lifestyle. However, the scripture rather clearly directs us to go out in search of all people, whether like us or not. How shall we do this if we see people and the world only through the eyes of our own familiar gathering of like-minded persons?

Shall we try another approach, still using the perspective of humans rather than a pretension to the perspective of God, but this time seeking to perceive the world from the viewpoint of persons outside the circle of the familiar? Have we the courage to come to terms with this possibility? The existence of these people has made very little claim upon many within the churches because we conceal from ourselves their existence. We hide behind the facade of our expertise and professionalism within the comfortable family of the church. We who are supposed to be "in the know" may indeed be the very last ones willing to know what is lurking behind our own masks in the formless fear of engaging those with whom we are unfamiliar.

Let us look at the humans in need of evangelism, and let us strive to gain a useful perspective from this locus. Let us get in tune with the restlessness and emptiness, the *anomie* and *ennui* said to characterize our age. Again we trip over our arrogance, quickly projecting upon our brothers and sisters our fears and desires, offering them "Christian" answers which we have been unwilling to assimilate fully ourselves. Perhaps our hope has been that as they accept what we offer we may be encouraged at last to practice what we have been preaching. Is there a way out of this dilemma? Human sexuality and liberation theology have led me to interesting insights while struggling with it.

### Evangelism and Human Sexuality

Who is the person to be evangelized? Certainly not an asexual being. What has human sexuality to do with our approach to evangelism? Very much! Persons investigating the sexual dynamics of their lives get in touch with the core of their reality as humans. No matter what I may say or act out pretentiously about myself, I know the "real me" as I contend with or surrender to the surging forces of sexuality within me. I learn also in the depth of my sexuality what forces influence me, mold me, change me basically. Here other persons impact upon my life most intimately, inhibiting me or calling me into awareness and joy. Those who by love induce me to growth and openness I experience as generative, to use a term much used by D.S. Bailey in his works on sexuality. I change and become different in the core of my being through the generative presence and influence of their love entering into the depths of my own mysterious and private being.

Even Jesus Christ enters the core of my own mystery and makes me more than I could ever be alone. Jesus Christ enters my life generatively, with a nearly-sexual force touching also my sexuality. John Donne was aware of this long before the present popularity of human sexuality studies, expressing the idea quite openly.

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you  
 As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend,  
 That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and bend  
 Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.  
 I, like an usurpt towne, to' another due,  
 Labour to' admit you, but Oh, to no end,  
 Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,  
 But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.  
 Yet dearly' I love you, 'and would be loved faine,  
 But am betroth'd unto your enemye:  
 Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,  
 Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
 Except you' enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelism, if it is to bring the renewing force of Jesus Christ into human life, must be generative in the very core of a person's being. I, if I am to be an effective evangelist, must open the way for a generative experience within the mystery of the neighbor's inner being. I must meet the neighbor in a loving, compassionate, renewing manner which will open the person to change of life at its secret and mysterious center. Somehow I must assist the development of a trust which will lower the barriers in order that Christ may enter my neighbor's central being with warmth and power. I can no more describe this event than I can describe the joys of orgasm with one's beloved. Nevertheless, we must strive in evangelism to discover ways in which the "real me" may address the "real other" about the generative power of the "real Christ" at the core of our lives.

Another way to express this, without specifically sexual references, is in terms of personal interaction at a deep level. Henri J.M. Nouwen, in his book *Reaching Out*, speaks of receptivity and confrontation, which suggest experience at the core of being:

Receptivity and confrontation are the two inseparable sides of Christian witness. They have to remain in careful balance. Receptivity without confrontation leads to a bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody. This balance between receptivity and confrontation is found at different points, depending upon our individual position in life. But in every life situation we not only have to receive but also to confront.

It might be worthwhile to stress at this point that confrontation is much more than "speaking up." Words are seldom the most important form of confrontation. We often have communicated many things long before we speak a word.<sup>2</sup>

Such interaction as this is affirming and generative of new life, admitting the possibility of the life-changing power of Christ to become operative within a person's core of being.

## Evangelism and Liberation

Some observations derived from liberation themes in theology are also helpful. Liberationists emphasize the desirability of moving from seeing oneself as an object of history to seeing oneself as a subject and creator of one's own history. The many givens of life do not change in response to one's wishes, but one may nevertheless choose a responsible course in and among the givens, refusing to be trapped and dominated by what cannot be changed. Closely linked to the commitment to be authentically responsible for one's own life and future is the conviction that others must share this conviction in their lives. Only if all share the concept and work to become responsible subjects can we hope for measurable results. From individual responsibility arises a solidarity in which we share a common lot. In the North American context, one way to think of liberation is that we may be free *from* the bondage of the "success syndrome" of "The American Way of Life," and free *for* the creating of a future for ourselves different from what a consumer society would offer us. The joy of such a freedom is contagious, and soon we excitedly call others to break free and join in seeking to be what potentially they were created to be. What is that potential? There is One who comes to us as the model of what we potentially were meant to be. However, this One comes with power to break all the chains of sin and fear. This One comes to call us into the solidarity of those whom he called to be his. Suddenly insights from liberation theology join up with the insights from human sexuality. I discover that the same One who works generatively within me to make me authentic works also within me to break the interior bonds of sin and set me truly free. Now I can speak to my neighbor about authentic selfhood and authentic freedom, and I can joyously declare that both are the result of surrender to the only One who truly liberates! Blacks in slavery knew the ecstatic reality of a freedom of the person in spite of the bondage of the flesh. They could sing of freedom which would not let slavery shackle their inner being.

Oh, Freedom! Oh, Freedom!  
 Oh, Freedom, I love thee!  
 An' before I'll be a slave  
 I'll be buried in my grave  
 And go home to my Lord and be free.<sup>3</sup>

## Decisions and Character

All this appears to be too good to be true. Surely human sinfulness can find ways to undo it! Christians who are free in Christ will know him as the generative force within them. They will also know that their lives must be lived in a conscious relationship to Christ as he is to be found in the world around them and especially in the lives of all their neighbors, believers and unbelievers alike. Precisely at this point another problem arises, a problem for which ethics may sensitize us. How are we to live

out all relationships with integrity? Good North American Christians, carefully nurtured in the cultural traditions of Puritan New England — more a fiction than a fact, and yet a potent force in our religious life in North America — will seek to govern relationships by proper conduct duly guided by tried and tested customs and laws. Where the customs and laws may be somewhat unclear, we may strive for upright and clean-cut Christian decision-making. The emphasis falls upon decision-making, which tempts us to legalism, to the search for commandments and law codes, all of which starkly challenge the freedom we profess to have in Christ through his generative presence within.

Furthermore, decision-making conditions us to think of Christian living as a series of discrete acts of decision. We lack continuity as Christians; we always are or are not Christians as we make or fail to make Christian decisions. Søren Kierkegaard challenges us to remember that at any moment we may fall away from Christian life by decisions which deny Christ's sovereignty in our lives. But to think of Christian life only as discrete decisions is to destroy its continuity. We lose as well a sense of the dynamic nature of life, the joy of the generative power of Christ within us discovered through the insights derived from human sexuality awareness. Instead of living as free children of God within the living universe of the living God, we succumb to the attempt to conform our lives to presumed changeless patterns of a static universe. We may appear more Stoic than Christian.

The discontinuity of life for the Christian who understands Christian life in terms of discrete moments of decision-making may contribute to a sporadic quality of Christian action. Human life consists of many interests and many activities. Some may understand Christian faith as but one element among many which comprise life. We act on occasion in response to a Christian impulse. Other times we do what is completely divorced from our Christian convictions. It is possible to play with the Christian portion of life as though it were a talent to be used or ignored as convenient. In my early parish experience I was in a Pennsylvania German territory. Many neighbors were Mennonites and Amish. In this rural community there was a Mennonite congregation which held evangelistic services every summer. A certain farmer and his wife were annually converted anew, attended a few nights, and then retreated to the isolation of their farm until the next summer. Each year men in the local general store placed bets on which night would be the conversion night! The ethics of decision-making has a valuable place within the Christian community, but to consider decisions alone as the essence of Christian life is questionable.

Christian character is also an interest of ethics, and the style of life which may be described as "being-in-relationship" offers a corrective to the atomistic tendencies of decision-making alone. Focusing attention upon character reminds us that there is continuity in life. Attitudes, dispositions, intentions, are features of human life which contribute to the configuration or constellation of personal traits and behaviors recognized as character. One's character is that enduring aspect of one's life in which others may discover the openness of loving interaction, the matrix from

which flow the affirmations which encourage the new configurations of a life changing at its center in response to the generative presence of one who loves. Changing patterns of behavior may be in response to a person whose character has made itself felt generatively. Character surely is in part also that perduring product of the Christ within, bringing to fulfillment the creative and created potential of a child of God. What we do to encourage the development of character is as important as what we do to develop skills in decision-making. Both have an effect upon who we are as Christians and what impact we have upon the lives of others around us.

## Conclusions

What we are is a visible pattern for those whom we would make into Christians. What do we look like, this mixture of decision-making and character? Do we appear to be Christians of integrity? They whom we evangelize evaluate us as they see our endeavors at evangelism. I conclude, therefore, by suggesting something of what we *should* look like, we who would evangelize others. From the interactions of my interests already presented, I suggest that we should reveal at least these characteristics:

1. We should be sensitive and self-aware persons who have a healthy self-acceptance which includes our human sexuality. We should be in touch with our personal capabilities and capacities either for rapacious behavior toward our neighbors or for engendering behavior which results in the nurturing of hope and of love in them.

2. We should be persons undergoing constant growth and change in the depths of our being, responding to the generative presence of the Christ within. We should be involved in the growth of others with whom we make common cause in the partnership of the faith, growing "from glory unto glory."

3. We should at the same time never be different in our character as Christians totally committed to the Lord. We should be genuinely accepting and compassionate toward others, and deeply involved in working for reconciliation among all people.

4. Finally, I think we should be evidently free in Christ from bondage to the life-style purveyed by the consumer society of the world around us. We should stand free amid the clutches and claims of "The American Way of Life." As we are free *from* such bondage, we should also be free *for* fearless and responsible commitment to fellow humans wherever they may be in the world, whatever may be their class or condition.

We cannot create such persons. Only Christ can. The most we can seek to do is to let our neighbors discover Christ in us and be encouraged to admit Christ into the centers of their lives. We can do this best if we are liberated from life-styles that are less than Christ-centered. We can do this best if we not only make Christian decisions but also grow in Christian character. Then we may be ready for evangelism, for discipling, for giving ourselves to the growing of churches. Then Christ may be aided in making such Christians as please him.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Donne, "Holy Sonnet XIV," *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne & The Complete Poetry of William Blake* (New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 1941), p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>Olin P. Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1979), p. 223.

## EVANGELISM AND THE THEOLOGICAL CURRICULUM

Jim L. Waits

As I began to think about the topic you have assigned me, "Evangelism and the Theological Curriculum," my mind turned first to that early Christian community described in the book of Acts and to this account of their life together after the day of Pentecost:

"They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy, as they praised God and enjoyed the favor of the whole people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

I take it, if one is to teach evangelism, he/she must take instruction from this text.

The worlds, of course, are not the same. Theirs was a pre-Christian age, primitive; ours a so-called "post-Christian era," sophisticated and technological. But is not the evangelistic task the same? Both seek to give witness to the profound truths of God in a world inattentive to ultimate concern. Both testify to a Jesus trivialized and misunderstood by contemporary culture. Both offer to their day the saving grace of Jesus Christ — only to be met with the arrogant and pitiable human striving toward self-preservation.

The ferment in "public" religion today differs only in its oddity and extravagance from that which the church has known throughout its history. Yet the Church survives, and remains the principal vehicle for the communication of the Gospel. Despite its detractors, the Church continues as the faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the one bodily and holy instance of fidelity to God's purpose and intention. We must remember, as evangelists and pastors, that it is the Church, the body of faith, and not

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individual personalities, that is the effective advocate for the Gospel in this culture.

Yet if there exists ferment in the integrity of religion and contemporary culture today, such ferment also characterizes theological education. For the theological seminary is a hybrid institution, standing between academy and church — and feeling the tension between the two. To a significant degree, the issues the seminary is facing today concerning its own purpose and identity affect the acceptance of evangelism as a legitimate discipline of the theological curriculum.

Theological education must not take lightly the fact that evangelization was a primary motive and driving force of most early education in America. Roland Bainton writes of the founding of Yale: “The Founding Fathers were committed to ‘the Grand Errand’ of propagating ‘the blessed reformed protestant religion in this wilderness’ whereunto they deemed the religious education of suitable youths a chief expedient.”<sup>1</sup>

Is this some arcane history? Have we become so sophisticated that religious passion has no place in contemporary academic life? Is the curriculum now so specialized and technical that the formation of religious commitment is no longer a part of the vocation of the modern university? What irony that would be, if our modern academic enterprise were divorced from the very roots and rationale of its founding.

Of course, there are some voices in higher education today that are calling for new emphasis on character, values and religious formation in the educational process. The importance of value education in college humanities programs; the increasing emphasis on professional ethics in law, business, and medical schools; the growth of interdisciplinary programs focusing on questions of meaning and value — all are evidence that higher education today is ready to reclaim some of its rootage in religious and philosophical inquiry.

And there is a lively discussion today in theological education about the nature and rationale of the theological curriculum. In his widely discussed book, *Theologia*, Edward Farley argues that increasing specialization in the academic disciplines has led us away from the integrative and religious purpose of the theological curriculum.<sup>2</sup> So our students become adept technicians of Bible, theology, and Church history, but with too little appreciation for the scope and meaning of this knowledge for pastoral and churchly vocation. What Farley calls for in the theological curriculum is “sapiential knowledge,” a faithful and religious wisdom, understanding, and commitment that informs all pastoral acts and indeed the very nature of ministry. Although Farley’s agenda for theological education is not evangelical per se, it has powerful import for an ethos in the theological school which is supportive of evangelical instincts and passionate employment in the theological disciplines.

The reflections of John Cobb and Joseph Hough on current curricular issues in their recent book *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, have attempted to address the same concern: that the religious and theological self-understanding or identity of the minister provides an orienting focus for the task of theological education and how the school

forms its students for the ministries of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that all these conversations point to a central question for those of us engaged in theological education today: “Can the theological school be religious?” “In what sense is our theological education religious education — education for faith and piety as well as academic competence?” I realize that is an odd sort of question for a group of theological faculty! But the question remains: “Can we respond to the dual demands of academy and church, in ways that yield ministers both of deep religious insight and thorough-going Christian faith?”

In university settings we are drawn increasingly by a religious studies approach that often competes with the professional orientation and priorities of the seminary, and emphasis on academic inquiry and research versus religious formation and commitment. Some seminaries are more painfully confronted with this question than others.

Even in free-standing and evangelical schools, however, the demand for academic respectability often creates an ethos unsympathetic to the kind of piety represented in the student body. And of course evangelical schools are driven by the same specialization in theological disciplines that other institutions are, often at the expense of that deep-seated religious and pastoral “wisdom” which Farley affirms.

But it is not a matter of turning back the clock on theological research and specialization. The establishment of the earliest chairs of divinity at Harvard and Yale in the 1700s signalled a distinct and specialized disciplinary approach to the theological curriculum. Indeed theological research can advance the religious task of the seminary; and I take it this is one of the clear reasons for the existence of this Academy.

What is needed is an organizing principle that will celebrate the yield of theological scholarship, and integrate it into the ordinary life of the Church. H. Richard Niebuhr saw the seminary as instrumental to that task. He identified the seminary as an intellectual center for the life of the Church. The theological school, in Niebuhr’s view, was not simply a school like all the rest. It had a distinct purpose — a religious purpose — indeed we can say an evangelical purpose, that was inextricably tied to the mission of the Church and the authentic proclamation of the Gospel.

To understand the seminary as “an intellectual center for the life of the Church” is to acknowledge both its tie to the academy and its indispensable identification with the Church’s mission. It is to commend as a special function of the seminary, disciplined reflection on what the Church is about — its mission, its theology, its practice, its very character as the people of God. It means being studious — and savvy — (and at times even canny) — about the Church’s witness to the culture. It means thinking — and being carefully analytical — about the place of the Church in this time, and by what means the Gospel is to be proclaimed.

But the seminary’s role as “an intellectual center for the life of the Church” obligates it fundamentally to the use and practice of theology in behalf of the Church. It mandates that the seminary offer not only the rich resource and grounding of theology — but that it call the Church to the employment of theology as the critical, disciplining instrument against

which church life and mission today is assessed. We would do well to go back to that passage in Acts — to mine its theological meaning for modern church life; and to assess the vitality of contemporary church life in light of the early church's practice.

Nowhere else in the Church is the intellectual cogency of the Gospel brought to bear with the same intensity and intentionality as in the seminary, at least in those seminaries rightly fulfilling their role in the Church. As theological faculty we need to appreciate the unique vocation to which we are called in fulfilling this role in the life of the Church.

What then shall we say about evangelism, and evangelists, in the theological curriculum? Can evangelism have a legitimate place in the current change now occurring in theological education? Is it a credible discipline, like theology, Biblical studies, church history, ethics? How does its legitimation occur? Two observations and two questions I think suggest a response.

*The first observation:* the reform of the theological curriculum toward a more coherent religious purpose and a more churchly mission is itself an acknowledgment of the evangelistic task of the seminary. To bring together heart and mind and spirit — in a new kind of pastoral "wisdom" is to touch the deepest instincts of an evangelical faith. Those of you who teach in this area can be encouraged that the questions of personal faith and practice about which you have been speaking are at the center of discussion about the reform of the curriculum today; perhaps not entirely in the words or the terms you would choose, but certainly in a vernacular that will insure its place in our institutions as they enter the 21st Century.

*The second observation:* the signs are more positive than ever before for acceptance of evangelism as a legitimate discipline in the theological curriculum. I cannot count — though some of you will know — how many schools of theology now have chairs of evangelism or have given priority to such teaching in their curriculum. And I cannot but believe that the motivation for this receptiveness toward evangelism as a subject matter has to do with the new thrust of seminary education about which I have been speaking. The best of our seminaries have now learned that passion and rigorous theological scholarship are not inimical to each other, but go hand in hand in faithful mission.

Now for the Questions — and we had best be candid. The first question is one to which I have already alluded: "Is evangelism a theological discipline?" "Does it belong in the theological curriculum?"

Traditional academic disciplines have certain predictable characteristics:

- Each has a body of content and tradition, each, a definable subject matter and boundaries
- Each possesses a technical language, and methods of inquiry,
- Each conducts original and basic research.

Only if our teaching of evangelism participates in the rigor of the academic discipline can it justifiably stand alongside the classic and practical subjects of the theological curriculum. I believe that now is the unique opportunity for professors of evangelism to create precisely that kind of theological and practical discipline. To do so will require that you move

beyond the common-sensical methodologies of the past to genuine research and analysis. It will require sophisticated understandings of cognate disciplines such as sociology and cultural anthropology as well as theology and Biblical studies. The practical disciplines of preaching, communication and education are natural allies. But in all these you will benefit by the most careful reflection on the boundaries and definition of the discipline *as discipline*. In my judgment, and I think in the mind of many of my colleagues, it is still an open question whether the kind of rigor, definition, and basic research about which I am speaking will be forthcoming. It is my hope that the work of this Academy will provide just such a stimulus to that development.

The second question is parallel to Niebuhr's affirmation of the seminary's own mission: Can the academic study of evangelism contribute to the role of the seminary as 'an intellectual center for the life of the Church'? Certainly the entry of teachers of evangelism into the theological faculty has symbolized a closer relationship between seminary and Church. But does our academic study of evangelism contribute a new intelligence to the Church's life and practice? Is the mind and perceptiveness of the Church changed by the way we in the seminary teach evangelism?

The evangelist's identification with the seminary's role as "an intellectual center" for the life of the Church partakes of the hope that the entirety of the Church's approach to evangelism may be transformed:

- The possibility that a new theological passion and coherence may be contributed to the Church's witness.
- The possibility that disciplined thinking and wholesome critiques may freshly assess the Church's methods.
- The possibility that renewal and a new vitality in the Church's mission to this world may be achieved.

What I am calling for is, in a sense, a new evangelism: An evangelism which places thinking and discipline at the center; which does the hard work of analysis and research; which reflects profoundly on the theological integrity of our witness. I am calling for an evangelism led by a competent, scholarly guild of teachers which is no longer at the periphery, suspect in mainstream church life and its institutions, but an evangelism whose very passion drives it to the most imaginative — and most rigorous — thinking about how the Gospel is to be proclaimed in the modern world.

That, it seems to me, is a curriculum of evangelism truly worthy of the Gospel and our most profound commitment.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Yale and the Ministry: A History of Education for the Christian Ministry at Yale from the Founding in 1701* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education (Studies in Religious and Theological Scholarship)* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985).

## MEN AND THE CHURCH: WHAT KEEPS THEM OUT AND WHAT BRINGS THEM IN

Woody L. Davis

Where have all the young men gone,  
Long time passing?  
Where have all the young men gone,  
Long time ago?

These words from the song, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" could be sung with poignant meaning in the church today. When we gather for worship or Sunday school, men are conspicuous by their absence. This problem is not new, of course. In 1885 Washington Gladden wrote *The Young Men and The Churches*, delineating fifteen reasons for non-attendance commonly given by the men he interviewed.<sup>1</sup> In 1930, C. Luther Fry wrote, "... 48 per cent. of the men are church members, contrasted with 63 per cent. of the women. This striking difference bears out the contention that churches have a decidedly greater hold upon women than upon men."<sup>2</sup> In 1982, the Princeton Research Center reported that only 35% of American men attend church regularly, while 46% of the women do.<sup>3</sup> Yet, for all its longevity, the problem of the church's inability to reach men is rarely addressed, either as to its sources or its solutions. Men are, indeed, "the Church's overlooked minority," as Cliff Stabler put it.<sup>4</sup> This paper reviews earlier findings about men and the church, and then presents additional research. *Why* are men absent from the church? What approaches have proven effective in reaching them? What strategies are available for reaching unchurched men?

### Previous Research

To date, there has been very little research in this field. With the exception of Gladden's book, it has usually been a minor part of more general projects.<sup>5</sup> The most helpful of these for our purposes are *The Playboy Report on American Men*<sup>6</sup> and *Faith Development and Your Ministry*<sup>7</sup>, both of which contain general information on the attitudes of men toward

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religion and faith development.

According to the *Playboy Report*, 41% of American men between 18 and 49 consider religion "very important for a happy, satisfied life." Yet only 16% feel that religion is one of the "two or three most important things to them" and a full 35% feel that it is "one of the two or three least important things to them." This indicates that most American men do not have a very high view of religion. However, only 44% said they were "satisfied with their religion at the present time," and the greatest degree of satisfaction was found among the "Traditionalists," the group we would expect to have the closest ties to the church.<sup>8</sup>

From this research, then, we may conclude that (1) Most men do not consider religion relevant to their daily lives; (2) Many are dissatisfied with their current religion; and (3) At such time as their circumstances reveal the relevance of religion, they will be looking for one that is meaningful.

In their report, *Faith Development and Your Ministry*, the Princeton Religion Research Center hypothesized that there would be significant differences between men and women concerning the dynamics of faith development. They found that certain life experiences, such as the death of a loved one, a born-again experience, or consideration of an abortion, did affect life as a whole for men less than women. They also found that men are more likely to work through problems on their own, as opposed to the tendency of women to turn to others or seek help in the Bible or prayer.

On the other hand, there was no significant difference between men and women in the effect of such life experiences as a promotion, the birth of a baby, health worries, loneliness, joblessness, divorce, the decision to leave one's church, or receiving counseling. Seventy percent of the men reported faith changes since age 16, and 30% of those indicated that their faith was now completely different! Seventy-four percent said they would pray if they were facing a problem and 56% would read the Bible. Sixty-one percent said they had "given a lot of thought in the past two years to living a worthwhile life," while 51% had thought a lot about their relationship to God and 52% had thought a lot about the basic meaning and value of life.

From this research we may conclude the following: 1) While there are differences in how men and women respond to life experiences, the majority of men do respond in religious ways. 2) Many men are asking ultimate kinds of questions, questions which require religious answers. 3) As a result of these two factors, the majority of men are open to religious change at some point in their lives. 4) The sensitive, responsive church can win significant numbers of these men.

If so, why has the church been comparatively ineffective in winning men? What can the church do to reach more men with the gospel? I propose some important possibilities discovered in 54 interviews with men, age 20 to 64, both unchurched and those who have come to faith and church membership within the last two years. Nine churches (six growing, two declining and one static), representing four denominations (United Methodist, Southern Baptist, Christian, and Free Methodist) and located

in five states (Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Georgia, and North Carolina) were included in the sample. Following my own field research, I compared my results with the interviews with men reported by J. Russell Hale in *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away*<sup>9</sup> and Edward Rauff in *Why People Join the Church*.<sup>10</sup> This revealed significant general trends, which are applicable in the North American context at the least, and may have important cross-cultural implications as well.<sup>11</sup>

## Why Do Men Stay Away?

We sometimes hear that men are not the "joiners" that women are, that they do not participate as much in voluntary organizations. But the facts do not bear this out. According to the 1986 Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 56% of the women in America and 53% of the men participated in volunteer organizations in 1983, by no means a significant difference.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, we must look elsewhere for the reasons. This study revealed reasons in two basic areas: 1) Unchurched men's *images* of the church and Christianity; 2) The church's lack of *intentional ministries* to men.

### *Images of the Church*

Hale identified ten types of unchurched people based on their experiences in or impressions of the church. In my research with men, five impressions consistently surfaced.

1. "*Money, Money, Money!*" Many men were rankled by what they perceived to be the church's obsession with money. One man said, "I've been several times over the years, and it seems like every time I've been, they've been talking about money. Makes me wonder if they ever talk about anything else." This image of the "materialistic church" creates distrust of the church's motives and message. The feelings of a number of men were summed up well by one who said, "The church talks out of both sides of its mouth, They tell me money's not important, that it's the root of all evil and I should just think about my soul. But when it comes to the church's affairs, that's a different story. Then all they can talk about is money!"

2. "*They're Just a Bunch of Hypocrites!*" Some men perceive the church as an institution that does not practice what it preaches. Sometimes this is perceived in relation to the question of unity. Denominationalism, church splits, and congregational dissension all contribute to this image. This issue's importance is underscored by *churched* men, many of whom cited the unity of their church as a major factor in drawing them.

At other times the charge of hypocrisy is leveled at the church for its members' lack of holiness (often accompanied with a holier-than-thou attitude!) More than one man said, "I know who goes to church around here, and I see them on Saturday night when the preacher doesn't know what they're doing." There is also little to counter-balance this impression. One man said, "Most of the church people I know are good people, but they

aren't much different from most of the other people I know." Apparently enough church members lead double lives to cast doubt on the credibility of the whole, and the lack of a qualitatively different lifestyle on the part of the rest does nothing to dispel that doubt.

Fuel is added to the flames by the widespread notion that Christians are supposed to be "perfect." The church has managed to communicate that Christians are going to heaven because they do not sin. Armed with that misconception and faced with the behavior of the average church-goer, what else are the unchurched going to see but hypocrisy?

3. "*What Do They Stand For?*" Several of the men felt the church had compromised its message. They were turned off by what they perceived as the church's tendency to soft-pedal the hard issues in order to attract more people. "I'll tell you one thing," said one. "A preacher should stand up there and preach the truth! He shouldn't be afraid to tell it like it is." Again, this issue's importance is underscored by churched men, many of whom expressed appreciation for their pastor taking a stand on social issues in direct opposition to prevailing cultural values. An administrator in a major university exclaimed, "I don't always agree with the stand our preacher takes. In fact, I don't agree a lot of times. But thank God he stands for something!"

The above three perceptions of the church, that it is materialistic, hypocritical, and compromising, add up to the church's low credibility. According to these men, the church has not shown by its life that it believes its own message. This leads to the conclusion:

4. "*It's a Waste of Time.*" The unchurched men said that, since it did not seem to make that much difference in people, they would rather sleep in or fish or play golf. "Religion is okay for people who are into that sort of thing," said one, "but for me it's a waste. I've got better things to do with my time." In other words, they consider Christian faith and participation in the church irrelevant. This view was confirmed by new Christians. Until they met a need they could not handle, Christianity was unrelated to everyday living.

5. "*Don't Push Me!*" When the view of irrelevant Christianity is combined with Christians who are perceived as pushy, the result is often a strongly negative response to the possibility of Christian faith. The word "pushy" was probably the most frequently used word in the interviews. Statements like, "I felt forced to feel what I didn't feel — to be what I'm not," or, "They wanted me to be part of something I felt no need for," were common. These men often expressed feelings of anger. Their body language communicated assertiveness and aggression. This leads me to believe that too strong an approach to men raises their combative instinct, creating resistance to the form or style in which the gospel is offered.

Generally, the definition of pushiness was a matter of degree. The men did not object to someone sharing their faith or inviting them to church. They did object to being *badgered*. The reports of the Christian men revealed a composite picture of the type of person who was effective in reaching them: S/he usually broke the ice with an invitation to an event, such as Sunday morning worship, a concert, or a play. This led to a brief

conversation about his faith or participation in the church. S/he then let things lie for a while, with one exception — when the bridge person was a man, he would often use humor to surface the subject from time to time, either by telling jokes or by friendly bantering.<sup>13</sup> Periodically, yet with sensitive persistence s/he would issue other invitations. S/he might introduce him to one or two people in the church. Always s/he was sensitive to him. This laid the foundation for his eventual conversion and enfolded into the church.

### *Images of Christianity*

If there is one over-riding impression of Christianity held by men, it is that it is “unmanly.” This is expressed in different ways. One says, “That stuff’s for women and kids.” Another says, “All the Christians I know are wimps.” Another says, “They can’t make it, so they hide behind God.” When asked why they felt that way, many of the men cited Jesus’ admonition to “turn the other cheek.” They had not perceived that to do so takes the greater strength and courage, probably because Christians have not helped them to. R. Alan Johnson points this out forcefully when he says:

Yet the characteristics which the church associates with Jesus are those of the kind, gentle, serving, compassionate and caring man. In our society these are all stereotypes of the woman, of what it means to be feminine. One quite outlandish and wonderful clergyman said that the church has made Jesus ‘the bearded lady.’ The church forgets other powerful images of Jesus and emasculates him, thereby causing men to say, ‘It is unreasonable to expect me to be like him.’<sup>14</sup>

This has important implications for the question of inclusive language. Feminist theologians have rightly pointed out that there are numerous feminine images of God in Scripture, images which have been inadequately used in the western church, to say the least. What we have not realized is that our insistence upon using masculine nouns and pronouns in reference to God, even when representing “feminine” characteristics, has resulted in an effeminate *misrepresentation* of God which is repulsive to many men. Thus, we find ourselves in a church which has been chauvinistic in its use of language, not to mention its leadership, and yet has produced a gospel which fails to win men, and even repels them.<sup>15</sup>

Not only do they consider Christianity unmanly. Some men also perceive the leadership of the church to be made up of second rate people. One man said:

Your church leaders aren’t your top notch, most capable people. Those kind of people are leaders in other areas, in business or politics or the community. They get their strokes other places, so they’re not interested in leading the church, even if they are in church. Of course, not very many of them are. So the leadership in the church is generally people who couldn’t lead in other places.

This comment was made by a man in a church populated by professional people, with several community leaders as members of its board of elders. The evidence of his own church did not dispel his general perception of Christian men as second class citizens.

Thus, unchurched men’s images of both the church and Christianity provide barriers to their becoming Christians. These images include a lack of credibility, sensitivity, and relevancy on the part of the church, and a picture of Christianity as weak, and second rate.

### *The Church’s Lack of Intentional Ministries To Men*

The second reason for a lack of men in the church is the lack of intentional ministries to them. Churches generally have not made reaching men one of the main goals of their ministry. They have not devised strategies or developed plans for meeting the needs of men. This stands in marked contrast to the church’s approach to youth and women. Where we often find groups, softball teams, choirs, societies and circles for youth and women, only occasionally do we find more than one fellowship group for men. Indeed, many churches have *no* men’s groups at all.

All of the churches in this study which effectively reach unchurched men provide multiple opportunities to men for involvement. Often these were the result of a serendipitous experience which caused the church to think of other ways to reach men. In one church, a man who had a home shop began inviting other men to gather and make use of it on the night the United Methodist Women met. In that neutral, familiar atmosphere several men came to faith. The church began to look for other ways to do the same thing. One man opened up his home gym. Others started a Men’s Glee Club. These kinds of opportunities are all too rare in the Church. If we are to see more men in the Church they will have to become the rule, rather than a rarity.

### *What Does Win Men?*

If we are to plan effectively to reach men, what variables must we consider? Data from this study revealed four main issues with which churches that are effective in winning men deal successfully: Image, Authenticity, Relationships, and Receptivity.

#### *Image*

Churches that win men effectively counter the negative image held by the unchurched. This is true in terms of the image of the church, Christianity, and Christian men.

1. *A Good Church Self-Image.* All the churches that were winning men had a positive atmosphere. To check this variable I interviewed five men who had made professions of faith in declining or static churches. I found

that all of them had been won during "the good old days" when the churches were strong. No men had been won since the time the churches had begun to decline, though several women and children had been.

It may be especially important to men to be associated with "winners" when it comes to churches as much as to business or friends. One man's response was typical. When asked why he had chosen his church over one that was closer to him, he said:

That church isn't going anywhere. The people are good people — real committed. But they're on a dead end street. I want to be where things are going to happen. That's the feeling you get here — everybody's up."

It takes a church that feels good about itself (with good reason) to counteract the image of the church and its people as losers.

2. *Public Involvement.* Churches that were winning men communicated their positive self-image by participation in the life of the community. Several of the pastors took every opportunity to speak, pray, or be present at public functions. One actively *pursued* such opportunities. Several of the men said their bridge-person's involvement in the same civic or social club was a factor in changing their opinion of Christianity over time. The churches sponsored scout troops, cut firewood for the needy, provided soup kitchens.

They also used the electronic media. One church televised their service on the local cable station, while others had radio ads and programs. Another produced thirty second television spots focusing on family concerns. These were mentioned several times in interviews. They gave a positive impression to the new Christians and a sense of pride and accomplishment to the church leaders.

3. *Visible Male Leadership.* Several of the churches gave high visibility to male leaders. One church did this by use of identification badges, so that it was clear to everyone including visitors that these men were in positions of responsibility. Two churches decided that only men could lead and teach in the church, and applied this policy to the official board and the Sunday school. Men taught all classes over Junior High age to consciously role-model male leadership in the church. A large Christian church employed their elders as communion servers and to pray with those who came to the altar at the close of the service. The impression this makes on men is striking when compared to the usual church service, where the only men "up front" are the preacher, and a few basses and a tenor in the choir!

4. *People Like Me.* The men frequently expressed surprise at discovering that members of the church were "regular people" rather than saints on one extreme, or outright hypocrites on the other. One said:

It wasn't till I started coming to church and reading the Bible for myself that I saw the difference between God and man. I'd always thought Christians were supposed to be perfect. But I

started reading the Bible and found out nobody's perfect — not even the apostles were perfect. Then in church I found a lot of people who were just like me, except they knew what they were supposed to be like and were trying to become like that. They knew where they were going. I guess that's how life is most different for me now. I'm not where I ought to be (though I'm better than I was), but I know where I'm going and I'm trying to get there.

This church had effectively communicated both the forgiveness and acceptance of God and the necessity of growth to maturity in Christ, thus countering the image of Christians as people who supposedly had arrived.

### *Authenticity*

Churches that effectively reach men, and the Christians within those churches, were experienced by the men as authentic in a variety of ways.

1. *The Fun of It All.* The breaking of the church stereotype as a dry, dull, depressing place was a significant factor for the majority of the men in this study. "Church is fun here," and "I enjoy myself here," were common comments, always with a touch of surprise, as though they could not quite believe it were true. When I asked one man what that meant to him he said:

I don't know. I guess it makes me feel like it's all real. When everything's all serious all the time you kind of feel like people are putting on a show. But here everybody's real relaxed and you feel like their being themselves.

Men are drawn to a church where people enjoy their religion. Music, a relaxed atmosphere, and an ability to laugh were all mentioned as important ingredients, but absolutely key was the pastor.

2. *The Man.* All the churches that were winning men had strong, and often long, pastoral leadership. The men frequently referred to the pastor as a man they respected, and often admired. Each pastor was characterized as a man of courage and conviction. Some of the lay leaders mentioned having "locked horns" with their pastors over an issue. One said:

We've been on different sides of the fence several times. Every time he's stuck to his guns and I respect him for that. But I respect him even more 'cause he's never treated me any different because I disagreed with him, and when the board didn't vote his way he didn't hold it against them.

In every case the pastor was seen as a "man's man," in direct contrast to the popular image of ministers, an image characterized by James Dittes as "a wimpy, powerless profession in the eyes of many, each year sinking lower in the charts of social status."<sup>10</sup> The men felt they could relate to

him because of shared interests such as hunting, sports, or auto racing. Often they felt that his sermons were geared toward men and so were especially relevant to them. Most of all they felt he set the tone of authenticity for the church:

Tom is like no other minister I've known. Man, he's *real*! He laughs and he cries, right in the middle of his sermons. He's relaxed and comfortable and he makes you comfortable.

The consistency with which the men mentioned the pastor and referred to their relationships with him indicates that the type of pastor at a given church will influence greatly its ability to reach men.

### Relationships

Far and away the most frequently mentioned variables were relational. Time and again the words love, concern, acceptance, and unity came up. This reflects both the primary nature of the gospel, and men's greatest need. It indicates the extent of the alienation experienced by men. Paul Robbins states:

When asked "How many men have real friends?" the leading psychologists and therapists in this country answer about 10 percent. Most males, including Christian males, view other men as allies at best and enemies at worst. Getting ahead and staying on top dominate our thought and conversation.<sup>17</sup>

Four main relational variables surfaced in the interviews: love, acceptance, unity, and a sense of participation. A fifth variable, social webs, provided a context for the other four.

1. *Love*. Virtually every man interviewed referred to the love he experienced in the church. One man, previously living a completely secular lifestyle, said, "I've learned about another kind of love I never knew existed — a different kind of commitment." A new board member said his church of 3,000 members was growing rapidly, "because of the love here. There have been times I have literally asked myself, 'How can we feel so much love in one church?'"

It is clear that in these churches love is more than just a feeling. They express it in words and actions. Comments like these were common:

"People here take an interest in you. They want you to do good."  
 "When I finally woke up in the hospital, they were there. Nobody ever cared enough to pray for me before."  
 "They thought something of me before I was even a member. I guess they thought more of me than I thought of myself."

2. *Acceptance*. The sentence, "They accepted me," kept recurring, often with a note of surprise. My first thought was that this surprise was due

to the men having had bad experiences with judgmental Christians in the past. However, further questioning revealed no such experiences, and the men themselves could not give any clear reason for their surprise at being accepted. A possible explanation is that, since the norm for men from the racquetball court to the job market is competition, and since acceptance is the opposite of competition, men simply do not expect to find it anywhere and are amazed when they do. It led one man to say, "When you walk in this church people notice you, speak to you, make you feel welcome. *They're not like other people.*"

3. *Feeling a Part of It All*. Men are more likely to experience conversion and become part of a church when they are made to feel a part of the church *before* they join. When asked, "Do you feel like you belong here now?" most of the men responded, "I felt like I belonged long before I joined." Several cited having been given responsibilities before they were members as significant factors in their conversion. They were provided with opportunities to serve in meaningful ways. This met two important needs: the need for a sense of belonging and the need for a sense of purpose. The importance of providing this opportunity prior to their joining the church cannot be over-stressed. Given such an opportunity, men begin to experience what life as a committed Christian can be like and are motivated to seek that life. As one man said, "My wife tells me not to say this, but I kind of feel like, if there wasn't any heaven or hell this Christian life is worth living just for the pure enjoyment of it."

4. *Unity*. Staff members, lay leaders, and new members frequently mentioned unity. Indeed, one of the few negative responses to the question, "What almost kept you from joining?" was, "This church has so much unity, except among my age group. That almost stopped me." Just as a lack of unity is a barrier to reaching men, the presence of unity is a magnet. As with acceptance, unity may be so strong a force because it is so rare in the world. The business that operates in unity and team spirit is rare. Even recreational league softball teams are often torn with strife. So, unity is very important to men considering church membership.

5. *Social Webs*. All of this — love, acceptance, unity and belongingness — takes place within "the social webs" of the church members. This is the supreme factor in drawing men to the church. Eighty-four percent of the men interviewed identified a previously existing relationship with someone in the church which was instrumental in their conversion. This, of course, is nothing new. Donald McGavran, Lyle Schaller, George Gallup Jr., Herb Miller and a host of others have written extensively about it. Win and Charles Arn have based a comprehensive approach to evangelism upon it.<sup>18</sup>

Remarkably, church leaders are often *aware* of this dynamic (one estimated that "probably two thirds of our new members correlate with existing members of the church"), and yet none of the churches made strategic use of it, despite the fact that the new men themselves saw this as the primary means to reach unchurched men! In response to the question "What does this church need to do to reach more men?" the most consistent answer was some variation on "Help me win my friends." Most

of them had made attempts to reach others, but had met with very little success. They expressed frustration at not getting any help from the church in this area. One response bears quoting at length. This man was asked, "If you could change one thing in this church, what would it be?" This was his answer:

It'd be for people to put as much emphasis on helping new members become stronger Christians as on getting new members. 'Cause that's where your new members are going to come from anyway. I come into contact with 10 to 100 more "sinners" than the staff does, and the more my faith becomes strong the more I'm able to influence them. I don't mean to brag, but I looked around in church last Sunday and I could count nine of my friends who have started coming since I re-dedicated myself, and that's just six weeks ago. See, after my re-dedication, every place I went people were asking me, "Why'd you do it? What was it like? What worked? What didn't work?" I've been careful not to change a lot of the things I do, like exercising and stuff, so I can keep my contacts. Then when people ask me about it (and they usually get around to it) I tell them what happened and invite them to come to church with me. The church needs people who've been on the other side. Most church people can't identify with a person like me — they've been in the church for a long time, like since their teens. The people who came to visit me were "good guys." They couldn't communicate. They couldn't get to first base 'cause they tried to hit a home run first off. That's part of Wayne's success. He's down to earth. You don't find a lot of church people like that. A church person can't help you much right off. They can help you later on, down the road, but they don't get to you first — you need someone who hasn't been there too long.

His statement is significant for several reasons: It shows the new Christian's high motivation for sharing the gospel; it accurately represents a secular person's impression of the church and church people; it indicates that secular people are, in fact, interested in the Christian faith and are curious about what it means and what it is like to become a Christian; it shows they are looking to Christians whom they know to show them.

### Receptivity

Many men joined during a receptive season of their lives. Indeed, 91% reported situations in their lives which caused them to be more open to the gospel than before. At least two elements were at work for many men in awakening their receptivity: a sense of need, and a sense of being needed.

1. *I Needed You.* Many circumstances created openings in previously closed minds and hearts. For many it was broken relationships. A surprisingly high number cited the loss of girlfriends, while others referred to

marital problems. In the aftermath of these experiences they began to ask what life is all about. For two men, a close brush with death made them receptive. (Significantly, neither cited a fear of death or judgment as a reason for their turning. Rather, for each it was a combination of the church's concern during their hospital stay, a sense that God had spared them for a purpose, and a resultant desire to invest their lives in something.) Many cited life-stage transitions, such as marriage, the birth of children, and aging. Several had experienced major failures in their work, some with substantial financial loss. Others cited a period of confusion and a search for ultimate truth. Others expressed feelings of anomie and a vague awareness that they were "looking for something." In each case there was a conscious awareness that *this* was the time of decision. As one man said, "This was *the* turning point for me. I either did it now, or I was never going to do it."

2. *You Needed Me.* William Willimon advocates striving to reach the strong or gifted person by offering him the opportunity to use his gifts in ministry. He writes:

Persons of strength do have needs, and one of their most pressing needs is to be challenged beyond narrow confines of their limited notions of both their own lives and the Christian faith.<sup>19</sup>

George Hunter develops this concept further in *The Contagious Congregation* where he presents an "Inductive Model for Christian Witnessing" based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. He suggests offering grace to "human beings who are relatively weak, on the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy" and mission to "people who are relatively strong" because:

the higher motivational needs are not met by ministry from another, but rather as a by-product of a person's own Christian service.<sup>20</sup>

The validity of this approach was confirmed by the experience of several men in this study. However, in no case did it operate alone. As mentioned previously, men who were involved as softball coaches, bus mechanics, soup kitchen volunteers, meals-on-wheels servers, etc. felt these were significant factors leading to their conversions. But each also had *experiences* which made them more receptive immediately prior to their conversions. In other words, involving strong persons in mission is a seed-planting effort which requires a Christ-centered interpretation and subsequent nurture to bear fruit.

## Strategies for Reaching Unchurched Men

At last, the question behind this study: What must we do to reach men? Though we do not yet have all the answers we want, or need, the following will enable any church to launch out.

### *Relationships and Receptivity*

1. Make intentional use of the church members' existing social webs. Encourage each member to identify, pray for, invite, and witness to unchurched men in their kinship and friendship webs.
2. Teach the congregation to recognize indicators of receptivity. They can then respond appropriately and alert the church so it can focus its ministry during the season of opportunity.
3. Seek to broaden the number of relationships between unchurched and churchmen. Encourage the church's men to participate in service, civic, social, and athletic clubs as a conscious ministry of presence and witness.

### *Training*

1. Train church members, particularly men, in basic communication skills and how to meet new people and make new friends. Encourage them to make friends with a certain number of unchurched men each year.
2. Train lay men, especially new members (who are highly motivated and have the contacts) in evangelism. Discipleship and ministry training was a strong felt need among new Christian men.

### *Multiplication*

1. Multiply ports of entry. Form interest groups among the men, men's classes, service oriented groups, etc. — all with an outward focus and an eye toward growth. Include study groups as well. Several men felt that inquiry groups for discussion of the Bible or questions about Christianity would be effective. A number of men expressed a hunger for learning and a search for truth prior to their conversion.
2. Multiply points of contact. Several of the churches offered "excuses" for men to attend. These included concerts and plays, awards banquets and special speakers. Other possibilities might include a Father-Son Banquet, a Father-Daughter Fishing Tournament, or a periodic Businessmen's Luncheon at a "neutral" location with a prominent speaker and a relevant topic. Such events allow unchurched men to rub elbows with real live Christians in a non-threatening situation.

### *Service Opportunities*

1. Offer "things that give you a feeling of accomplishment." Involve non-members in task-oriented capacities. The chance to coach one of the youth softball teams was meaningful for one of the interviewees. Playing in the orchestra was meaningful for another.
2. Offer opportunities involving the use of non-verbal skills. A building contractor's recruitment for a work team to Jamaica marked the beginning of a three-year conversion process.

### *Atmosphere*

1. Let the church, if in need of it, clean up its act. The new pastor of a church torn by dissension and delinquent in its bills, reported to the congregation the picture of the church painted for him by the local businessmen. People were reconciled, the bills were paid, the church's reputation was restored, and it began to grow.
2. Develop a positive, relaxed atmosphere in the worship services. Give people the chance to greet one another. Work hard on the music — it was consistently mentioned by the men as a drawing card. Never let church be dull!

### *Visibility*

1. Give men responsibility and visibility in the church. Use them in worship. Insist on male Sunday school teachers. Recognize them frequently before the congregation for their service.
2. Encourage Christian men to participate in secular organizations as a ministry of presence and to make new friends among non-Christians.
3. Use all means possible to change the image of the church, Christians, and ministers. Publish articles in the local paper. Make use of radio and television. Offer your services to the chamber of commerce — they often want preachers to pray at new business openings. Speak at service clubs. Dare to preach in the open air!

### *A Case in Point*

Steve looked out the window one morning and saw his life going nowhere. Raised an "Air Force brat," he had seen much of the world and sampled many of its pleasures. Life since high school had been a party. Now he was approaching age 30 and had recently married. He began to look at himself in a new light. Marriage, a new house, maybe kids — suddenly he was responsible for more than himself.

"I don't want my kids growing up drinking and doing drugs — like me. I want to be an example," he thought.

He and his wife, Karen, had gone to the "Living Christmas Tree" production at her parents' church the previous Christmas. Steve had enjoyed the music, and one of the ministers had come around and greeted them warmly before the concert. He decided to go to church there the next Sunday.

Over the ensuing weeks Steve became increasingly impressed with the people at the church. They were so accepting! It was like they were standing there with open arms, and yet they didn't force themselves upon him. The ushers and ministers went out of their way to make everyone feel comfortable. The people greeted one another with genuine friendliness during the special greeting time in the service. The preacher was especially friendly and outgoing — even jovial — and his sermons made Steve think.

This radically changed his previous notion of Christians. Of course, he

had never known any Christians before — he hadn't wanted to. He had only wanted to smoke dope and drink and party. But he had always *thought* they were supposed to be perfect people, somehow better than everybody else. Yet, these people were like him — struggling, needing help. And instead of looking down on each other, they were encouraging each other! Steve began to think he might like to be a Christian.

Steve and Karen made several new friends over the next several months. They joined a young marrieds' Sunday school class, then a mid-week Bible study on basic Christian beliefs. When their class discovered that Steve had been a carpenter, they asked him to build a set of cabinets for their room. He began ushering for the worship services and volunteered to help with special events. After about six months, one of the ministers and two elders asked him if he wanted to become a Christian. They had asked him that before — the week after he and Karen had first visited the church. Then he had not been sure. Now the choice was easy. Steve and Karen were baptized in the church baptism the next Sunday.

Steve's life is different now. "It's harder," he says. "Bad habits are hard to break. Sometimes, when I get angry, I want to drink, or smoke a joint. It's hard. But it's worth it. I never realized how much I enjoy helping others till I became a Christian. I've got such a feeling of accomplishment here. For the first time in my life, I feel like I'm part of something bigger than me! And I wouldn't trade that for anything."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Washington Gladden, *The Young Men and The Churches: Why Some of Them Are Outside, and Why They Ought to Come In* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, 1885)

<sup>2</sup>C. Luther Fry, *The U.S. Looks at Its Churches* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1930) p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>George Gallup Jr., *Religion in America — 1982* (Princeton: The Princeton Religion Research Center, 1983) p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Cliff Stabler, "Reaching Men: The Church's Overlooked Minority," *Leadership*, Volume 5, Number 4 (Fall, 1984) pp. 125-127.

<sup>5</sup>Gladden's work is primarily an apologetic, as the title implies. Its main contribution as far as this study is concerned is that it shows how consistent over time are the reasons men give for not attending church. Indeed there is nothing new under the sun!

<sup>6</sup>William Simon and Patricia Y. Miller, *The Playboy Report on American Men* (Playboy Enterprises, Inc. and Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., 1979) pp. 23-25.

<sup>7</sup>*Faith Development and Your Ministry* (Princeton: The Princeton Religion Research Center, 1986) pp. 37-42

<sup>8</sup>Simon and Miller make a helpful distinction between four distinct types of men — Traditionalists, Conventionals, Contemporaries, and Innovators — based upon their "receptivity to changes taking place in society" (p. 5). Use of this distinction in future research could prove beneficial, on the assumptions that these different types of men would respond best to different types of ministry.

<sup>9</sup>J. Russell Hale, *The Unchurched: Who They Are and Why They Stay Away* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Edward Rauff, *Why People Join the Church* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979).

<sup>11</sup>As this study is confined to individuals and churches in the United States, some of its findings may be limited in applicability to that setting. However, the problem of gender imbalance in the church is not limited to American culture. Conversations with pastors from Jamaica, Kenya, Sierra Leone, northern India, southern India, and Japan indicated that this problem is experienced by the church worldwide, and that some of the dynamics (such as the image of Christianity as unmanly among unchurched men) operate in other cultural contexts. Further research in this area in settings outside the United States would be most beneficial in determining its causes. For instance, when the man who, though raised an animist for whom religion *is* life, paradoxically participates in the church less than the women after his tribe's conversion, is it for the same reasons American men participate less? If it is, are the reasons related to the westernization of the gospel or are they inherent in the gospel itself? These and many other questions would be enlightened, and raised, by cross-cultural research.

<sup>12</sup>*Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1986* (Washington Bureau of the Census, 1986) p. 384.

<sup>13</sup>The use of humor as a witnessing technique surfaced time and again, but only between men. Apparently humor serves to put the conversation in a different category and de-fuse the combative response. It is not clear why this only occurs between men. The whole question of the role of humor in evangelism would be a fertile field for study.

<sup>14</sup>R. Alan Johnson, "What the Church Says to Men," *The Christian Ministry*, Volume 14, Number 1 (January, 1983) p. 32.

<sup>15</sup>If the church is to win men this issue must be faced on two fronts. First, the church must make use of those descriptions of God and Jesus which speak to men: The power, majesty, strength, and wisdom of God; the courage, moral strength, endurance, and perseverance of Jesus. Second, the church must summon the courage to use feminine nouns, pronouns, and images of God when they are appropriate, so that in the minds of the men who hear, the characteristics described will fit the referent.

<sup>16</sup>James E. Dittes, *The Male Predicament* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985) p. xi.

<sup>17</sup>Paul D. Robbins, "Must Men Be Friendless?" *Leadership*, Volume 5, Number 4 (Fall, 1984) p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena: Church Growth Press, 1982).

<sup>19</sup>William H. Willimon, *The Gospel for the Person Who Has Everything* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1978) p. 57.

<sup>20</sup>George G. Hunter III, *The Contagious Congregation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979) pp. 47-51.

## Case Study

# A GOAL-DIRECTED MODEL FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING

Samuel R. Schutz

### Criteria for Christian Life and Witness

Christ's will for us is expressed succinctly in the single imperative of the Great Commission: "Go make disciples..." (Matthew 28:19). This means that evangelism necessarily involves discipleship; and as we do evangelism, we must not neglect this goal. At the most elemental level, therefore, we must ask how discipleship is to be identified?<sup>1</sup>

Easily observable behaviors, such as church attendance, verse memorization, hours of service in or out of the church, may be helpful indices under certain circumstances, but may also be legalistic and misleading. And our basic desire is not for legalism but for life. Just as new parents have the highest hopes and dreams for their newborn child, so we in the church respond to recent converts among us with joy and with hope for their spiritual growth and development. Among ourselves, as well, we seek to assist one another toward maturity as disciples of Jesus Christ.

How then, may we conceptualize discipleship? The answer is both personal and social. Personally the mature disciple experiences and witnesses to God's love (Matthew 22:37-39; John 13:34, 35). Socially, how may we take this truth and particularize it for our own life situation? How may we conceptualize Christian maturity so that we may seek to realize God's desires for us as we live out our discipleship in the world?

This article recommends one possible model that may lead to mature Christian life and witness. By "model," is meant a conceptual scheme or descriptive analogy that can help us to understand complex structures and the interrelationships among these structures. Models can provide an effective means to interpret what is happening in the "real" world, and are utilized by many disciplines (science, philosophy, theology, etc.). A chemist might use a Tinkertoy model to describe a complex molecular structure. A heart specialist might use a computer graphics model of an ailing heart. Similarly, a model which helps us to better understand Christian life and witness might assist us "to make disciples" for Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup> While no

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model is complete, by definition, nevertheless it is hoped that the following integrative framework may prove useful both for the individual disciple and for the church collectively.

It may be helpful at the outset to suggest five essential criteria by which to evaluate any practical theology of Christian life and witness:

(1) *Biblically-based.* The Bible is our only ultimate authority. From it we discern truth and distinguish error. The Old and New Testaments are God's treasure to us, a gold mine challenging us to discovery and rewarding us with every find. The Bible also reveals that God graciously enables us to explore the magnificence of creation through general revelation in the arts and sciences and even through casual insights of daily activity (Psalm 19; Romans 1:19, 20).

(2) *Holistically Integrated.* We must reject simplistic, mechanical formulas as an adequate expression of Christian experience. No human exercise ever "saved" anyone. God is not a robot, nor are we who have been made in God's image. God relates to us personally. On the other hand, when we are witnessing to others concerning our faith, certain standard presentations of the gospel given sensitively and wisely can be authentic and valuable means of communication.

Any adequate theory of Christian life and witness will recognize God's "saving faith" (initial conversion) as primary for Christian life itself, and God's gift of ongoing faith as vital for Christian growth and maturity. Christian faith should affect every part of our being, and through us should penetrate the world of which we are a part, from family and friends to our larger community.

(3) *Ethically Responsible.* A good theory should be capable of generating many practical applications. However, it is not enough to demonstrate that "it works." Pragmatism is not the final criterion of truth. What are we doing and why? The end does not justify the means. God's love through Jesus Christ is our guiding norm.

(4) *Socially Responsive.* We are the body of Christ, God's representatives to a lost and hurting world. Any adequate theory of Christian life and witness must reflect the Christian's responsibility in the church and in the world.

(5) *Culturally Transferable.* Truly there is but "one faith," and the gospel is the same from people to people and from age to age. God does not change. But we humans are very different by design, and God meets us where we are. A compartment-

talized faith does not derive from the LORD of all creation and of redemption. The gospel, absolutely true, is supracultural.

Although the following model is at best a beginning, it is an attempt to describe one theoretical system of Christian life and witness that meets the above criteria.

## A Model for Disciple-Making

There are three basic dimensions to our understanding of mature Christian life and witness:

### 1: *God's Revelation*

The starting-place of Christian theology is God's gracious self-revelation through the Bible and, pre-eminently, through Jesus Christ the Lord. The written word reveals the Living Word (John 1:1-14; I Peter 1:23).

### 2: *Our Faith Response*

Through his death and resurrection, Christ has done everything that is necessary on our behalf for salvation and wholeness. In the most basic sense, to be a Christian is to turn from own lost way and instead to accept by faith what God offers: forgiveness and new life through Christ. The gift is free, but must be appropriated (John 3:16-17; Romans 6-8). By our response to this self-revelation, we are enabled to know God personally. "To know" is to love deeply, intimately. Biblical faith is active rather than passive. In fact, Old Testament Hebrew does not have a noun for "faith" *per se*, but rather expresses the concept with verb forms. True faith is demonstrated by action (John 15:1-5, 9-14; Philippians 3:7-14; James 2). It must not be assumed, however, that we can earn our way into God's favor. God loves us even in our most desperate condition, and in love makes possible our faith response. The role of the Holy Spirit is vital from beginning to end (Ephesians 2:8-10; John 14:15-18; Acts 1:8).

### 3: *Living Context*

Personal salvation by its very nature entails shared life and corporate responsibility. We are both individually and collectively members of the body of Christ, and are to love and care for one another (I Corinthians 12:12-27). But God's people are not to live for themselves; we are sent into the world to serve. A church isolated unto itself betrays its Lord, for God entered into the world in person and has commanded us to do the same (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 10:45; John 20:21). It should be emphasized again that the Holy Spirit is our source of union with Christ and of our witness to the world (I Corinthians 12:13; Romans 15:5-6, 13; Acts 1:8).

The model derives from the preceding theological dimensions. Let us first examine the two dimensions, "God's Revelation," and "Our Faith Response." (See figure 1.) When these seemingly obvious theological categories are viewed in logical juxtaposition to one another, fascinating profiles emerge. Even a casual glance will reveal some interesting insights.

Let us look at the columns. Throughout church history to the present time, there have been communities of Christians who have given relatively greater emphasis to either the written word (direct study and application of the Bible) or the incarnate word (existential love and obedience to Jesus). Note that this is a matter of relative emphasis. Either grouping would be horrified at the thought of rejecting the written word or the incarnate word. At the same time, each grouping may be suspicious of the other. In our present day, many mainline Christians who feel more at home in the right-hand column might well benefit from more attention to the realities represented in the left-hand column. Conversely, many evangelicals who feel more at home in the left-hand column might well benefit from more time and attention to the realities represented in the right-hand column. The spiritual realities are not contradictory but complementary; indeed, they are necessary to one another for Christian wholeness.

There are even more distinctive profiles, rich with meaning, inside the matrix of Figure 1:

The *Learning Disciple* focuses upon knowing the Bible, through which God speaks to bring about in the believer ever increasing faith and spiritual life and maturity. In some churches, for example, Sunday morning worship services resemble a classroom, where the sermon comprises most of the hour and is a lecture on the meaning of the specific Bible text. Eager parishoners take copious notes for personal understanding.

The *Administrative Disciple* relates to the Bible in a similar fashion as the Learning Disciple, but with a major difference of emphasis. The Administrative Disciple seeks to find explicit principles (rules) which lead to disciplined Christian lifestyle. While they would recognize the dangers of legalism, and would want to disassociate themselves from a mechanical adherence to law, nevertheless the Administrative Disciples have a profound appreciation for "the perfect law that gives freedom" (James 1:25) and would strongly affirm Psalm 119. When Administrative Disciples form a Christian community (e.g., local congregation or parachurch organization) they encourage and hold each other accountable to the common principles to which they have become committed.

The *Benevolent Disciple* wants above all else to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, to be a servant willingly. Having found freedom and new life in Christ personally, the Benevolent Disci-

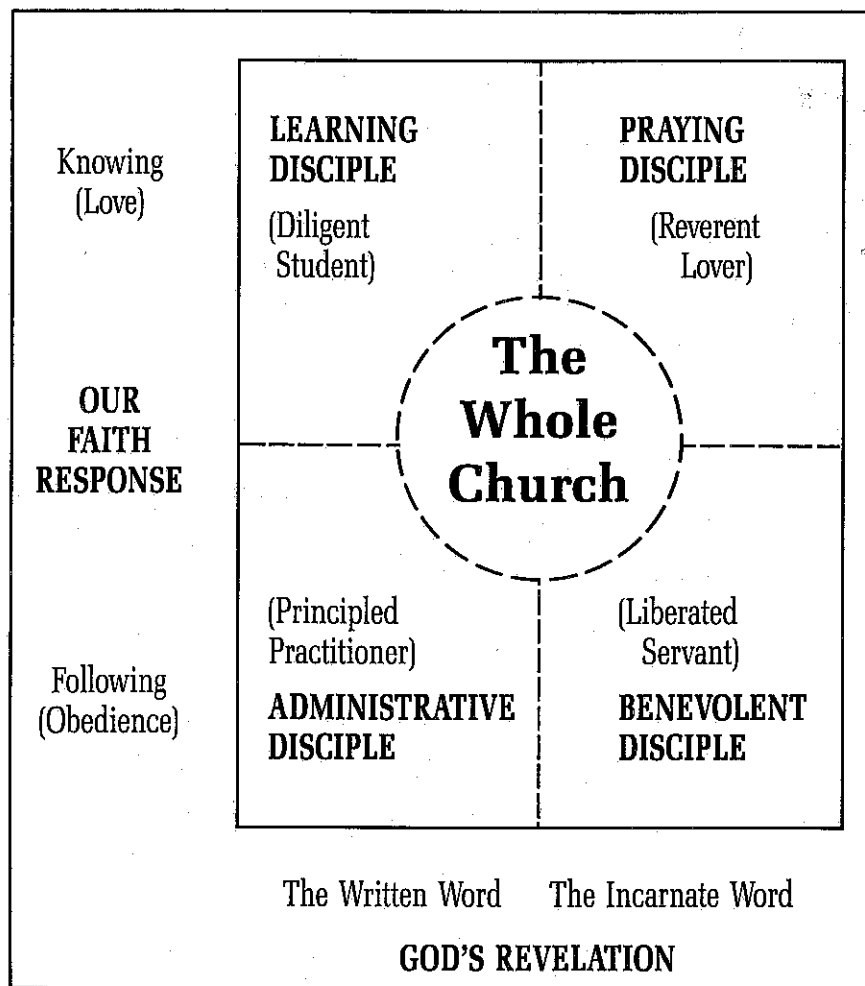


Figure 1: Two-Dimensional Model of Christian Life and Witness

ple seeks to help others experience the same. This active concern may take the form of helping a next door neighbor in need, or of working through certain social/political organizations to alleviate suffering or injustice.

The *Praying Disciple* seeks communion with God Himself as the highest good. In response to the pragmatic critic, the Praying Disciple might reply that because God is who He is, therefore prayer and adoration to Him require no further justification. They might also add that more mountains have been moved by prayer than all of the efforts of human labor

combined. Praying disciples may be found most evidently in Roman Catholic monastic communities, and now increasingly in both Catholic and Protestant churches through the influence of the Charismatic Movement.

It must be emphasized again that these are not mutually exclusive categories, but rather complementary aspects of Christian life and witness. Notice in this regard that the lines in Figure 1 are broken rather than straight. If it were possible within a line drawing we would depict even greater movement and dynamic interaction. A particular Christian (or congregation) may be principally characterized by one or more of these profiles at any given time. No one profile, or profile-mix, is necessarily better than another. Within the total church, we need them all.

Further understanding of these profiles can yield valuable insights and practical tools for gospel proclamation and kingdom service.<sup>3</sup> A rich and full understanding will require ongoing study and dialogue. But the prospects are exciting. In using the profile in Figure 1, for example, one's own gifts and graces for discipleship emerge in sharper focus. We discover what is our greatest frequency of activity in what areas we would like to develop and how we perceive our full potential.

In this way the model can help us better understand and relate to one another within the local church, and to churches other than our own, which may be very different from our own context.

The matrix becomes more complex and interesting when we add the third dimension, "Living Context" (Figure 2). God calls us beyond the church ("God's Community of Faith") to live in all of creation (God's Larger Kingdom") with Christian life and witness. The Word is the Lord of all creation, and is revealed in all of God's works:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 119:1, NIV).

What are some possible implications within our model for bearing witness to the world? The Bible challenges us to reveal God in our own persons, to be a reflection of God in every aspect of our daily living:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (II Corinthians 3:17,18 NIV).

... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (I Peter 2:9 NIV).

Precisely how is the church (and the individual Christian) to relate to the

world outside? The issue is larger than we can deal with adequately here, but the conceptual model (Figure 2) may help us understand some of the obvious differences among us as we attempt to witness to the world:

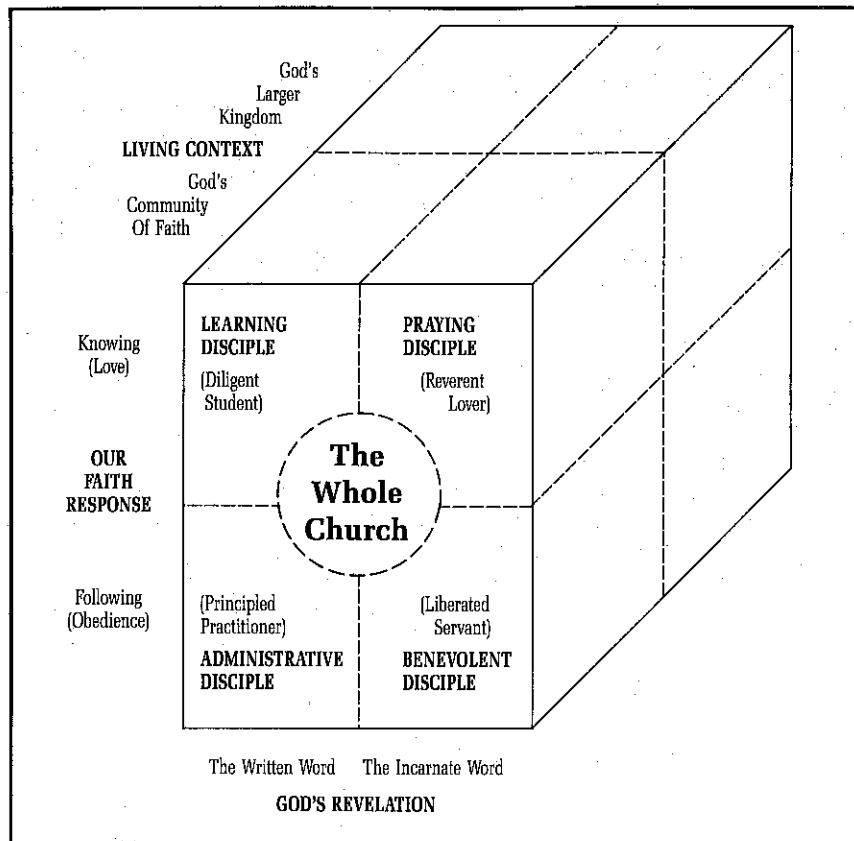


Figure 2: Three-Dimensional Model of Christian Life and Witness

The *Learning Disciple*, as such, would most emphasize teaching the Bible as the primary means of gospel witness. An example would be small group community Bible studies, often held in homes, principally designed for the non-Christian and/or the unchurched.

The *Administrative Disciple*, as such, would most emphasize the application of biblical principles or rules as they seek to witness to the world. An example would be initiating conversation with strangers by use of Campus Crusade's "Four Spiritual Laws."

The *Benevolent Disciple*, as such, would most emphasize direct alleviation of human suffering/immediate need as the principal means of Christian witness. Examples abound: food for the hungry, medical assistance, psychological counseling, job/economic assistance, etc.

The *Praying Disciple*, as such, would most emphasize consistent, disciplined prayer on behalf of the one needing Christian witness. The Catholic Church has given institutional organization to this form of witness through certain monastic orders. Within our Protestant churches, particular congregations may recognize certain individuals or groups for this kind of specialized ministry.

The immediately preceding categories are not mutually exclusive, nor contradictory, but complementary. In practice, a given church (or individual Christian) does not "live out" faith entirely within one of the above categories, but rather in some creative combination. Good works and prayer apart from biblical witness of Jesus Christ the Lord, for example, is deficient gospel witness. Conversely, Bible study and verbal assent to biblical teaching apart from prayer and the witness of one's own active love, is likewise deficient gospel witness. If the issue is one of relative emphases, and we believe that it is, then we would hope that the conceptual model presented here may contribute to clearer focus and more adequate understanding of the variety of legitimate Christian witness.

It must also be emphasized, however, that whole Christian witness is an affirmation of the whole gospel: i.e., knowing and following the written word and the living word. The former reveals the latter, and the latter actualizes the former. An aberrant form of witness invariably results from undue preoccupation with one of the expressive categories, and leads to a closed-mindedness, or even bigotry, which is antithetical to the gospel. These pseudo-expressions are summarized in Figure 3. Such unhealthy profiles undoubtedly may be traced historically, theologically, and biblically. The antidote is the gospel, and better understanding of why they have evolved should help us learn how they might be corrected.

## Critical Discussion

While this approach is likely to generate some debate over quantifying or qualifying spirituality, the purpose of the model is not to measure discipleship, but to describe the observable outcomes of genuine spirituality. These outcomes become goals toward which we may move toward mature Christian life and witness. However, there may be objections to this approach.

Some may object, for example, that "material theory" relating to the natural world is incompatible with Christianity which is of the "spiritual world." Jesus' incarnation, however, demonstrates that God makes no such

<b>Determinative Attitude</b>		
	"Open-Minded"	"Closed-Minded"
<b>Religious Lifestyle:</b>	<b>LEARNING DISCIPLE</b> (Diligent Student)	<b>CEREBRAL SOPHIST</b> (Bookworm)
Book-Orientation	<b>ADMINISTRATIVE DISCIPLE</b> (Principled Practitioner)	<b>MECHANISTIC LEGALIST</b> (Scorekeeper)
Rule-Orientation	<b>BENEVOLENT DISCIPLE</b> (Liberated Servant)	<b>RELATIVISTIC ANTINOMIAN</b> (Robin Hood)
Service-Orientation	<b>PRAYING DISCIPLE</b> (Reverent Lover)	<b>SUBJECTIVE NARCISSIST</b> (Navel-gazer)
Experiential-Orientation		

Figure 3: Christian Life and Witness:  
Varieties of Expression

distinction. The Bible teaches that God is the creator of all: material and spiritual, natural and supernatural, temporal and eternal. The gnostic dichotomy of spiritual good versus material evil is not shared by writers of the Old and New Testaments.

Others may question whether it is right for Christians to make judgments regarding spiritual maturity. Most certainly Christians are not to be self-righteous in attitude or behavior (Luke 18:9-14; Romans 2:1ff). Self-righteous human judgment is soundly condemned by God. However, it does not logically follow that we should avoid self-understanding or mutual accountability (I Corinthians 11:28; II Corinthians 13:5; James 5:16). When we willingly hold up the mirror of God's Word we are enabled to see our needs and to attend to them. There is no benefit to hiding or withdrawal. In fact, hiding is symptomatic of serious self deception. It is hoped that the model

recommended here may contribute to constructive self-examination, to positive motivation, and to practical steps toward increasing Christian growth for the individual believer and for the corporate church.

It may also be objected that the model promotes categorical thinking, which can lead to prejudicial stereotyping of people. Yet it can equally be argued that careful conceptual thinking contributes to the elimination of prejudice. Without categories, our lives would be chaotic. By the same token, Christian life and witness can benefit from careful evaluation.

A final objection may be that, although the model could accurately describe overt behavior, Christian discipleship cannot be ascertained from behavior alone. It is also a matter of the heart. This is true. God alone sees and understands our hearts. Such realization keeps us humbly dependent. At the same time, our behavior is important to God, and cannot be separated from true faith. With Abraham, for example, his faith preceded his righteousness and his righteousness was demonstrated by his deeds (Romans 4; James 2).

### An Invitation for Dialogue

Any model, is by definition incomplete. The critical issue is whether the criteria advanced here have value for practical understanding and growth in Christian life and witness. Constructive criticisms are welcomed, and even more, participation in the testing of the model.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The word "disciple" in the New Testament refers to one who is a devoted follower, a learner in the sense of an apprentice, and "always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole of life and of the one described." See Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1967), 441.

<sup>2</sup>This paper deals principally, although not exclusively, with the implications of what it means "to make disciples" following initial conversion. For an excellent discussion of conversion and salvation, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 887-1024.

<sup>3</sup>Appreciation is expressed to the following students for their assistance in reacting to this model: Clark Flesher, LeAnn Flesher, Daniel Niebeling, Timothy W. Smith.

<sup>4</sup>For another medical model analogy applied to the church, see C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Be Healthy* (Nashville: Abingdon), 1979.

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT The Right Question for the North American Church

Dan E. Bonner, Jr.

#### Evangelism and Social Involvement

By Delos Miles. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986.  
Pp. 189. \$9.95.

In the small East Texas town where I spent my first eighteen years, I lived in two different church worlds. My parents nurtured me through the warm if motionless Methodist Church every Sunday morning between 1950 and 1968 when I left for college. Every Sunday evening during that period, a second church world beckoned to me as my grandfather took me with him to the evening services of the First Baptist Church. There I experienced a call to change from my various sinful ways but not much warmth in which to nurture those decisions often made and just as frequently dropped. In that ecclesiological schizophrenia, I developed a very clear sense that evangelism is one thing and the warm heart of compassion, perhaps the existential basis before social action, was another.

Those early memories came back as I read Delos Miles' call for a few synthesis between these long separated halves of faithful Christian witness. It is particularly heartening for me that this call comes from a Southern Baptist. While my communion, The United Methodist Church, has groped with this question for the better part of four decades without much discernible progress at an effective *praxis*, Southern Baptists have at least been faithful to the personal witness member of the twins we all agree are fundamentally inseparable. I think, parenthetically, that is why I have retained a warm place in my heart for the Southern Baptist way. Though I never believed they had all the answers they seemed to think they had in my youth, they at least practiced with zeal one aspect of faithful Christian witness. I suspect if Miles' book helps focus the question of social action as a part of faithful witness for the Southern Baptists, they will answer with a new zeal that includes justice and mercy as well as judg-

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ment and guilt. Perhaps that is too much said about the noteworthiness of a Southern Baptist asking this question. Jimmy Allen, Jimmy Carter, Will Campbell, and a whole host of Southern Baptists have understood and practiced this synthesis between evangelism and social action a lot longer than most of us.

Miles' book provides a useful addition to the literature of missiology and North American evangelization not so much because of the profundity of its argument as for the readability of its plea. I suspect the audiences that will benefit most from this volume are the pastors and laity of local churches who are ready to venture beyond either pole of Christian witness toward a new synthesis of faithfulness to the whole Gospel.

Divided into three sections, Miles deals with (I) the biblical, historical and theological background of the synthesis debate. This section is faithful to the *sola scriptura* approach of his communion. I would have wished for a little more "real world" dialogue with scripture as the basis for his discussion of theological sources than his chapter provides. But the biblical base of his argument is satisfying enough so that I cannot tarry long with my interest in a theological method beyond scripture citation. For those of us from more liberal traditions, however, this might be viewed as a weakness in this section.

(II) The middle section of the book deals with case studies and examples that the author feels are helpful in understanding the new synthesis he encourages between evangelism and social witness. If the reader continues to bear in mind that Miles' audience is practically minded, the thinness of these examples need not be viewed as a weakness. The one important conclusion that seems to be omitted from this section is that almost all his examples of a workable synthesis between a rich personal evangelism and a strong social witness are from *urban contacts*. Readers of the book might have benefited from being challenged to see that in the city there is greater social dislocation than in rural settings. Regardless of whether personal or social witness comes first, this urban dislocation issue clearly makes the North American city the most fruitful context for fruitful witness to the Gospel. This point could have been made more clearly, though the selection of case examples implies this.

The only other deficiency I see in this far reaching middle section of the book is that it deals with social witness only in the context of what Miles calls the "underprivileged" population groups. Though I would use another term, Miles is correct in pointing out the openness to the gospel that the open wounds of the poor provide. There is also, especially in urban context, a great hunger among the "upper classes" who find divorce, alcoholism, job pressures, and a whole host of "yuppy insufficiencies." This is another urban context in which a witness that presents a Gospel of wholeness and hope within human relationships can bear good fruit.

In that my pastoral experiences are exclusively urban after my leaving the small town of my childhood and youth, I am not in a good position to analyze the "menu of human need" in North America's rural areas today. Perhaps small rural churches and their leaders would find Miles' theological section compelling, though I doubt they would find much

analogy to their situation in the case presentations of the book. This is, perhaps, simply a question for further exploration in a second volume.

(III) The final section points the reader and his or her local congregation toward the future opportunity that comes from the faithful synthesis of evangelism and social witness. The author summarizes his argument by presenting a very helpful new typology for moving on beyond our current poles. "The Typology of Personal Evangelism" emphasizes an orientation toward discerning human needs and, therefore, the basis for faithful witness. This is distinct from what he describes as the "propositional approach."

George Hunter and others have done excellent work in recent years at adopting Maslow's hierarchy of needs to personal evangelism and church growth. Miles suggests that a similar kind of analysis can be used to present the social witness aspects of the Gospel effectively in urban North America. He correctly points to the apostolic church and Jesus' own methodology as the best examples of this sensitivity to individual and collective needs. I think he is right in his analysis. I am not so sure he has added anything new to the discussion, however, beyond the fact that some may read his book who would not read others.

The final section should be added to the 1988 Discipline of the United Methodist Church as a warning to my communion and every other declining denomination that suddenly wants to get serious about personal evangelism in these latter days. In this section he encourages the "Christian Social Minister" to integrate an appropriate "evangelistic methodology" into his or her social witness. In other words, he is asking the social activist to become articulate about the faith that informs actions of justice and mercy. Even more challenging and essential for most of our communions today is the challenge he places at the feet of the "evangelist." "Christians and churches may be measured by their commitment to the least, the lost, and the last, but not by size" (page 159). Did a Southern Baptist really say that? Is a transplanted Texas United Methodist pastor of a large and growing church really affirming that in this review? Will the church we are building reflect these values in the next twenty years? In that we are all parts of institutions concerned about our potentially declining strength within this culture, the answer to this question is probably the most important one of all.

This simple book calls clearly for a new synthesis between "evangelism and social involvement." This will be a hard question for the increasingly middleclass Southern Baptist Convention to faithfully answer. But a far more wide ranging usefulness of this volume is to challenge the rest of us to *practice* both sides of the coin called faithful witness and not just continue to talk about it. For that reason more than any other, I appreciate Miles' work and commend it to increasingly broad population of eager "mainline" Protestant laity and clergy.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit

By George G. Hunter III. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987.  
Pp. 212. Paperback \$9.95.

"Church Growth and John Wesley — what a combination! And who better to do it than George 'Chuck' Hunter," writes Bishop Richard Wilke of The United Methodist Church in the foreword to this book. As a student of early Methodism and a teacher of evangelism, I was delighted to read it. And having done so, I am inclined to agree with the bishop.

Hunter's book is organized around six "mega-strategies" of church growth that would be of use in any religious tradition and in any setting. Briefly stated, Dr. Hunter believes that churches grow as they: 1) learn to identify and reach "receptive people"; 2) reach out across the social networks; 3) "multiply unites" of various kinds (classes, choirs, groups, congregations, et al.), as recruiting groups and ports of entry for new persons; 4) minister effectively to the felt needs of undisciplined people; 5) develop culturally indigenous ministries for the people they intend to reach; 6) form (prayerful) planning for their future, laying the stepping stones to get there, and implementing the plans (chs. 3-8). Before he begins this central work, the author tries his hand at "liberating Christians from the three entrenched myths that have long frustrated the effectiveness of evangelism" (p. 14). Then he introduces the reader to the history of the church growth movement (ch. 1) and to "John Wesley as Church Growth Strategist" (ch.2).

*To Spread the Power* is a valuable contribution to both the theory and practice of church growth, not so much for its originality as for the way theory, insight and illustration are distilled within its pages. It is an excellent piece of "second generation Church Growth literature". In it one finds a unique blend of Methodist history, Church Growth principles, and a wide knowledge of contemporary Christian congregations. Materials are drawn from every possible size of local church (from the very small to the very large) and from every conceivable walk of life (bishops, deacons, dish washers and day laborers; pastors, lay people and international leaders). The breadth of scope, the economy of size and the skillful style of writing all combine to make this book a pleasure to read.

As is often the case in books of applied theology, much more attention is given to application than to theology. And with all its strengths, Hunter's work leaves the task of providing a thorough theological discussion of

church growth principles to another writer or at least another time. A second modest criticism of this particular work on "Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit" has to do with the effect of the controlling emphasis (in this case church growth) upon the historic material related to John Wesley. Hunter's fine chapter on "John Wesley as Church Growth Strategist" and the other material related to the mega-strategies, still fall short of the depth and breadth one finds in the Evangelical Revival during the time that John and Charles gave leadership to the people called Methodists. This is particularly true in the key areas of prayer, hymnody (or sacred verse) and the sacrament of the Lord's supper. To omit significant attention to these matters is, in my opinion, to omit something central to the Wesleyan spirit, and perhaps to a future generation of church growth literature as well. However, these concerns are more of a call for additional work within the field that Hunter has opened for us, than a critique of what he has done.

Bishop Wilke is right, The Dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Seminary is uniquely qualified to bring Church Growth and John Wesley together. And he has done so in a way that will benefit scholars, students, and persons interested in either discipline. In fact, the field of interest for this book will extend far beyond the class room or strategy session, into the libraries and studies of the pastors and people who make up local churches all across the country — to those within the evangelical and Methodist traditions — and to all those with a desire "to spread the power of Jesus' name".

Thomas R. Albin

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## Rethinking Evangelism: A Theological Approach

By Ben Campbell Johnson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987. Pp. 141. Paperback \$9.95.

Mr. Johnson has written this book for clergy because of his concern for evangelism in mainline churches. The work is somewhat uneven but remains true to his stated purpose of not presenting methods and programs for evangelism but of exploring fundamental Christian doctrines for their implications for evangelism. He identifies ghosts of the past which impede evangelism and argues for a distinction between outdated evangelicalism and evangelism. He proposes to work at the issues of theology and evangelism from the viewpoint of the contemporary person, and to work at fusing theology from below with theology from above. He may not have attained these goals but he has offered valuable insights about theologically sound evangelism.

His description of the contemporary person is flawed. Drawing at the outset upon such persons as Carl Jung and Abraham Maslow, and clearly using ideas of existential thinkers, he slips away from them and resorts to biblical descriptions of people. He fails to recognize the meaning discovered by those outside his theological convictions, not seriously considering that they could be encouraged to bring within their existential horizon possibilities which Christians call *God* and *salvation*.

He does with God what he does with persons. John Macquarrie for one suggests that persons are aware of finite beings in their world, and through this reality there arises the sense that not only is there the possibility of nothingness instead of being but also there is the possibility of a source behind the finite entities of being. That this source could be considered what Christians call "God" and used in conversation with contemporary persons is an opportunity overlooked. Johnson turns instead to the needs of persons, suggesting that God is the supplier of their needs and slipping again into Bible quoting and into declaring doctrines from the top down.

Johnson fails to break out of his "top-down" pattern of thinking. This tentativeness toward an all-out exploration of the human person and toward the related theological implications of thought from below pervades the book, and the longed-for encounter with the "theological" thought of the contemporary person outside the church does not occur.

However, there is much good in the book. Chapter six, "The Church as an Evangelizing Community," is outstanding. Johnson distinguishes mission and evangelism while demonstrating their inseparability. He describes the church as both a converting and a nurturing community. Nurture without decision leads to a vague sense of what it is to be Christian, and to no positive convictions about evangelism. On the other hand, one conversion is not enough for a lifetime.

The faith decision of a twelve-year-old needs revision at eigh-

teen or twenty. A strong commitment at thirty takes a new form at forty (p. 82).

An appreciation of the church underlies Johnson's treatment of salvation, regeneration, and sanctification. He rescues conversion from only dramatic episodes. He posits nurtured conversion within the normal life of the church, and dramatic conversion frequently outside the church. Our background experiences are largely determinative of our type of conversion; we must not assume our conversion experience to be normative. He also recognizes the communal dimension of sanctification:

The transformation of life into the image of Christ is personal, but not private. It is . . . always in the context of a community of faith (1 John 1:3) (p. 95).

Johnson sees four characteristics of evangelism implied in the incarnation: (1) divine initiative, (2) identification with humans, (3) divine participation in human affairs, and (4) transformation. However, Johnson does not clearly state his theory of Atonement and his Christology. The failed process of fusing bottom-up theology and top-down theology may well be rooted here in spite of his intentions.

The last chapter, "Evangelism with Integrity and Effectiveness," succinctly draws together the implications of the book for sound evangelism. He has preserved the dignity of the contemporary person and maintained the centrality of the church in the entire matter of evangelism.

Evangelization must be *one* major priority of the church's ministry — but not *the* priority. . .

Therefore, to establish evangelism as *the* priority of the church perverts it. . . (p. 132).

"Mainline" pastors should find the book helpful reading.

Francis E. Ringer

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## The New Paganism: Understanding American Culture & The Role of The Church

By Harold Lindsell. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.  
Pp. xv, 279. \$16.95.

Harold Lindsell is former editor of *Christianity Today*. He has authored several books and edited the well-known *Harper Study Bible*. He is currently a professor of history at Simon Greenleaf School of Law. *The New Paganism* is a hard-hitting analysis of the sources and nature of our present spiritual situation. He joins many before him to affirm that the post-Christian age is here.

Lindsell argues that the current paganism (a term he prefers to secular-humanism) is not the product of the Renaissance, but of the eighteenth century enlightenment. His discussion centers upon the new world view (*Weltanschauung*), and the current intellectual, moral and cultural climate (*Zeitgeist*), of the controlling elements in Western Civilization. Although the Roman Catholic Church rose to be the primary progenitor of Western culture for 1500 years, enlightenment influence has brought about a major reversal. The reformation opened the door to dissent and secularized views. That, in turn, ushered in the enlightenment with its anti-Christian, anti-supernatural stance.

Theologians such as Baur, Strauss, Wellhausen and many others were influenced by enlightenment views and exalted reason over revelation. This brought about the historical-critical approach to the Bible, a new hermeneutical methodology, and the abandonment of traditional orthodoxy. The practical result has been a tragic decline in church membership, Sunday schools, traditional Christian life style, and missions involvement overseas. In addition, Lindsell sees many main line churches to be in a state of morbidity, a sad condition in which to face a new post-pentecost situation. Not even Barth offers an adequate middle way. Because he too has adopted certain enlightenment views, he is a powerful force contributing to the pagan situation.

While Lindsell is convinced the church will survive, and while he recognizes its transforming power following Pentecost, he is not optimistic about any quick improvement short of an awakening. He does see a healthy vitality in some smaller denominations, certain independent churches and para-church organizations and in evangelical radio and television. Churches must again make evangelism the central focus. Christian schools must educate the Christian's children so as to hand down the heritage. There must be a new type of scholar who can be a leading thinker in his or her own field as well as in theology. And, there must be a turn from anti-Christian, enlightenment views to traditional orthodoxy, based on an inerrant Bible.

In answer to critics, Lindsell does not "gloss over" the enlightenment. He attempts to answer current related views such as atheism, rationalism, materialism and deism. In addition he attacks the false confidence peo-

ple have in science and the assumption that people necessarily arrive at truth by the use of the scientific method.

Readers may well like or dislike this book depending on how close their theological position is to that of the author's. Certainly many readers will not agree with all that he asserts.

Be that as it may, Lindsell argues his thesis forcefully. Those who are sincerely interested in evangelism will weigh carefully what he says. His analysis of the source of our current situation is convincing. His description of the current world view and cultural intellectual climate rings true. Few will read the book without an improved understanding of the pagan mind. His appraisal of many current church situations in regard to non growth and mission indifference is unpleasantly accurate. While some sense of depression may be the outcome, it is nevertheless a book to be read.

### G. William Schweer

G. William Schweer is the E. Hermond Westmoreland Professor of Evangelism at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, California.

## BOOK NOTES

by

David Lowes Watson

### Faithful Witnesses: A Course in Evangelism for Presbyterian Laity

By Richard Stoll Armstrong. Philadelphia: The Geneva Press, 1987.  
Leader's Guide: Pp. 105. Paperback. \$8.95.  
Participant's Book: Pp. 119. Paperback. \$6.95.

The research and teaching which has produced three major books by Richard Stoll Armstrong in the past eight years (*Service Evangelism* [1979], *The Pastor as Evangelist* [1984], and *The Pastor-Evangelist in Worship* [1986], all published by Westminster) is here applied to a most creative denominational resource. But there is more to *Faithful Witnesses* than pedagogical spin-off; much more. These resources were field tested in five different presbytery workshops, then revised and tested again in a nationally representative workshop. All told, they were three years in preparation, and are a significant component of "New Age Dawning," the official evangelism program adopted by the 196th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1984.

The Leader's Guide and the Participant's Book are extremely well designed and complementary. Listening skills are stressed as a prerequisite to effective evangelism, followed by Armstrong's well-known PROOF model for faith-sharing — i.e. Probing Responsibly Our Own Faith as we share it with others. Perhaps most significant, however, is that in these books we have one of the first attempts to provide a model for evangelism which also announces the Reign of God. Chapters on "Understanding the Gospel" and "Exploring the Kingdom" give us an important compass heading for how to utilize the work of Alfred C. Krass (*Five Lanterns at Sundown* [Eerdmans, 1978], *Evangelizing Neo-Pagan North America* [Herald, 1982], Mortimer Arias (*Announcing the Reign of God* [Fortress, 1984]), and others. This indeed is a welcome development in congregational resourcing.

On the cover of the book, the author explains that "New Age Dawning . . . means introducing people to the Kingdom of God through repent-

ance and faith in Jesus Christ and to full participation in the community of faith as an expression of the Kingdom of God.' If this reflects the Presbyterian heritage, it is also a powerful statement of what we are all about — or should be.

### Getting The Word Out: How to Communicate the Gospel in Today's World

By Theodore Baehr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986. Pp. xx, 337. \$17.95.

One of the realities of church leadership in the late twentieth century is the role which the media have come to play in communicating the gospel. Whether in printed form, or on television and radio, pastors and laity have unprecedented opportunities to reach more people with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Many of us are apprehensive about the use of media, however, and as often as not we leave it to those who have built up reputations as authors, or who have cultivated large radio or television audiences. Here is a book which cuts through this mystique to help the average church pastor and lay leader be familiar with the new communications technology, so that the ministry of their congregations might be expanded, and their evangelism improved.

The author has been active in producing, directing and hosting television and radio programs for many years, and was formerly director of the Television Center of Brooklyn College, New York. His expertise is much in evidence in his book not least because it is a paradigm of the clear communication he advocates. It begins with an informative exposition of communication theory — How do I communicate? What do I want to communicate? Who am I? Who is my audience? — and then proceeds to an extremely helpful assessment of which of the media to use. In a series of "Medium Determination Charts" the advantages and disadvantages of television (Network, PBS, Cable, Satellite, Video, etc.), of film (movies, slides, multimedia, drama), radio, audiocassette, telephone, print (books, newspapers, magazines, letters, etc.) and direct public speaking, are fully listed, then correlated with guidelines for how to choose which is best for one's own ministry.

The title of the concluding chapter says much about the book as a whole: "What does God want me to say?" It is a welcome addition to the literature on Christian communication in general, and evangelism in particular.

### The Urban Christian: Effective Ministry in Today's Urban World

By Ray Bakke, with Jim Hart. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987. Pp. 202. Paperback. \$6.95.

Last year on these pages we noted *The Expanded Mission of Old 'First Churches'* by Raymond Bakke and Samuel Roberts. Now comes a sequel which deals even more directly with Ray Bakke's love for the city and its people. As Jim Hart writes in the foreword, this book "weaves together aspects of [Ray Bakke's] autobiography and his teaching on urban ministry." The result is not only an eloquent *apologia* for the city and its evangelization, but also a spiritually sensitive witness. For the Bakkes have lived as a family for many years in the inner city of Chicago, where their children have grown up and attended high school, and where Ray and Corean still live.

Two things emerge with some cogency from the opening pages of the book. First, that Bakke's own upbringing in a rural valley in Washington state, as part of a community of immigrant Norwegian homesteaders, gave him a sense of security which stood him well in the inner city. And second, that when they sent his boys to the local high school, he and his wife went in with them and did what few parents do today. They identified with the faculty and students, and shared their task.

Much of the material in the book is drawn from lectures and seminars which Bakke has given throughout the world in recent years as the Lausanne Committee senior associate for large cities. Accordingly, an early chapter, titled "The Lord is Shaking up the World," describes the rapidly increasing shift in urban agglomerations from the Western world to the developing countries. By the turn of the century, it is projected that nine out of the ten largest cities will not be in the West. Mexico City, for example, already the world's largest city, is projected to have a population of 27.6 million by the year 2,000.

For the most part, churches are not facing these realities. Such concentrations of people require new theology and new evangelistic methods. And for these to emerge, there must first be new understandings. Drawing on rich biblical precedent, we are shown how faithful servants of God in Old and New Testament times ministered to the city, and how present-day disciples must venture forth boldly into similar ministry today, through work, worship and witness. In conclusion, there is an affirmation of a global vision for the city, along with a call to join in its worldwide evangelization.

Perhaps the most inspiring chapter in the book, however, tells how the Bakkes brought up their family in Chicago. In many ways it is the source of the book's authenticity. And its authority.

## Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept

By David B. Barrett. Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1987.  
The AD 2000 Series.  
Pp. 92. Paperback. \$5.95.

## Cosmos, Chaos and Gospel: A Chronology of World Evangelization from Creation to New Creation

By David B. Barrett. Birmingham, AL: New Hope.  
The AD 2000 Series.  
Pp. 108. Paperback. \$5.95.

David Barrett is already well known as editor of the highly acclaimed *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Oxford, 1982). These two books are further examples of his meticulous research, and his gift for enlarging the horizons of our evangelism with facts which are readily available in the data banks of futurologists and social anthropologists, but which all too seldom impact those of us who claim to be messengers of the Savior of the world.

Both publications are much more substantial than the number of pages would seem to indicate, for they are in workbook format with more than 1,000 words to the page. And they are literally packed with information. Rather than attempting a theology, or a history, or strategies and models of evangelism, Barrett has compiled the factual details which these other studies so often lack, and so badly need.

For example, in *Evangelize!* he begins with one of the most thorough word studies to appear on the subject, covering Septuagint, Aramaic, and Greek New Testament usages. Typical of his precision is a table, listing 42 Greek words which overlap in the New Testament around *euangelizo* (p. 16); and if that were not enough, he has further tabulated their aggregate occurrences — 2,468 in all. Another table gives 153 current English meanings of the words (p. 18).

Subsequent chapters deal with usages of *euangelizo* throughout church history, beginning with the early church fathers, but focusing on the development of *evangelism* and *evangelization* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Particularly informative is a chapter in which Barrett culls 79 definitions of evangelism from the worldwide survey undertaken by John Mott in preparation for the Tambaram Assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1938 — an instructive admonition for those evangelists today, to say nothing of teachers of evangelism, who function in an historical vacuum.

The concluding chapters are as inclusive as they are succinct, dealing with denominational, ecumenical, evangelical and conciliar trends. And in a lively postscript, Barrett points us to current "megatrends" in the field.

How many of us are aware, for example, that some 10,000 books and articles are published every year on mission and evangelism? Or that, of the world's 600,000 periodicals, 20,000 are on Christianity, and 1,000 on mission and evangelism?

In *Cosmos, Chaos and Gospel*, Barrett, who is also a noted futurologist, provides a chronology which places our present evangelistic task in what is surely the fullest possible historical perspective. To cite examples from the vast panorama he unfolds would do it a disservice, Suffice it therefore to note that he divides the chronology into three Cosmic Eras: "The Prehistory of World Evangelization," beginning with the uncreated, eternal existence of God, through the "Big Bang" and the creation of life on earth, up to the birth of Christ; II, "World Evangelization in Christian History," beginning with Jesus Christ, and ending with an assessment of the cosmos, the world, and Christianity in 1988; and III, "The Futurology of World Evangelization." This last is sub-titled "An eschato-scientific scenario," because Barrett employs the science of futurology in making his projections. Consistent with his starting point of 19 billion BC, he takes us 100 billion years into the future, and even beyond the "eschatofuture," to where God creates infinite parallel cyclic universes.

If, as we proclaim, our salvation in Christ is of God; and if, as we claim, we live in the power of the Holy Spirit; then these books are a timely reminder of J.B. Philips' warning a generation ago, not to make our God too small. They are stimulating, salutary, and required reading.

## Evangelism on the Cutting Edge

Edited by Robert E. Coleman. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1986.  
Pp. 156. Paperback. \$5.95.

## The Master Plan of Discipleship

By Robert E. Coleman. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987.  
Pp. 156. Paperback. \$5.95.

These two volumes are recent contributions to the field of evangelism from an author who is best known for his classic, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, which now has more than a million copies in print in a wide range of editions. Robert Coleman, the Director of the School of World Mission and Evangelism at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and a Past President of the Academy for Evangelism, continues to publish prolifically, and the second of these recent volumes was reviewed by Robin Wainwright at the fifteenth annual meeting of the Academy at Candler School of Theology, with the author responding. The dialogue which followed was a clear demonstration of why Coleman is so widely respected as a leader in the field.

Both volumes give an equally clear indication of Coleman's position on the significant issues facing evangelism today. As editor of *Evangelism on the Cutting Edge*, he has compiled a set of essays which, as stated on the back cover, provide an opportunity for "ten respected evangelical scholars [to] address the issues that are thwarting the efforts of evangelism today." This they proceed to do, with clarity and cogency. The opening essay by Kenneth Kantzer, for example, contrasts "The Claims of Christ and Religious Pluralism." A very helpful contribution by William Taylor gives an overview of contemporary theologies of mission with special reference to Latin America, but warns of the dangers inherent in "promoting social justice and liberation . . . no system — Marxist, socialist, monarchical, or democratic — will provide the ideal . . . the issue comes back to evangelism" (pp. 71-2). North American cultural idols likewise come under scrutiny, as in Gary Collins' essay, "Self Esteem and the Pursuit of Fulfillment."

If one were to identify the real concern of the editor, however, it would be in his own essay, "The Great Commission Life-style," and in Walter Kaiser's assessment of "Leadership for Evangelism in Theological Education." One hopes that the issues raised by this important volume will get a full and open discussion.

*The Master Plan of Discipleship*, in many ways a sequel to *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, draws heavily on the author's seasoned knowledge of the Book of Acts. Beginning with a powerful statement of the vision of the coming Reign of God, it provides the basic criteria by which a Christian disciple can live out this vision in the world: in witness, in fellowship, in ministry, and in disciplined use of the means of grace. The concluding chapter contains helpful bibliographical references for further reading and study.

## The Subversion of Christianity

By Jacques Ellul.

Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley from the French edition of 1984.

Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986.

Pp. 212. Paperback. \$9.95.

No bibliography for evangelism is complete without something of the work of Jacques Ellul. His prophetic monograph, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (1948; English edition, Seabury, 1967), remains required reading for anyone who wishes to understand the identity of the Christian in contemporary technological society. *The Meaning of the City* (Eerdmans, 1970) provides the clearest biblical and theological rationale for urban evangelism we have available. In *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (Eerdmans, 1972), he brilliantly links the doctrine of justification with the reality of worldly living in a series of Old Testament monographs. And his ethical study, *To Will and To Do* (Pilgrim Press, 1969), confronts the dialectic of biblical revelation and biblical relevance as few such studies even attempt. This sampling from his vast corpus of the last forty years is an indication of why there is a newly-formed study group at the American Academy of Religion devoted to his work.

Fortunately, more of his publications are now translated promptly into English, and this recent volume is a case in point. It is also one of his more controversial works, written very much from his perspective as a French Protestant in the Reformed tradition. Taking the church to task for failing to keep faith with the Scriptural revelation, he argues that the result of this bifurcation is a pervasive enculturation of the gospel, and in turn the sacralization by the church of much of contemporary culture. The relevance of this for evangelism is self-evident. And for the reader who is unfamiliar with his work, it is as good an introduction to Ellul as one can find.

## Handbook for Youth Evangelism

*Compiler/Contributor, Dean Finley. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988. Pp. 239. Paperback. \$6.95.*

In his review article on Delos Miles' book, *Evangelism and Social Involvement* (pp. 74ff. of this issue), Dan E. Bonner gives the Southern Baptist Church credit for being faithful to the personal dimension of the evangelistic task, while other large denominations have often vacillated between the personal and the social. In this volume compiled by Dean Finley we have a good example of what it has meant in the life and work of their church.

Finley himself contributes one of the most substantial sections of the book by laying out the principles and strategies for building an evangelistic youth ministry. He proposes five approaches, all of them supported by numerous biblical references: Prayer for Spiritual Awakening; Relational Evangelism; Environmental Evangelism; Presentational Evangelism; and Informational Evangelism. Each of these is given a detailed strategy, with a sensitivity to developmental psychology so that they can be applied in appropriate situations. The list of ideas for their implementation will be immensely helpful for youth leaders in any congregation.

Other chapters expand on this theme: the theology of youth evangelism, youth leadership, discipleship, music, campus ministries, and youth rallies, to mention but a few. Good use is made of authors such as Lewis Drummond, and there is thorough bibliographical and programmatic documentation. There remains, of course, the question which confronts all of us in the field: How and when should the social imperatives of the gospel be incorporated into our evangelism? This book is certainly a solid foundation for such explorations.

## Pat Robertson: A Personal and Religious Portrait

*By David Edwin Harrell, Jr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. Pp. x, 246. \$15.95.*

Had the Republican primaries taken a different direction, this book would of course have been much more topical. As things have transpired, however, there is now an opportunity to assess it more objectively for what it is — an excellent contribution to the field of North American religious biography; and further, of religious sociology. David Edwin Harrell chairs the department of history at the University of Alabama in Birmingham, and is the author of an equally perceptive biography of Oral Roberts (Harper & Row, 1985).

His research is thorough and well documented, and his narrative takes seriously both his subject and his readers. Religious broadcasting, for example, has a history in North America which is not in fact well known,

in spite of widespread impressions. The opening chapters take us behind the scenes, and do much to explain why this medium is now dominated by conservative evangelicals. Equally informative and absorbing are the passages which deal with dispensational prophecy (e.g. pp. 143ff.). Since eschatology is now at the cutting edge of evangelism, such insights into the apocalypticism of so much of North American religious life are bound to be of interest to the scholar and practitioner of evangelism both.

It was Jeffrey Hadden and Charles Swann who broke this ground for us with their definitive study, *Prime Time Preachers* (Addison-Wesley, 1981). This volume by David Edwin Harrell is proof that there is much to be gained from further research in the field.

## Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate

*By Donald A. McGavran. Foreword by Roger S. Greenway. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1988. Pp. 162. Paperback. \$8.95.*

This is vintage McGavran: a clear statement of the principles and strategies of church growth he has forged and espoused over the years; informative references to recent contributions from contemporary authors in the field; and some peppery polemics against pluralism, universalism, liberalism, and the like. But the underlying and overriding theme of the book is an impassioned plea for evangelism to be included, not only as a component of theological education, but as one of its major emphases.

One must marvel that an octogenarian has put such a volume together. And if his case is stated somewhat abrasively, this is his privilege, not only as an honored statesman of the church, but also because of his lifetime of service to its mission and ministry. As with all of McGavran's later writings, this is a very direct call to service. One who has run his laps is earnestly holding out the baton, urging those who follow to match his momentum so that the transition may take place smoothly.

Accordingly, we find here an eloquent exposition of McGavran's vision for the revitalization of the church through theological education — his hope that the next generation of pastoral leadership might be better trained and motivated to equip congregations for their evangelistic outreach in the world. It is an appeal to schools of all theological perspectives: those which have neglected evangelism because of theological suspicion on the one hand, or theological self-satisfaction on the other. Not everyone will agree with his arguments — something which has never been McGavran's concern or intent. But everyone should consider them; carefully.

## Unreached Peoples: Clarifying the Task

Edited by Harley Schreck and David Barrett.  
 Monrovia, CA: MARC, and Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1987.  
 Pp. viii, 302. Paperback. \$7.95.

This volume marks an important collaborative step in the compiling of background information for world evangelization. It is the seventh volume in *Unreached Peoples*, a series which began publication in 1979, co-sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center (MARC), a division of World Vision International. This time it is combined with *The AD 2000 Series*, implemented in 1985 with much the same objectives by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (see the notes above on two other publications in this series, edited by David Barrett).

The advantage of this cooperation is that we not only have a great deal of new information gathered by two first-rate centers of research in religious and social anthropology. We also have their combined insights, resulting among other benefits in an excellent first part to the volume, titled "Clarifying the Task." This suggests two approaches in defining the unreached: ethnolinguistically as "peoples" and sociologically as "people groups." The first approach is global in its understanding; the second is particularistic; but both are essential, insist the editors, for the overall task of world evangelization. Also included in this part of the volume: a selective chronology of how people have been reached across the centuries; a selection of Christian materials on the subject since 1910; and a selected contemporary bibliography.

Part Two consists of thirteen case descriptions of reaching peoples in Africa. Part Three is an updated Registry of the Unreached, listing those peoples and people groups where it is reported that less than 20% have any affiliation with a Christian church. The inclusiveness of the editors' criteria is readily evident in the listings for Western countries. Under the United States, for example, gays in San Francisco, ex-mental patients in New York City, and urban street women in Los Angeles rate entries.

The value of this book is not only the wealth of data it supplies, but also the stretching of perspective it provides for church leaders and members who are chronically myopic in their evangelistic vision. And while there are some who might have theological reservations over the use of the word "unreached," there are few who could take issue with the editors' definition: "By *unreached* we mean 'a people or people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize the rest of its members without outside (cross-cultural) assistance'" (p. 7).

## Outside Looking In

By Gordon Bruce Turner. Foreword by Henri J.M. Nouwen.  
 Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1987.  
 Pp. viii, 136. Paperback. \$6.95.

This is a book which links two vitally important features of ministry and mission: evangelism and pastoral care. As Henri Nouwen states in the foreword, "Ministry in its deepest meaning is martyrdom, witnessing with our whole being to God's faithfulness in our individual and communal lives. With many concrete and deeply moving examples, he shows that Evangelization and Pastoral Care can never be separated."

This is an area which badly needs resourcing in the field. As Tom Stran-sky once put it, evangelism is for the strong, not the vulnerable. And if we are to evangelize with the fullness of the gospel, we must also be equipped to care for people in the midst of their woundedness and suffering. As evangelism executive for the United Church of Canada, Gordon Turner is admirably suited for this task. Not only does he have a keen sense of where evangelism needs to be developed; he also has a wealth of pastoral experience on which to draw. In short, he knows the church, warts and all; and he loves its people. Too many evangelists set out to do their work with neither of these qualities.

Part One of the book deals with why so many people are "dropping out" of the church; why it is that they do not feel part of the ecclesial branches of the family of God. Turner has done his statistical homework, but he punctuates the narrative with vivid pastoral illustrations, which do much to explain why we should take the statistics seriously. Part Two shows how people might be drawn to "dropping back in." Beginning with an excellent discussion of how pastoral care and evangelism are distinct but inseparable, and making good use of the work of Seward Hiltner, Turner suggests a *modus operandi* of "pastoral conversation," leading to the paradigm of a caring church which is the subject of Part Three. Nouwen's *Wounded Healer* is presented as the fundamental model for evangelization today, and the people of God are affirmed as a royal priesthood, a means of grace for the world.

This is an important book, and may well be the catalyst for a much needed collegiality between evangelists and pastoral counselors, who continue to share an unfortunate degree of mutual professional suspicion.

## Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism

By C. Peter Wagner. Foreword by Ralph D. Winter.  
Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987.  
Pp. 216. \$9.95.

The appendix to this book is a reproduction of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974. But it functions as much more than an appendix throughout. As Peter Wagner says in the Introduction, he has tried to deal realistically with "the delicate relationship between evangelism and Christian social responsibility, following the lead of the Lausanne Covenant." It is also a very practical book, the tone for which is set by the title of the opening chapter, "Why Plan Strategy?" Chapters on "The Meaning of Mission" and "The Meaning of Evangelism" come only after church growth has been given very thorough treatment in chapters on "The Harvest Principle" and "Testing the Soil."

As we have come to expect from Wagner, he lets us know exactly where he stands. His theological "nonnegotiables" are: 1. The glory of God is the chief end of humans. 2. Jesus Christ is Lord. 3. The preaching of the gospel is the preaching of the Kingdom of God. 4. The Scriptures are the only normative authority for believers. 5. Sin, salvation and eternal death are eschatological realities. 6. God wills all to be saved from sin and eternal death. 7. God has given His people a responsibility for saving souls, and the Holy Spirit works through them to accomplish the task. Wagner does acknowledge, however, that there is theological ferment in the field, and that the Kingdom of God is much more prominent in establishing evangelistic priorities than was the case twenty years ago.

While accepting the "cultural mandate" of social outreach as a "biblical responsibility," Wagner still gives clear priority to the "evangelistic mandate" of "seeking and finding lost men and women" (p. 100). Accordingly, in defining evangelism he is primarily concerned to relate it to and distinguish it from church growth. After describing the various typologies of each, he proceeds to identify three streams of evangelism which have impacted the church in recent years. "Crusade evangelism" and "saturation evangelism" have been important, he suggests, but "body evangelism," incorporating church growth principles, in his view has been the most effective and the most lasting.

Those who are looking for strategies to implement this form of evangelism will find much in the book to give them direction. But more interesting for those who teach in the field are the definitions and distinctions for which Wagner argues, thereby addressing questions which have been on the pedagogical agenda for quite some time. One hopes that this augurs a more rigorous theological dialogue than we have yet had — a dialogue which, far from confusing and enervating the task of evangelism, is badly needed for its further development.

## Liberation & Human Wholeness: The Conversion Experiences of Black People in Slavery and Freedom

By Edward P. Wimberly and Anne Streaty Wimberly.  
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986.  
Pp. 143. Paperback. \$10.95.

The significance of this book lies in the relevance it has for so many constituencies of the church, and indeed for human society as a whole. But for the purposes of evangelism, it is important primarily as a set of penetrating questions about the nature of the gospel and the purpose of its proclamation. The authors make this very clear in the preface, where they recount the dream of a black theology student shared in one of their classes:

I parked my car in a factory parking lot. I got out of the car and went into the factory. There was a conveyor belt where caskets were being moved up to a special room. I found myself on the conveyor belt face down going up to this room. When I arrived at the room a man met me. He said that he was a Jew. This man gave me a ticket receipt, and told me where to go next. I found myself back on the conveyor belt facing up this time on my back. When I got down to the bottom of the conveyor line, I saw a woman who asked me for a ticket, but I had no ticket. I had only the receipt for the ticket. I gave her the receipt, and then I proceeded into a room where the people were gathered in a circle to worship (p. 12).

The authors proceed to describe conversion experience as a sudden change within a process: conviction, withdrawal, inner change and reincorporation into the community of faith. In the context of slavery, this perforce was a fusion of social and personal salvation; for the process in which conversion took place was perceived as God's activity on behalf of those in captivity. The reflections of slaves and ex-slaves as they described their religious experiences made this very clear. Moreover, the need for community, both to nurture and affirm religious conversion, was likewise self-evident. One thing was sure: a slave could not expect any of this from the white church.

The implications of slave conversion traditions for our own day and age are powerfully argued in this book. We need a discernment of what God is doing in the world, and especially in the dynamics of human society, if we are to understand what it is we are converted to when we make a Christian commitment. The compulsion of this "hermeneutics of involvement" is not as clear today as it was for black slaves; but it is no less an

imperative for authentic Christian discipleship. The authors have not only placed the social psychology of conversion firmly on our agenda; they have also made the question of theodicy unavoidable. How did a slave come to love a God who left them in slavery? By firmly believing and hoping that slavery was not God's last word. And if that is not part of our *evangel*, it most certainly is not the good news we claim it to be.

## The Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education Fifteenth Annual Meeting MINUTES

The fifteenth annual meeting of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education was held on the campus of Emory University, Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia, October 7-9, 1987. The meeting was opened at 7:30 p.m. with a devotional by President David Lowes Watson who then introduced Carl E. Braaten, Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago for our keynote address "The Meaning of Evangelization in the Context of God's Universal Grace." On Thursday morning we had a stimulating discussion of Braaten's keynote address and related themes.

For many the highlight of the fifteenth annual meeting of the Academy was the address in chapel on Thursday morning by President Jimmy Carter who shared his own experience and perspectives on evangelism and his commitment to holding social action, such as the work of Habitat for Humanity, in partnership with personal witnessing and visiting from house to house. Following his address Mr. Carter answered questions and met with the Academy members for lunch.

In the afternoon books recently authored by members were reviewed. Robin Wainwright reviewed Robert Coleman's *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, Francis Ringer reviewed Ben C. Johnson's *Rethinking Evangelism, A Theological Approach*, and due to Dan Bonner's absence Bill Jones read Bonner's review of *Evangelism and Social Involvement* by Delos Miles. Each author responded to the review of his book, and open discussion followed.

The business meeting of the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education convened at 4 p.m. on Thursday, October 8, 1987. The minutes were approved as published in the Journal. Visitors and new members were introduced. The Treasurer's report was approved as distributed with a balance on hand of \$5,240.42 and a printing bill for the Journal, Volume Two, expected to be about \$3,400. David Watson reported on the difficulties encountered in printing Volume Two of the Journal and explained the late delivery date. It was moved and seconded that the Academy apply for a grant from the Mustard Seed Foundation to allow continued mailing of the Journal to seminaries overseas deemed unable to afford ongoing subscription fees. Carried. The editorial policy of how articles are selected was clarified. Articles received are sent blind to two independent readers in the Academy who are asked to re-

spond with suggestions and an evaluation.

Nominations and the election of officers followed. The new officers of the Academy for 1987-89 are: President, Ray Bakke; Vice President, Richard Armstrong; Secretary/Treasurer, Ron Crandall. It was moved, seconded and carried that the office of Secretary/Treasurer be divided by the next annual meeting due to the increase in responsibilities. The dates and location of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Academy were announced as October 6-8, 1988 at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City. Our host will be Charles Shaver and the focus will be on "Evangelism Resources for Teaching and for the Local Church." Michael Green, now at Regent College, Vancouver, will be the keynote speaker. Thursday evening a banquet was hosted by Candler School of Theology. Dean of the School, Jim L. Waits, addressed the Academy on the theme "Evangelism in the Theological Curriculum." Special tribute was offered by President Watson to those who with foresight established the Academy fifteen years ago and to all who had served through the years as President.

Friday morning devotions were led by George Morris in the chapel. Left over business was completed with Dick Peace reporting on the syllabus project, soon to be published by World Vision, and on the Institute for Computer-Assisted Ministries. New applications for membership were reviewed and voted on by the Academy. Applicants accepted into full membership included: Thomas Albin, James Burtness, Donald Buteyn, Dan R. Crawford, Julia D'Andrea, Paul S. Fransen, Eddie Gibbs, J. William Giles, E. Michael B. Green, Dirk J. Hart, George Hunsberger, Herbert Klem, George C. Papademetriou, Robert Price, Priscilla Pope-Levison, Jerold F. Reed, B. Keith Rowe, Samuel Schultz. Applicants accepted for associate membership included: Woody Davis, Melvin E. Lorentzen, Johnie Monroe, Harry L. Poe, Thom Rainer, and Bill Sullivan.

The Academy ended its working session by viewing two video presentations. The first introduced the Institute for World Evangelization centered at Candler School of Theology, Emory University and directed by George Morris. The second video was part two of a three part series created by Ray Bakke and produced by World Vision entitled "The City for God's Sake." A stimulating discussion on reaching cities with ministries of justice and evangelism followed.

Appreciation was expressed to all who helped with the details of the meeting with special thanks offered to George Morris and Jim Waits for hosting the Academy's Fifteenth Annual Meeting. Ron Crandall, speaking on behalf of the Academy, expressed gratitude to David Watson for his two years of effective leadership as President of the Academy. Ray Bakke was invited as the new President Elect to close the meeting in prayer. The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
**Ronald K. Crandall**  
 Secretary/Treasurer

## The Sixteenth Annual Meeting

The Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Academy will be held at the Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, October 6th, 7th and 8th, 1988. Host member for the meeting is Charles Shaver. Keynote speaker will be Michael Green.

## The Seventeenth Annual Meeting PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Academy will be held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, October 5th, 6th and 7th, 1989. Further details to be announced.