TEACHING PROCLAMATION

A MODEL FOR TRAINING

EVANGELISTIC SPEAKERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF

MCMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

MISSION AND RENEWAL

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY

HAMILTON, ONTARIO

BY

JOHN BOWEN

APRIL 1999

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

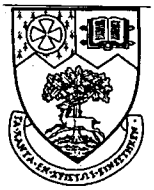
McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: A Model for Training Evangelistic Speakers

AUTHOR: John P. Bowen, B.A. (Oxford), Dip.Th.(London)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Andrew Irvine

NUMBER OF PAGES: 279



McMASTER DIVINITY COLLEGE

Upon the recommendation of an oral examination committee and vote of the faculty, this thesis-project by

John P. Bowen

is hereby accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

First Reader and Advisor

Second Reader

External Reader

Dean

Date: April 21, 1999

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers how Christian ministers and other Christian workers may be trained to communicate the Christian message through public speaking, in a way that is Biblically sound, culturally appropriate and pedagogically informed.

The data base for the thesis is a group of staff and students of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship Canada who attended a training conference in evangelism in November 1995. Twenty-two of the delegates to this conference who opted to receive training in evangelistic speaking returned a questionnaire on their understanding and practice of evangelistic speaking.

The results of this questionnaire were considered from four perspectives: Biblical material on evangelism and evangelistic speaking; current missiological considerations; contemporary cultural trends, particularly the growth of postmodernism; and recent writings in the area of pedagogy.

The conclusion proposes a model for training evangelistic speakers in the light of this material, a model which may be applied in parachurch and seminary settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the writing of this thesis. IVCF especially has done much to shape my understanding of evangelism and evangelistic speaking over the past 30 years. I am particularly grateful to evangelists like David Watson and Michael Green, who were outstanding models of what Gospel proclamation could be. In Canadian IVCF, Don Posterski and Jim Berney have given consistent affirmation, wise direction and encouragement over many years. And then countless conversations, Bible studies and meetings with IVCF students and staff colleagues across Canada have influenced me more than I can measure.

On a more personal level, my family have been wonderfully understanding of my frequent absences while I was working on my "demon." In particular, my wife Deborah, who has been this way before me, offered wise counsel, reassurance and cups of tea when needed. A friend of long standing, Dr. Emily Gear Berkman in Ottawa, has also been a constant source of encouragement.

Finally, Dr. Andrew Irvine has patiently worked with me on this thesis in the midst of his own hectic schedule. It has taken many cups of coffee, more than one strategy session involving chalk and blackboard, and numerous messages on answering machines. He has gone the second mile . . . not to mention the third and the fourth.

To all of these, my heartfelt thanks.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: PERSONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

Evangelistic preaching is the public proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ to those who are not yet his followers. In the New Testament, evangelistic preaching is one of the chief ways the Gospel message is spread. Jesus, Peter, Paul, Philip and Apollos are among those who employ public proclamation as a means of evangelism.

The Unpopularity of Evangelistic Preaching

In North America in recent years, however, confidence in evangelistic preaching has waned. Partly this is due to the air of scandal which surrounds the most visible of such preachers--TV evangelists. It is also due to the perceived inadequacy of their message. David Buttrick parodies it thus:

> First, lay on a heavy sense of guilt, and then, when the congregation quivers in despair, hand out a carrot-on-a-stick Jesus with mercy. Such strategies, including emotional climaxes, threats of coming wrath, last-chance gospels, and the like, border on manipulation and are a denial of our freedom for God.[1]

A further level of reaction to evangelistic preaching comes from those who want to re-emphasize the importance of the church and the lifestyle of its

---

[1] David Buttrick Homiletic: Moves and Structures (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1987), 454. 225-234.

members in God's evangelistic purposes. The influential missiologist, David Bosch, for instance, comments that in the early church:

> Of far greater significance than the mission of the peripatetic preacher . . . was the conduct of early Christians, the "language of love" on their lips and in their lives.[2]

William J. Abraham too notes the way that evangelistic preaching often separates evangelism from other facets of the church's life, and thus fails to give converts (or potential converts) adequate initiation into the work of the Kingdom. He believes that:

> [m]ost contemporary evangelistic preaching is unrelated to the intention to initiate people into the Kingdom of God.[3]

Further criticism of evangelistic preaching is implied in a popular textbook on homiletics such as David Buttrick's 1987 text, Homiletic: Moves and Structures. Out of a total of 459 pages, Buttrick devotes only 9 to the question of evangelism, and even then his emphasis is on the witness of the laity and not on preaching.

For anyone concerned for evangelistic preaching, the criticisms which have been leveled at it need to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, behind this thesis lies the conviction that, once evangelistic preaching has learned these lessons, it still has an important contribution to make as one element within the totality of the church's evangelistic efforts.

---

[2] David J. Bosch Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1991), 191.

[3] William J. Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 173.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is to develop a model of how people can be trained in evangelistic preaching. The goal of such training is to prepare them to continue the tradition of preaching begun by Christ and his Apostles, and practised in the church through the centuries. The model of training will also need to be one which helps evangelistic preachers be sensitive to contemporary concerns, both theological and cultural. Lastly, the training will be based on sound pedagogical principles.

The Strategy of this Thesis

In order to develop this model, Chapter 1 will describe and evaluate a conference for training in evangelistic speaking held in 1995 which I directed. Delegates to this conference formed my database for this thesis: I sent them a questionnaire 6 months after the conference, and a second one 2.5 years after the event.

Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 will then consider theoretical issues related to evangelistic preaching, and Chapter 6 will revisit the question of a practical model for training. In the theoretical section, I will consider background issues essential for the understanding and practice of evangelistic preaching today.

Chapter 2 will examine a biblical understanding of evangelism, with particular attention to the theological and eccelesiological context in which evangelistic preaching takes place. A consideration of biblical data alone is not

a sufficient foundation, however, since evangelistic preaching is practised differently according to one's overarching theological scheme and, in particular, one's theological understanding of culture and of mission. Chapter 3 will address this question, motivated in part by Lesslie Newbigin's urging that the Western world be treated as a mission field.[4] In light of this, I will examine evangelistic preaching as a part the church's missiological calling and seek to show how it is possible to preach evangelistically in such a way as to "relate to the culture" without "selling out to the culture." The argument of this chapter, that the evangelistic preacher must speak in the idiom of the surrounding culture as well as being faithful to the Gospel, needs then to be pursued further in order to give guidance to the preacher in the specific culture of the contemporary West. Chapter 4 will thus consider the current transition from modernity to postmodernity, and I will offer some practical proposals for how evangelistic preachers may engage with a postmodern world.

Chapter 5 then moves on to address the practical question of training in evangelistic preaching, through a consideration of pedagogical method. It will also illustrate pedagogical principles by reference to interviews with practising evangelists. At the conclusion of each of these chapters, I will consider the responses of those who attended the training conference in the light of the theoretical issues raised. I will analyze not only how they position themselves in relation to each topic, but, in Chapter 5, I will also ask how they learned the

---

[4] E.G. "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking and living that we call 'modern Western culture'?" Lesslie Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks: the Gospel and Western Culture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1986), 1.

understanding and skills of evangelistic speaking which they have demonstrated by their answers.

These considerations—biblical, missiological, cultural and pedagogical—will then inform the practical conclusions of Chapter 6.

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and Evangelism

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) is an evangelical parachurch organization working in universities and high schools. Christian faith became a personal reality for me through the work of the high school branch of this organization (Inter-School Christian Fellowship) in 1961. I linked up again with IVCF as a university student at Oxford University between 1966 and 1970, and then, in 1973, I joined the staff of IVCF, working first of all in Britain and then, from 1977 on, in Canada. Not surprisingly, then, IVCF has been very significant in shaping my understanding and practice of evangelism and evangelistic preaching, and my ministry with IVCF has in turn shaped this thesis both implicitly and explicitly. It therefore seems appropriate at this stage to describe something of the evangelistic ethos of IVCF.

Evangelism may be said to be in the lifeblood of IVCF. Canadian IVCF was founded in the Fall of 1928 by an young English medical graduate named

Howard Guinness, who traveled across Canada "like a flame of fire"[5], drawing Christians together, helping them be bold in their witness, and himself winning many to faith in Christ. Today the first stated Purpose for the existence of IVCF chapters across Canada is:

> To witness to the Lord Jesus Christ as God incarnate and to lead others to a personal faith in Him as Saviour and Lord: EVANGELISM IS A PRIME OBJECTIVE.[6]

The official documents of IVCF do not state how the ministry of evangelism is to be carried out, but in practice two forms of evangelism have predominated throughout the history of the movement. Howard Guinness was very gifted in the first: "personal" evangelism in a one-to-one setting. However, in British IVCF, which had sent Guinness on his mission to Canada, personal evangelism had long been complemented by evangelistic preaching missions. The first such was in 1882, when American evangelist D.L.Moody was invited to speak at Cambridge University, and "about two hundred stood on the last night to indicate that they had received blessing during the week."[7] In Canada, the first evangelistic mission of this kind was organized by IVCF in 1941. The main speaker was Dr. Samuel Zwemer, a pioneer missionary among Muslims. Probably the most memorable mission of this kind, however, was John Stott's 1956-57 series of four missions on campuses from Toronto to Vancouver.[8]

Thus in Canada as in Britain, an emphasis on the Christian's personal responsibility in evangelism has often been complemented by regular

---

[5] Melvin V. Donald, A Spreading Tree: A History of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada, 1928-29 to 1988-89, n.p. [1991], 29.

[6] Ibid., Appendix III.

[7] Oliver R. Barclay Whatever Happened to the Jesus Lane Lot? (Leicester UK: Inter-Varsity Press 1977), 28.

[8] Donald, 164, 239.

evangelistic preaching. However, verbal proclamation of the Gospel has never become quite such a regular part of IVCF chapter life in Canada in the way it still is in Britain. In particular, during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a reaction against the preaching aspect of this partnership. It was said that students did not want to be preached at; that the culture required a more relational approach; and that traditional evangelistic missions required a disproportionate amount of work for the benefit that resulted. Probably there were also fewer people in Canada than in Britain doing the kind of evangelistic preaching that was appropriate for a university campus.

My own interest in evangelistic preaching began during my years as a university student and a student member of IVCF in the late 1960's. As a young Christian, I was thrilled to be able to listen to evangelistic preachers such as David Watson, John Stott, and Michael Green.[9] Not only were their lives morally beyond reproach, but their theology had depth (most were trained at either Oxford or Cambridge), they refrained from emotional appeals, and their connection to the ongoing life of the church was self-evident since all were ordained Anglican clergymen. I suppose I was unaware at the time that this model was not universally followed.

After 18 years on staff, in 1991, I was appointed National Evangelism Consultant by IVCF. In this role, I was to be available to university chapters of IVCF across the country, to teach about evangelism and to speak evangelistically. I was also to offer training to other IVCF staff who were interested in learning evangelistic speaking.

---

[9] I will say more about Watson, Stott and Green in chapter 5.

In 1995, I was responsible for planning and directing the IVCF evangelism training event referred to above, the Evangelism Consultation (referred to hereafter as EC'95). Delegates to this conference could choose whether they wanted to be trained in evangelistic speaking, evangelistic Bible studies, or apologetics, but this thesis is concerned only with those who chose training in evangelistic speaking. The remainder of this chapter will describe EC'95 in its context in the life of IVCF, the methodology which informed the conference, delegates' immediate responses at the end of the conference, and then their comments six months later.

The IVCF Evangelism Consultation 1995

In my role as National Evangelism Consultant for IVCF, I actually directed two conferences on evangelism for IVCF staff and students, not only EC'95, the subject of this chapter, but also an earlier one in 1992. A brief description of the 1992 conference follows, since my experience there became a helpful catalyst in the shaping of EC'95.

The 1992 consultation was very general in focus, and, in my opinion, lacked any serious methodological or pedagogical strategy. The content of the five days was lectures, seminars, watching videos of evangelists like Billy Graham at work, and discussion. Many people found parts of the conference useful, even inspiring, but I found myself dissatisfied with the amount of theory in the curriculum. Delegates were required to do nothing more than listen and absorb. The approach was largely what Paulo Freire called "banking education

[which] anesthetizes and inhibits creative power."[10] When the second consultation was suggested, therefore, I was glad for an opportunity to put into practice some growing convictions about how training could be accomplished more effectively--that is, more practically and with more lasting results.

The conference was planned by a Design Team of national IVCF personnel which I chaired. The focus for this second consultation was to be specialized, practical training in three areas: evangelistic speaking, evangelistic Bible studies, and apologetics. I directed the evangelistic speaking track; IVCF colleagues directed the other two. My goal was to move away from the over-emphasis on theory by ensuring that delegates should have the experience of giving an evangelistic talk during the Consultation, and return home with the confidence that they could be used by God in the exercise of this gift.

The pedagogical model used in the evangelistic speaking track was a simplified form of the experiential learning paradigm developed by David Kolb.[11] Kolb synthesizes the work of educational thinkers Kurt Lewin, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget to produce a dialectical model of learning which is applicable to any field of education. He describes the dialectic as he finds it in Lewin thus:

> Immediate concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection. These observations are assimilated into a "theory" from which new implications for action can be deduced. These implications or hypotheses then serve as guides in acting to create new experiences.[12]

He observes that Dewey, similarly:

---

[10] Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 68.

[11] David A. Kolb, Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984)

[12] Ibid., 21

> [placed] emphasis on learning as a dialectic process integrating experience and concepts, observations and action. The impulse of experience gives ideas their moving force, and ideas give direction to impulse.[13]

Kolb's third authority is Piaget:

> In Piaget's terms, the key to learning lies in the mutual interaction of the process of accommodation of concepts or schemas to experience in the world and the process of assimilation of events and experiences from the world into existing concepts and schemas.[14]

In synthesizing these three, Kolb concludes that:

> there are two primary dimensions to the learning process. The first dimension represents the concrete experiencing of events at one end and abstract conceptualization at the other. The other dimension has active experimentation at one extreme and reflective observation at the other.[15]

On the basis of this model, the four components of Kolb's approach were built into the structure of the conference. Theoretical instruction would be provided by practising evangelists, who would teach "concepts" and "ideas" from Scripture and from their own experience. Secondly, there would be a chance to observe models of evangelistic speaking, both by experienced evangelists and by fellow-participants. Thirdly, there would be the opportunity to give an evangelistic talk in front of an audience. Finally, there would be reflection on the experience of speaking, both one's own speaking and that of others.[16] These four components were simply referred to as theory, observation, experience, and evaluation--though placing the four in this order was not intended to be prescriptive. As well as following Kolb's four-fold description, a fifth dimension was added to the learning experience: a loving atmosphere. This is not essential to all learning situations, but it was important for this event for at least three

---

[13] Ibid., 22

[14] Ibid., 23

[15] Ibid., 31

[16] Kolb says that "Lewin . . . believed that much individual and organizational ineffectiveness could be traced ultimately to a lack of adequate feedback process." Ibid., 22

reasons: because this was training for Christian ministry, because the skills to be developed were uniquely individual, and because learning new skills can be an intimidating experience. [17] Significant time in small groups, led by a mentor, became one of the main locuses of the caring environment. Thus the Consultation was structured to incorporate all five of these factors.

In order to initiate the practical dimension of the training, delegates were asked to bring with them to the conference the outline of a short (twenty minute) evangelistic talk. Each delegate was placed in a small group of five or six led by a mentor--someone experienced in the field of evangelistic speaking. During the small group meetings, each person, beginning with the mentor, presented their twenty-minute talk, and was then evaluated by the other members of the group. Mentors were asked to spend one-on-one time with the members of their small group during the Consultation, to add more personal comments of encouragement and advice.

Delegates were also asked before they came to be prepared to give an evangelistic talk within three months of returning home from the Consultation. Wherever possible, this was to be prepared and evaluated afterwards in consultation with the mentor. The mentor was further asked to stay in touch with his/her small group for at least twelve months after the Consultation to help with integrating what had been learned into regular field ministry. The intention was that, wherever possible, people would be linked with mentors in their geographical area to make this easier.

---

[17] Military training includes the other four components, but, since the skills to be learned are by nature impersonal and individuality is a drawback rather than an asset, love is hardly a priority for a military instructor.

Delegates to the consultation were chosen by their local staff director. Directors were asked to nominate staff who had shown special interest or giftedness in any of the three areas of evangelistic ministry covered by the training. There were no other requirements in terms of age or length of experience on staff.

Mentors were staff and others who, in the opinion of the Design Team, were experienced in evangelistic speaking and competent to mentor others. They also needed to be people with the time and motivation to persevere in follow-up for the following twelve months. We endeavored also to find mentors representing racial and gender diversity. Once a suitable list had been drawn up, potential mentors were sent an invitation to join the Consultation team along with a Job Description for being a mentor. (See Appendix 1.) The results were not entirely satisfactory. Out of a total of fourteen mentors distributed across the three training tracks, four were people of colour (this is actually a higher proportion than in the IVCF staff team nation-wide), but only two were women (almost 50% of staff across Canada are women). In the evangelistic speaking track, however, all seven mentors who agreed to come were men. This drew some criticism, as will appear below in the evaluation comments. In fact, six other women were invited to be mentors in evangelistic speaking but said no, for a variety of reasons.[18]

Although the conference included plenary sessions, it was in the small groups that delegates experienced most fully all five of the components of

[18] These included sickness, busy-ness and pregnancy.

training. Mentors modeled how to give a talk and how to receive evaluation with humility and grace. Small group members had practical experience in giving a talk, and being evaluated by their peers. As people listened to one another and prayed together, a spirit of love certainly grew within the groups. The final element--theoretical instruction--was provided partly in the small groups, as they discussed their work together, but was also assisted by plenary speakers. The evening talks were divided between Lindsay Brown, General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and Nigel Lee, Universities' Secretary of the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (the name by which IVCF is now known in Britain) and England's most experienced campus mission speaker. These evening sessions dealt with the theological basis for evangelism and discussed current strategies for university evangelism. More directly relevant to the work of evangelistic speaking were morning talks by a variety of speakers: Nigel Lee spoke about the evangelist's preparation, Elward Ellis (one of the mentors) spoke on the evangelist's personal life, and I demonstrated one way to give an "altar call" appropriate to a university audience.

Statistics

73 delegates attended EC'95, of whom 31 chose the evangelistic speaking track. Of the 31:

20 were men, 11 women;

17 work in universities,

1 with international students, and

3 in high schools;

3 were specially selected university students;

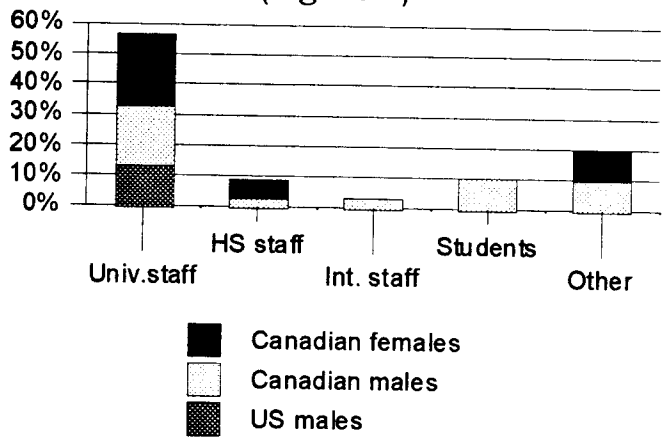
6 were staff managers, office staff, and invited guests.

27 were Canadian;

4 were staff from IVCF in the USA. (See Figure 1.)

IVCF roles of participants

(Figure 1)



Delegates' evaluations

At the end of the conference, delegates were invited to answer two questions: **What did you specially appreciate?** and **What should we change for another time?** Fifty-six evaluations were handed in. (A breakdown of how the fifty-six were divided between the speaking, Bible study and apologetics tracks is not available.) The following is a selection of delegate responses as they apply to training in evangelistic speaking, taken from my 1995 Director's Report.

Thirty-seven people (74%) mentioned the mentoring and small group components of the conference as a highlight. Several added the importance of the practical nature of the small groups. Specific comments included:

> * Small groups were a highlight for me. That part was significant learning that I will take home with me. So much practical that I am looking forward to putting into practice. [My mentor] was an excellent speaker.
>
> * The small group/mentoring format worked supremely well. I was fortunate enough to have a great mentor and a terrific group, full of sensitivity and insight. A delight.
>
> * I've learned a lot in my small group. I will put it into practice because it was so practical.
>
> * Mentors were dynamic! Very personal and a wealth of knowledge and wisdom. Small group dynamics were a very good idea! Allowed people to feel comfortable in a smaller group to risk.
>
> * The format of learning-doing-evaluating-goalsetting for the future was a very helpful structure.
>
> * Not talking about evangelism but doing it.

Some in fact proposed an intensification of the practicality of the conference, in particular to move the practicum out of the safety of the conference setting onto a university campus. Typical of these requests were:

> * A practical component, e.g. dorm talks at UBC
>
> * Hold a campus mission alongside [the conference] and integrate the two

In chapter 5, I will consider the nature of the reflective practicum, and the recommendation of writers on this subject that an artificial "protected environment" (such as existed at the conference) can actually be more conducive to learning than the kind of "real-life" setting these respondents are asking for.

There were a few negative comments about specific aspects of the small groups, particularly insensitive evaluation, which could probably have been remedied by better briefing of mentors:

> * My roommate was critiqued at midnight on the last night. . . . She was devastated.
>
> * Most of the people in my group felt more insecure after their evaluation than before!

In chapter 5, I will note the experience of seasoned evangelists as they reflect on those who evaluated them during their formative years, and their appreciation of those who were gentle in doing so.

Five women said they would have appreciated the presence of more female mentors, and both men and women commented on the lack of female upfront presence in general:

> * More effort [to get women mentors/speakers] is required. What are the criteria for invitation? Who did we forget to invite? It is important that we model shared leadership. We need to hear these voices--all of us.
>
> * I was saddened and angry that there were so few women mentors, and more women speakers. . . . Why didn't we celebrate women's evangelistic gifts?

The plenary speakers were strongly appreciated by twenty delegates, and strongly disliked by a further twenty. Positive comments identified such qualities as "passion and energy," "profound and stimulating," "the teaching and humor." Those who were not impressed took more time and trouble to explain why. The seriousness of this issue is indicated by the fact that this topic attracted the longest, most thoughtful comments of the whole evaluation. Almost all who wrote these comments also gave their names (most evaluations were anonymous). The following comment is typical:

> * The implicit biases of voice, gender, etc. in their presentation and their content seems really inconsistent with the movement towards reconciliation and mutual understanding within elements of the Canadian IV community. Further, they seemed out of touch with current trends in culture--they taught me about the last 30-50 years, but provided precious little to equip me for the next 30-50. As a listener, I felt alienated, frustrated and at times embarrassed by their presentations. A great opportunity for vision etc. provided by this gathering was lost in these sessions.

Another wrote regarding another aspect of culture:

> * Evangelism from other voices i.e. people of colour, women etc. IVCF leans heavily towards the British white male voice of evangelism (which is excellent, as seen in John Stott and others). But we need to think beyond these wonderful models towards other wonderful models.

The problem can perhaps be summarized by saying that the plenary speakers were perceived as lacking in cultural insensitivity. It was unfortunate that both plenary speakers were from Britain, and did not appear to have adapted their material to the Canadian context. Neither did they seem aware of issues of modernism and postmodernism which Canadian staff encounter every day. These themes of evangelism and culture in general, and evangelism and postmodernism in particular will be explored in greater depth in chapters three and four.

Six-month evaluation

Six months after the 1995 Evangelism Consultation, the delegates in the evangelistic speaking track were surveyed to discover how the Consultation had affected their day-to-day ministry. What follows is a summary of the results from the twenty out of thirty (66%) of these delegates who responded.

What are the main effects of EC'95 that you are conscious of on your thinking, life and ministry?

Many spoke of a changed attitude to evangelism in general and evangelistic speaking in particular. For some the effect was background encouragement rather than anything they could pinpoint:

* It was a good opportunity to be encouraged and instructed in this speaking business.

* I have more confidence as a result of EC'95.

Many speak of encouragement. For example:

* [I found] encouragement to keep plugging away at the task of evangelistic speaking and to think mission(s).

For some, the conference instilled specific convictions:

* Evangelism must be incarnational--from fresh experience of God; [you need to] find your own voice, your own take.

In every case, this change in attitude was connected to changes in behavior. Six months after the event, one delegate said he had:

* Incentive to give a few evangelistic talks [and] a desire to do more and find new topics.

For another, the most significant aspect was having been able to watch an expert in youth culture at work at the conference:

* From spending time learning from Al MacKay [her mentor] . . . Watching Al.

This led to a new measure of cultural sensitivity in her own ministry by:

* Using "in-roads" e.g. music kids are familiar with, expressions which have loaded meaning, movies they have seen, as one of the ways to bring them from what they know into what I want them to learn.

One staff member who applied the methodology of EC'95 to her campus work commented:

> * EC'95 underscored for me how vitally important it is for us to be passing on to our students the resources, training, vision, heart etc. for evangelism which emerge from these types of events.

Another delegate who had been very active in evangelism after EC'95 pinpointed the practical nature of the conference as a key to its effectiveness:

> * EC took and dispelled a lot of fear and misconceptions regarding evangelism. I've taken courses in evangelism but the practical nature of the program was extremely helpful.

It was encouraging too that at least one delegate had adopted in his own ministry the posture of learning which EC'95 sought to foster. He continues to:

> * Learn from the experience of others--[to] ask questions and ask for advice.

Many of these comments resonate with the discussion in Chapter 5, where I will set alongside one another comments of experienced evangelists on how they learned their speaking, and writings on pedagogy by Donald Schon and Lawrence Daloz.[19] That chapter will also comment on those influences EC'95 delegates consider to have been important, such things as encouragement, background learning, observation, practical experience, and finding one's own voice.

Every delegate was asked before coming to EC'95 to be prepared to make an evangelistic presentation on his/her campus within three months of returning home. Hence they were asked the question:

---

[19] Donald Schon, Educating the Reflective Practitioner (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988) and Lawrence Daloz, Effective Teaching and Mentoring (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986).

Have you been able to carry out your post-conference assignment yet? If YES, what encouraged you to actually do it? If NO, is it just a matter of scheduling, or are there problems you (and we) did not foresee? Please specify.

Sixteen out of twenty-two (73%) reported that they had carried through with their commitment. Six of these report having spoken more than once. Several explained that they spoke because they received an invitation to speak, and deliberately made the presentation an evangelistic one.

* I was invited to speak

* [A leader] knew I had a talk to do and asked me to speak.

* [Someone] encouraged me to do it.

* I had 3 opportunities and used them to give evangelistic presentations.

Frequently, a suitable context made the assignment seem more feasible:

* A regular youth rally

* Easy to do since a venue [a "church in the pub" setting] was already in place

* There was a natural context, i.e. an International Christmas potluck

In a pre-conference mailing, it had been suggested that delegates should schedule their follow-up speaking commitment before the conference took place. Not surprisingly, those did so found it easier to carry out their assignment:

* It had already been booked prior to the conference.

* The event was set up before EC.

Conversely, the person who blames "scheduling problems on my part" and the one who says, "our year . . . was planned [already]" illustrate the problem of failing to do such planning ahead.

Circumstances--such things as a suitable venue, a pre-arranged date, and supportive friends--have to be positive, or fear, always lurking in the background when something new and risky is required, will take over:

> * It didn't happen because the [IVCF] chapter was undergoing tumultuous changes and...I was unable to recruit students to be involved with me--and lost my nerve.

One delegate obviously understood the importance of putting in place the support mechanisms she needed:

> * I set up a time immediately upon returning with group of high school students...Having people around me encouraged me in doing the talk...What helped? Setting up a time and place. Making myself accountable to others. Asking others to help me plan.

For those who have still not carried out their assignment, there are wise words from another delegate who had defaulted:

> * It takes me usually one year to begin acting on the revolution of mind and heart that happens during a conference.

Delegates were also asked: **If [you did carry out your post-conference assignment], what was the event at which you spoke and how did it go?**

Contexts for speaking were very varied. One delegate had spoken three times: at a youth retreat, at an IVCF ski retreat, *and* at a downtown Gospel Mission. Others spoke on such occasions as a camp follow-up meeting, a church in the pub setting, and at citywide youth rallies.

66% commented (or implied) that they thought the presentation went well. For the others, unexpected factors discouraged them:

> * You need to include [in training] "Feeling out your audience and changing your talk on the fly", i.e. how to respond to an uninterested audience who came to play basketball.

However, even this delegate added that it "went well". In fact, this delegate has continued to give evangelistic talks, so clearly the experience was not too disheartening.

The influence of EC'95 is evident from the fact that some delegates used the talk they had worked on at the conference. One actually "borrowed" material from another delegate:

> * Borrowing from Mark Harris' talk, I spoke on Generation X and how Jesus of Nazareth responds to the longings of this generation.

One describes clearly how she worked with her talk at EC'95, incorporated what she learned from her mentor, and then presented it on campus:

> * I had kids listen to a song by Sarah McLaughlin called Circle--it talks about love and uses words such as jealousy, smothering, having no identity. I then compared that with the identity-giving love Jesus gave the woman at the well. I then tied it together with some personal experience. I left them with the question of whether the love they experience gives them freedom or binds them.

At least one felt moved to go beyond what he had learned and formally prepared, with striking results:

> * I spoke at Street Lights [a citywide youth rally] and gave a call to commitment, rather spontaneously one night (Spirit really prompted--I was terrified). The response was great and we had new converts and rededications.

The presentation did not need to be long or complex. The simple fact of standing in public before a (spiritually) mixed audience and surviving is itself very affirming:

> * I spoke for five minutes explaining who we were and why we were doing this event. It went very well. This doesn't sound very long, except yelling out that you're Christian in the hospital foyer is a bit forward.

Overall, it is encouraging that such a high proportion of delegates carried out their assignment, not least in view of the low level of ongoing support from mentors (see answers about mentors below). It probably helped for them to know beforehand that this was a requirement of attending EC'95. The variety of contexts in which delegates chose to do their speaking is also impressive.

In order to ascertain whether delegates had merely learned lessons from EC'95 for themselves, or whether the strategy of learning by modeling and mentoring was beginning to reproduce itself, delegates were asked the question: **Have you found other people interested in learning from you the skills you have been learning? I.E. Have you had a chance to mentor someone? Yes/No. If yes, in what way?**

Some have used material from the conference to teach others directly:

> * Our [chapter's] focus the fall/winter/spring semester... was outreach, so I did a lot of teaching to the exec and other members and specifically for training on the booktable--how to make connections, how to tell the gospel, how to tell your story.
>
> * I led a 4-week adult Sunday School class on evangelism and used material which I learned while at the EC '95.

Some have intentionally begun to train others in the way they were themselves trained:

> * I've had a chance to mentor someone, in preparing talks and leading Bible studies.

For others, passing on what they have learned is more informal and ad hoc:

> * I wouldn't call it mentoring, but there has been some ad hoc feedback, interest, etc.
>
> * [I have not begun to] mentor someone specifically but my other students often ask me questions on different aspects of speaking.

In the VCF chapter at the University of Toronto, the staff member was able to incorporate the aspects of practical experience and evaluation into her training for students:

> * Three exec members put together two talks to give in a kind of res[idence] 'moveable feast' using a Smashing Pumpkins song and an NFB film short cartoon (The Big Snit). Attendance [was] poor, but interaction good. I had them give a sample 'dry run' at our January retreat and the group just about demolished them. It was awesome to behold.

Since mentoring was a major focus of EC'95, I was concerned to know how the mentoring relationship had continued during conference follow-up--if at all. Delegates were asked:

Have you been in touch with your mentor? Would you have liked more post-conference contact with your mentor? less?(!) If you HAVE been in touch, has that contact helped you in carrying out your assignment? how?

Mentors were asked in their job description to maintain contact with their trainees for a period of twelve months after the conference. However, only ten out of twenty delegates (50%) said they had had any contact at all with their

mentor. For some even the contact they had was brief and superficial. For instance,

> * [He] came to [my campus] to speak in February and we chatted very briefly about the conference and follow up.

Where there was a complete lack of contact with the mentor, people felt discouraged. Some even sound angry:

> * Impossible to reach my mentor--no contact from him...Fax number didn't even work. Received NO news. UG!!
>
> * He was going to mail us all so that we could get back to him

Others are simply wistful:

> * Lots more contact would be always welcomed!

Geographical distance is a significant factor. In spite of the organizers' efforts to connect delegates with mentors from their region, this was not always possible. Even the most conscientious mentor found it difficult to keep up contact at long distance. For instance, a delegate in BC writes of a mentor in Ontario:

> * I sent an outline of the talk revised after the consultation. He gave me feedback. After the talk I sent him a thank you.

Once the assignment was over, however, there was silence. She comments, "He's too far away."

For one mentor, email was a help, at least for a time. Two of his students mentioned it appreciatively:

> * When I was giving my talks, he emailed me and prayed for me.
>
> * He and I have had a little bit of email contact. After I sent my report to him, he replied with some comments and encouraged to do a dorm talk this year (I didn't).

This last comment highlights the fact that the mentoring relationship is the responsibility of the student as much as it is that of the mentor. A few students blame themselves for not taking more advantage of the opportunity:

> * My mentor was outstandingly helpful during the conference, and certainly afterward as well. Unfortunately, I did not avail myself of that help, but shall in the future if it is still available.
>
> * Have not yet been in touch with mentor. Still intend to send a copy of talk, videos.
>
> * I think more contact would have been good, especially in the preparation of my talk but it was my fault, not his. I didn't have enough time.

Those who are most enthusiastic about the mentoring arrangements are those who for various reasons managed to find an ongoing relationship with their mentor. One, having moved to a new part of the country, says cheerfully: "My mentor is my new boss!!" Another was able to link up with her mentor at Regent College:

> * I did a course with Al [McKay] in April. It re-affirmed what I was doing and my desire to connect with young people where they are. I'm challenged to be aware of culture and how people interact with it and within it.

In some cases, where the relationship was able to continue, it was able to broaden beyond the scope of the assignment alone. This increased its value for the students:

> * The contact has been encouraging and helpful (like getting me to write...articles and stuff!). I've also appreciated the feedback on when to speak and when to shut-up and stay home (i.e. saying no). My mentor contact has been more general (not assignment focused) and I've liked that just fine.
>
> * Contact with my mentor since the conference has been good indeed. Approximately six weeks after the gathering I met with him a day in his city and we talked about my research, a multitude of personal and professional goals, and the general direction of my life.

In some instances, where the assigned mentor has not worked out for some reason, others have taken their place. For example, one staff member was at EC'95 with a couple of her students. That has helped follow-up even though she was not formally their mentor:

> * Anne calls me regularly to update me and discuss how she's doing in evangelizing a non-Christian friend. Encouraged Navin and Jen with evangelistic speaking in Lithuania.

Another delegate, to whom I was not officially a mentor, videotaped his talk, sent it to me for comment, and he and I then sat down and discussed it together.

Part of my concern in contacting these delegates was to plan for the future. What guidance could they give us about planning this kind of training event from their experience of EC'95? The question was:

If we plan another EC, what would make it a more positive training experience?

The majority of delegates want the conference to be even more practical. Twelve out of the twenty (60%) indicate that they think the conference could be improved by: *Working with an experienced evangelist on campus*; eight (40%) selected the option *More modeling by experienced evangelists;* seven (35%) said *More practical exerience*; and six (30%) opted for *More hands-on experience on the campus*. One delegate added this comment about practicality:

> * Do the practical tools, and the practical experience. Keep up the modeling. I thought we could have done the conference in Vancouver and actually done some evangelism at the Universities there.

Some explicitly say they do not want more theory: "[We have] had enough or quite a bit of theory already." In similar vein, when asked if it would be helpful to watch videos of experienced evangelists at work, another replied, "In the flesh was better." One respondent reflects on the pedagogy behind this practical emphasis:

> * I cannot emphasize enough the value in individuals having practical experience in their area of interest. It is potentially the most effective way of learning.

Maybe recalling the cultural inappropriateness of the speakers, three respondents urge for more of any training to be devoted to questions of culture:

> * Identifying themes of postmodernity and asking HOW the Gospel addresses these themes.
>
> * More cultural stuff! Paradigm development!

One of the three suggests ways for this also to be practical:

> * Train to listen (essential for evangelism)--learn to pick out clues about a person's background, worldviews, interests and spiritual needs etc. before blabbing out a prepared talk.

Conclusion

Overall, answers to the six-month survey are encouraging, implying that the basic components of the training--such things as mentoring, small groups, practical experience, and encouragement--were helpful. Although it is not an infallible judge of the effectiveness of EC'95, it was nevertheless encouraging to hear of several people becoming Christians across the country as delegates went home and gave their prepared talks.

However, any future training has to take into consideration the recommendations of the respondents for strengthening the training. Suggested areas for improvement may be summarized thus:

(1) Issues of evangelism and contemporary culture need to be urgently addressed and acted on, particularly around questions of gender, race, and postmodernism. As one writer comments, "We need to read the culture and get creative." Of these issues, chapter four will discuss the relationship between evangelism, modernism and postmodernism.

(2) Effort also needs to go into honouring delegates' concern for practicality. Clearly, while the experience of addressing their small group was helpful, delegates appreciate the chance to speak in a genuinely evangelistic situation. As another delegate simply says, "Do it, do it, do it... nothing replaces doing the actual work of evangelism." The problem may be finding enough "real-life" situations in which an "apprentice evangelist" can speak. This issue will be considered in chapter six.

(3) While mentoring is crucial to the learning process, geographical proximity between students and mentors is essential, so that an ongoing relationship is realistic. Case studies of mentor-evangelists will be included in chapter five.

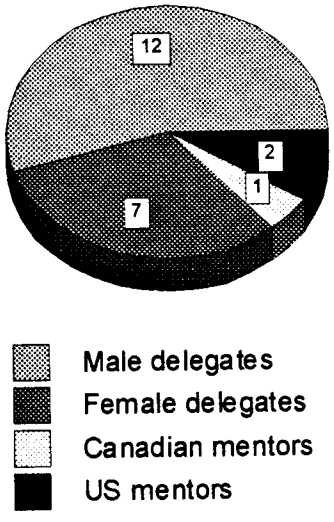
The principles of training expressed in EC'95 can be embodied in ways other than the conference format. In fact, because of the frustrations pinpointed above--lack of "real-life" experience, lack of ongoing contact with mentors, and so on--other ways may actually be better. At the heart of the model used at the conference is a very simple structure: a mentor and a student. This makes

training highly portable: wherever students and mentors can be brought together, one to one, or in a small group, this kind of training can happen. Chapter six will return to this question of alternative training structures.

Principal survey: February 1999

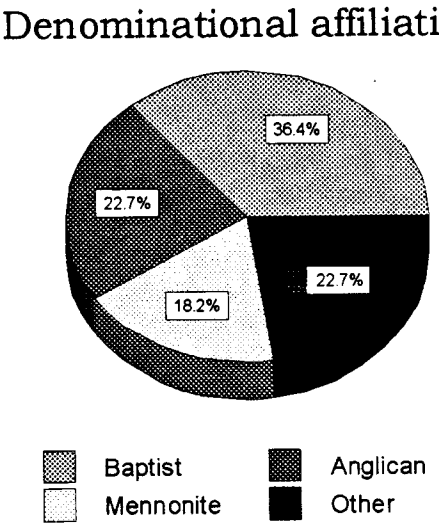
In February 1999, I sent a fuller questionnaire to the 31 delegates and 6 mentors from the evangelistic speaking track at EC'95. This was not only to survey the long-term usefulness of EC'95 (though it did that) but also to collect data on the evangelistic speaking practices of delegates, and to determine the influences (including EC'95) which have shaped their ministry. 22 (59%) delegates responded, including 3 mentors. Three respondents were Americans, two of them mentors. Of the 22, 7 (32%) were women, the same proportion as were at EC'95.

Gender, nationality and role



The denominational affiliations of these 22 are not generally surprising, considering that IVCF is both interdenominational and evangelical: 8 denominations are represented, most of them evangelical. The largest groupings are Baptist, Anglican and Mennonite Brethren; Christian Reformed, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Presbyterian, Evangelical Covenant (USA), and "nondenominational" have one representative each. The number of Anglicans might seem surprisingly large, but John Stackhouse has observed that, historically:

> Evangelical Anglicans and Christian Brethren held leadership positions out of proportion to their numbers in Canadian Protestantism at large.[20]

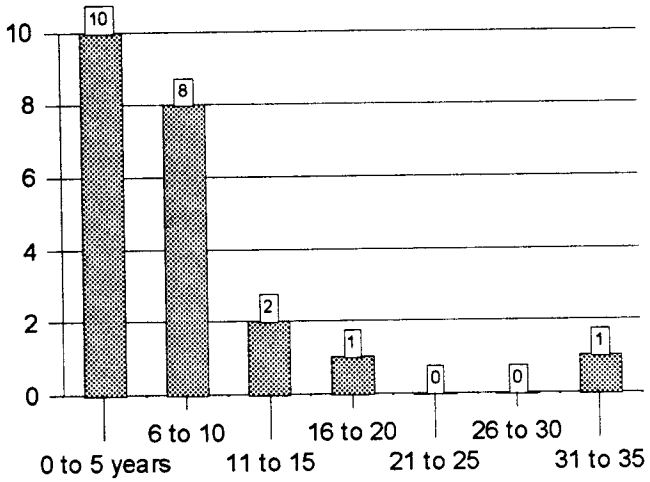


Delegates were asked how long they had served on IVCF staff. While the range is from 0 (two respondents are students—both of whom have become staff since then) to 33 years (the Canadian mentor), the median is between 5 and 7

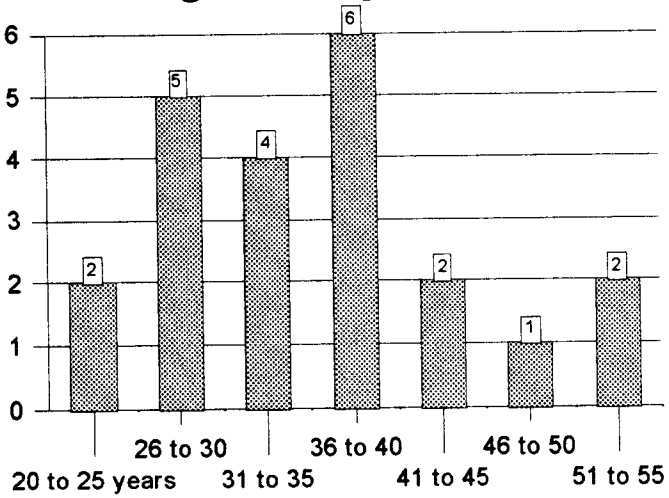
---

[20] John G. Stackhouse Jr. Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 94. Stackhouse also cites a survey of IVCF staff in 1965, which identified 5 United, 5 Baptist, 4 Anglican, Presbyterian and AGC 3, other denominations one or two (252).

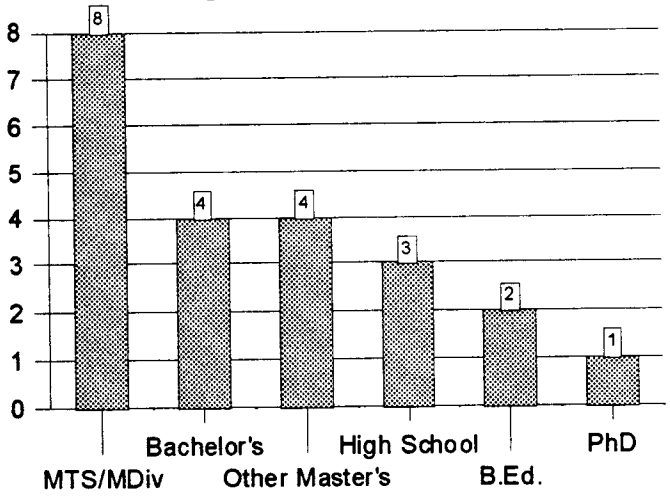
Number of years on staff



Ages of respondents



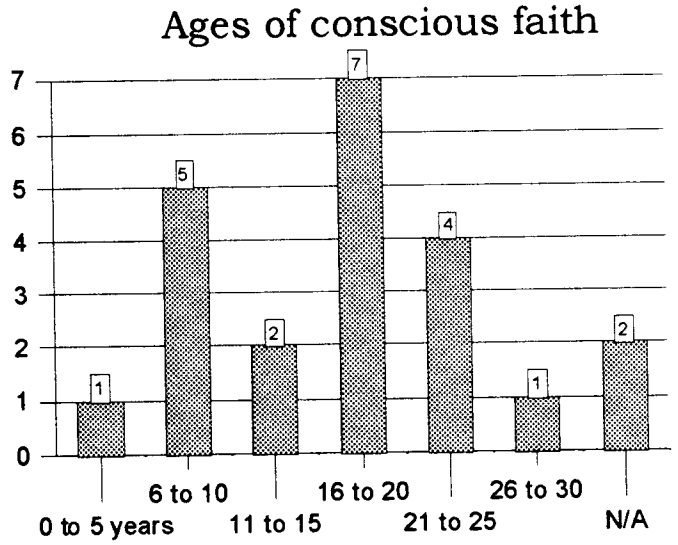
Highest academic level



years. There is a similarly wide range of ages, from 23 (the youngest student) to 56 (the Canadian mentor), the median being between 34 an 36.

In terms of educational achievement, the range among respondents extends from High School (3) to Ph.D. (1), with 12 (54%) having a Master's degree.

Delegates were also asked a background question about their spirituality: "If you remember a moment when you would say you became a Christian, what age were you? If you do not, write N/A." The answers concentrate in the ages 6 to 10 (largely those from Baptist backgrounds) and between the ages of 16 and 25. The median is between 15 and 17.



On the whole, none of these factors seem to have affected respondents' answers to any significant degree. Any exceptions to this principle will be noted as they occur.

Chapter 2

BIBLICAL MODELS OF EVANGELISM

This chapter will consider biblical data about evangelism, moving through the Old Testament to the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of John, and touching on the Book of Acts. I will argue that evangelism is part of God's project to redeem a fallen world, and that God's people have consistently through the centuries been invited to participate in that mission, in part by evangelistic preaching. In particular, I want to propose a paradigm for evangelism which stresses process more than crisis, learning more than conversion, community more than the individual. Finally, I will examine how the respondents from EC'95 think of and practise evangelism in light of this material.

Evangelism in the Old Testament

The words *euaggelion* and *euaggelizomai* are rare in the Greek Old Testament, and even when they are used, it is frequently with a secular rather than a spiritual meaning. Indeed, it is ironical that the first uses in the Septuagint concern the death of Saul, which the Philistines and one unfortunate Amalekite considered to be "good news," but which from the point of view of Israel or of David was anything but good.[1] If the word is not used earlier, however, certainly the concept is present.

---

[1] 1 Samuel 31:9 (*euaggelizomai*), 2 Samuel 4:10 (*euaggelion*).

God's promise to Adam and Eve ("your offspring . . . will strike . . . [the serpent's] head") is often referred to as the *protoeuaggelion* (or *proteuaggelion).*[2] However, while this may be the first spoken message of good news, the attitude of concern which motivates those words is evident even sooner. In fact, as soon as sin has entered the world, God comes to search for Adam and Eve and asks, "Where are you?"[3] The message of good news (the *protoeuaggelion*) is only a verbal expression of God's evangelistic posture, God's passionate desire to reconcile the human race to himself. In fact, one could argue that now sin has entered the world, nothing has changed except that God's love for humankind takes on several previously unknown aspects: God calling to Adam and Eve is love searching for the beloved; the message of judgment is God's love correcting the beloved;[4] God's practical love gives clothing to cover their newly-discovered nakedness;[5] and evangelism is love promising future victory over evil to the beloved.[6] Thus the impulse to evangelism is present from the entry of sin into the world. There are two important principles here that undergird the rest of the Bible's views of evangelism: that the evangelistic impulse originates with God the Creator, not with any human being, not with the early church, not even with Jesus' so-called Great Commission;[7] and that evangelism (the spoken

---

[2] e.g. "There is good New Testament authority for seeing here the *protevangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel." Derek Kidner, Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary (London: Tyndale Press 1967), 70.

[3] Genesis 3:9

[4] "It should be noted that neither the man nor the woman are cursed: only the snake (v 14) and the soil (v 17) are cursed because of man." Gordon J. Wenham, Word biblical Commentary : Volume 1: Genesis 1-15 (Vancouver: Word Communications Ltd., 1987), 81.

[5] Genesis 3:21

[6] Genesis 3:15

[7] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Matthew 28:20)

word) is only one expression among many of God's loving concern for the sinful human race.

The story of evangelism is picked up again in the story of the calling of Abram. God calls to Abram and says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you . . . and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[8] David Bosch comments on the missiological significance of this story:

> [Abram's] election is for service--more particularly: for the sake of the nations. . . . Yahweh . . . journeys with Israel into the future for the sake of the nations.[9]

God's desire is still to reach out the human race, alienated in sin, but God's strategy now is to reach out with human hands--the hands of a new race, the race of Israel.

The theme of Israel's calling for the sake of the nations is reiterated at several strategic points in Israel's history. One of the most significant is in Moses' retelling of the story of the exodus. He explains one of the effects of Israel's obedience to the law thus:

> You must observe these statutes and ordinances diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people." For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?[10]

Moses understands that when God's people live as a community of God's people in God's way, nations round about will be impressed and attracted by the

---

[8] Genesis 12:2-3

[9] David Bosch, "Reflections on biblical Models of Mission", in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, eds., Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 186.

[10] Deuteronomy 4:6-8

"wisdom and discernment" of the people. In particular, Moses calls the law a "just" law, that is, a law that demonstrates the just character of God. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh underscore this ethical dimension of Israel's character:

> Israel's distinctive practice of justice was meant to shine as a beacon in the ancient Near East, attracting other nations to the distinctive God who wills such justice.[11]

This concern for God-like justice is summed up in the Levitical refrain, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."[12] The character of God's people is to mirror the character of their God. As Gerhard Lohfink says:

> The salvation which God has prepared must shine in Israel itself if it is to entice others to life with God's people.[13]

Thus, when people are attracted to the quality of life of an obedient Israel, a nation that reflects the image of its God, they are in fact being attracted to Israel's God as well. Raymond Brown comments:

> [T]he Old Testament anticipated the time when God's community would be a missionary people; here Moses says that God's word will become his effective instrument in that missionary program by making his name known to Israel's neighbours. It would serve to attract unbelieving people to spiritual realities because of its authoritative, compelling and effective teaching.[14]

In fact, it is not so much the teaching which attracts, as Brown seems to imply, but the observing of the teaching ("You must observe"). This is confirmed by the

---

[11] Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995). 98.

[12] Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7 (implied), 20:26, 21:8. Peter echoes this saying in the New Testament (1 Peter 1:15). Jesus substitutes "perfect" (*teleios*) for "holy" in a parallel saying (Matthew 5:48).

[13] Gerhard Lohfink, Jesus and Community: the Social Dimension of Christian Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press and New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 19.

[14] Raymond Brown, The Message of Deuteronomy (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1993), 64.

fact that surrounding nations will be impressed by Israel's "wisdom," which "[l]ike all Hebrew intellectual virtues . . . is intensely practical, not theoretical."[15] Nevertheless, Brown's description of this as a "missionary program" is helpful.

At other turning points in Israel's life also, Israel's leaders understand that God's nature and activity should and will be demonstrated through her to the world. David, for instance, boasting of what will happen to Goliath, is confident that "all the earth [will] know that there is a God in Israel."[16] Later, at the dedication of the temple, Solomon asks God to answer the prayers prayed there by foreigners, "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel."[17] Solomon's request is that the nations may have access to a relationship with God similar to that which Israel already has ("know" and "fear"). This Old Testament theme seems to be what David Bosch is referring to when he comments that "Through Israel, God is busy with the nations."[18]

So far, of course, this is not what the New Testament understands by evangelism. At most, these stories indicate an understanding that if Israel is obedient, if God is seen to be at work in her midst, then others will be attracted by the character and reality of her God.[19] There is no sense of a message to be

---

[15] David A. Hubbard, "Wisdom," in J.D.Douglas ed., The New Bible Dictionary (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962), 1333-1334.

[16] 1 Samuel 17:46

[17] 2 Chronicles 6:32-33

[18] Bosch, in Phillips and Coote, 184.

[19] C. S. Lewis argues that the Old Testament knows little of life after death because God wished to teach people to value relationship with him for its own sake, rather as a means to life after death. C. S. Lewis Reflections on the Psalms (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958; London: Collins Fontana 1961), 38-40.

taken to the nations, nor of any obligation to do so, nor of any expectation that nations will respond in significant numbers. Rather, Israel's door is understood to be open to any enquiring outsider who has grasped something of who God is and who wishes to participate in the life of God's people--isolated individuals such as Jethro, Rahab and Ruth.[20] For the most part, the furthest the prophets foresee is that the number of such enquirers will dramatically increase. Micah is typical:

> Many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.[21]

Here, the nations have understood something of who Israel's God is: that the worship of this God involves a process of learning ("that he may teach") and a particular way of life ("may walk in his paths").

Some of the psalms, however, suggest a more proactive form of faith-sharing when they announce, for instance, that "I will extol you, O LORD, among the nations" or "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations."[22] At the same time, H.H.Rowley comments that:

> here they are not missionaries, seeking to win the nations to the faith of Jehovah, but rather men [*sic*] who are so moved with gratitude to God for all His goodness to them that they can think of no worthier way of acknowledging His goodness than to tell all men about it. . . . But this was born of their sense of what they owed to God, rather than of any compassion for the Gentiles.[23]

Perhaps in the same way it was necessary to establish the importance of living a godly life before introducing the obligation to speak to others about God.

[20] Exodus 18:8-12, Joshua 2:8-11, Ruth 1:16-17

[21] Micah 4:2, cf. Zechariah 8:22-23, Isaac 2:2-4

[22] Psalm 18:49, 57:9.

[23] H. H. Rowley, The Missionary Message of the Old Testament (London: The Carey Press, [1945]), 36.

In the New Testament, however, "[t]hese words . . . are taken with full seriousness . . . as a prophecy which had to be fulfilled."[24] They are understood, in other words, to indicate the direction in which the witness of God's people was to grow to full expression. Deutero-Isaiah also hints at a more proactive role for God's people, with his portrayal of Israel, the Servant of Yahweh, as "my witnesses"[25] and the promise that "I will give you as a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."[26] Perhaps the closest the Old Testament comes to the New Testament understanding of evangelism, however, is in the exclamation of Isaiah 52:

> How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces [*euaggelizomai*] peace, who brings good news [*euaggelizomai*], who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'![27]

Here is the idea of a God-appointed messenger (an "evangelist") who travels to tell people the good news of what God has done. Even so, in the context, the messenger is coming over the mountains to bring the news *to* Jerusalem, not taking it *from* Jerusalem to the nations.

By the end of the Old Testament period, therefore, according to H. H. Rowley:

> There is nothing actively missionary yet, but there is a sense of the infinite worth of the treasure entrusted to Israel in her faith, and the profound conviction that her God embraces all men in His love, and wills that they shall share her treasure.[28]

---

[24] Derek Kidner Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 207.

[25] Isaiah 43:10, 12

[26] Isaiah 49:6

[27] Isaiah 52:7.

[28] Rowley, 32.

The New Testament moves beyond this understanding of Israel's responsibilities to the nations. At the same time, as in so much else, it builds on the Old Testament foundations rather than repudiating them. In particular, the message of Moses and the prophets--that the quality of community life among God's people ("wise . . . discerning . . . just") must itself be attractive to outsiders--is incorporated into the church's understanding of its mission. And while New Testament evangelism may know more of God's goodness than the psalmist who wants to sing God's praises in the hearing of the nations, it will never improve on the attitude of joyfully testifying to what God has done.

In approaching the New Testament data on evangelism, I want first to describe the context of evangelism by looking at Jesus' ministry as a whole, and in particular considering the recurring motif in the New Testament of Christian faith as school. This model has been explored by Robert Brow, in his 1980 book called Go Make Learners.[29]

The School of Jesus

Brow points out that the most common self-chosen term for Christians in the New Testament is "disciple",[30] that Jesus accepted the term rabbi, inviting people to "learn from me"[31], and that therefore it is appropriate to think

---

[29] Robert Brow, "Go, Make Learners": A New Model for Discipleship in the Church (Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1980), chapter 2.

[30] The term "Christian" was coined by outsiders. Luke's phrasing is significant: "It was in Antioch that the *disciples* were first called Christians." Acts 11:26 (my italics)

[31] Matthew 11:28-30

of the Christian movement as a school--the school of Jesus, in which people can be with Jesus, and learn the ways of God's kingdom as taught and embodied by Jesus himself. T. W. Manson agrees:

> Discipleship, as Jesus conceived it, was . . . a practical task to which men [*sic*] were called to give themselves and all their energies. Their work was not study but practice. Fishermen were to become fishers of men, peasants were to be labourers in God's vineyard or God's harvest field. And Jesus was their Master, not so much as a teacher of right doctrine, but rather as the master-craftsman they were to follow and imitate.[32]

This was a practical school, on the model of other rabbinical schools, where a "rabbi taught by what he did as well as by what he said"[33], and where the students learned by watching and imitating the master. In the terms of this model, there is no need to seek for a definitive spiritual crisis or turning point: what is important is that the disciples were just that--disciples, learners from Jesus.[34] What Jesus looked for was their allegiance to him and the learning that he offered. Baptism, Brow suggests, was the mark of entering or enrolling in the school.[35] The students' enthusiasm for learning might wax and wane. Sometimes they did well in their assignments,[36] and at other times they failed.[37] Some even left the school when the lessons seemed too hard.[38] Then, when Jesus' time on earth came to an end, he commissioned his disciples to "make

---

[32] T .W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 239-240, in Michael Griffiths, The Example of Jesus (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 48.

[33] Griffiths, 22-23.

[34] David Kelsey calls this the "Athens" mode of learning: "theological education is a movement from source to personal appropriation of the source, from revealed wisdom to the appropriation of revealed wisdom, in a way that is identity forming and personally transforming." David Kelsey, Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 19.

[35] Brow, 15.

[36] e.g. Luke 10:17

[37] e.g. Luke 9:38-40

[38] John 6:60-66

disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you"[39] In other words, they were to continue the process initiated by Jesus, and to start their own schools in which to teach the ways of the kingdom ("all I have commanded you") to more and more people.

Evangelism, according to this model, is not so much urging people to be "saved" as telling them the good news that God has come in the person of Jesus to be our teacher and that God's kingdom school is accepting new students, and encouraging them to register by baptism. This means that people will join the school with differing degrees of enthusiasm, differing levels of knowledge, and differing prospects of "success." Brow explicitly connects this procedure with the experience of the twelve:

> What is striking about the early churches described in the book of Acts is that they seemed to take in anybody! Since all baptisms were immediate, there was obviously no time to investigate the new disciples, no probationary period to weed out the good from the bad. Disciples were baptized first, *then* taught. This was certainly the case with Jesus' first twelve disciples.[40]

He observes the same principle at work on the Day of Pentecost:

> Baptism was immediate and what counted was the instruction given by the Holy Spirit to the learners after their enrollment.[41]

This understanding of evangelism seems very appropriate in a post-Christian Western culture where the preferred approach to anything new is to sample it cautiously, not least in the field of religion, where education is considered of high value, and where most Christians say they had to hear the Gospel ten or

---

[39] Matthew 28:18-20

[40] Brow, 33-34.

[41] Ibid., 36.

more times before they believed it.[42] This approach to evangelism also engages the postmodern observation that truth is normally discovered in community rather than by isolated individuals--or, to use different language, that people learn best in community with other learners.[43]

Jesus the Primal Missionary[44]

There are two ways in which John's Gospel sheds light on the subject of evangelism. One is John's distinctive approach to it, which is indicated by the fact that he never uses the terms *euaggel* or *euaggelizomai.*[45] The other is what John seems to imply about the functioning of the school of Jesus in relation to evangelism.

The absence of the usual terms for evangelism in John's Gospel should not be taken to mean that he is uninterested in evangelism. When John's Gospel omits a term which is common in the Synoptics, it is generally because he has "translated" it into a different culture or transmuted it into a different

---

[42] Arnell Motz with Donald Posterski, "Who Responds to the Gospel and Why", in Reclaiming a Nation: The Challenge of Re-evangelizing Canada by the Year 2000 (Richmond BC: The Church Leadership Library, 1990), 139.

[43] The postmodern view of learning truth in community will be considered further in chapter 4.

[44] This phrase is from Martin Hengel, "The Origins of the Christian Mission," in Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity (London: SCM Press, 1983), 63, quoted by Bosch in Phillips and Coote, 182.

[45] G. Friedrich wonders whether this is "perhaps because the primary concept in John is that of fulfillment." "Euangelizomai" in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 268. I believe the text gives us clues which lead in a different direction.

theology.[46] This seems to be the case here. Rather than ignoring evangelism, John has painted a different, broader picture of evangelism. In fact, I will show that John's picture of evangelism provides continuity with the Old Testament material, as well as a rich context in which to consider other aspects of evangelism in the New Testament. In contemporary terms, what John does is to set evangelism in the context of the whole Christian mission.

The clue to John's theology of mission and evangelism is his use of the verb *pempo*, to send, which, in its various forms, he uses as often as the other three Gospels combined.[47] Two-thirds of these usages are Jesus' repeated statements "the Father sent the Son." In fact, in this Gospel, Jesus' preferred way of referring to the Father is as "the Father who sent me."[48] Clearly, Jesus' awareness of his status as a missionary, sent by the Father, is acute. When he finally commissions his followers to take over the mission (20:21), it is as if he takes the place of the Father as the sending agent ("as the Father sent . . . so I send"). The disciples are now to live with that same strong consciousness that they have been sent, that their Lord is "the Lord who sent" them.

Jesus also has a clear sense of why he has been sent. In principle, he is "to do . . . the will of him who sent me" (6:38). Indeed, doing the Father's will is food and drink to him (4:34). When one asks what exactly the Father's will entails, part of the answer involves a combination of works and words. Works of compassion are a significant part of the Father's will. When he is about to heal

---

[46] Thus, for example, John generally substitutes "eternal life" for the Synoptics' "kingdom of God."

[47] In round numbers: Mark uses the word 10 times, Matthew 20, Luke 30, and John 60.

[48] e.g. John 4:34, 5:23, 5:24, 5:30, 5:37, 6:38, 6:39, etc.

the man born blind, for instance, Jesus explains that "we must work the works of him who sent me" (9:4), implying that healing is precisely the sort of work that is the Father's will. There is an element of imitation in this kind of work: in healing the man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus comments that "the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise" (5:19). God does not simply will others to do these good works; God is actively engaged in them already. God's people are simply called to repeat the pattern. This principle is later applied to Jesus' sending of the disciples. After he washes their feet, he explains:

> If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (13:14-15)

Jesus' doing of the Father's will involves not only works, however, but also words:

> I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. . . . What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me." (12:49-50)

Jesus understands his teaching and preaching as passing on the Father's message to the world. Here it will authenticate itself to all those who are similarly seeking to do the will of God: "Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching [I give] is from God or whether I am speaking on my own." (7:17) Just as in the Old Testament, observers would be intrigued and attracted by the life of God they saw in God's people, so here, those who are seeking for God will be drawn to the teaching (and, by implication, the living) of God as they see it in Jesus.

The climax of John's theme of sending comes in 20:21, after the resurrection, where Jesus says to the frightened disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." John Stott states that, in these words of Jesus, "deliberately and precisely he made his mission the *model* of ours."[49] David Bosch too says, bluntly, "his disciples . . . have to emulate him."[50] Here is where the implications of being a student in the school of Jesus become clear. Jesus' purpose in teaching is not "to tell people something new, to impart information they did not previously possess"[51] but rather to encourage people to live a life in imitation of his. Here too is continuity with the thrust of the Old Testament material considered above. There, God's people were required to observe the Torah, in which God's character and will were made known; now they are challenged to imitate Jesus, in whom God's character and will are made known through a different medium. His teaching and life have "taken the place . . . of conformity to the Jewish Torah. Jesus Himself--in word and deed or fact is a New Torah."[52]

What it means for the disciples to be sent as Jesus was sent--to imitate Jesus--is clarified by John's repeated use of the word "send." Just as he did the Father's works of compassion, and spoke the Father's message to those who

---

[49] John R. W. Stott Christian Mission in the Modern World (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 23.

[50] Bosch in Phillips and Coote, 189.

[51] This is how N. T. Wright caricatures one view of Jesus as the teacher. N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 101.

[52] W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology (London: SPCK, 1948; rev.ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 148. Davies says this primarily of Paul, but the same may be said of any disciple. If obeying the law made one like God ("Be holy as I am holy"), following Jesus who is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) is also the route for restoring humankind to the image of God.

would hear, so the disciples are to act and speak, representing now the Father and the Son whom the Father had sent. Just as the mission of Jesus was a natural blend of deeds and words, "the words interpreting the deeds and the deeds embodying the words,"[53] so the disciples' mission was to embody both.

Passing on the torch in this way has a further implication, however. Jesus claimed that, because he acted and spoke authentically on behalf of the Father, any response to him (either positive or negative) was in fact a response to the Father: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me" (12:44). This principle too he applies to the disciples: "whoever receives me whom I send receives me" (13:15).[54] Jesus' expectation is that the disciples will so incarnate his life and teaching, just as he incarnated the Father's life and teaching, that a response to them will be the equivalent of a direct response to him. To reject God's image, whether fully revealed in Jesus or partially revealed in those who seek to imitate Jesus, is to reject God.

In the Old Testament view, outsiders would be drawn to join in the life of God's people to the extent that the nation was obedient to God and manifested the character of God. Jesus fulfilled that dream in his own person, obeying God fully and living out the character of God, and so becoming a magnet for those who were seeking the kingdom. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright comments on Jesus' sense of continuity with the Old Testament:

> Jesus' aim [was] the restoration, in some sense, of Israel, beginning with the highly symbolic call of twelve disciples . . . [Jesus'] implicit, and sometimes explicit, claim [was] that in and through his own work Israel's

---

[53] Stott, 26.

[54] "Receiving" Jesus and "believing in" Jesus are equivalents in John's Gospel, e.g. 1:12.

> god [*sic*] was doing a new thing, or rather *the* new thing, that for which Israel had longed.[55]

Jesus embodied in his own person the ideal community Moses described, modeling what it means to live under God's rule. In calling and commissioning his followers, Jesus intended his followers to take on this same role, becoming "the new Israel." As Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh express it:

> The original disciples were, in effect, the remnant of elect Israel, called by the Messiah to complete Israel's vocation to the nations which had never been fulfilled.[56]

Thus they were to "take their strategic clues from their Messiah leader"[57] and to live out the life of God, both in their community and in their dealings with the world.

Yet the picture of the new community is not merely one of continuity with the Old Testament. What is added to the Old Testament picture is two-fold. One is that now words are explicitly said to be part of expressing the image of God. It is no longer merely a matter of the Gentiles overhearing Israel's praise. Deliberately passing on the words of God has clearly become part of the mission. Secondly, the role of the Holy Spirit is foregrounded. Not surprisingly, little is said in the Old Testament about the role of the Spirit of God in relation to "the nations",[58] but in the Gospel of John, where mission is so central, the importance of the Spirit is stressed by Jesus even as he hands over responsibility for the mission to his followers. He sees the gift of the Spirit as his own gift ("If I go, I will send him to you," 16:7) and as the Father's gift ("I will

---

[55] Wright, 104, 380.

[56] Middleton and Walsh, 139.

[57] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission Strategies," in Phillips and Coote, 222.

[58] The exception is the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah, e.g. Isaiah 42:1, 61:1, which the New Testament understands to be fulfilled in Jesus, e.g. Luke 4:18-19.

ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate," 14:15). Just as the Spirit empowered Jesus' ministry (John 1:32), so the Spirit will now empower the disciples to follow in his footsteps by life and word.

The emphasis of John's missiology on following Jesus' model in life and words is a helpful corrective in thinking about evangelism. Discussions of evangelism which begin with a consideration of verbal proclamation sooner or later have to deal with questions of how evangelistic words correlate with life, relationships, and community. For example, the controversy in the 1960s and 1970s over the best way to understand the relationship of evangelism and social action would not have arisen had the two things not become separated in the first place.[59] Once words are considered in isolation from their life-context, it is difficult to put them back. John's approach to evangelism--to put the speaking of God's words firmly in the context of the whole *missio dei*--obviates that danger. EC'95 respondents pick up on this emphasis by including in their definitions of evangelism such things as "living out our lives as Christians"; "evangelism is part of living . . . God's redemptive purposes"; and "evangelism is most of my life."

Jesus came, then, to offer himself as a teacher to those who would be his disciples, not just as "a teacher of subversive wisdom," but as:

---

[59] This is documented in David O. Moberg, The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, revised edition, 1977), e.g. chapter 2, "The Great Reversal." The words/actions distinction may also be regarded as a fruit of the Enlightenment and modernity: see my chapter 4.

> a subset of 'Jesus the prophet'; 'Jesus the teacher of wisdom' . . . challenged his contemporaries to a new way of being Israel, and summoned them to follow him in this way.[60]

Part of John's contribution is to fill out the picture of what it means to be Israel in "a new way" with his description of the ministry--the mission--of Jesus, which Jesus then explicitly turns into a model for the disciples to follow. Two further New Testament themes are important to round out this understanding of the place and nature of evangelism: process and community.

Evangelism as Process

When Jesus spoke about the kingdom, one group of metaphors he seems to have favoured concerns agriculture: in fact, some half-dozen parables use themes of sowing, growth, fertilization, and fruit-bearing or barrenness to describe the work of the kingdom.[61] Such images were not unfamiliar to Jesus' hearers.[62] Craig Blomberg comments that:

> it is common to speak of [these] parables . . . as "parables of growth." Numerous interpreters have assumed that a major emphasis of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom . . . was to describe the steady, sometimes

---

[60] Wright 311, 314. Wright deliberately distinguishes his picture of Jesus the teacher from that of the Jesus Seminar.

[61] Matthew 13 (sower, seed and soils; weeds in the field; mustard seed), 24:32-35 (leaves on the figtree), Mark 4:26-29 (growing seed), Luke 13:6-9 (the barren figtree). In three others, the vineyard is the context in which the action of the parable takes place: Matthew 20:1-16 (labourers in the vineyard), 21:28-32 (two sons and work in the vineyard), 21:33-44 (tenants of the vineyard).

[62] "The use of seeds and plant growth to refer to righteous behavior had ample Old Testament precedent. . . . The harvest was a standard metaphor for judgment. . . . The imagery of God as sower and the people of the world as various kinds of soil was standard in Jewish circles." Craig L. Blomberg Interpreting the Parables (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 197-198, 226.

hidden, yet always relentless growth of the kingdom from its unpromising origins to its triumphant culmination.[63]

Jesus also uses agricultural metaphors which are less than actual parables. In one context, he tells his disciples that the "harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few."[64] At the city of Sychar in Samaria, where "the fields are ripe for harvesting," he expands the metaphor to speak of the complementary roles of sower and reaper (he quotes what appears to be a proverb: "one sows and another reaps").[65] It is intriguing, though ultimately fruitless, to speculate who Jesus might have considered the "sower" in this context. We learn from the Book of Acts that disciples of John the Baptist had been making converts as far away as Ephesus,[66] so it is within the bounds of possibility that they had also been to Sychar, following their master's example and proclaiming "Prepare the way of the Lord!"[67] Presumably Jesus means by his analogy that there would have been no harvest for him to reap had not someone else done the earlier work of sowing. The Apostle Paul expands on this metaphor by adding the role of the one who waters the seed: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."[68] The work of evangelism, it seems, requires teamwork--some to sow

---

[63] Ibid., 300. Blomberg himself rejects such a characterization since the emphasis in the majority of these parables is on sowing and harvest, rather than on growth. While he may be right that growth is not a major interest of Jesus in these parables, nevertheless sowing is wasted and harvest never comes unless there is growth, so the image, though not foregrounded, seems to be implicit in Jesus' choice of metaphor.

[64] Matthew 9:37

[65] John 4:35-38

[66] Acts 19:1-7

[67] Mark 1:3

[68] 1 Corinthians 3:6-9. A certain Dr. Bruce, a pioneer missionary in nineteenth century Iran, added further to the image: "I am not reaping the harvest; I scarcely claim to be sowing the seed; I am hardly ploughing the soil; but I am gathering out the stones. That too is missionary work, let it be supported by loving sympathy and fervent prayer." Quoted in Max Warren, I Believe in the Great Commission (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 178.

God's word,[69] others to nurture it and yet others to reap the harvest--over a period of time. Jesus and Paul thus seem to agree that the work of the kingdom is a process similar to that of a farmer growing a crop. The process may take one by surprise[70] or take years to come to maturity.[71] The results may be overwhelmingly bountiful or disappointingly few.[72] It is not always clear that there even will be a harvest.[73] And the process is certainly mysterious.[74] Since evangelism is a part of the work of the kingdom, one aspect of sowing the seed of God's word, evangelism too may be understood as a process.

This being so, it is unfortunate that evangelism has traditionally been understood in terms not of process but of crisis--of preaching and instantaneous (probably dramatic) response. Talk of "decisions for Christ" and stories of dramatic conversions heighten the expectation of a sudden response. It may be that the prominence given to the conversion of the apostle Paul in the Book of Acts—after all, the story is told three times[75]--and his pivotal position in the subsequent history of the church have encouraged this understanding.[76]

---

[69] Blomberg suggests that while God is the primary sower, "derivative applications to Jesus or his disciples as sowers of the word (cf. Lk 8:11) are entirely appropriate." Blomberg, 227.

[70] John 4:35

[71] Luke 13:6-9

[72] Mark 4:8, 4:5-7. "Recent research suggests that a yield four or at most five times the amount of seed used would be normal." Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 102.

[73] Matthew 13:24-29

[74] Mark 4:26-28

[75] Acts 9:1-19, 22:6-16, 26:12-18

[76] John Stott, while acknowledging that some of the circumstances of Paul's conversion were unique and unrepeatable, nevertheless believes that "other features of Paul's conversion and commissioning are applicable to us today. For we too can (and must) experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, surrender to him in penitence and faith, and receive his summons to

However, in Canada today, the majority of people are not coming to Christian faith suddenly or dramatically. A survey already cited asked Christians how often they had heard the Gospel before they decided to respond. Only 6% said "once," that is, that their conversion was immediate; half said ten times or more.[77] The biblical model of a process over a period of time would seem to more helpful for our culture than the crisis-oriented model of Paul.[78]

The first disciples of Jesus provide a paradigm for considering evangelism as a process. Apart from anything else, there is no clear turning-point "decision" in their recorded experience. They experience different turning points, certainly, but none is as decisive as Paul's on the road to Damascus. Among the many contenders for the "moment of decision" for the disciples, one may include their initial contact with Jesus'[79] Jesus' formal call to them to be his disciples,[80] Peter's declaration of Jesus' Messiahship'[81] their acceptance of the truth of the resurrection,[82] or the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.[83] Each one of these seems to be a distinct spiritual turning point, but the Gospel

---

service." John R. W. Stott The Spirit, the Church and the World: the Message of Acts (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 166. In spite of Stott's disclaimers, the language of "encounter," "surrender" and "receive" still inevitably speak of a sudden experience rather than a process.

[77] Motz and Posterski, 145.

[78] Don Posterski, in a sermon, has characterized this contrast as Damascus road conversion versus Emmaus road conversion.

[79] John 1:35-40.

[80] Mark 1:16-20

[81] Matthew 16:13-17. After all, the confession that "Jesus is Lord" was later considered a test of true faith (1 Cor. 12:3).

[82] John 20:20. After all, Paul says a condition of salvation is to "believe in your heart that God raised [Jesus] from the dead." (Romans 10:9)

[83] Acts 2:1-4. After all, Paul warns that "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." (Romans 8:9)

writers do not seem to indicate that any one of them counts as what we would call "becoming a Christian."

The first disciples, in other words, are a classic example of evangelism as process. They respond to Jesus' evangelistic invitation, "Follow me," by which they become students in the school of Jesus, and then, at the end of their three years' apprenticeship, they are commissioned to continue the work they have seen him do.[84] This does not mean that he ceases to be their teacher: they continue under his tutelage, which is now mediated to them by the Holy Spirit, who will "teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you."[85] So the learning process continues.

What does this process-oriented model of Jesus' school imply for the practice of evangelistic preaching? Firstly, it implies a close relationship between evangelism and teaching. On three occasions Matthew's Gospel links *didaskein* (to teach) and *keryssein* (to preach/proclaim) in describing Jesus' preaching, as though they are virtually interchangeable.[86] For example,

---

[84] It is intriguing that Donald A. Schon, speaking of mentoring, uses the phrase "Follow me!" to describe a kind of mentoring "when a coach wants to communicate a way of working, or a conception of performance, that goes beyond anything a student presently knows how to describe." This is a good summary of what Jesus' disciples experienced when they followed him. Schon, 214-216.

[85] John 14:26

[86] In the 1930s, C. H. Dodd attempted "to show that the early church made a definite distinction between preaching and teaching." (Abraham 43) Abraham comments that "[c]ritics now widely acknowledge that Dodd's view is an artificial division of labor that is not borne out by the evidence." (Abraham 51)

> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and sickness among the people.[87]

In Mark's gospel, Mark uses the term *euaggelion* only in his summary of Jesus' ministry: "Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming [*kerysso*] the good news [*euaggelion*] of God."[88] This Gospel describes Jesus as teaching [*didasko*] fourteen times (compared with *kerysso* three times), and the implication seems to be that Jesus' teaching unpacks the meaning of the good news. In other words, his teaching is evangelistic, and his evangelism is didactic.[89] In the Book of Acts, the pattern continues: on four occasions, Luke links teaching with evangelistic preaching, in contexts such as: "They did not cease to teach [*didasko*] and preach [*euaggelizomai*] Jesus as the Messiah."[90]

Evangelistic preaching has the image of being "preaching for a decision": its purpose is to call unchurched hearers to repentance and belief. Teaching, conversely, is regarded as being for those who have already made a Christian commitment, and is to educate them in all the breadth and depth of the faith. Yet if evangelistic preaching is also teaching, then there will be far more to the content than simply inviting a decision. This is particularly important in a culture where the faith is no longer known, and where the necessity for, or nature of, a "decision" will not be immediately obvious to the first-time listener. Evangelistic preaching will convey much more content about

---

[87] Matthew 4:23, cf. 9:35, 11:1. In the first two of these, Luke adds "healing" to "preaching and teaching." The Synoptics know the importance of works and words together as much as John.

[88] Mark 1:14

[89] Luke's gospel uses the verbs *didasko* fifteen times, *euaggelizomai* three times, and *kerysso* seven times, but in this Gospel there do not seem to be significant links between *didasko* and the others.

[90] Acts 4:2, cf.5:42, 15:35, 28:31

the Christian faith--about Jesus, about the kingdom, about the Bible--than has traditionally been necessary in Western culture.

The second implication of evangelism as process, and Christian faith as a school, is that there will not necessarily be a hard and fast distinction between teaching which is for believers and teaching which is for "outsiders". Every evangelist needs also to be a teacher. After all, both gifts encourage the same process: receiving the word of God and responding to it. Every evangelistic preacher knows that believers will be encouraged by an evangelistic talk; every teacher knows that a sermon for Christians can have an unexpectedly evangelistic effect. In one sense the content is the same: the Gospel. Both "insiders" to the faith and "outsiders" need the Gospel, though it may be explained differently.[91] As a corollary, it appears that in the New Testament the gifts of teacher and evangelist, though mentioned separately,[92] are difficult to distinguish in practice. Timothy, in particular, seems to have exercised a ministry both as a teacher[93] and as an evangelist'[94] since Paul exhorts him to pay attention to both. Paul himself clearly engaged in both ministries. His parting speech to the Ephesian elders, for instance, reminds them of his ministry to them as evangelist and also as pastor and teacher.[95] When we

---

[91] Paul actually suggests in Romans 1:15 that he is eager "to proclaim the gospel [*euaggelizomai*] to you also who are in Rome," though presumably he is writing to people who are already Christians. David Watson comments on this verse, "Even the most mature in faith need to have the gospel, with all its simplicity yet profundity, preached to them." David C. K. Watson, I Believe in Evangelism (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 31.

[92] e.g. in Ephesians 4:11

[93] "These are the things you must . . . teach. . . . Give attention . . . to teaching. . . . Pay close attention to . . . your teaching." 1 Timothy 4:11-16.

[94] "Proclaim [*keryxon*] the message . . . Do the work of an evangelist." 2 Timothy 4:2, 5.

[95] Acts 20:18-36

consider that both evangelism and teaching are gifts for communicating the faith, however, this is hardly surprising. Whether one is "teaching" or "evangelizing" may not depend so much on the gift of the speaker as on the pedagogical need of the audience: is this the first time they are hearing the message, or are they seasoned believers? Or, to use the school image: is this a grade school class or a university graduate class?

The third implication of the school/process paradigm is that evangelism will take time. Seeds take time to grow to harvest. The disciples lived close to Jesus for three years, and were hardly spiritually mature even then. Paul understood this principle, because whenever possible, he stayed and taught/evangelized for a substantial period of time. For instance, he and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for a year[96] In Corinth he stayed eighteen months' "teaching the word of God,"[97] and in Ephesus two years, "arguing daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus."[98] His reason for staying was partly strategic--the longer he stayed, the more people heard the message[99]--but it was also pedagogical--his goal was, as he stated on leaving Ephesus for the last time, to declare to them "the whole purpose of God."[100] It is impossible to communicate the Gospel in all its fullness in one address, and the more it is explained, the more persuasive it becomes.

---

[96] Acts 11:26

[97] Acts 18:1-18

[98] Acts 19:8 Some manuscripts add "from eleven o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon."

[99] "So that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord." 19:10

[100] Acts 20:27

The final factor to be considered in the New Testament's picture of evangelism is that of community, which has so far been implicit, particularly in the images of school and mission, but which is worth consideration in its own right.

Evangelism and community

The image of the school implies community. Jesus' school does not operate by correspondence course with isolated individuals: it assumes corporate learning. This theme resonates with the emphasis of the Old Testament material above, where the life of a community learning to obey God will be attractive to outsiders.[101]

"The evangelist," on the other hand, is generally thought of as one person, a preacher, more or less loosely attached to a particular church, but this image is only shallowly rooted in either Scripture or theology. While Jesus is proclaiming the kingdom, for instance, he lives and travels with a group of disciples, both men and women, who learn from him, support him financially, and assist him in his ministry.[102] While he speaks about the nature of God's kingdom, he and his followers seek to live out the principles he is teaching. In fact, he regards them as his surrogate family, because they "hear the word of

---

[101] The idea of a school of disciples goes back as far as the prophetic schools of the Old Testament, e.g. 2 Kings 2, Isaiah 8:16-18.

[102] Luke 6:12-16 lists the twelve; Luke 8:1-3 names women who traveled with them and supported them "out of their resources"; Luke 9 describes an example of their participation in Jesus' work.

God and do it."[103] Jesus makes it clear that his disciples should live by the norms of the kingdom, not by the norms of the world.[104] It is probably not coincidence that he includes among the twelve two social and political opposites--Levi, a collaborator with the Roman army of occupation, and Simon the Zealot, perhaps a guerrilla fighter against the Romans--and expects that they will break bread together at his table. The Pharisees question why the disciples behave differently from other religious people, and the answer is essentially that Jesus' followers are a distinct community with a different way of understanding the religious life.[105] N.T.Wright considers that Jesus' immediate goal as he traveled and ministered was:

> to establish . . . what we might call cells of followers, mostly continuing to live in their towns and villages, who by their adoption of his praxis, his way of being Israel, would be distinctive within their local communities.[106]

If this is so, it would seem appropriate that Jesus and his followers model the kind of kingdom community he is commending. Thus Jesus the evangelist lives in a community of the kind about which he is preaching.

In the early part of the Book of Acts, this motif of speaking from within a community continues. The classic example is Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit comes upon the gathered community, observers question and mock, and "Peter, standing with the eleven," preaches to explain to the crowd what it is they are seeing and hearing. The crowd's reaction is to repent,

---

[103] Luke 8:19-21. "The Christian group acting as a surrogate family is for Luke the locus of the good news. It transcends the normal categories of birth, class, race, gender, education, wealth and power--hence is inclusive in a startling new way." Malina and Rohrbaugh, 335-336.

[104] Mark 10:35-45 "[A]mong the Gentiles . . . their rulers lord it over them . . .But it is not so among you."

[105] Mark 2:19 "Why do . . . your disciples not fast?" cf. Mark 7:1-23 "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders?"

[106] Wright, 276.

and three thousand join the community by baptism.[107] Luke then records a summary description of the life of the community--miracles, having goods in common, having table-fellowship across previous lines of division, prayer and worship, and the teaching of the apostles. The life of the community clearly gives credibility and attractiveness to the apostles' preaching, and the preaching in turn strengthens and multiplies the community. Luke mentions also that the community has "the goodwill of all the people"--a phrase which appears to fulfill Moses' expectation that a community living in God's way will be attractive to outsiders.[108] William Abraham comments that:

> the Gospel spread and the church grew because the sovereign hand of God was in the midst of the community that found itself surrounded by people who were puzzled and intrigued by what they saw happening.[109]

The same emphasis on evangelistic speaking out of the heart of the community occurs in Luke's second summary description:[110] in one verse he describes the sharing of goods in the community, in the next he mentions the apostles' evangelistic preaching, and in the next he says "there was not a needy person among them." The life of the community and the preaching of the evangelists thus make a seamless web. Abraham concludes:

> For the early Christians, it would have been unthinkable to have evangelism without community and community without evangelism.[111]

---

[107] Acts 2

[108] Deuteronomy 4:6-8. In Acts 3:22, Peter explicitly sees Jesus as fulfilling the prophecy of Moses concerning a prophet like himself. Richard Longnecker argues that it is important for Peter to establish this continuity with Israel so that the church may be considered "God's righteous remnant in the inauguration of the final eschatological days." Richard N. Longnecker, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Acts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995), 94.

[109] Abraham, 37.

[110] Acts 4:32-34

[111] Abraham, 57.

As the gospel moves out in ever widening circles from Jerusalem, Luke's focus appears to be more on individual preachers than on the community. Stephen testifies alone before the Jewish council; Philip goes alone to Samaria and to the Gaza road; Paul is left alone at Athens.[112] Yet this is more appearance than substance. In all of these cases, the solitariness is merely circumstantial. Paul in particular, is commissioned for his missionary journeys by a prayerful Christian community at Antioch through which the Holy Spirit gives guidance.[113] He normally travels in a group, as did Jesus, varying in size from one or two (Barnabas, then Barnabas and John Mark, then Silas and Timothy) to eight.[114] Moreover, if there is a Christian community when he arrives in a city, he quickly becomes a part of it (as he does by staying with Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth[115]). If not, in those cities where he is able to stay as long as he chooses, a Christian community grows up around him as he preaches. These communities undoubtedly perform similar functions in relation to his preaching as the Jerusalem community did in relation to Peter's: validating the message, supporting the messenger, and drawing outsiders in. Thus the Christian community is always present in Acts, though when Luke's focus is one central individual it tends to fade into the background.

William Abraham has argued strongly for the importance of community in evangelism. He believes that although the church community should be the natural locus of evangelism: "[s]ince the middle of the nineteenth century evangelism has, for the most part, been cut loose from Christian

---

[112] Acts 7:2-52, 8:26-40, 17:16-31.

[113] Acts 13:1-3

[114] Acts 20:4-6 Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, and (presumably) Luke.

[115] Acts 18:1-3

communities."[116] Certainly in the eighteenth century, an evangelist like John Wesley understood the importance of community for evangelism. Wesley scholars agree that, as J. Glenn Gould puts it:

> [John Wesley] wisely discerned that the beginnings of faith in a man's heart could be incubated into saving faith more effectively in the warm Christian atmosphere of the [Methodist] society than in the chill of the world.[117]

One writer goes so far as to say that it was in the Methodist class meeting, and not as a result of Wesley's preaching directly, that "the greatest majority of conversions occurred."[118] The shift away from community appears most starkly in the time of Charles Finney and his introduction of "New Measures" into mass evangelism. It was Finney who introduced strong elements of modernism into evangelism, stressing the "personal decision" of the individual, holding a high view of human freedom (and a correspondingly weak doctrine of sin), and offering instantaneous assurance of salvation to converts, regardless of their incorporation into the church. Each of these strategies works against a high view of community: the emphasis of such a Gospel is simply to connect a free, autonomous, rational individual with God. Incorporation into the church, to be part of God's faithful community throughout time, is simply not a part of the story.[119]

Abraham offers his own definition of evangelism as:

---

[116] Abraham, 57.

[117] J. Glenn Gould, Healing the Hurt of Man: A Study in John Wesley's "Cure of Souls" (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press 1971), 65.

[118] William B. Lewis, "The Conduct and Nature of the Methodist Class Meeting and the Values Inherent in Personal Groups Today (Nashville: Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), 25. Both this and the previous source are quoted with approval in Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1980), 56.

[119] Finney will be considered at more length in chapter 4.

> that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.[120]

He deliberately uses the term "initiate" rather than "convert," since initiation conveys the sense of being ushered from one community into another, in the same way that one might be initiated into a craft guild or a secret society. Initiation is not a single step but a series of steps, each with attendant privileges and responsibilities, and with appropriate learning at each stage. It is furthermore a "set of activities," rather than a single one, a "polymorphous activity . . . more like farming or education than like raising one's arm or blowing a kiss."[121] In this set of evangelistic and initiatory activities:

> we need to find room for conversion, baptism, and a commitment to love God and neighbor . . . [w]e also need to find room for receiving the Christian creed, for owning the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and for embracing the disciplines of eucharist, prayer and fasting.[122]

What is salutary in Abraham's proposals is the emphasis on a return to a more holistic kind of evangelism. Evangelism, he makes clear, is not simply preaching and inviting a response, and then encouraging converts to join a church as one secondary form of following up a Christian commitment[123]. Evangelism, rather, is an expression of the church's life, and by its very nature it draws people into the fellowship of the church. Such evangelism is not complete until those who respond are fully involved in the life and work of God's kingdom in every dimension.

---

[120] Abraham, 95.

[121] Ibid., 104.

[122] Ibid., 118.

[123] One popular evangelistic booklet makes joining a church seventh in its list of instructions to new believers. Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws? (Arrowhead Springs: Campus Crusade for Christ, n.d.), 14-15.

While Abraham's general direction is a healthy and biblical one, his position does have drawbacks. One danger, for example, is that the word "evangelism" quickly loses its usefulness. If everything the church does, from small groups to the eucharist, from exorcism to acts of mercy, counts as evangelism, then in effect nothing is evangelism. "The work of the church" and "evangelism" become synonymous.[124] The way the New Testament uses the word, however, is distinct. *Euaggelizomai*, in whatever context it occurs, always means "to announce good news." In general, the good news is announced to those outside the community, and includes or implies an invitation to them to join the community.[125] A more helpful way to express Abraham's concern for holistic evangelism is that this act of announcing good news never occurs in isolation in the New Testament. David Watson, for instance, observes:

> it is worth noting carefully that the word is frequently used in a rich context. . . . [W]e cannot take the verb "to evangelize" out of its active and varied context without destroying a vital part of its meaning.[126]

Whenever Jesus preaches the good news of the kingdom, he also welcomes sinners, attends parties, gives sight to the blind, exorcises the possessed, forgives sins, feeds the hungry, and raises the dead. In the terminology of John's Gospel, Jesus speaks the words of God and does the works of God. The message is a message of God's redeeming activity: if it is true, it is accompanied by that redeeming activity. As Gerhard Friedrich puts it, "The message carries

---

[124] Abraham himself anticipates this objection, but in my estimation does not adequately rebut it. Ibid., 44. A parallel problem is noted by Stephen Neill: "If everything is mission, then nothing is mission." Cited by George R. Hunsberger "Acquiring the Posture of a Missionary Church", in George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 291.

[125] Romans 1:15, as noted earlier, is the one exception to this rule, but it does not undermine the general principle.

[126] Watson, 26-27.

with it the fulfilment."[127] In this way, evangelism is still more than words, and is still linked to the reality of God in the community, yet it remains a distinct, identifiable activity. Rodney Clapp expresses it thus:

> Not everything the church does is evangelism, but everything the church does—and is—relates to evangelism.[128]

A related problem is that evangelism (of potential believers) becomes confused with nurture (of established believers). Abraham addresses this problem,[129] and tries to maintain a distinction between the two, but it is an artificial one because what he sees as "fundamental initiation" is so lengthy and ambitious in scope that it is difficult to see what would be left for the nurturing of long-term believers. Abraham's purpose might have been better served by acknowledging that evangelism and nurture are on the same continuum, since, if our relationship with God is always in process, the difference between a new student who is still being evangelized (on Abraham's model) and a mature student is simply a question of where they are in that process. To revert to Brow's image of the school, it is as though there are elementary grades and there are graduate-level programs, but the steps are cumulative, and the overall goal of all the programs is the same: to enter into the fullness of the kingdom.

It might be deduced that Abraham has no time for traditional evangelistic proclamation, but this is not the case. In fact, he speaks very positively of its importance--that it be bold yet culturally sensitive, and that it take place in genuine interaction with unbelievers:

---

[127] Kittel and Friedrich, 268.

[128] Rodney Clapp, A Peculiar People: the Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 167.

[129] Abraham, 108.

> What matters is that the good news of the kingdom be transmitted with flair and in culturally fitting forms. The announcement, furthermore, is to be heralded less in the church and more in the marketplace and in the world at large.[130]

His concern about preaching is consistent with his overall thesis, that it be linked to a process of initiation into the church, and not an isolated event. "Most contemporary evangelistic preaching," he warns, "is unrelated to the intention to initiate people into the kingdom of God."[131]

Practical implications for evangelism

Evangelism throughout the Bible is part of God's loving response to a sinful world: God takes it upon himself to reconcile people to himself. As the Old Testament unfolds, it does not offer a model for evangelism, but it does hold out the ideal of a community created by God, obedient to God, and attractive to outsiders. Jesus fulfills that ideal by living a life of obedience to God. He also draws together his disciples into a new people of God, committed to learning what it means to live by his teaching. What Jesus adds to the fulfillment of the Old Testament picture is his explicit verbal teaching about who God is, what God's reign means, and how people may be reconciled to God: Jesus adds words to works. After his death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' followers continue to form themselves into communities where Christ is learned.[132] Evangelistic preachers speak on behalf of the community to outsiders, telling who Jesus is, explaining that he is the source of the new life

---

[130] Ibid., 171.

[131] Ibid., 173.

[132] The phrase "to learn Christ" is Paul's: Ephesians 4:20

which is visible in this new community, and inviting others to come to Jesus and join his school. Evangelism is understood to be a process of which God is in control, by which God gradually draws people into relationship with himself, through the influence of the community and the preaching, and establishes people in a lifetime of discipleship.

What does evangelism look like when it incorporates words as well as deeds, affirms evangelism as a process, connects to the model of a school, and is an expression of community rather than of individualism? Four examples illustrate the possibilities:

David Watson, one of Britain's most effective evangelistic preachers, describes the experience of speaking evangelistically in the context of a worshipping Christian community:

> I have seen the immense power of worship and praise preceding the more formal presentation of the gospel. . . . [O]ften, after twenty or thirty minutes of songs that are specifically God-directed worship in their content, there is a sense of God's presence which wonderfully enables people to hear and receive the spoken word of God.[133]

According to Watson, God's presence is felt by the unbeliever as well as by the believer when the community of God's people is at worship. As a result, the effectiveness of the evangelistic sermon is greatly enhanced by being in such a context:[134] the hearers have already experienced the reality which the preacher then explains.[135]

---

[133] Watson, 31.

[134] Roland Walls said in a lecture, "A praising community preaches to answer questions raised by its praise." (Watson, 31) For "praise" one might equally well substitute "love" or "celebration" or any other authentic expression of the life of Jesus.

[135] Watson quotes one woman who wrote after an "ordinary" service, "One of the most wonderful things was to look around at the faces of the

Social action activities are also a way by which the authenticity of the gospel is conveyed to outsiders. Kevin Graham Ford offers a composite semi-fictional scenario based on a number of real-life experiences:

> Lindsey and Grant [not Christians] had been involved with the Street Haven Outreach team for the past several weeks . . . Once a week the team came out to the city park and served over four hundred hot meals. [They] were simply accepted into the group and made to feel that they were a fully integrated part of the homeless ministry. Week by week, Grant and Lindsey began to sense the reality of God in the midst of that team. . . . They saw Christian community and Christian involvement at work. And slowly, without even realizing it, they were changed.[136]

Here is the Body of Christ, sent by God, doing the works of God. Outsiders, as Moses foresaw of Israel, and as happened in the book of Acts, are attracted by this lifestyle and become involved, and, as they do so, they gradually sense the reality of God. They are being drawn into the process of learning from Jesus even before they realise this is the case.

The Alpha program is an effective evangelistic program presently used by thousands of churches around the world. It consists of fifteen weekly sessions plus a weekend in which the Christian faith is systematically taught. Evening sessions include a meal and build a sense of community among the attendees. Part of the success of the Alpha program is that it implements the principle of evangelism as a process, giving people time to consider different aspects of the faith. One effect of emphasizing process is, as William Abraham would observe, that evangelism and nurture blend easily in to one another.

---

congregation . . . If I had any doubts before your service, all that it showed us would have quite decided me about the reality of Christ." (Watson, 50)

[136] Kevin Graham Ford Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in the Language of Xers (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 211-212.

Alpha also works through community, so that people do not simply hear lectures (or, more often, watch videos) but get to know a community in which Christian faith is real.

My own more limited experience offers another model of evangelism which combines community and teaching. In recent years, I have spoken at a number of evangelistic dinner parties. Here the Christian community will arrange a special evening, with good food and perhaps wine, the room and the tables decorated in celebration. Friends will invite friends. Some of the community will cook, others will serve. The whole evening is surrounded with prayer. Invariably when I get up to speak, I feel as though half of the evangelism has already been done: guests have already tasted the reality of the kingdom of God in friendship, welcome, celebration, laughter and servanthood. They have already experienced a little of the quality of life that flows through a community which has Jesus as its centre, though they may not recognize its source. What I then say about Jesus and faith is set against that backdrop, as though the speaking is merely to explain what people have just experienced. The evenings always end with an invitation to attend other events of this kind, so that the learning process can continue.

There is much scope for these aspects of biblical evangelism--word and works, process, learning, and community--to be combined in other ways. It seems a particularly appropriate blend for a culture which is moving away from an Enlightenment emphasis on the individual and on pure rationalism and towards a view of human nature that is more community-based and holistic. This question of contemporary culture, and what is appropriate evangelism for different cultures, will be pursued in the following two chapters.

Questionnaire responses

EC'95 respondents demonstrate a strong grasp of this kind of theology of evangelism. One might argue that this is in fact part of the IVCF "ethos" which will be discussed in chapter 5. To learn from an ethos means to absorb from casual conversation as much as from formal learning situations, from what is assumed as much as from what is stated, from jokes and metaphors and attitudes. It is what Schon calls "background learning"[137], learning which is taking place even when we are not aware of it. As a result, respondents are to varying degrees engaged in an evangelistic praxis which honours beliefs in evangelism as process, the role of community in evangelism, and the relationship of evangelism to teaching.

Evangelism as Process

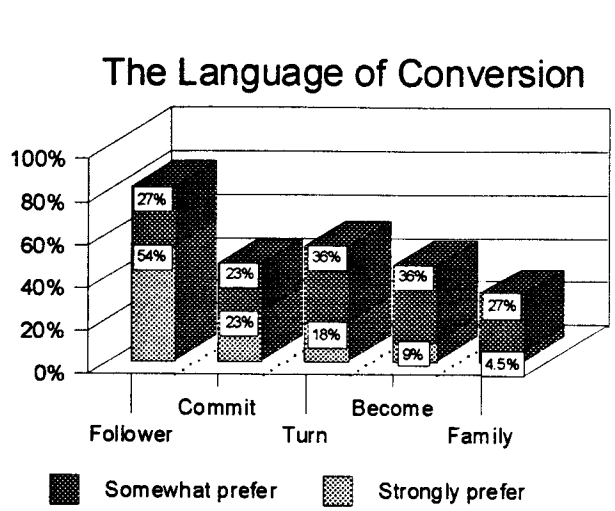
The idea of evangelism as a process, and the agricultural kind of metaphor which represents that process, is almost universally accepted by the EC'95 respondents. When asked whether they identify with the statement, **My job is to nurture the seeds of faith in the hearer**, six (27%) "Strongly agree" and twelve (54%) "Agree"--81% in all. The same tendency is clear when asked how far respondents identify with the statement, **My main task is to encourage my hearers to make a commitment to Christ**. Only three (14%)

[137] Schon, 38.

"Strongly agree" that this is their goal and six (27%) "Agree"--41% in all. Six (27%) feel "Neutral" about the statement and six (27%) actively "Disagree" that this is their goal. This means that over half (54%) of these evangelists do not consider commitment to Christ their goal: the goal of fostering a process seems to have displaced the goal of bringing about a spiritual crisis. One explicitly says that the purpose of evangelistic events is "for students to bring their friends who are in process."

This conviction about process naturally leads several writers to share William Abraham's concern that evangelism should be integrated with the whole of Christian initiation. In defining evangelism, one points out that evangelism "lives in direct but creative tension with discipling and nurturing;" another understands evangelism to be "the birthing of new worshippers" and one adds that evangelism leads to "subsequent discipleship and Christian community development." The clearest indication of popularity of this emphasis, however, appears when respondents are asked. **When speaking about making a Christian faith-commitment, what terminology do you prefer?**

Twelve (54%) indicate that they "Strongly prefer" to speak about "becoming a follower of Jesus," a phrase which suggests that conversion is the beginning of a journey in company with Jesus, not merely a transfer from one static state ("sin") to another ("salvation"). The next most popular is "commit your life to Christ (or Jesus, or God)" which is selected by only five (22%). The least popular expressions are "being born again," "being saved" and "joining God's family," each chosen by only one person (4.5%) Unfortunately, unless explained more fully, the phrase "follower of Jesus" does not automatically imply joining the community of Jesus' followers, and can convey an



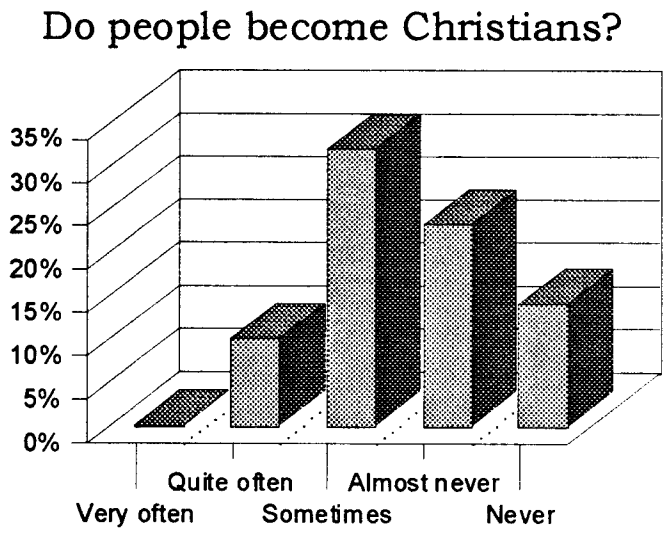
individualistic approach to faith. In fact, only two (9%) "Strongly prefer" and eight (36%) "Somewhat prefer" to speak of conversion as "joining the Christian community."

Evangelism and Community

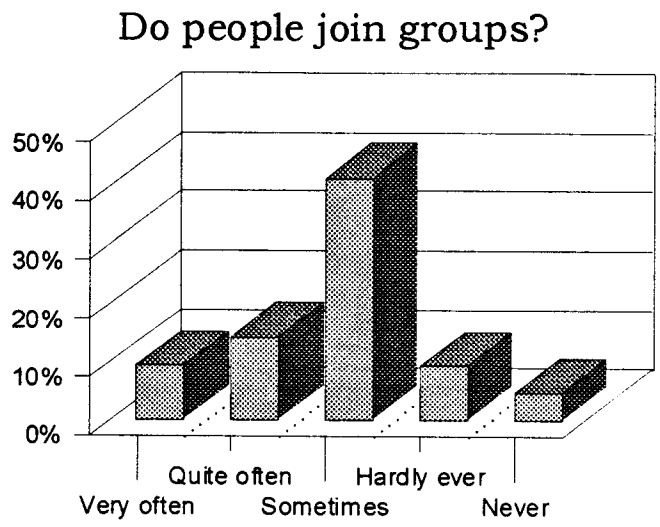
When asked whether **One of my goals in speaking is to encourage the hearers to check out the Christian community**, just over half (55%) believe this is important, and two of those "Strongly agree."[138] These evangelists also note that more of their listeners join Christian groups than actually "become Christians." Only two (10%) say that people "Quite often" become Christians through their talks. Seven (32%) say it "Sometimes" happens. Five (23%) respond "Almost never" and three (14%) say it "Never" happens. Four choose not to answer. A higher rate of response is found,

[138] For some reason, these are not the same people who, in speaking about conversion, invite their hearers to "join the Christian community."

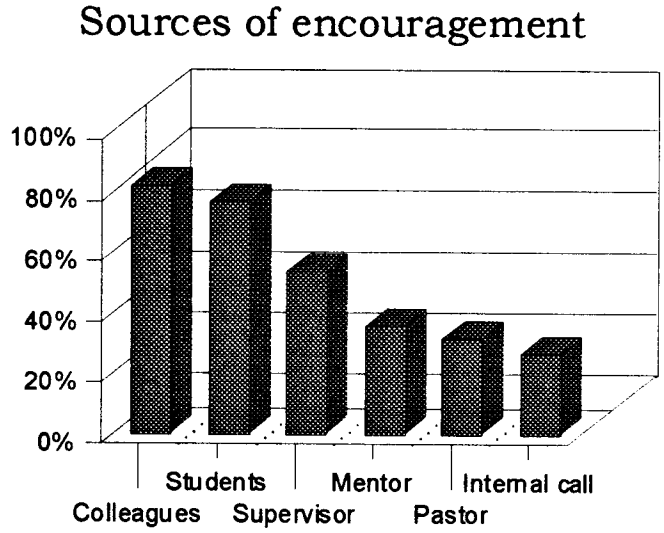
however, when asked whether members of their audience join follow-up groups.



Two report that this happens "Very often"; three report "Quite often"; and nine report "Sometimes." This indicates that while less than half (42%) observe some of their hearers becoming Christians, almost two-thirds (64%) find that audience members join follow-up groups. There is a similarly positive response to the question of whether hearers begin attending regular fellowship meetings (59%) or church (55%).



Another expression of Christian community emerges when respondents are asked the question: **What encourages you to speak evangelistically?**



Eighteen (82%) say that IVCF staff colleagues are "Very encouraging" or "Somewhat encouraging", while seventeen (77%) credit their students with being "Very" or "Somewhat encouraging." There is little sense here of isolated individual evangelists at work, buoyed up only by their sense of spiritual

calling. For these evangelists, their staff colleagues and their students are their primary ministry community, and it is not surprising to find evangelizing communities effectively nurturing the different evangelistic gifts of their members.

At the same time, it is important to note that seven (32%) speak of an internal spiritual drive of some kind. These respondents say they are encouraged by such influences as "the Holy Spirit," "my own desire to work on this gift," "a passion from God," "my own encounter with God in prayer," and "my own desire to see students reached." For four of these seven, this drive or conviction is the *only* influence they find "Very" or "Somewhat encouraging." They appear not to need or find the support of a Christian community for their evangelism. This subject of an internal spiritual conviction causing people to engage in evangelism, though beyond the scope of this thesis, is worthy of further research. Of more interest for this chapter is the fact that sixteen respondents (73%) say nothing about an internal drive to evangelize. For them, the motivation to evangelism comes, by their own account, entirely from other people--colleagues, students, a supervisor, a mentor, or a pastor. Rather than seeing this motivation as inferior to the sense of internal calling, it is more in harmony with the New Testament's emphasis on community to see this as an equally valid way for God to call to ministry.[139]

In terms of the community's support for those learning evangelistic speaking, it is sad that those with pastoral oversight of the EC'95 delegates are

---

[139] In Acts 13:1-3, Paul and Barnabas are called to missionary service not primarily through anything internal but by the work of the Holy Spirit through the worshipping community at Antioch.

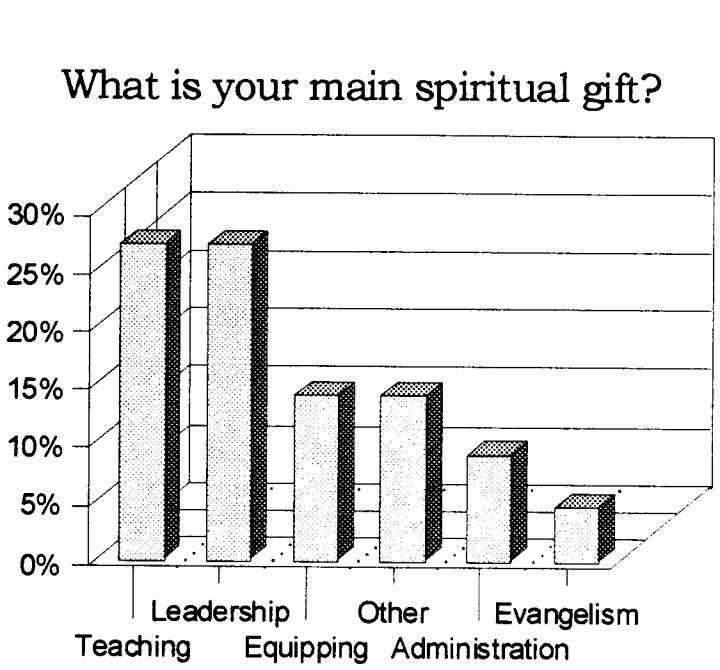
not perceived as very encouraging in this area. Only four (18%) say their IVCF ministry supervisor is "Very encouraging"--and three of those four also acted as mentors at EC'95. A further eight (36%) say their supervisor is "Somewhat encouraging." Pastors are rated even less highly. Two (9%) say their pastor is "Very encouraging" of this aspect of their ministry, and a further five (23%) report "Somewhat encouraging." While there are obviously unknown factors here'[140] these figures do offer at least a reminder that Christians need and appreciate encouragement from their pastoral caregivers as they seek to develop new competencies.

Evangelism and Teaching

Most respondents would agree with the observation that there is no hard and fast distinction between evangelism and teaching. Indeed they prefer to connect evangelism with the gifts such as "leadership" and "equipping." When they were asked, **Would you say evangelistic speaking is your main spiritual gift?** only one says an unqualified "Yes". Seventeen (77%) believe that evangelistic speaking is one of their spiritual gifts, though not the main one. These seventeen were then asked, **What *do* you consider your main spiritual gift?** Of these, six indicate that their gift is "teaching," six "leadership," and three "equipping", "motivating" or "discipling." One is employed by IVCF:USA as an "evangelism specialist," yet he believes that his primary gift is "leadership."

---

[140] E.G. The staff member may well see colleagues and students more often than the IVCF supervisor; colleagues and staff may hear the delegates speaking more frequently than the supervisor; the pastor may assume the IVCF staff supervisor gives primary support to the staff member; ministry commitments may mean that the staff person is not often present on Sundays.



Two say that evangelistic speaking is one of their gifts, but do not indicate what they feel is their primary gift. Another checks the box to say that **evangelism is not really one of [her] evangelistic gifts**. One simply queries the whole question. Another does not like to consider evangelism a gift so much as a responsibility. These are startling answers when one recalls that the respondents are people who came to a conference to learn about evangelistic speaking, and made a commitment to continue practising that skill.

It is difficult to account for this ambivalence about claiming to have the "gift" of evangelism. It may simply be that culturally determined images of an "evangelist" have caused many who are actually gifted in evangelism to shy away from the terminology. Judging from respondents' preference for the language of "nurture" and "process," however, it may equally indicate a move away from the model of decision-oriented and proclamation-based evangelism which has dominated the church's understanding of evangelism to a model which encourages teaching and process. The simple fact that fifteen respondents (68%) prefer to follow their presentations with discussion indicates

a clear move away from straightforward proclamation which tolerates no disagreement, to a more pedagogically sensitive approach where discussion and questions are welcomed as the norm. The term "evangelist," apparently, has not adapted as fast as has the nature of evangelism.

There are three individual respondents whose responses to these questions are distinctive and instructive. The first is the only respondent who said he did have the gift of evangelism; the other two said they did not.

The self-styled evangelist by no means fulfills the cultural caricature of "an evangelist." In fact, in most respects, his views of evangelism are shared by the majority of respondents. He strongly affirms all the non-traditional, process-oriented views of evangelism emphasized by other respondents: for instance, he wants to **nurture the seeds of faith in the hearer**, to **help the hearer recognize the activity of God in their lives**, **encourages [his] hearers to check out the Christian community**, and **sees [himself] as a fellow seeker for God with his hearers**. He is also among the 50% who do not agree that **I will always speak about the cross**. He is out of step with the majority only in seeing himself as **a herald for the Gospel**; and in agreeing (though not strongly) that his **task is to encourage . . . commitment to Christ**. In terms of his practice of evangelism, this respondent has spoken evangelistically only three times in the past twelve months, far less often than the majority (the median is 7 or 8), and the visible "results" of his speaking are similar to those of others.[141]. In other words, there are no outstanding features which identify why this person calls himself an "evangelist," while others do not. Since he is an

[141] People become Christians "Sometimes", join follow-up groups "Quite often", and "Usually" engage in discussion after a talk

American, however, it is tempting to speculate that the term "evangelist" is still more acceptable in the majority of American churches than it is in Canada.

The one who claims that her gift is definitely not evangelism is also in the mainstream of respondents in most respects. Certainly in terms of how she views evangelism, she differs only in that she focuses her talks on **the exposition of Scripture** and in wanting **to present the truth, not to make it palatable**: she is the only one to indicate "Strongly agree" to both of these. She is only one of two who "Disagree" with the proposal that an evangelist should **nurture seeds of the faith**. However, this person's approach is not as unyielding or insensitive as it might at first sound. She describes her speaking as often revolving around her personal story. She prefers, for instance, to speak from John 4 (the woman at the well) or Luke 7 (the woman with the jar of ointment) because they "are similar to my story." The presentations sound very personal and powerful, and certainly constitute very authentic evangelism. It is hardly surprising, considering the personal nature of her content, that she is one of only four who say that discussion "Always" follows their talks, and that it is "Never" fruitless argument. However, she is one of only three who say that people "Never" become Christians through her talks, and the only one who says that her hearers "Never" join follow-up groups. It seems likely that this delegate is more influenced in her self-assessment by an understanding of evangelism based on results. She is one of a minority who attend traditional evangelical churches, and perhaps that is the picture of evangelism she has received from her church. It may also be that her denominational tradition does not encourage women to think of themselves as evangelists. Certainly, from what she says about her experiences of evangelistic speaking, she has no less reason to think of herself as an evangelist than any other respondent.

The third individual is surprising in that, maybe more than any other respondent, she fits the traditional image of an evangelist, yet she still prefers to call herself primarily a teacher. Her background is Pentecostal and Baptist. She has a High School diploma and a denominational Bible School diploma and she works with high school students. More than almost any other delegate she acknowledges the strong influence her church background has had on her understanding and practice of evangelism. She also mentions the positive influence of Campus Crusade for Christ and its publications, including "The Four Spiritual Laws." Her responses to questions are distinctive in several respects. She is one of only two who disagree with the proposition that, if they are faithful, **some people will be offended**. When asked what passages of Scripture she favours when speaking, she is the only one who lists individual verses—proof texts--mainly from the epistles. She is the only respondent who does not agree that she sees herself as **a fellow-seeker for God**; indeed, she puts a question mark against the statement. She is one of only two who feel "Neutral" about the need to **affirm people's spiritual search**. She is the only respondent who says it is not one of her goals to **encourage [her] hearers to check out the Christian community**. She is, rather, one of only four who strongly agrees that her "goal is to encourage [her] hearers to make a commitment to Christ."

This appears to be a ministry geared to a "crisis" type of conversion rather than a "process" type. She has spoken 100 times in the past year: nobody else's response indicates more than 30. She is also one of only two who say that people become Christians through her work "Quite often." In spite of this, she still regards herself as "a teacher" rather than "an evangelist."

It has been suggested at various points in this chapter that the kind of evangelism described here—a blend of words and works, a process more than a crisis, with an emphasis on discipleship as learning, and taking place in community—is particularly appropriate for a post-Christian, postmodern culture. Chapter 4 will expand on the question of how evangelism may be legitimately adapted for contemporary cultures. That begs the question, however, of whether adaptations to particular cultures should even be considered. For some, such adaptation inevitably compromises the God-givenness of the Gospel, and therefore blunts its power. Before turning to the question of evangelism in contemporary culture, therefore, the next chapter considers the overarching question of the relationship between the Gospel and culture.

Chapter 3

EVANGELISM AND MISSIOLOGY

This chapter will consider evangelistic speaking as a part of the church's missiological mandate. It will address firstly the ideology of those in the Barthian tradition, particularly that of William Willimon, who advocate simply proclaiming the Gospel message without regard for cultural considerations, and the underlying theological convictions about God, revelation and grace which this reflects. Then it will pursue the alternative approach, represented by Emil Brunner in his 1946 debate with Karl Barth. Drawing on the experience of Paul at Athens (Acts 17) and of contemporary overseas missionaries, the chapter will then offer reasons why this is a preferable approach to evangelistic speaking. In spite of these criticisms, I will nevertheless acknowledge where I consider the warnings of Barth and Willimon to be helpful, and I will seek to demonstrate from my own work how the evangelist may steer a course between ignoring culture on the one hand and capitulating to the demands of culture on the other. Finally, the chapter will consider how the respondents from EC'95 deal with this issue of Gospel and culture in their own evangelistic practice.

Willimon and Campbell

William Willimon is the chaplain and Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University. He is perhaps best known for several books written in collaboration with his colleague at Duke, Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of

Divinity and Law. Of particular relevance to this thesis is his 1994 book, The Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Unbaptized,[1] a book on evangelistic preaching.

His premise is formulated in reaction to much contemporary evangelistic preaching: preachers should not attempt to translate the Gospel into the thought-forms of secular culture, because this will compromise the message and prevent it doing its transforming work. Thus he challenges many current clichés of evangelistic discourse. If speakers seek to "communicate," Willimon warns that "[d]esiring to communicate, at any cost, can lead us into apostasy."[2] A speaker who seeks to address the "thinking person" "plays into the hands of [the] tyranny of detached subjectivity."[3] If a speaker addresses "felt needs", "[t]his renders the gospel into nothing more than a helpful resource to get us what we wanted before we met the gospel,"[4] and the gospel becomes just "another technique for making nice people even nicer, successful people even more successful."[5] A speaker who seeks to establish common ground with the audience is warned that "'[c]ommon experience' doesn't exist, and even if it did, it should not be confused with the gospel."[6] Those who argue that the miracles of Jesus are "scientifically true", have only made the point that "science is God, and everything must bow to it."[7] We cannot in fact speak to someone who does not share our (Christian) culture because "all language is only fully intelligible within the context of specific ways of living and the practices of a given social

---

[1] William H. Willimon, The Intrusive Word (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

[2] Ibid., 18

[3] Ibid., 37

[4] Ibid., 38

[5] Ibid., 60

[6] Ibid., 23

[7] Ibid., 38

life."[8] To make the Gospel "user-friendly" means "the reduction of the gospel to a slogan for a bumper sticker, a church billboard."[9]

Lest it be thought that Willimon is an isolated case (albeit an influential one), a more recent book, Preaching Jesus by Charles Campbell (1997) makes these criticisms even more focused. Campbell, working within the framework of Hans Frei's postliberal theology, analyzes the homiletical strategy of four well-known preachers and finds that each of them gives away authority for the shape and content of the message to the secular audience, thus compromising the distinctiveness and power of the Gospel. Charles Rice is a typical example. For him:

> [t]he preacher seeks to express the Christian tradition in the idiom of the culture so that it can become meaningful to contemporary hearers."[10]

Fred Craddock, by Campbell's analysis, falls into the same trap by arguing that "American culture is the starting point, and the preaching of the gospel must be made relevant to it."[11] For Campbell and Willimon, however, trying to make the Christian faith "meaningful" or "relevant" to outsiders is a fundamental methodological error for the evangelist. To make it meaningful or relevant implies that the hearer is the authority on what is meaningful and relevant, whereas in fact only the Gospel gives meaning to life, and what is relevant is measured only in relation to God. A Gospel which seeks to be meaningful or relevant is by definition not the Gospel of God: all it will accomplish is to confirm the hearers in their spiritual alienation, or cause them to add a little

---

[8] Ibid., 93

[9] Ibid., 60

[10] Charles L. Campbell, Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 148

[11] Ibid., 155

religion to their basically secular lives.[12] The God-given Gospel is so radical, so different from anything in an unbeliever's present life, that he or she will inevitably find the Gospel meaningless and irrelevant when it is faithfully preached--until they are converted by the Holy Spirit.

A key to understanding this approach to evangelism is Willimon's statement, "I agree with Karl Barth."[13] Barth's views, as they relate to the question of communicating the Gospel, appear most sharply in his 1934 debate with Emil Brunner, published in 1946 under the English title, Natural Theology.[14]

Brunner and Barth

The substance of the debate concerns general revelation and natural theology. General revelation is the self-disclosure of God which is "universally available" and which "it is impossible for anyone not to know."[15] Natural theology is the human response to that revelation:

---

[12] One of the twentieth century pioneers of this approach was Paul Tillich. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas say of him, "[I]t is Tillich's presumption that he must constantly find a way to "translate" the language of the gospel, to map the language of the gospel, into experiences that are well understood. . . . Thus the inherent narcissism of the high-culture bourgeoisie was not fundamentally challenged by the gospel of Christ." Preaching to Strangers (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 7-8.

[13] Willimon, 40. I acknowledge that I am taking this sentence out of context, but I do so because it does seem to me to represent the thrust of Willimon's approach.

[14] Emil Brunner, Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946)

[15] Clark H. Pinnock, "Revelation" in New Dictionary of Theology ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I.Packer (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1988), 585.

> the attempt to attain an understanding of God . . . by means of rational reflection, without appealing to special revelation.[16]

Brunner's argument begins with an account of general revelation:

> In every creation the spirit of the creator is in some way recognizable. The artist is known by all his works . . . Wherever God does anything, he leaves the imprint of his nature upon what he does. Therefore the creation of the world is at the same time a revelation, a self-communication of God.[17]

For Brunner, there is a crucial connection between general revelation ("the revelation of God . . . in the works of creation") and special revelation ("his proclamation of Christ") without which the task of the missionary or evangelist is impossible. For example, it is only because of this link that repentance is possible. Human beings are aware of the reality of God, and, in general terms, of God's law, through their grasp of general revelation, and thus they become aware of their sin:

> Only because men somehow know the will of God are they able to sin. A being which knew nothing of the law of God would be unable to sin.[18]

Thus when the evangelist talks of repentance, the hearers already understand something of the God against whom they have sinned, as well as the meaning of the sin from which they are to turn.

Barth, on the other hand, has no time for a discussion of general revelation and natural theology because he is convinced that "[the] subject . . . [of natural theology] differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ."[19] Sinful human beings, with their powers of reasoning distorted and naturally inclined against God, cannot draw accurate theological deductions from general revelation. Any theology they construct in ignorance of Christ will

---

[16] Ibid. Colin Brown, "Natural Theology," 452.

[17] Brunner, 24-25

[18] Ibid., 25

[19] Brunner, 74

be partial and misleading, and for Christians to affirm any truthfulness in natural theology invites:

> [the] assimilation of God to nature and of revelation to history, and thus the reduction of theology to anthropology.[20]

He does not believe that natural theology can have an existence subsidiary to special revelation, finding its fulfillment only in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Sinful human beings prefer a theology which enables them to retain their autonomy from their Creator. Thomas Torrance confirms this:

> what Barth objects to in natural theology is not its rational structure but its *independent* character.[21]

At one point, the disagreement is expressed in terms of a metaphor. Brunner distinguishes between natural and special revelation with an image which suggests complementarity: "from nature we know the hands and feet but not the heart of God."[22] In other words, while we may deduce something of the character of the Creator from the creation, it is only from Christ that we truly know the Creator's heart. Barth counters with Calvin's version of the same image: "Christ is the imago in which God makes manifest to us not only his heart but also his hands and feet." [23] There is no image of God outside of Christ: anything we know of God we know through Christ.

To some extent, the disagreement is more apparent than real. If Jesus is the author of creation (Colossians 1:16), and if the God whose character is revealed through creation is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, there cannot be a

---

[20] Thomas F. Torrance, Karl Barth, biblical and Evangelical Theologian (Edinburgh: T.&.T.Clark, 1990), 136.

[21] Brunner, 147.

[22] Brunner, 38

[23] Ibid., 109

contradiction between the two.[24] It might be better to say that there is a single revelation, which is God's self-revelation, but that different aspects of it are found in creation and in Christ. If general revelation is a candle in the darkness, then the revelation in Jesus is a floodlight.

John's Gospel links the two expressions of God by explaining that "the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." Commentators as diverse as C. H. Dodd, R. H. Lightfoot, Barnabas Lindars, Lesslie Newbigin and George R. Beasley-Murray[25] all interpret this verse to mean that the revelation in creation and the revelation in Jesus are equally valid and true, differentiated only by the medium of communication and the fullness of what is revealed. Lightfoot is typical:

> Rightly understood, the Lord's ministry is, as it were, the relations, written small, of the Logos with mankind.[26]

Dodd puts it this way:

> The whole passage from v.4 is *at once* an account of the relations of the logos to the world *and* an account of the ministry of Jesus Christ, which in every essential particular reproduces those relations.[27]

---

[24] "Although there are differences between general and special revelation, we should not draw the contrast too sharply. After all, there is only one God, whose Logos is spreading the knowledge of the Lord everywhere. The two species of revelation stand together in a complementary relationship." Pinnock, 585.

[25] C. H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), R. H. Lightfoot, St.John's Gospel: A Commentary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); Barnabas Lindars, The Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Lesslie Newbigin, The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), George R. Beasley-Murray, John (Milton Keynes: Word Publishing, 1987).

[26] Lightfoot, 81

[27] Dodd, 284, cited in Beasley-Murray 12

The problem occurs when general and special revelation are separated. Brunner seems to open himself to this criticism by contending that general and special revelation are "two kinds of revelation."[28] The danger of allowing this kind of wedge to divide God's revelation is clear in a writer such as Roman Catholic Philip Rosato,[29] who speaks so consistently of the Creator Spirit and the Redeemer Spirit that they almost become two separate entities:

> [T]he Redeemer Spirit so monopolizes Barth's attention that the Creator Spirit has no power to lead man to truth which is not explicitly christological. . . . Barth attributes to the Spiritus Redemptor a function which is really that of the Spiritus Creator.[30]

Further, Rosato wants to understand the Spirit's work:

> in a way which is free from the Word and yet endowed with equal ontological validity.[31]

It is not clear how anything in creation, let alone the work of the Spirit, can be "free of the Word," who created and who sustains the universe; nor, by the same token, how anything from a Christian perspective can have "ontological significance" without the Word.[32] This would seem to open the door to a plurality of religions, even a plurality of gods.

Brunner, of course, has no intention of going that far. Apart from anything else, his doctrine of sin is much closer to that of Barth than to that of someone like Rosato:

---

[28] Brunner, 26

[29] This is not true of all Roman Catholic theology. John MacQuarrie contends that "In Aquinas, natural theology has an auxiliary function, as leading the reader from everyday experience to the specific experience of being addressed by the Christian revelation." John McQuarrie, "Natural Theology", in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 403.

[30] Philip J. Rosato, The Spirit as Lord: the Pneumatology of Karl Barth (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 149-150.

[31] Ibid., 151.

[32] e.g. Colossians 1:15-17

> The . . . fact that human beings are not able rightly to understand the nature and meaning of this revelation in Creation is due to the fact that their vision has been distorted by sin.[33]

Because of sin, human beings cannot save themselves:

> something from outside of him must penetrate within him to transform his . . . resistance into self-surrender and acceptance.[34]

As a result, he explicitly does not open the door for people to find salvation apart from Christ:

> [A]s concerns the heathen, God did not leave himself without a witness, but . . . nevertheless they did not know him in such a way that he became their salvation.[35]

Brunner then is relatively modest in the claims he makes for general revelation and natural theology. On Barth's side, it is surprising in view of the angry tone of his rejoinder to Brunner to discover that in earlier writings, he does not deny the existence or the importance of natural theology. Torrance comments that for Barth:

> [natural theology] must . . . be taken seriously and can be respected as the natural man's "only hope and consolation in life and death."[36]

He is even prepared to give it a place as a subset of Christian revelation. In his own words:

> natural theology (theologia naturalis) is *included* and brought into clear light within the theology of revelation (theologia revelata), for in the reality of divine grace there is *included* the truth of the divine creation. In this sense it is is true that "grace does not destroy but completes [nature]."[37]

---

[33] Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics Volume I, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 134.

[34] Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), 11.

[35] Brunner, Natural Theology, 27

[36] Torrance, 142.

[37] Karl Barth, Theology and the Church, Shorter Writings 1920-1928, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (London 1962), 342. Cited in Torrance 147. Italics mine.

The idea of bringing into "clear light" suggests that natural theology without the light of Christ is still capable of attaining a partial or distorted truth, which the Gospel corrects and fulfills. Thus the distance between Brunner and Barth comes to seem quite minimal.

Why then the argument? Several writers have suggested that Barth's vehemence in responding to Brunner's argument was the result of the political situation in Germany at the time of their writing. The endorsement by the church of "the romantic depths of German nature and culture," and the consequent "upsurge of paganism in a Christian country"[38] leading to the rise of Hitler provided a pressing example of how nature could devour grace. Torrance's interpretation is typical:

> Barth was so angry with Emil Brunner's mediating pamphlet . . . for to those fighting their battle of resistance in Germany it appeared to fortify the basis on which the so-called "German Christians" were advocating conciliation with the Nazi regime.[39]

A church which endorsed natural theology could not at the same time oppose Hitler. The only adequate theological weapon was a Gospel of a God who came from outside to judge the arrogance of human theologies. As Brunner reflected later:

> Barth's "surgical temperament" . . . drives him not only to cut out the malignant growth but also a great deal of healthy tissue as well, in order to be quite sure that the evil has been eliminated.[40]

---

[38] Torrance, 142

[39] Torrance, 142. Also Alister McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 162; and McQuarrie, "Natural Theology" in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, 404.

[40] Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics Volume II, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 43.

To say that Barth was influenced by his cultural context is not a criticism. What authors like David Bosch have said of the Gospel is equally true of all theology:

> The Gospel always comes to people in cultural robes. There is no such thing as a "pure" Gospel, isolated from culture.[41]

There is no theology which is not shaped by culture as well as by Scripture. In the context of the growing threat of German Nazism, one cannot but agree with Torrance:

> Subsequent events have surely justified Barth in his uncompromising stand against that sort of naturalization of the Christian message.[42]

The question is whether, in a different cultural situation, Barth's extreme rejection of natural theology is necessary. John MacQuarrie says cautiously:

> [N]atural theology . . . may have an important function in the future. In a secularized society, it provides a bridge from everyday concerns to God-language and the experiences which such language reflects. . . . [P]erhaps in an age like the present one, it needs to be given more prominence.[43]

If Barth's views are set against the backdrop of the need for the church to defend the faith, Brunner's seem to presuppose a situation where the church is active in mission in general and evangelism in particular:

> The knowledge of this fact [of general revelation] . . . ought to be of decisive importance, now as then, for *all who proclaim the Gospel* . . . This knowledge becomes practically effective in the "contact," *indispensable for every missionary,* between his proclamation of Christ and the revelation of God (which leaves men inexcusable) in the works of creation and in the law written in the heart.[44]

Perhaps this is what MacQuarrie means when he says a doctrine of natural theology is helpful in a secular society where bridges need to be built.

---

[41] David Bosch, 297, cf. Lesslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989), 186.

[42] Torrance, 143.

[43] MacQuarrie, 405. I will comment on this kind of "bridge" imagery in chapter 4.

[44] Brunner, Natural Theology, 11. Italics mine.

Barth's defensive mindset[45] and Brunner's missional mindset explain other differences in their debate. For instance, Barth is horrified at the suggestion that God's revelation in nature and in Christ might be a seamless robe, asking:

> Is the function of the revelation of God merely that of leading us from one step to the next within the all-embracing reality of divine revelation?[46]

For the missionary, that picture of "steps of revelation" is consistent with a Creator who is present in every place in the world, and a Holy Spirit one of whose roles is to be a Teacher.[47] It would also be consistent with the testimony of many (like C. S. Lewis[48]) who have been drawn to Christian faith in stages, moving slowly from atheism to theism (in response to general revelation) and finally to explicit Christian faith.[49]

Again, Barth realizes rightly that if Brunner's natural theology is different, then his theology of the Holy Spirit will be different as well:

> I do not know what [Brunner] proposes to do next. It seems that behind his re-introduction of natural theology a "new" doctrine of the Holy Spirit wants only too logically to break forth.[50]

He argues this because, in his view, "[t]he Holy Ghost . . . does not stand in need of any point of contact but that which he himself creates."[51] For Brunner,

---

[45] I am not using the word "defensive" in a pejorative sense.

[46] Brunner, Natural Theology, 82

[47] John 14:26

[48] e.g. "It must be understood that the conversion described in the last chapter was only to Theism, pure and simple, not to Christianity. I knew nothing yet about the Incarnation. The God to whom I surrendered was sheerly non-human." C. S. Lewis Surprised by Joy (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955; Fontana Books, 1959), 184.

[49] One friend, who was part of a sun-worshipping community in the 1960s, reflects that "It was not a bad preparation for the worship of the Creator."

[50] Brunner, 94

[51] Ibid., 121

however, it is not that the Holy Spirit stands in need of points of contact. Brunner knew, as missionaries and evangelists learn, that it is the Holy Spirit who creates those "points of contact," the one who brings home to people the significance of general revelation, the one who draws fallen people on from general revelation to special revelation. It is not that some autonomous "natural" force operates in general revelation, leaving the Holy Spirit to take over only for the second leg of the journey, when special revelation is needed.[52] The Holy Spirit's work is to glorify Jesus wherever Jesus is to be found, whether in general or in special revelation. Brunner cites Calvin:

> [Fallen man] has an inclination towards truth and a capacity for recognizing truth. Calvin is not afraid to relate this *lumen naturale* directly to the Spirit of God . . . Wherever a man of science investigates the divine laws of the starry heavens, wherever an artist creates any great works, there he is in relation with divine truth.[53]

Bishop John Taylor, himself a missionary for many years, says the same thing in a different way:

> [I]t is essential for our doctrine of the Holy Spirit to recognize that so much can be said about him which is universal . . . [H]e works anonymously through all the processes of creation . . . The more we learn to recognize his actions, the more we shall find him in the life of the world everywhere."[54]

As Brunner realizes, such an understanding of the Spirit is "indispensable for every missionary," and the repeated experience of missionaries has justified this faith. Clark Pinnock expresses it thus:

> [W]hen missionaries take testimony about Jesus to the world, they take the gospel to places where the Logos has already been active. They will

---

[52] Brunner makes this clear in his Dogmatics: "[A]n act of God is put in the place of unaided human activity, and this act of God is called the work of the Holy Spirit." Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation: Dogmatics, Volume 3, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962).

[53] Ibid., 42

[54] John V. Taylor The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission (London: SCM Press, 1972), 83.

discover noble insights and actions which are the result of God working among the people.[55]

Examples of the interaction of missionaries, local culture, general revelation and the Holy Spirit will be discussed below.

The influence of Barth on Willimon, then, seems to be this: if there is no general revelation, then there is no prior "knowledge" of God in the unbeliever's experience to which the evangelistic preacher can appeal. Indeed, to make any appeal or connection to the thought or experience of an unbeliever would automatically be to compromise the message, since it would be to link God's message with untruth. The preacher's job is not to make connections (since there is nothing in the hearers' experience or thinking with which the message can be legitimately connected) but simply to proclaim the message of special revelation which is Jesus. If the preacher does this faithfully, then some will be converted, not through skillful explanation or through an appeal to things the hearer already knows, but simply and solely through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. As Willimon logically concludes: "How does the gospel manage to work such power among epistemologically enslaved folk like us? I don't know. It's a miracle."[56]

If Brunner is right, however, a different approach to evangelistic preaching is possible. A classic biblical example of this approach is the Apostle Paul's most extensive address to a non-Jewish audience--an audience completely lacking in any knowledge of special revelation--in Acts 17.

---

[55] Clark H. Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy: the Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 77

[56] Willimon, 19.

Acts 17: Paul at Athens

Before looking in detail at what Paul does here, it is worth noting in principle that there is a difference between the presentation of the Gospel here and the presentation of the Gospel to a Jewish audience--for instance, Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost.[57] Peter drew extensively on Old Testament Scriptures for validation and illustration of his message--virtually half of the sermon as recorded consists of quotations from the Book of Joel, Psalm 16 and Psalm 110. Paul's audience on Mars Hill in Athens, on the other hand, had no Jewish background. As a result, he makes no attempt to quote the Jewish Scriptures, he does not draw attention to the way Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, and neither does he accuse his hearers of rejecting God's Messiah. Calvin is quite clear that, for Paul in this context, this is the most appropriate approach:

> [B]ecause he is dealing in debate with profane men, he takes his proof from nature itself, for he would have wasted his time in contending with them by citing scriptural proof-texts.[58]

How, then, does he present his message? The first remarkable thing is that while the sermon in English Bibles is ten verses long, Paul does not introduce Jesus (even then not by name) until the last one: the final ten percent. The first eight verses are an exposition of the character of God, and the ninth is a call to repentance. Why is this?

In those eight verses, Paul relates to the understanding of the Athenians in three distinct ways. Firstly, he speaks about the altar to the

---

[57] Acts 2: 14-40.

[58] John Calvin, The Acts of the Apostles, vol.2, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 112.

unknown God, and announces, "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." On the Day of Pentecost, Peter had begun his sermon by making a connection: in seeing (and hearing) the disciples filled with the Spirit, speaking in tongues and praising God, the hearers were observing the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, that in the last days God's people would all experience the Spirit. In effect, Peter said, "this is that".[59] In just the same way, in Paul's mind there is a correlation between the unknown god the Athenians are worshipping and the God he has come to proclaim. The difference is that Peter relates his message to what was revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures, while Paul relates his message to what was revealed to the Athenians through general revelation. The principle in both sermons is the same: both Peter and Paul began with what God had already revealed to the hearers--a point of contact, provided by the Holy Spirit--and simply added what God had further revealed to them in Jesus.

Secondly, Paul takes advantage of the religious understanding of his audience. Some of his audience have been identified as Stoics and Epicureans (verse 18). I.Howard Marshall comments that for the Epicureans, "either the gods did not exist, or they were so far removed from the world as to exercise no influence on its affairs"; the Stoics, on the other hand, "had a pantheistic conception of God as the world-soul."[60] Such views of God might cause one to consider them idolaters, that is, having a distorted and human view of God.[61]

---

[59] This phrase is found in the King James Version of Acts 2:16, and is also the title of a book by F. F. Bruce: This is That: The New Testament Development of Some Old Testament Themes (Exeter UK: The Paternoster Press, 1968)

[60] I. Howard Marshall Acts, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980; repr., 1994), 284.

[61] Calvin incidentally offers a definition of idolatry in commenting on this story: "[M]en fashioned Gods for themselves according to their own opinion . . .[M]en measure God according to their own inclination and understanding." (Calvin, 112)

Paul, however, far from condemning their idolatry, chooses rather to affirm whatever is good in their philosophy. F. F. Bruce comments on verse 25:

> Here are combined the Epicurean doctrine that God needs nothing from men and cannot be served by them, and the Stoic belief that He is the source of all life . . . Paul consistently endeavours to have as much common ground as possible with his audience.[62]

So closely does Paul identify with his hearers at this point that Henry Chadwick can suggest that the difference in their views temporarily disappears:

> Paul's genius as an apologist is his astonishing ability to reduce to an apparent vanishing point the gulf between himself and his converts, and yet to "gain" them for the Christian gospel.[63]

Willimon complains that "We preachers often try to get too close to our listeners . . . to make it all sound too easy."[64] Paul certainly gets very close to his hearers, but this is hardly synonymous with making it "all sound too easy": indeed, one could argue that the closer he gets to his hearers, the more they are likely to understand the difficulty of the message. Judging from the Athenians' response, that seems to have been the case here.

Barth asks, "Is it [Brunner's] opinion that idolatry is but a somewhat imperfect preparatory stage of the service of the one true God?"[65] It would appear from Acts 17 that Paul's answer would be "Yes." Even Calvin seems inclined to agree: "[The Athenians] were convinced that there was some divinity; their perverted religion was merely requiring to be corrected."[66] Missiologist Charles Kraft cites other biblical examples of how Gospel content corrects and amplifies inadequate conceptions of God. He concludes:

---

[62] F. F. Bruce, The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary, (London: Tyndale Press, 1951, repr. 1970), 336.

[63] Henry Chadwick, quoted in Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1970), 140.

[64] Willimon, ibid., 62.

[65] Brunner, Natural Theology, 82.

[66] Calvin, 112.

> Scriptural evidence suggests that God allows, but seeks to transform, *most* subideal beliefs and practices except those that require faith allegiance to another god.[67]

Thirdly, Paul identifies with his hearers by quoting from their (pagan) poets. Calvin comments that "there is no doubt that Aratus [one of the poets cited by Paul] spoke about Jupiter." Paul could presumably have condemned Aratus for his culpable error in attributing the works of God to a fictional deity. What he does instead is to "adapt [Aratus'] clumsy statement about his Jupiter to the true God."[68] Calvin goes on to explain that Paul is not twisting Aratus' words and giving them a meaning the poet never intended, but rather, "since men are imbued by nature with some knowledge of God, they draw true principles from that source." Though it is true that sin readily causes us to distort the truth, "yet the first general knowledge of God remains in them for a time."[69] In other words, Paul is drawing out the God-given truth in what the poet only dimly perceived.

It is interesting to read Willimon's own comments on this story in his 1988 commentary on Acts.[70] In this work, he appears much more tolerant of Paul's efforts to find common ground with his hearers than he is of contemporary evangelists who try to do the same thing. More than other commentators on this story, Willimon begins by expressing compassion for the Athenians and their spiritual plight:

---

[67] Charles H. Kraft Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books 1979), 401.

[68] Calvin, 121.

[69] Ibid., 121.

[70] William H. Willimon, Acts, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) 142-144. He repeats these views, almost word for word in Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1994), 80-87.

> Idolaters they may be, but at least they are searching. . . . Their religious yearning . . . is the inarticulate and uninformed yearning of the pagan for . . . God. . . . The church, rather than standing back from pagan religiosity, pointing our fingers in righteous indignation, should, like Paul at Athens, minister to their searching.[71]

Willimon also acknowledges that it is important to speak to what the Athenians already know of God, rather than simply announcing to them the Gospel they do not know:

> Appealing to their knowledge of creation (for he could not simply recite Scripture to pagans who were ignorant of Scripture) and to our common humanity, Paul asserts that his God "made the world and everything in it."[72]

This appears to be a different approach from that recommended in The Intrusive Word (1994), where (for instance) rather than praising the appeal to "our common humanity", we are informed that "'[c]ommon experience' [between believers and unbelievers] doesn't exist."[73] Or again, does not the approach of Acts 17 come close to assuming the natural theology which Barth, Willimon's mentor, so roundly condemns? Willimon concedes that it does:

> In reasoning from the natural world toward faith in God, Luke's Paul borders upon a "natural theology"--our observation of the natural world and its wonders is a forerunner of faith. . . . In citing the verses of a pagan poet (17:28), in drawing upon the pagan's experience of the world, Paul hopes to move them to faith by way of the natural world.[74]

This clearly suggests that the natural world and what it reveals of God is a step towards Christian conversion, a way by which unbelievers may "move" towards God, and a way the evangelist may take advantage of in helping the hearers towards true faith.

---

[71] Willimon, Acts, 142-143)

[72] Ibid., 143

[73] Willimon, The Intrusive Word, 23.

[74] Willimon, Acts, 143.

Paul, of course, is not content merely to establish common ground with the Athenians. Affirming what they already know of God (albeit dimly) is only the first step towards passing on to them information they do not have and could not find out by light of nature alone: information about coming judgment and the resurrection of Jesus. Here I would agree with Willimon in his repeated statements that the Gospel complements natural revelation:

> Paul cannot convert his audience through an exclusive appeal to their observation of the world. Revelation takes us where observation alone cannot go. . . . Natural theology is hardly more than preliminary instruction. Something else is needed. . . . Appeals to reason and to observation of the natural world can only be taken so far in the proclamation of the gospel. Eventually revelation must be invoked and the scandal of faith to reason and experience must be made plain.[75]

I will describe below an evangelistic presentation which, using the model of Paul's speech at Athens, seeks to link general and special revelation in the way Willimon describes.

Missionaries and general revelation

The importance of general revelation for evangelism has repeatedly been highlighted by overseas missionaries. Two illustrations will serve: Vincent Donovan, a Roman Catholic, has written about his experience of evangelizing the Masai tribe in Kenya in his 1978 book, Christianity Rediscovered[76]; and Don Richardson, a conservative evangelical, has described the problem and the joys of taking the Gospel to the Sawi people of Borneo in his popularly-written 1974 book, Peace Child.[77] In spite of the different backgrounds of these two

---

[75] Ibid., 142.

[76] Vincent J. Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1978; repr. 1985).

[77] Don Richardson, Peace Child (Ventura CA: Regal Books, 3rd ed. 1976).

men, their experience of finding God at work in unevangelized cultures before their arrival is remarkably similar.

Don Richardson found that among the Sawi people, "treachery was idealized as a virtue, a goal of life."[78] Thus when he told them the story of Jesus, they were struck, not with the heroism of Jesus, but with the ingenuity of Judas, betraying his master with a kiss, and with the gullibility of Jesus. Richardson was unable to reverse this understanding until he discovered a ritual by which the Sawi established peace with a neigbouring warring village. The two villages would exchange newborn babies, and the gift of the children would be the guarantee of peace between the two communities. Richardson was then able to explain the Gospel in a different way: human beings have been at war with God, but God has given us his own son as a guarantee of his desire for peace with us, as the ultimate Peace Child. This the Sawi understood. Now Judas was understood in Sawi terms as the villain, because he had betrayed the peace child. In characteristic melodramatic style, Richardson concludes:

> To the Hebrews [Jesus] was the Lamb of God, to the Greeks the Logos. But to the Sawi he was the Tarop Tom Kodon, the Perfect Peace Child--the ideal fulfillment of their own redemptive analogy! Ticking away like a time bomb through the ages, that redemptive analogy was now being detonated by the proclamation of the gospel.[79]

Vincent Donovan, like Richardson, found that all he had previously learned of the faith failed to communicate with the Masai:

> [they had] no word in their language for person or creation or grace or freedom or spiritual or immortality . . . Every single thing I prepared to teach them had to be revised or discarded once I had presented it to them. Just what was the essential message of Christianity?[80]

---

[78] Ibid., 177.

[79] Ibid., 234.

[80] Donovan, 25.

While he was unsure what to say, he did discover that they had their own questions about God:

> What is he really like? Does he love all Masai, all people? Is he kind sometimes and cruel at other times? Does he always give everyone his just rights? Does he talk with people? Or can't he? Does God live far from here? Does he still work among the Masai, or has he forgotten them? . . . Does he answer any of these questions? Or is he a mute God?[81]

Those who say that the Gospel is not meant to answer people's questions because the questions are misguided, or that Gospel does not address people's "felt needs" because the felt needs are warped,[82] or that the preacher should not begin "where people are at" because they are likely to be "in the wrong place",[83] have presumably never been in such a missionary situation, where an evangelist may be reduced to such inarticulateness, hear such questions or perceive such felt needs.[84]

In his ministry, Donovan stressed continuity between Masai culture and the Gospel. Significantly, he refers to Acts 14, Paul's first recorded speech to a non-Jewish audience (his speech at Athens is the second), in order to understand his experience. He paraphrases Paul, then comments:

> "The loving kindness of God has appeared to all men. . . . God lets each nation (each tribe, each culture) go its own way. . . . He is evident to them in the happiness he gives them." . . . [God] was there before we ever got there. It is simply up to us to bring him out so they recognize him.[85]

---

[81] Ibid., 72

[82] Willimon, The Intrusive Word, 38-39.

[83] Paul Scherer, The Word God Sent (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 95, quoted in Campbell, 162.

[84] Clark Pinnock quotes a story from D.T.Niles, who, "when he heard Karl Barth say that other religions were unbelief, asked him how many Hindus he knew personally. Barth replied that he knew not a single one. When Niles asked him how he knew that religions were merely unbelief, Barth said he knew it as a presupposition." Clark H. Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy, 108.

[85] Donovan, 58

Thus, for instance, he found that the Masai had their own creation and fall myths--should he seek to replace them? Since they clearly understood about sin and about the cost of forgiveness, he decided it was not necessary. As he taught them, he found that they were more concerned to understand the humanity than the deity of Jesus: Donovan decided that since it required a long, slow process for the first Christians to articulate the deity of Jesus, he would not require such belief of his converts. When they became Christians, he encouraged them to choose a name for themselves, and they chose a term which meant "the age group brotherhood of God." This was:

> the most sacred notion in their culture. . . .[This] made them feel so certain that that which they have been treasuring and valuing for generations has not been a waste, but rather a sign of God's continuing love for them.[86]

Were there aspects of "church" in the New Testament which were lost to the Masai by this identification? Probably so, but the missionary decided on balance that there was more to be gained by accepting the indigenous concept than by repudiating it.

The risks of translation

This question of the risk missionaries (and evangelists) take by translating is a central theme of Lamin Sanneh's 1989 book Translating the Message.[87] Sanneh's thesis is that "translatability" is characteristic of Christianity.[88] By translatability, he means a willingness and an ability to be

---

[86] Ibid., 58

[87] Lamin Sanneh Translating the Message: the Missionary Impact on Culture (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992).

[88] Northrop Frye agrees: "Christianity as a religion has been from the beginning dependent on translation. . . . From the first Pentecost . . . down to the missionary societies of the nineteenth century . . . the emphasis on translation has been consistent." Northrop Frye, The Great Code: the Bible and Literature (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982), 3-4.

translated into other languages and cultures than those in which the faith originated.[89] He contrasts this with the character of Islam, which at a deep level believes that Arabic language and culture are normative because the Koran was given in Arabic.[90] Christianity, Sanneh contends, has thrived when it has welcomed the possibilities for translation, and withered when it has insisted on conformity to a single language and culture.

Of course, there are dangers in the strategy of translation, not least that something essential to the truth and power of the Gospel will be lost in the process.[91] Yet Sanneh would agree with David Bosch that "[t]here is no such thing as a 'pure' Gospel, isolated from culture,"[92] therefore there is no absolute form of the Gospel which must be adhered to. The only norm is Scripture,

---

[89] In fact, Sanneh states of Africa what is largely true for all cultures, that "language is the intimate, articulate expression of culture, and so close are the two that language can be said to be synonymous with culture, which it suffuses and embodies." (Sanneh, 3).

[90] Frye says the same thing: "The Koran . . . is so interwoven with the special characteristics of the Arabic language that in practice Arabic has had to go everywhere the Islamic religion has gone." The Great Code, 3. A university chaplain commented recently, "Some Muslim students at my university protested the appointment of a Muslim chaplain because he was born in Canada and could not speak Arabic. They considered this to be second-best."

[91] Anthony Thiselton comments on the question of whether translation is even possible: "Lyotard falls into the well-known trap of perceiving Wittgenstein as proposing, in effect, 'autonomous' language-games, or localized linguistic activities, the criteria for which remain incommensurable or incapable of 'translation.'. . . [In fact,] Wittgenstein speaks of linguistic activities-in-context (language-games) as 'overlapping and criss-crossing' already . . . Indeed, in many cases (even if not in all) Wittgenstein sees 'the common behaviours of humankind' as 'the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language'." Anthony C.Thiselton, Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 33-34. In other words, Thiselton argues that Wittgenstein believed translation is possible between different languages and cultures because of the universality of the human condition. This last phrase is a problem in postmodernity because it implies a universal metanarrative: see chapter 4.

[92] Bosch, 297

which (unlike the Koran) is itself a culturally diverse document, and which models within its pages the very kinds of translation that missionaries are called to attempt. He gives examples of missionary work, particularly in Africa,[93] which, because of its sensitivity to the translation issue, has produced a vigorous indigenous church with a strong sense of ownership of the Gospel.

Apart from the threat to the message itself incurred by translation, there is a more surprising threat in the process of translation--a threat to the missionary and the culture he or she represents. Sanneh describes it thus:

> [T]he gospel is potentially capable of transcending the cultural inhibitions of the translator and taking root in fresh soil, a piece of transplanting that will in time come to challenge the presuppositions of the translator. . . . That can be unsettling in the extreme.[94]

He describes this two-edged effect of the Gospel in Africa as "mission deliberately fashioning the vernacular instrument . . . [which] Africans . . . came to wield against their colonial overlords."[95] In other words, those who are evangelized may finally turn and criticize the missionaries for not conforming more closely to the Gospel they have brought. Thus the missionaries are made aware in a new and painful way that their own understanding of the Gospel is not "absolute truth," but reflective of a particular culture, one that is as flawed by sin, and as liable to God's judgment, as that to which they have brought the message.

Both Don Richardson and Vincent Donovan took the risk of translating the message of the gospel into a new culture and language, and were made aware of their own cultural limitations. Richardson had to abandon (at least

---

[93] Sanneh is from the Gambia, in West Africa.

[94] Sanneh, 53.

[95] Ibid., 5

temporarily) traditional western understandings of the atonement, and work instead with the model of the Sawi peace child. Donovan found that he had to abandon the theology he had learned in seminary, including the biblical stories of creation and fall, arguments for the deity of Jesus, and a traditional Catholic understanding of priesthood and sacrament. Then, while he was still teaching them, he in turn was challenged by (for instance) the ecclesiology which "naturally" emerged in their culture:

> Even before baptism I could see a pattern forming, a community of faith in the making, but not exactly the pattern of Christian community that I, from my background, had expected, or to which I was accustomed.[96]

As a result, he began to criticize the culture in which he originally learned the Gospel:

> There is much reason to for believing that the present form of the priesthood . . . is indeed a cultural interpretation of Christianity. The entire body of laws surrounding the present-day priesthood have grown out of that culture, or conglomeration of cultures that make up the Western world.[97]

His contact with the Masai, and the way they expressed the Gospel in their culture, brought Donovan to a new understanding of priesthood, of leadership, of community, of equipping for ministry, and of the functioning of the Body of Christ.

This is not to imply that the host culture was totally innocent and the sending culture totally corrupt. The Gospel certainly challenged aspects of the host culture as well as of the sending culture. Donovan, for instance, tells how the inclusive nature of the Mass challenged the patriarchal assumptions of the tribe, where the presence of women at a meal was believed to contaminate the

---

[96] Donovan, 144.

[97] Ibid., 147.

food.[98] He speaks elsewhere of the way people naturally began to bring their dances to the celebration of the Mass. However:

> [t]here were some dances they were ashamed to bring into the Eucharist. . . . Such dances should no longer be part of their lives at all. The Eucharist served as a judgment for them.[99]

Thus the Gospel, whether expressed in Western Catholic terms or Masai terms, has a dynamism of its own and reorders all cultures, affirming some aspects and judging others. It is for this reason that George Hunsberger has written of Gospel, church and culture as a triangle, with the Gospel encountering and challenging church and culture equally.[100]

Western culture as a mission field

Since the mid-1980s, Lesslie Newbigin has called the church in the Western world to consider the West as its mission field, and to apply the lessons learned by cross-cultural missionaries to the realities of being the church "at home." His books have all elaborated on the question spelled out in an early title, Foolishness to the Greeks (1986):

> What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and this whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call "modern Western culture"?[101]

One aspect of responding to this challenge is to apply the lessons of missiologists such as Sanneh, Donovan and Richardson, drawn from

---

[98] Ibid., 121.

[99] Ibid., 125.

[100] George R. Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America," in Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America, 9.

[101] Newbigin Foolishness to the Greeks, 1.

experience on non-Western mission fields, to evangelistic preaching in contemporary Western culture.

The first step is to acknowledge that God the Holy Spirit is at work in Western culture, just as much as among the Sawis of Borneo or the Masai of Kenya, creating awareness of God the Creator and making people aware of spiritual issues such as forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. Moreover, just as there are aspects of those cultures which the Gospel affirms and others which the Gospel judges, so we can expect the Gospel to do the same in ours. Evangelistic preaching will then be shaped by the awareness of these realities. Evangelists will be on the lookout for "rumours of angels"[102] in the culture, for the kind of points of contact (anknupfungspunkten) of which Brunner spoke, and which the Holy Spirit is creating in the culture. This may be in general cultural trends (a vague concern for "spirituality", for instance) or in specific cultural artefacts (such as movies, songs or novels). Rather than shunning such expressions as idolatrous, the evangelist will receive them gratefully, seek to refine them and shape them, and show how they point in the direction of Jesus.

This, of course, is completely contrary to the views of those like Willimon, Campbell and Barth, who advocate a more "closed" view of evangelistic preaching, in which general revelation is not worth serious consideration, no concessions should be made to culture, and the preacher's mandate is simply to preach the Gospel faithfully and trust that God will work the miracle of conversion. However, the lessons of overseas missionaries challenge this point-of-view. Just as the missionaries discovered, to their

---

[102] Peter L. Berger A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural (Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company 1969; Anchor Books 1970), passim.

dismay, that their Gospel was not absolute and culture-free, so the writing and preaching of (say) Willimon are not as free from cultural taint as his theology leads one to expect. For instance, his views on preaching are formed as much under the influence of postmodernism as that of a Christian and biblical tradition. The influence of postmodern thinking is evidenced, for instance, by his frequent criticisms of modernism and modernity. The following is representative:

> [O]ne of the maddening aspects of modernity is the way modern people constantly congratulate themselves on how "universal" their values are, how "open" they are to all points of view. . . . Modern people are deluded into thinking that there really is such a commodity as independent, innate "reason," universally resident in everyone.[103]

It is hardly surprising that he acknowledges his debt to Stanley Fish, Duke University's best-known postmodern literary critic, "who speaks of the text's need for 'interpretive communities' in order for a text to have meaning."[104] In fact, the idea of an interpretive community lies behind Willimon's insistence that "[o]ur reasons make sense . . . within a particular narrative tradition,"[105] or that we "deceive people into thinking that it is possible to hear without conversion"[106]: people have to enter the interpretive community of the church by conversion *before* they can understand the message. Of course, this in itself is a reasonable point-of-view and a helpful reminder to evangelistic preachers. However, there is a certain inconsistency in arguing against speaking to the culture when one's views have been directly shaped by the culture.[107]

---

[103] Willimon, The Intrusive Word, 94-95.

[104] Willimon and Hauerwas, Preaching to Strangers, 137.

[105] Willimon, The Intrusive Word, 96.

[106] Ibid., 19.

[107] What Alan Jacobs says of Willimon's colleague, Stanley Hauerwas could equally well be said of Willimon: "Nowadays Hauerwas says things that resemble the things said by [Stanley] Fish. Fish, on the other hand . . . never sounds like Stanley Hauerwas. For instance, while Hauerwas now uses words like 'interpretive communities' and 'strategies of interpretation,' Fish has not yet

The value of Willimon's warnings

In spite of my disagreement with Willimon's theology, his cautions are nevertheless valid. Even when a message does "begin where people are at," in the belief that the Holy Spirit has already been at work in bringing them to that point, it is important that the message do more than simply create "correlation" (Tillich's term) between the Gospel and the culture, to confirm the hearers in their position. Like Paul at Athens, the evangelist's job is to encourage the hearers to move forward from "where they are at," and to show from the Bible why and how that is important and desirable.

This may be illustrated by a presentation of mine entitled, "Three Kinds of Freedom: The Gospel According to Groundhog Day." Groundhog Day is a movie from 1993, starring Bill Murray and Andy McDowell. The premise is that a TV weatherman, Phil Connors (Murray), is sent with a producer (McDowell) and a cameraman, to report on the Groundhog Day ceremony at Punxsatawney PA. An unexpected snowstorm, which Connors did not forecast (perhaps a hint of supernatural powers at work) prevents their leaving the town till the following morning, but, when Connors wakes up the following morning, he discovers that it is still Groundhog Day, with all the same circumstances, opportunities and problems that he has already encountered. In fact, every succeeding day is also Groundhog Day. The only thing that changes is Connor's response to the happenings of the day.

---

been heard to talk about God or the Church." Alan Jacobs "A Tale of Two Stanleys," First Things 44, (June/July 1994): 18.

I argue in my presentation that, as the movie proceeds, Connors discovers, in sequence, three kinds of freedom. He soon realizes that if there is no tomorrow, then there are no consequences to his actions, and, predictably, he begins to live in a thoroughly irresponsible manner. This illustrates a commonly held understanding of freedom: that freedom is "doing whatever I want." Paul Scherer's caution about "not starting where people are at because they are likely to be in the wrong place"[108] has some validity, since this conception of freedom and the New Testament's understanding of freedom are radically different--indeed, they are fundamentally opposed to one another.

However, the movie continues. When Connors tires of the experience of this totally self-centred "freedom," he comes to realise that on each successive Groundhog Day, he is actually encountering people in need, and he determines to do whatever he can to help each of them. On his last Groundhog Day, no longer concerned for personal autonomy, he simply moves from one good deed to another. Morally, this is an improvement: he uses his freedom now not to do whatever he wants but to help others, and, as a result, he appears a much more humane person. However, this use of freedom is still not Gospel freedom, and for the preacher merely to endorse this picture of responsible citizenship would not be to proclaim Gospel freedom. Rather, in terms of Jesus' parables, it would be to affirm the Pharisee praying in the temple rather than the tax-collector, the older brother rather than the prodigal son.[109] This is not what the kingdom is about.

Yet the movie is not over. Phil Connors is still trapped in the same day. At the Groundhog Day celebration that night, however, he becomes the subject

---

[108] See note 83

[109] Luke 18:9-14, 15:11-32

of a "bachelor auction," and the TV producer, who has (inevitably) fallen in love with him, empties her wallet of every cent she has--$339.88--in order to "buy" him. Like Jesus, she gives everything she has to "redeem" the one she loves. When Connors wakes up the following morning, the calendar has finally moved on: it is February 3rd: the endless repetition of Groundhog Day is over. As in the divine comedy, he experiences the paradox that it is only when he belongs to someone else, someone who loves him, that he is he truly free.

Clearly, one could not claim that this is a full explanation of the Christian Gospel. It says nothing, for instance, about the fact that Christian freedom comes from learning to live according to the Creator's model for human life. It says nothing about the cost to human autonomy of choosing to live that way. It says nothing about the Spirit's enabling to follow Jesus, nor of the community into which we are brought. The analogy between McDowell's sacrifice and Jesus' death is one-dimensional. Nevertheless, no single presentation of the Gospel can ever explain everything. Pedagogically, if a non-Christian audience has understood the few points that are made, they have taken a significant spiritual step in the direction of Christian faith. What are those few points? The presentation argues that sin does not fulfill the promise of life which is offers; that self-righteousness is equally unable to deliver on its promises; and that freedom comes only when we are redeemed with love and at great cost.

Methodologically, it is important to point out that these points are made inductively from the movie itself, without an appeal to the outside authority of Scripture. It is not that a secular artist has by natural insight stumbled onto truths about the Kingdom: rather, that the Holy Spirit seeks to draw people

towards the truth of Jesus as they seek to explore a subject like freedom. We should no more be surprised to find such truth in a secular movie than Paul was to find truth in the Greek poets. What then is the place of Jesus? In making this presentation, I introduce the person of Jesus towards the end[110] as the One of whom the Andy McDowell character is only a pale reflection, whose love drove him to redeem us with far greater cost than the contents of his wallet, and in relation to whom the only true freedom is found. As always, the truth of Jesus refines, focuses and completes the truth that is only seen "through a glass darkly" apart from his revelation.

Lesslie Newbigin suggests that:

> communication of the gospel across a cultural frontier . . . has to be such that it accepts, at least provisionally, the way of understanding things that is embodied in the language. . . . However, if it is truly the communication of the gospel, it will call radically into question that way of understanding embodied in the language it uses.[111]

One might cite as an example the fact that, while early Christians had no alternative but to accept the reality of slavery,[112] in time the Gospel undermined slavery as an anti-Christian institution. Newbigin himself gives an example from John's Gospel:

> Much of [John's language] is suggestive of the sort of world-view that . . . has obvious affinities with Indian thought. . . . In my own experience I have found that Hindus who begin by welcoming the Fourth Gospel as the one that uses their language and speaks to their hearts end by being horrified when they understand what it is really saying.[113]

In the same way, in contemporary western society, the evangelist is wise to affirm ("at least provisionally") the desire of the culture for "freedom," all the while knowing how different current use of the word is from biblical usage. Over

---

[110] This is the model of Paul at Athens. See page 10 above.

[111] Newbigin 5-6

[112] In fact, Paul uses the imagery of slavery in a positive way, e.g. Philippians 1:1.

[113] Newbigin, Foolishness, 6

time (and the time may be as short as a thirty-minute address), the evangelist will point out the difference between the first and the second, and encourage them to seek the latter. At the risk of over-simplification, this approach has three stages: recognize the question as it is formulated by the culture; rework the question in biblical categories; show how the Gospel responds to the new question.[114] Rodney Clapp describes a similar process when he says:

> The aim of . . . contextualized, full-orbed evangelism . . . is not to answer "felt needs" as they already exist, but to present Christian concepts, language and practices in such a way that we might alter the meaning of people's experience as they have understood it and introduce a new set of felt needs into their already existing felt needs.[115]

This model of evangelistic preaching seeks to avoid, on the one hand, the pitfalls of a Barthian approach, where the desire to be faithful to the Gospel obviates the need for sensitivity to the audience, and, on the other hand, a Tillichian approach, where the desire to connect with the audience robs the Gospel of its transformative power.[116]

Questionnaire responses

---

[114] Tillich's approach is superficially similar: "[S]ystematic theology . . . makes an analysis of the human situation out of which existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions." Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology I, 70. Quoted by Anthony Thiselton, "Tillich, Paul," in A New Dictionary of Theology. Tillich's two-step approach omits the crucial middle step from the strategy outlined above: reworking the question in biblical categories.

[115] Clapp, 168.

[116] Jean-Jacques von Allmen compares these two extremes, respectively, to the Docetic heresy and the Arian heresy. Cited by John R. W. Stott, I Believe in Preaching, 149.

Almost every EC'95 respondent identifies with statements that suggest a traditional cross-cultural missionary orientation. In other words, they have an awareness that in speaking evangelistically they are not speaking to people who necessarily share their worldview, whose attention cannot be taken for granted, and whose language has to be learned. In this respect, they would not share the views of Willimon. For example, almost all (95%) either "Strongly agree" or "Agree" that **I try to talk in the language of the culture**. This suggests a high degree of sensitivity to the thought-forms of the hearers. A similar proportion (91%) "Agree" or "Strongly agree" that **It is important to build bridges to the secular world**. This too recognizes the difficulty of communicating Christian faith to people who are not familiar with biblical concepts and the need to establish "points of contact" between the Christian message and the culture's world-views. In order to build such bridges, fourteen respondents (63%) consider "explaining theological terms in non-technical language" to be "Very important," and almost the same proportion (59%) consider it "Very important" to work at "finding culturally intelligible ways to explain doctrines such as sin." Like missionaries in a foreign culture, these speakers are concerned to translate the ideas of the Gospel, into the host language. In terms of the Barth/Brunner debate, nearly all respondents would side with Brunner, who, after all, understood the importance of his view for anyone wishing to be a missionary. [117]

---

[117] "*He who thinks as a missionary understands* without further ado the central significance of this contact . . . with the two-fold revelation in creation; and he knows also that far from prejudicing the sola gratia, it alone makes possible the preaching of justification." (Italics mine.) Brunner, Natural Theology, 11.

Like Brunner, too, EC'95 delegates would strongly affirm the existence of general revelation--or, more significantly, behind general revelation, the activity of God the Holy Spirit preveniently at work in the lives of unbelievers. Thus every one (100%) agrees that "pointing out signs of God's activity and/or truth in the culture" is important for their evangelism. Ten (45%) say this principle is "Very important" in preparing an evangelistic talk. Exactly the same proportion of respondents "agree" (55%) or "agree strongly" (45%) with the proposition, **I try to help the hearers recognize the activity of God in their lives**. One explains the role of evangelistic speaking in these terms:

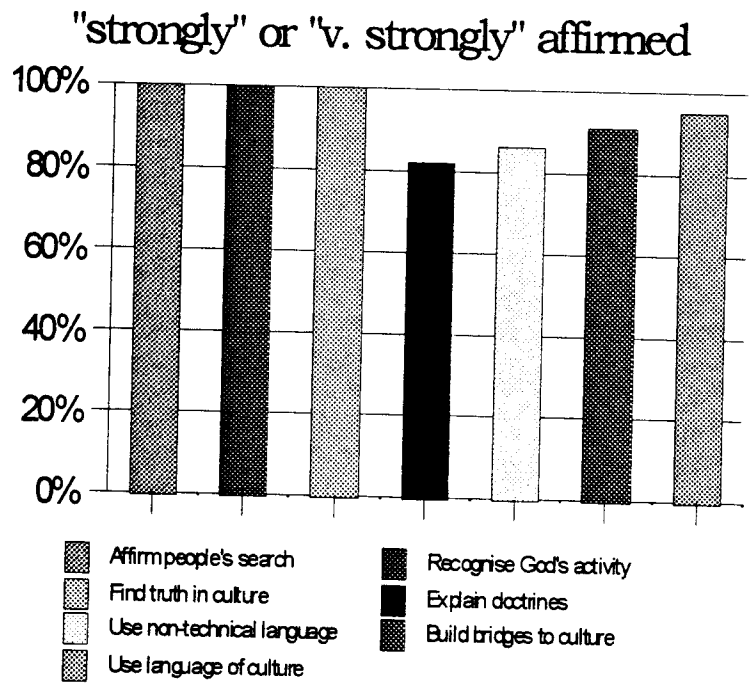
> An evangelistic talk is a naming process in a person's life. This assumes God is working in people's lives.

In other words, the evangelist's task is to help the hearer identify and name what is (and is not) the activity of God in their lives, and to encourage them to see Jesus as the fullest expression of that activity. A similar philosophy is expressed by the respondent who says:

> One of my hopes is to encourage hearers to consider the possibility that God is involved more deeply in their lives than they may have expected.

This is consistent with Paul's sermon at Athens, where he too names the God who is already at work unrecognized in their lives.

By the same token, respondents affirm rather than condemn such features of the culture as the current interest in "spirituality." Almost all (86%) agree, ten (45%) of them "strongly," that **I see myself as an affirmer of people's spiritual search**. It is true that a non-Christian understanding of "spirituality" will not normally be that of the Bible, as Willimon might remind us, but when given a choice between dismissing an interest in spirituality as idolatrous or affirming it and seeking to redirect it towards Christ, EC'95 participants overwhelmingly vote for the latter.



In similar vein, respondents almost unanimously affirm the use of "appropriate video, song or other current material" in explaining the Gospel. Eleven (50%) consider such use "Very important" and a further eight (36%) "Somewhat important." When asked what topics they have spoken on in the past year, out of the fifty titles given, twelve (24%) begin with a cultural artefact such as a song or a video. Movies include "Contact," "The Shawshank Redemption," "Superman," "Pulp Fiction," and "Star Trek." TV shows also provided "points of contact," including "The Simpsons" and "The X-Files." Other talks were built around popular songs such as "What if God was One of Us?" and "The Things We Do For Love." A further ten (20%) began with a "felt need" in the audience, such as intimacy, loneliness, hope, freedom, spirituality and anger. This choice of topic illustrates the stated convictions of respondents that they "try to identify the questions and needs in [their] hearers' lives and show

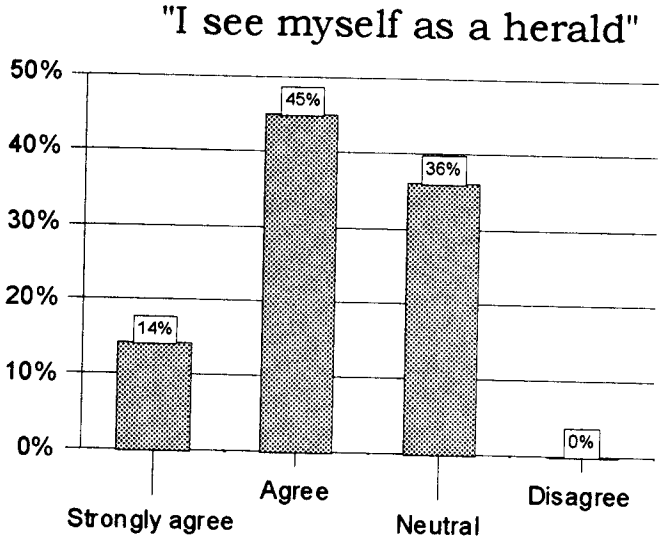
how Christ answers them" (82% identify themselves as agreeing or strongly agreeing).

Since delegates are clearly concerned to practise cross-cultural communication, it is interesting that they simultaneously rally to some traditional conservative principles. For instance, when asked how far they agree with the statement **The heart of my evangelistic talk is generally the exposition of Scripture**, twelve (54%) either "Strongly agree" or "Agree". Eight (36%) are neutral. Only one respondent disagrees with the proposition.[118] However, when the apostle Paul was confronted at Athens with a biblically illiterate audience, as Western ones increasingly are, he did not quote Scripture. It seems strange that speakers who in many ways seek to be in tune with the culture would apparently be out of step in this respect.

Similarly, the image of the "herald" for an evangelist, while a biblical one, is somewhat impersonal, declamatory and potentially confrontative. Therefore it seems strange that youth workers, who are in other ways sensitive to the mood of the times--relational, informal and dialogical--when asked about the statement, **I see myself as a herald for the Gospel**, agree with this self-identification in a proportion of almost two to one (59%).

---

[118] This is a delegate who says that she holds "weekly dinner parties during which I do an amplified and updated version from the Gospels of "____ meets Jesus." It may be that she understands the term "exposition" to mean formal grammatico-historical exposition, whereas her presentations are predominantly imaginative and dramatic.

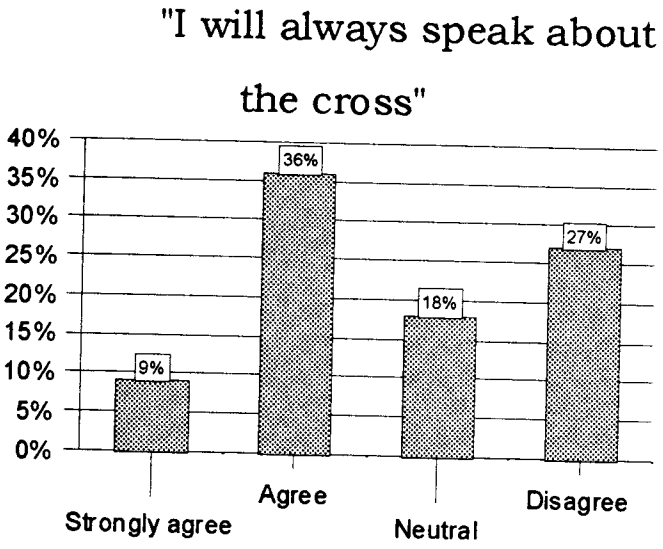


On other questions, respondents are divided over whether they endorse traditional priorities in evangelism. For example, to "preach the cross" has traditionally been a sine qua non of evangelistic speaking, because of Paul's protestation, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."[119] Yet respondents from EC'95, when asked to respond to the statement, **Whatever else may be in a talk, I will always speak about the cross**, divide between ten (43%) who "Agree" or "Strongly agree" with the proposition and six (26%) who actually "Disagree" with it. From a traditional perspective, it is equally surprising that four (17%) feel neutral about it.

---

[119] 1 Corinthians 2:2. W. M Ramsay in St.Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen (1896) believed that Paul rejected the evangelistic style he had pioneered at Athens because of the lack of response, and, when he moved on to Corinth, concentrated instead on the message of the cross. Eighteen years later, however, Ramsey modified this verdict, acknowledging that his theory "did not allow for adaptation to different classes of hearers." Discussed in Acts: an Introduction and Commentary, by E. M. Blaiklock (London: Tyndale Press, 1959), 142-143. Subsequent commentators on Acts have generally agreed with Ramsey's later conclusion, that Paul's sermon at Athens, though it did not centre on the cross, was not a "mistake" but was, rather, appropriate for that audience.

However, if evangelism is in fact a process involving learning, as delegates seem to believe, the cross cannot be the explicit content of every "lesson," even though, theologically speaking, it is central.



When these three "conservative" statements (concerning exposition of Scripture, the image of the herald and the non-negotiability of the cross) are correlated, there are only five who affirm all three. These five are also more likely to resonate with the statements **If I am faithful, I expect that some people will be offended by what I say**, and **My job is to present the truth, not to make it palatable.** On the other hand, they vote with the majority in affirming less traditional statements about evangelism, such as **I see myself as a fellow seeker for God with my hearers**, and **I see myself as an affirmer of people's spiritual search**. In fact, differences between this group of respondents and the majority are few, though they tend to be somewhat older and more experienced in ministry. Their average age is 42, compared to the overall average of 36. They have been on staff an average of 9.8 years, compared to the overall average of 8 years. Denominational affiliations are broad, ranging

from Baptist, via Christian Reformed, to Anglican. They have the average amount of theological education. If there is a possible commonality, it may lie in the fact that all but one "became Christians" between the ages of 7 and 28: none say they cannot recall a conversion experience; only one says it happened under the age of sixteen (five out of the whole sample give ages between 4 and 8). Is it possible that a more "adult" conversion experience inclines people to be more conservative in their approach to evangelism?

Conclusion

It is impossible to avoid being shaped by one's culture. Those who claim to preach a "culture-free" Gospel cannot avoid being influenced by secular culture, even in claiming that such a thing is either desirable or possible. What then is a suitable response to being an enculturated Christian? Firstly, evangelistic preachers (like other Christians) must humbly acknowledge that they are children not only of God but also of their culture, and seek to identify the cultural influences on their understanding and proclamation of the Gospel. Secondly, they need the wisdom of the Spirit and of Scripture to discern which cultural influences resonate with God's truth as they understand it, and are thus points of contact for the Gospel, and which run counter to the direction of Scripture. As Newbigin puts it:

> We have to say both "God accepts human culture" and also "God judges human culture."[120]

Participants in EC'95 seem to understand the ambivalence of the missionary towards culture, and are committed to working at the interface between Gospel and culture.

---

[120] Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, 195.

The next chapter will consider some of the characteristics of contemporary Western society, and, in particular, the shift from modernity to postmodernity, and how evangelistic speakers who are committed to being discerning about culture may respond.

Chapter 4

EVANGELISM AND THE POSTMODERN WORLD

This chapter seeks to set the work of evangelism and of evangelistic speaking in the context of the contemporary world. It will examine the shift from modernity to postmodernity and explore the implications of this shift for the church's mission. Finally, the chapter will consider how respondents from EC'95 have been affected by this cultural paradigm shift in their approach to evangelistic speaking.

The modernist worldview[1]

What is modernism? It is difficult to define modernism with any precision, not least because:

> [a]ny characterization opens us up to charges of reducing the numerous intellectual and cultural movements during that period to one monolithic essence. [2]

Nevertheless, Nancey Murphy believes that:

> [w]e are at a point in history where we can see the emphasis on certitude and universality as a particular, historically conditioned episode in Western thought.[3]

---

[1] It is helpful to distinguish between "modernism" and "modernity", between "postmodernism" and "postmodernity", all four of which will be used in this chapter. Though it is difficult in practice to keep the two categories totally discrete, broadly speaking, "-ism" refers to the more theoretical or philosophical aspects of the phenomenon, while "-ity" refers to concrete, cultural or sociological expressions of the "-ism".

[2] Middleton and Walsh, 14.

[3] Nancey Murphy. Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics. (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997), 7. Murphy argues that even where there have been disagreements in the

Modernism, then, is the name given to the worldview which was dominant in Western Europe and North America from the time of the Renaissance until (roughly) the mid-twentieth century.[4] Wilbert Shenk explains its origins thus:

> Modernity is the result of intellectual developments in European culture over a period of several centuries on the basis of the influence of thinkers such as Bacon, Newton, Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes, who established "the scientific method". . . . The Enlightenment emphasized the potential of rational human reason to solve problems, unaided by the supernatural, and radical skepticism as the hallmark of all authentic intellectual pursuits. Enlightenment culture put a premium on "facts," defined as that which can be tested in the laboratory--what is rational, objective, and verifiable. . . . Faith and knowledge were held to be irreconcilable.[5]

David Harvey quotes a description of modernism from the architectural journal PRECIS, which adds several characteristics of modernity which have resulted from this milieu:

> "Generally perceived as positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic, universal modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production."[6]

There are several ways of analyzing a worldview such as modernism. James Sire, for instance, has suggested seven questions which may be asked of

---

modern era, both sides "share certain underlying assumptions about the nature of justification, meaning, and the relation between parts and whole." (18)

[4] There is an overlap between modernism and the Enlightenment, though the term modernism is more generally used to describe broad cultural trends, while Enlightenment tends to be used for the more strictly philosophical aspects of the movement.

[5] Wilbert R. Shenk, "The Culture of Modernity as a Missionary Challenge," in Hunsberger and van Gelder, 70.

[6] PRECIS 6 (1987), 7-24, quoted in David Harvey The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 8-9

any worldview in order to ascertain its distinctiveness.[7] Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton offer a similar but more concise approach, asking four questions which elucidate the character of a worldview: Who are we? (What is the nature of human beings?) Where are we? (What kind of a universe is this?) What is the problem? What is the solution?[8] I will apply these questions to modernism and highlight its implications for Christian faith:

Who are we?

One of the cornerstones of modernist thinking concerns the nature of human beings. In this worldview, human beings are autonomous, rational beings--"independent, self-reliant, self-centering and self-integrating subjects."[9] Indeed, Immanuel Kant coined as the slogan of the Enlightenment, "Have the courage to use your own reason!"[10] Human beings, particularly in their capacity for rational thought, are thus accorded great dignity and importance.

---

[7] James W. Sire The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976; 2nd edn., 1988), 18.

[8] Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton, The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 35. This approach is also endorsed by N. T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 123. In this context, Wright also draws attention to a comparable series of nine questions which Vatican II "suggested were common to all humans."

[9] Middleton and Walsh, Truth is Stranger, 47

[10] Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment? trans. Lewis Beck White (Indianopolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), 85, quoted in Colin Brown, Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements, vol.1 (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1990) 285-286.

The image which has come to epitomize this aspect of modernism is that of the solitary Descartes, deep in thought:

> I shall now close my eyes, stop up my ears, turn away all my senses, even efface from my thoughts all images of corporeal things . . . and thus communing only with myself, and examining my inner self, I shall try to make myself, little by little, better known and more familiar to myself.[11]

One product of Descartes' meditation was his famous "Cogito ergo sum," which has come to symbolize the power of self-initiated, individual, abstract rationality. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, once mused whether Descartes' moment of revelation was not the most disastrous moment in European history.[12] Temple suggested this at least in part because of what it meant for the significance of the Christian God in the world. Descartes himself appears to have understood the theological implications of his philosophy:

> Freewill is in itself the noblest thing we can have because it makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects.[13]

If people are autonomous (literally, setting their own rules) and free, what place is there for a traditional conception of God as Ruler and Law-giver? God, according to Kant, is reduced to "a concept which completes and crowns the whole of human knowledge."[14] God thus becomes merely a cipher: a useful

---

[11] René Descartes, Discourse on Method and The Meditation (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988), 113.

[12] Brown, 184.

[13] René Descartes, Descartes: Philosophical Letters, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 228, quoted in Charles Taylor Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 147.

[14] Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), 531; quoted in Colin E. Gunton The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity: the 1992 Bampton Lectures (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.

concept in an anthropocentric worldview. Martin Marty dubs this figure "the departed God."[15]

Where are we?

According to modernism, we live in a world which, when measured by human standards, is full of potential usefulness. We "assume that the real world is both knowable and manageable by human beings".[16] Thus there is a correlation between what modernity believes about human nature (who we are) and what modernity believes about the world (where we are): the mind is a supremely efficient tool for understanding the world, and human power and ingenuity are highly effective instruments for managing the world. The world meanwhile is an object ripe for study, for manipulation and for exploitation. Bertrand Russell's explanation is typical of this view:

> To respect physical nature is foolish; physical nature should be studied with a view to making it serve human ends as a far as possible.[17]

It should be noted that this philosophy assumes a disjuncture between people and their world. Descartes, as quoted above, had already assumed this dichotomy by separating himself from "corporeal things" in order to meditate, and this separation between human beings and the world becomes an important cornerstone of modernist science: the world is now an "object" for human use, and "objective" study the necessary goal of science. Fritjof Capra,

---

[15] Martin E. Marty A Short History of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 297.

[16] Middleton and Walsh, 28.

[17] Bertrand Russell, "What I Believe," in Why I Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects (London: Unwin Books, 1957; 2nd edition 1967), 71.

contrasting the understanding of science in modernism and in postmodernism, observes:

> The "Cartesian" division allowed scientists to treat matter as dead and completely separate from themselves, and to see the material world as a multitude of different objects assembled into a huge machine.[18]

This contrasts ominously with traditional Christian faith. Firstly, the creation stories of Genesis include humankind as part of the world created by God. Human beings are not as different--nor as godlike--as the Enlightenment posited. Secondly, the cultural mandate of Genesis 1 gave humankind only a delegated authority over the world. Human beings were responsible to God for their stewardship of the world. But if human beings are now "exempt . . . from being [God's] subjects", there is no longer any external restraint on the human use of creation.

What is the problem?

In modernist thought, the problems of the world are those things which limit or reduce human fulfillment. Some of these problems--disease, for example--exist in the natural world. Others are caused by human beings themselves. After all, if instrumental rationality is the highest human quality, and its exercise the key to human existence, then anything which militates against reason is an enemy of progress. In particular, ignorance, superstition

---

[18] Fritjof Capra The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism (Berkeley: Shambhala 1975), 22.

and religion oppose rationality.[19] Bertrand Russell clearly demonstrates the antithesis:

> God and immortality, the central dogmas of the Christian religion, find no support in science. . . . Fear is the basis of religious dogma . . . . I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive. . . . It is evident that a man with a scientific outlook on life cannot let himself be intimidated by texts of Scripture or by the teaching of the Church.[20]

For Russell, God, fear, intimidation, dogma, Scripture, and the church represent reactionary forces standing in the way of science, courage, reason and fact. Without such enemies:

> There is probably no limit to what science can do in the way of increasing positive excellence. . . . There seems scarcely any limit to what *could* be done in the way of producing a good world if only men would use science wisely.[21]

What is the solution?

Fortunately, destiny is on the side of humankind. "You can't stand in the way of progress" is a classic modernist proverb. With human ingenuity and energy, things will get better, and the problems of the world will be solved. H. G. Wells wrote with characteristic modernist optimism:

> Can we doubt that presently our race . . . will achieve unity and peace, that it will live . . . in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever-widening circle of adventure and achievement?[22]

---

[19] The title of Immanuel Kant's book, Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone (1793), is indicative of modernism's limited tolerance of religion. "The claims of religion are narrowed in their essential content and made to rest on an autonomous practical reason." Peter Byrne, "Kantianism," in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, 294-299.

[20] Russell, 46, 49, 57.

[21] Ibid., 69

[22] H. G. Wells A Short History of the World. Quoted in Kenneth J. Gergen, The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life" (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 30 The First World War is commonly characterized as

Where there are people who stand in the way of progress, they must be educated (into our way of thinking, as autonomous, rational individuals) or converted (to the God who underwrites our projects--for there is a religious form of modernism), or be coerced (through slavery, war or colonization).

C. S. Lewis parodies this belief in progress in his science fiction novel, Out of the Silent Planet.[23] The scientist Weston (significantly named) leads an expedition to Mars (here called Malacandra) to prepare the way for human takeover of other planets. He declaims:

> I am prepared without flinching to plant the flag of man on the soil of Malacandra: to march on, step by step, superseding, where necessary, the lower forms of life that we find, claiming planet after planet, system after system, till our posterity . . . dwell in the universe wherever the universe is habitable. (Lewis 159)

In fact, this speech contains the modernist answers to all for world-view questions: human beings are the natural rulers of the world; the world (and indeed other worlds) exists for our benefit; the problem is that our planet may prove inadequate for our needs; the solution is to use our technology to colonize the rest of the universe.

The Influence of Modernism on Mission and Evangelism

How has the church responded to the growth and challenge of modernity? It is probably true to say that in many instances the church in

---

destroying such humanistic confidence, yet Wells' book was written in 1922. By 1945, however, he appears much more pessimistic in Mind at the End of its Tether.

[23] C. S. Lewis Out of the Silent Planet (London: The Bodley Head, 1938; Pan Books, 1952), 159.

Western societies, rather than acting as a counter-culture, demonstrating dominant cultural features different from those of the culture around, has merely been a sub-culture, accepting the dominant values of the society around, and differing only in cultural details, such as church attendance. In terms of evangelism, it is worth noting that the word "evangelism" is not itself a biblical one.[24] The first recorded use of the term, ironically, is in the writings of Francis Bacon, a pioneer of modern science, and hence of the modernist world-view, in 1650.[25] Just as David Bosch warns us that "the term 'mission' . . . is of fairly recent origin" and is "intimately bound up with the colonial expansion of the West," so Bacon's coinage of the word "evangelism" should alert us to the association of evangelism with modernity.[26]

One outstanding example of modernity in mission and evangelism is the church's overseas missions in the nineteenth century, and its complicity in the colonialism which was a natural expression of modernist thinking. Both David Bosch and Lamin Sanneh have significantly nuanced the popular picture of the church working hand in glove with colonizing powers,[27] yet both admit that there is significant truth in it. Bosch acknowledges that:

---

[24] The Bible prefers the concrete terms *euaggelizomai* (to announce good news), *euaggelion* (Gospel) and *euaggelistes* (evangelist), rather than the abstract "evangelism."

[25] The Oxford English Dictionary, 1933, vol.3, 329.

[26] I have observed on two occasions that churches where people are becoming Christians do not use the word "evangelism" to describe their ministry: it simply happens as a natural expression of their spiritual vitality. It is sobering to reflect that perhaps the church's coinage of the word "evangelism" is itself a sign of unhealth.

[27] Typical is Bosch's comment: "I am convinced that the missionaries were, by and large, a breed fundamentally different from their colonizing compatriots." David J. Bosch, "Reflections on biblical Models of Mission", in Phillips and Coote, 176-177.

> the entire modern missionary enterprise is, to a very real extent, a child of the Enlightenment. . . . [T]he very term . . . "mission" was conceived as a concomitant of Western imperial outreach. (Bosch 274)

Sanneh discusses one of the most famous of nineteenth century missionaries, David Livingstone, who:

> gave popular expression to the notion that commerce, civilization, and Christianity must go hand in hand. . . . It is of course true that Livingstone did encourage the spread of what he called "civilization," and that many people . . . understood the term as an extension of the instrument of empire.[28]

While nineteenth century overseas missions betray the influence of modernist thinking, the same tendencies are also obvious as the church sought to defend and further the faith in the West. Two examples will illustrate this weakness.

One is the apologetics movement. From Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752) to Josh McDowell (1941-), one response of the church to modernism has been to seek to explain Christian faith in light of the new questions thrown up by the modern worldview, and to defend the faith against intellectual attack. As David Bosch explains:

> How can God reign sovereignly if people understand themselves to be free? Is God still active in a world in which it is believed that people take the initiative to create whatever they need? . . . A new theological discipline began to emerge: Christian apologetics.[29]

To engage the enemy that closely, however, involves dangers, in particular what Martin Marty calls "the timeless error of Christian apologists: they granted so much to the presuppositions of the antagonist that they could not really win the case."[30]

---

[28] Sanneh, 105, 108.

[29] Bosch, 268.

[30] Marty, 298.

While it is debatable whether all apologists fall into this trap[31], it is true that the language of apologetics often sounds suspiciously modernist. The introduction to one popular apologetics textbook, for instance, claims that:

> [it] presents with great convicting power hundreds of historical evidences which validate the teachings of the Christian faith. I make bold to say that no intelligent person can read this with an open mind without coming to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God.[32]

The writer of this introduction uses quasi-scientific language ("hundreds of . . . evidences"), believes that external data can validate Christian faith (somehow these data are more significant than the Gospel's own self-validation) appeals to the "intelligent person" (a modernist conceit), and accepts the Enlightenment fiction of "an open mind." The problem is that this approach to apologetics merely confirms people in their modernist assumptions, whereas the Gospel challenges those assumptions as idolatrous, and calls us to repent of them. This is what William Willimon calls:

> the great lie behind most apologetics, the deceit that it is possible to hear the gospel while we are still trapped in outmoded or culturally conditioned patterns of thought and hearing.[33]

The other example of modernist influence on the church concerns evangelism and specifically evangelistic preaching. Charles Finney (1792-1875) introduced changes to the evangelistic style of his predecessors, preachers like John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards. One commentator alerts us to the significance of the change by observing that "[t]he difference between Edwards

---

[31] Colin Brown, for instance, believes that Bishop Butler argued from distinctively Christian presuppositions. Brown, 210.

[32] Dr. Harold Fickett, foreword to More Evidence that Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell (Arrowhead Springs CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975) i.

[33] Willimon, The Intrusive Word, 19.

and Finney is essentially the difference between the mediaeval and the modern temper."[34] Mark Noll says that Finney "created powerful yet controlled evangelistic 'methods'".[35] Already Finney's evangelism is expressed in terms of power, control, and method: distinctively modernist language. Finney in fact uses such language himself. He criticized Presbyterianism as "a theology unappreciative of native human ability". He made regular use of the "anxious bench" for those who came forward after his sermon, out of the conviction that "if God had commanded individuals to repent, he had also given them the means to do so at once." When Calvinists criticized his emphasis on human action in salvation, his "best defense of the practice was that it worked." Noll contends that "Finney was yet more Arminian than John Wesley": Wesley believed that God had to prepare an individual in order for them to choose God, but "Finney rejected this requirement." Lastly, "he tended towards a belief that emotions are the culprit that keep reason and will from following God's purposes."[36] These emphases on method, rationality, human freedom, activism, and pragmatism are characteristic Enlightenment concepts.

Finney's methodology was continued (with some variations) by D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday and Billy Graham. Indeed, it is probably true to say that most evangelistic preaching in the West has been influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the model provided by these men, so that we should not be surprised to find, in varying degrees, strong modernist influences in

---

[34] W. G. McLaughlin Jr. Modern Revivalism: From Charles G. Finney to Billy Graham (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), 11, quoted in Wayne Kirkland, "The Roots of Modern Evangelism", Stimulus, Vol.1 No.1 (February 1993), 30.

[35] Mark A. Noll, A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 174.

[36] Ibid. 175-176.

contemporary evangelism. The popular metaphors of evangelism are revealing. Terminology like "campaign," "crusade," "target," "tool," and "strategy" is common in thinking about evangelism, as though evangelism were warfare (with unbelievers as the "enemy," or, at best, "prisoners of war"), a marketing campaign (with unbelievers as the consumer) or an industrial process (with unbelievers as the raw material).[37] A term like "friendship evangelism" makes friendship appear a means to an end, rather than a God-given end in itself. "Lifestyle evangelism" similarly smacks of technique and manipulation, as if Christian discipleship were a lifestyle adopted not out of obedience to Christ but in order to impress and attract the unevangelized. Coming to faith is often characterized as a "decision"--the objective choice of a free, rational individual--again, a thoroughly modernist construct.

In terms of the content of evangelistic preaching, modernity has dictated that it be dominated by propositions, thus privileging the intellect over the imagination, the emotions or the heart.[38] Certainly there are stories, or illustrations, but, as Thomas Long has pointed out, the popular use of the term "sermon illustration," which became widespread in the nineteenth century, was "neither neutral nor innocent." Illustrations had "one and only one

---

[37] Wilbert Shenk points out that "the term 'strategy' derives from the Greek *strategos* or 'general'", and therefore suggests the metaphor of a military campaign, where "the 'other' is an enemy who is to be forcibly subdued. . . . Neither the goal nor the means employed in a military operation are appropriate to Christian mission." The metaphor also suggests calculation, "searching for the most efficient means based on empirical data." Wilbert R. Shenk, "Mission Strategies", in Phillips and Coote, 218-219. Gary Davis, an American evangelist, highlighted the incongruity of this when he said in a speech recently, "I don't need a strategy for kissing my wife!"

[38] One evangelist said to me recently, "Surely our job is to communicate propositional truth?"

communicative task: the clarification of concepts."[39] Concepts were primary, story or illustration was secondary. The emphasis on the mind was also underlined by a popular mnemonic such as the sequence, "Facts-Faith-Feelings": a response to the Gospel begins with "facts," public, neutral facts, heard in isolation from a community; "faith" then is a logical response of trust to the facts, quite separate from my perception of the facts; and "feelings," whether of joy or doubt, should not be regarded at all since they have nothing to do with the essential business of faith, which is a rational decision.

Historically, the period the Enlightenment coincided with the dominance of Christendom in the West, so evangelists could also presuppose a certain level of biblical literacy and even respect for the Bible. Evangelistic sermons could therefore begin with Scripture and work deductively: preacher and hearers both accepted that as appropriate common ground for discussing faith issues.

The Decline of Modernity

In the past two hundred years, there have been various challenges to the hegemony of modernism. One was the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century:

> Rejecting the ordered rationality of the Enlightenment as mechanical, impersonal, and artificial, the Romantics turned to the emotional directness of personal experience and to the boundlessness of individual imagination and aspiration. . . . The restrained balance valued in 18th century culture was abandoned in favour of emotional intensity. . . .

---

[39] Thomas G. Long, The Witness of Preaching (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 161

> [A]lmost all [Romantics] showed a new interest in the irrational realms of dream and delirium or of folk superstition and legend.[40]

The Romantics believed that the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationalism neglected significant aspects of human nature and experience. They sought, by their living and their art, to redress the balance in the direction of a more holistic view of human nature, embracing emotion, imagination and experience. Rousseau even suggested an alternative to Descartes' famous dictum: "I feel therefore I exist."[41]

Another challenge was the Existentialist movement of the 1960s. D. M. McKinnon explains that existentialism displayed "hostility to abstract theory for obscuring the roughness and untidiness of actual life."[42] As with Romanticism, Existentialism found that rationalism does not do justice to the fullness of human existence. One expression of this is the conviction that, as McKinnon puts it, "[t]he task of the moral philosopher is seen as continuous with that of the novelist or dramatist." In strict modernist thought, philosophy would be separate from, and superior to, creative writing, which stresses imagination, experience and story. Existentialists like Sartre or Camus, however, challenge what they perceive to be this false dichotomy: as a result, their novels deal with philosophical or ethical concerns just as seriously as their purely philosophical writings.

---

[40] Chris Baldick, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 193.

[41] Harvey, 19.

[42] J. O. Urmson and Jonathan Ree, The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers (New York: Routledge, 1960, new ed. 1989), s.v. "Existentialism," by D. M. McKinnon.

Postmodernism is the most recent in this series of reactions against the restrictions of the Enlightenment. There is a perception that the Enlightenment "project"[43] has failed to fulfill its promise, substantial evidence that it has caused as much harm as it has done good,[44] and, as a result, a lack of confidence in its premises and procedures. Alister McGrath summarises the problem thus:

> There has been a general collapse of confidence in the Enlightenment trust in the power of reason to provide foundations for a universally-valid knowledge of the world, including God. Reason fails to deliver a morality suited to the real world in which we live. [45]

Whether postmodernism will finally topple the long reign of modernity remains to be seen, but it appears to be a movement more broadly and popularly based (and consequently more difficult to define) than either Romanticism or Existentialism.

What is Postmodernism?

The problem with defining postmodernism is that, even more than modernism, it is not a cohesive, rational whole. As Stanley Grenz explains:

> [n]o clear shared focus unites the diverse and divergent elements of postmodern society into a single whole.[46]

---

[43] The image of the modern "project" is from Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity: an Incomplete Project" in H. Foster, Recodings: Art, Spectacle and Cultural Politics (Port Townsend, Washington: [?] 1985), quoted in Harvey, 9.

[44] R. Detweiler points, for example, to the "negativity generated by two shattering world wars, the threat of destruction from nuclear power and the persisting memories of Holocaust horrors." "Postmodernism" in The Blackwell Encylopedia of Modern Christian Thought, 456.

[45] Alister E. McGrath, Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics (Leicester UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 223.

[46] Stanley J. Grenz A Primer on Postmodernism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 19

In fact, "cohesive, rational wholes" are one of the things postmodernism most vehemently rejects. As Grenz says, "The postmodern ethos resists unified, all-encompassing, and universally valid explanations." Such explanations, or metanarratives, are perceived to have been historically oppressive and destructive of alternative world-views and ways of being. In place of such overarching explanations, postmodernism offers instead, "a respect for difference and a celebration of the local and particular."[47]

Having said that, it is possible to identify some distinguishing marks, particularly in the ways postmodernism reacts against modernism. Anthony Thiselton, for instance, suggests that postmodernism has rejected each of the basic tenets of modernist optimism:

> Postmodernism implies a *shattering of innocent confidence in the capacity of the self to control its own destiny.* It signals a loss of trust in global strategies of social planning, and in universal criteria of rationality.[48]

We will consider Thiselton's three indicators in reverse order.

Universal Criteria of Rationality

There is no longer a firm belief that rationality is the same the world over. What seems rational is frequently culturally-determined. For instance, if one asks whether it is rational to pray, the answer will be different according to one's world-view. To complicate matters further, no world-view--even modernism--is embraced on wholly rational grounds. "Facts" play a central part in the modernist understanding of the world: yet what counts as a fact will also

---

[47] Ibid., 12.

[48] Thiselton, 11.

differ according to one's culture and world-view. The problem is illustrated by Bertrand Russell, a classic modern rationalist, who suggested that what makes a belief true "is a fact, and this fact does not . . . in any way involve the mind of the person who has the belief." Karl Popper, in the same tradition, suggests that "knowledge in the objective sense is knowledge without a knower."[49] The problem brought to light by postmodernism is that human beings do not have access to "facts" which do not involve the mind of a human being, just as we do not have access to knowledge "without a knower." Postmodernism foregrounds the importance of the human knower, just as modernism minimized the importance of the human knower.

A crucial expression of this modernist understanding of rationality is modern science. Here too the absoluteness of modernism's claims have been challenged. Thomas Kuhn[50] is regarded as the first to question the "objectivity" of science, and to suggest that scientific "progress" was not as rational and linear as the mythology of modernity had suggested. He proposed instead that science works by means of "paradigms", imaginative models of reality, which change from time to time under pressure as the old paradigms fail to account for new data. He pointed to the human factors in science: to the role of nonrational intuition in new discoveries and advances; to scientists' reluctance to abandon an old paradigm, simply because it had become familiar; to the significance of vested interests, professional jealousies, and economic and political pressures which sway the supposed neutrality of science; and to the power of the scientific community with its own internal language-games. To

---

[49] Bertrand Russell, The Problem of Evil, 75; Karl Popper, Objective Knowledge, 109; quoted in Bosch, 266.

[50] Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; 2nd ed. 1970).

challenge the objectivity of science in the way that Kuhn did was to cut at the very roots of the ideology of modernity. The conclusion of this line of thinking was, as William Willimon declares, that:

> Descartes was wrong. There is no firmly established starting point for thought, some freestanding knowledge, independent of the background or coloration of a system of thought. All experience is value-laden. We see what we have been previously taught to see. Our analysis is not as empirical as we first claimed.[51]

Global strategies of social planning

Secondly, Thiselton says, it is hard to trust "global strategies". Usually "global strategies" has meant the export of Western technology and values--whether literacy, democracy, nuclear power, or Coca-Cola--to other countries. In modernist times, this made sense, since Western rational values were seen as universally valid, and, indeed, superior. Now, there is a move to reject a monolithic universal culture and to affirm different cultures in all their diversity--not least in view of the negative impact Western civilization has had on other cultures.[52]

The movie Schindler's List, for instance, illustrates how events like the Second World War have shaken confidence in what was once considered superior European civilization. In one scene of the movie, while the SS are clearing the Warsaw ghetto of its Jewish population, one officer comes across a piano in one of the apartments they have evacuated. He sits down and plays

---

[51] Willimon, The Intrusive Word, 92.

[52] Changes in contemporary culture are often indicated by bumper stickers. Postmodern bumper stickers include: "One World--No More!" "Celebrate diversity!" and even "Subvert the dominant paradigm."

Bach, while the devastating work of the SS goes on all around. In the mythology of modernity, "civilization"--the ultimate fruit of rational thought and scientific advance--was an absolute good. In fact, in the book on which the movie is based, author Thomas Keneally comments on the hope near the beginning of the Nazi occupation of Poland, that the violence would not last: "After all, Oskar [Schindler] and the Jews told themselves, the Germans were a *civilized* nation."[53] Philosophically, pogroms and Bach are worlds apart; historically, barbarity and "civilization" were never very far apart. As a result, global strategies based on the supposed superiority of the West now lack credibility.

The capacity of the self

The third characteristic of postmodernism Thiselton identifies is a change in the view of the self. If the modern self sought to be self-sufficient, the postmodern self is seen to be fragmented, limited, and dependent. Psychologist Kenneth Gergen summarises the postmodern mood by suggesting that "[u]nder postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction." He notes as one indicator of human brokenness that "[t]he vocabulary of human deficit has undergone enormous expansion within the present century."[54]

---

[53] Thomas Keneally, Schindler's List (Hemisphere Publishers, 1982; Toronto: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone Books, 1993), 57.

[54] Gergen, 7, 13. As examples of this terminology, Gergen offers over twenty terms, including: low self-esteem, externally controlled, depressed, stressed, obsessive-compulsive, sadomasochistic, identity crisis and anti-social personality.

Once again a movie documents this shift in culture. The movie Bladerunner is seen by many as "the acme of postmodern movies".[55] It is set in Los Angeles in the year 2019, where the "modern" world of offices and stores is falling apart. Harrison Ford, the main character, has the task of tracking down aliens who are indistinguishable from real people. Already puzzled as to whether the woman he is falling in love with is in fact human, Ford is confused by seeing a photograph of her family. Traditionally, "the camera never lies" (one of modernism's absolutes), therefore a family photograph should confirm a person's reality and history.[56] Yet the camera can and does lie--in fact, some would say the camera cannot do other than lie[57]--so how can Ford know whether this woman is human or an enemy alien? What, after all, constitutes a true human being? In a modernist culture, the answer was clear; now the lines are blurred. In a sense, the whole of the modernist world-view depended on its theory of the self: confidence in the power of human rationality, faith in the inevitable upward path of progress, trust in the efficacy of science and the goodness of technology, a vision of a utopian future--all these were predicated on a high view of human competence. Once that becomes untenable, the rest of

---

[55] David Lyon Postmodernity (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 2.

[56] Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes have both written significant treatises discussing how and why in fact the camera does lie. Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), and Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

[57] Commenting on one of the most influential photographs of the Vietnam war, of a Vietnamese general summarily executing a Viet Cong prisoner, the photojournalist who took the photograph, Eddie Adams, attempted to explain that, in the historical context, the act he had recorded was not as outrageous as it seemed to Western viewers: "Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths." TIME Magazine, July 27, 1998.

the project inevitably unravels, and Western culture is left without a unifying metanarrative.

The lack of a metanarrative

From a postmodern standpoint, the loss of the modernist metanarrative is cause for rejoicing. For almost three hundred years, modernity told a loud, authoritative, masculine kind of metanarrative. It is a story which has put certain people centre-stage--generally, white heterosexual males--and caused grief and hardship for others, particularly for minorities. In the postmodern world, that story and its story-tellers are being de-centred: the story did not live up to its promises of freedom and a new world, and has lost credibility. Indeed, postmodernism has introduced a fearfulness of metanarratives in general, since, it is contended, their tendency is invariably to become oppressive of others who do not share it. One of the most-repeated sayings of postmodernism is Jean-Francois Lyotard's: "I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives."[58]

The need for story, however, has not gone away. As Alisdair McIntyre has argued:

> I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?". . . It is through hearing stories . . . that children learn or mislearn . . . what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. . . . Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things.[59]

---

[58] Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), quoted in Middleton and Walsh, 70.

[59] Alasdair MacIntyre After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981; 2nd edn. 1984), 216.

Thus postmodernism seeks to hear and to validate local narratives, that is, stories of individuals and communities, stories without universal pretensions, stories which empower those who tell them but do not threaten the freedom of others. In particular, there is a welcoming of the stories of people and communities which were formerly marginalized and silenced by modernity--voices of women[60], of non-whites, and of homosexuals.

The transition from a world ruled by metanarrative to a world of local narratives has been dramatized by Stephen Sondheim's musical Into the Woods. At first, the story is told by a narrator (maybe it is only coincidence that he is a white male), but then the characters agree to sacrifice the narrator to a marauding giant. It is significant that nobody particularly cares for the narrator. After all, he is not a part of their lives: his role is to be "objective" and it is easy to "objectify" him. Then, however, the individual characters are forced to make up the rest of their own story--or stories.[61]

The problems of replacing metanarratives with local narratives, however, are two-fold: firstly that people still have a yearning to be part of a metanarrative (though not an oppressive one); and, secondly, that local narratives can be just as dehumanizing as metanarratives--for instance, the "local narratives" of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.[62] For the

---

[60] My wife has suggested that the script prescribed for women under modernity was, "I do not think, therefore I am not."

[61] I am indebted to Les Casson, IVCF staff at Queen's University in Kingston, for this illustration.

[62] Michael Ignatieff offers a further example of how local narratives are not always benign: "In the summer of 1992, when Serbian militias were viciously 'cleansing' the Muslim villages of southeastern Bosnia, journalists asked the Serbs of Foca and Goradze why people they had lived with for centuries deserved such treatment. The Serbs seemed surprised by the

Christian, of course, there is a further complication, since the Christian faith inescapably centres around a metanarrative--one which has often been seen (and indeed experienced) as oppressive. The evangelist has to decide how, if at all, that metanarrative can be told in a way which is liberating and which enhances human dignity.

What the shift from modern to postmodern means for evangelism

As the tide of modernity retreats, the forms of evangelism which it produced are increasingly left stranded as cultural anachronisms. How then should Christians respond to postmodernism, and what would evangelism look like which was appropriate for the postmodern world?

Following Lesslie Newbigin's call to regard the western world as a mission field, it is helpful to consider the insights of missionaries like Vincent Donovan[63] and Don Richardson about relating to an alien culture. For those who grew up surrounded by the medium of modernity, postmodernism certainly feels at first as alien as the culture of a different continent. Missionary thinkers, however, remind us that this is to be expected, and teach us that we must first listen humbly to the host culture. We seek to understand it, not least to learn from it and be corrected by it, but also, for our evangelism, to perceive where God is at work creating "points of contact" (Brunner's term) for the Gospel. This

---

question. Didn't everybody know that Muslims killed Serbian children and floated their crucified bodies down the river Drina? Several old women, doing their washing by the riverbank, swore they had seen them with their own eyes." "Myth and Malevolence", TIME, July 17, 1995, 72.

[63] "Vincent Donovan's attempt to reach the Masai . . . points us in the right direction." Shenk, "Mission Strategies", 223.

principle does not change simply because, through an accident of birth, we have grown up in what has become our mission field. Then also we can learn from missiologists like Lamin Sanneh, who points to the intrinsic translatability of the Christian faith. The Gospel can and must be translated into the language and culture of postmodernity, though, as Sanneh also reminds us, there are risks involved in the act of translation.[64]

The rebuke of postmodernism

Just as Vincent Donovan found that his involvement with Masai culture caused him to view his own culture critically, so exposure to postmodernism has caused some in the Christian community to become aware of and to repent for the unthinking way destructive modernist assumptions have influenced Christian thinking and acting. As long ago as 1975, for example, a strong note of repentance was incorporated into a mainstream evangelical document on mission and evangelism, The Lausanne Declaration.[65] Indeed, John Stott, in writing about the Declaration, commented that "the spirit of Lausanne was a spirit of humility and a spirit of penitence."[66] The Declaration itself includes these comments:

> the dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing . . . Thus a growing partnership of churches will develop . . . Missionaries should flow ever more freely from and to all six continents in a spirit of humble service. . . . The Gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness. . . . Missions have all too frequently exported with the

---

[64] See my chapter 3, section entitled "The Risks of Translation."

[65] John R. W. Stott, The Lausanne Declaration: An Exposition and Commentary (Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, 1975)

[66] Ibid., 4.

> Gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture.[67]

It is doubtful whether any conscious postmodern influence is present here. Nevertheless the concern for Western cultural dominance to cease, the emphasis on service rather than power, the stress on the equality (in beauty and in sin) of all cultures, the welcoming of mutuality rather than unidirectional patronage, the desire to be self-critical, and the determination to true to one's own story (Scripture)--all these are a Christian mirror of central postmodern concerns.

The work of repentance needs to go deeper, however, and to include a turning away from all the modernist distortions of evangelism. For example, those concerned for evangelism need to renounce the depersonalizing language of "strategies" and "tools" which is so antithetical to the Gospel's concern for human dignity, and to shape new language more appropriate to the nature of the Gospel.

The benefits of postmodernism for evangelism

There is much in postmodernism that Christians can rejoice about. Modernism was at worst a fierce enemy of the faith, and at best a treacherous friend, often leading us to be unfaithful to the Gospel. The postmodern critique

---

[67] Ibid., 56.

of modernity helps liberate Christians from the tyranny of modernism, whether as friend or as foe, and thus to grow in fidelity to the Gospel.

In the area of evangelism, the insights of postmodernism have been many. For example, postmodernism's emphasis on story as the primary source of truth has helped Christians remember that the Bible is primarily story, and that the story is not just a disposable setting for propositional jewels. The story is God's story, and evangelism, rather than being an attempt to convince people to subscribe to certain abstract propositions, may be understood as inviting people to be a part of God's story. Eugene Peterson is typical of Christian writers who approve this shift from proposition to story:

> Story is the primary way in which the revelation of God is given to us. The Holy Spirit's literary genre of choice is story. Story isn't a simple or naive form of speech from which we graduate to the more sophisticated, "higher" languages of philosophy or mathematics, leaving the stories behind for children and the less well educated. . . . To get this revelation right, we enter the story. . . . Story isn't imposed on our lives; it invites us into its life.[68]

How is evangelism which stresses story different? This kind of evangelism appeals to the whole person, including the imagination and the emotions and not only the mind; it speaks to all kinds of people, not only the intellectual; and it invites involvement, not only intellectual assent.

Postmodernism's emphasis on community has helped Christians rethink the corporate aspect of their faith.[69] The traditional Protestant

---

[68] Eugene H. Peterson Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 3-4.

[69] It is worth noting that this was being discussed as long ago as 1975. Typical of evangelical writers is Michael Griffiths who, writing in a popular book about the church, says: "The concept of a solitary saint is foreign to the New Testament writers. . . . There would appear to be little biblical justification for our becoming spiritual Robinson Crusoes." Cinderella with

emphasis on the individual, as in phrases such as "my personal Saviour," has begun to give way to a fresh awareness of "the body of Christ." Not least, the idea of "truth in community" has helped Christians understand why their message makes perfect sense to themselves but can seem incoherent to outsiders. N. T. Wright is typical of how Christians have taken advantage of this insight. Speaking of the Virgin Birth, Wright says:

> We cannot "prove" the virginal conception of Jesus to the satisfaction of post-Enlightenment scepticism. But in the light of the resurrection we are called to be sceptical about scepticism itself.[70]

Wright assumes that rationality is relative to the community in which one finds oneself. If, for instance, one is part of a post-Enlightenment sceptical community of thought, then naturally the virginal conception of Jesus appears to be nonsense. But if one is part of a community formed around the belief that Jesus rose from the dead, then the virgin birth makes perfect sense. From a Christian point-of-view, it is the modernist, Enlightenment way of thinking which is unconvincing.

It is good to have others say what Christians had sometimes suspected but seldom verbalized, that battles between secular rationality and Christianity were on an unfair playing field, and under rules, of secularism's choosing.[71]

Amnesia: A Practical Discussion of the Relevance of the Church (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 24. (It is significant that Robinson Crusoe is often seen by literary scholars as a type of the independent, rational, self-sufficient, technologically minded, white European male of the Enlightenment. See, for instance, J. D. Crowley's introduction to the World's Classics edition of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.))

[70] N. T. Wright, Who Was Jesus? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 85. Consistent with this view, Wright points out that Bishop John Spong, whose book on the Virgin Birth--Born of a Woman: a Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus (HarperSanFrancisco 1992)--he critiques, is definitely a 'modernist' not a 'post-modernist.'" 78

[71] "[O]ne can see way many Christians have been rather pleased to discover that the Enlightenment's standards of rationality and evidence . . . are

It has been a relief to have others challenge the powerful hegemony of Western rationality, and speak up on behalf of minorities who see the world differently, not least because Christians felt themselves to be a minority long before it was widely acknowledged that they were.

The realization that rationality is not the only nor even the most significant feature of human beings has made it easier for Christians to feel confidence about such deeply human characteristics as faith and feelings, intuition and spirituality.

In fact, the whole postmodern enterprise has in many ways brought a much-needed sense of freedom to the church in the West, even to those who have never heard the word "postmodern." For these things we should be grateful.

Problems of postmodernism for evangelism

The problem of an audience

While affirming the relief that postmodernism has brought from the stranglehold of modernity, the change has not been entirely beneficent. Alan Jacobs, in an article in First Things,[72] highlights two of the problems for

---

unworkable. This is why you hear so many Christians today claim, with the relief of a just-pardoned Sisyphus, that postmodernism . . . at long last 'levels the playing field'." Alan Jacobs, "A Tale of Two Stanleys," First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Life, Number 44 (June/July 1994), 20.

[72] Jacobs, 20.

evangelism which postmodernism, for all its benefits, has brought in its wake. Commenting on the popular image of the level playing field, Jacobs asks:

> [W]hat good is a level playing field if there is now no agreement on the rules of the game, or even on what game is to be played? . . . Our postmodern "level playing field" . . . can provide no-one a compelling reason to listen or to respond to the Christian case. Richard Rorty was once heard to say, in answer to a question about just this issue, that the theists are certainly free to talk, but "we don't have to listen."

In one sense, of course, no-one had to listen to the claims of Christians in modernity, either--though the fact that the Christian faith appeared to be challenging the ruling presuppositions of the age might prompt a reflex defence or counter-attack. Yet it is true that in a postmodern age, the evangelist has first to win an audience. After all, if truth is found in community, each community is free to pursue its own truth without bothering or offending or attracting anyone else. A title for a talk such as "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?" might in a different age have attracted modernists who understood the question as trespassing into secular rationalistic territory, and who were therefore curious or sceptical. In a postmodern world, however, such a question is understood not as a question in the public arena but as an in-house problem, of interest only to the Christian community. Once again, a point of contact with the culture is needed.

To take the example of speaking about the resurrection, I have found it fruitful to speak on the topic, "Jesus is Alive, Elvis is Alive: What's the Difference?" Whereas the question of Jesus' resurrection might be considered by an outsider to be an in-house belief for the Christian community, the question of Elvis' continued existence is part of secular culture (and mythology). The unlikely juxtaposition of the names Jesus and Elvis, therefore, connects

two worlds which might be thought to be totally discrete, in a way which creates intrigue and invariably draws a curious audience.

The problem of metanarrative

If the heart of postmodernism is the rejection of metanarratives, Christianity in general and evangelism in particular have a problem, since the Bible is inescapably a metanarrative, beginning with creation and ending with new creation, and, particularly in the New Testament, making universal claims about "the world." Middleton and Walsh attempt to resolve this tension by suggesting that while the Christian message is indeed a metanarrative, it is not in essence an oppressive one.[73] Christianity has, of course, been used as a controlling, oppressive metanarrative, particularly during the reign of modernity, but Middleton and Walsh argue that there are three features of the story in particular which undermine any tendency to use it in a totalizing way.

The first feature is the centrality the Bible accords to suffering. The exodus experience of the people of Israel should have had the effect of sensitizing them to the pain of others. Because they were slaves in Egypt, they should appreciate and empathize with the pain of aliens and other sufferers. Thus:

> [b]ecause of the distinctive ongoing story it told, remembered and participated in, this was to be a community which refused to cause oppression and instead was committed to fostering justice and compassion toward the marginal.[74]

The second theme Middleton and Walsh draw attention to is that this story claims to be the story of the Creator. This prevents "any merely nationalistic,

---

[73] Middleton and Walsh, chapter 5

[74] Ibid., 94

partisan interpretation of the story."[75] Certainly the nation of Israel plays a central part in the Old Testament, but this is no cause for nationalistic or triumphalistic interpretation of the story:

> Israel is called to be the particular, historically conditioned means of mediating a universal story of the healing of the world. As the servant of Yahweh, Israel exists for the sake of other nations.[76]

The third clue is what the authors call "counterideological resources . . . for inner-biblical correction."[77] By this, the authors refer in part to Scripture's own checking of the temptation to make its metanarrative oppressive. For example, Psalm 78 celebrates God's choice of Judah over Israel in a way that might encourage arrogance on Judah's part. Jeremiah's temple sermon[78], however, with its strong warnings against complacency, stands as a corrective to any such impulse. A second form of "counter-ideological resource" is the inclusion of "texts of terror"[79] in Scripture--stories of the suffering of the marginalized, such as Hagar and Tamar—which offer a different kind of corrective. Such stories have the effect of:

> evoking a primal biblical memory of suffering and oppression, and in so doing they have the potential to call into question violent and abusive uses of the biblical story.[80]

This careful treatment of the question of metanarrative--affirming its legitimacy for the Gospel yet being sensitive to postmodern ethical concerns--

---

[75] Ibid., 98

[76] Ibid., 100

[77] Ibid., 180

[78] Jeremiah chapter 7

[79] The phrase is from the title of Phyllis Trible's book, Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of biblical Narratives (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[80] Middleton and Walsh, 180

leaves the evangelist free to preach the good news of the Christian metanarrative, as long as it is done with gentleness and without arrogance. The good news of the Gospel is in part that God invites hurting people to be a part of his ongoing plan for the healing of the nations. Those who have no story are invited to be part of God's story. Those who feel their identity is fragmentary and unstable are given a role in the drama of the world. Those who have no hope are given a glorious glimpse of how the story will end. In evangelistic speaking, I have sometimes suggested that in God's great drama, Jesus is the casting director, and we must come to him to find our place in that story, to be cast in a role which is just right for us.

Middleton and Walsh point out, however, that it is not enough to tell the story well. The story must also be lived in a way that incarnates redemption and not oppression:

> [T]he charge of totalization . . . can only be answered by the concrete, nontotalizing life of actual Christians, the body of Christ who as living epistles . . . take up and continue the ministry of Jesus to a suffering and broken world. That is ultimately the only answer that counts.[81]

Thus, once more, the community which embodies the truth of the Gospel is the validation of the spoken message of Good News. The preacher is a part of the community, and speaks on behalf of the community.[82]

The problem of truth

How can a Christian evangelist convey the universal truth of the Gospel in a culture which does not acknowledge that such a thing can even exist? Alan Jacobs focuses this question in critiquing Stanley Hauerwas' book, Unleashing

---

[81] Ibid., 107

[82] See my chapter 2, section "Evangelism and Community."

the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America.[83] Jacobs cites Hauerwas as saying that:

> Stanley Fish and Pope John Paul II are on the same side when it comes to the politics of interpretation. . . . Both men assume that the text, and in this case the text of Scripture, can be interpreted only in the context of an 'interpretive community'."[84]

However, as Jacobs points out, the Pope and Fish are more different than they are similar. While Fish believes that "truth" can never be more than "truth-for-my-community", the Pope believes that:

> faced with the competing claims of many rival traditions and communities . . . it is not only possible but rationally defensible to claim that one of these traditions can be essentially right, the others (if not in every respect) wrong.[85]

The question for the evangelist, then, is how can non-Christian hearers, who are more likely to understand truth with Fish than with the Pope, be persuaded that Jesus is "the truth" and that no-one comes to the Father except by him? And if Christians acknowledge the truth of the postmodern insight that truth has something to do with community, how can they simultaneously claim that Christian truth is truth for everyone, whatever their community?

Once again, Newbigin's idea that missionaries should "provisionally accept" the host culture in which they witness is helpful.[86] Even if one acknowledges that Jesus is God's truth for all people, it is not necessary to foreground that conviction in proclaiming the Gospel. The Gospel must be preached in a way which connects with the points of contact the Holy Spirit is establishing in the culture. The concept of "one truth for all" is not one of those

---

[83] Stanley Hauerwas, Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[84] Jacobs, 19.

[85] Ibid., 19.

[86] Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks, 5-6.

points of contact. There are many other ways in which the truth of Jesus connects with unchurched people in western society: for instance, as the One who offers meaning, freedom, belonging, forgiveness, identity, significance, and healing.[87] Is this a betrayal of a fundamental principle of the Gospel? If "truth" is not discussed, can this be an authentic Gospel? I would argue that this is no more irresponsible than Don Richardson's deciding that he could not explain the Gospel to the Sawi people in terms of Judas' rejection of Jesus. Newbigin himself describes how he discovered that the Tamil people of India had no word for "hope."[88] How could he then explain what Christians mean by hope? Was his Gospel compromised because he could not explain the concept of hope?

Here, once again, the postmodern emphasis on truth-in-community and an understanding of the church as learning community are helpful. New Christians do not understand (nor do they have to understand) all aspects of the Christian faith in order to become followers of Jesus--to join his school. Obviously there has to be something that motivates them to come to Jesus, but it may well be inarticulate and even self-centred.[89] What is important is that, once in the Christian community, the new believer begins to learn a new world-view, a new way of life, and a whole new-language game. The Holy Spirit teaches him or her about the new life in Christ through the Scriptures in the context of the Christian family. Thus the person who comes to Christ with no

---

[87] It is true, as Willimon would point out, that secular definitions of these terms may be significantly different from Christian ones, yet I would argue that there is often sufficient area of overlap in meaning for the concepts to provide at least a starting point for explaining the Gospel. The discussion of the term "freedom" in the context of the movie Groundhog Day described in the previous chapter is an example of this procedure.

[88] Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralist Society, 101.

[89] Even the prodigal son came home primarily because he was hungry and had no money.

idea of hope will in time learn hope under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, in the fellowship of Christian community. In just the same way, the person who does not believe that there can be anything more than truth-for-me or even truth-for-us will in time discover the implications of who Jesus is through the process of learning in the Christian community.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see how this same progression--from the starting point of faith to an authentic Christian world-view--operated under a modernist paradigm of evangelism. For example, it was not uncommon earlier this century to initiate a conversation about the Gospel with a question such as "Have you ever considered the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?" Willimon would say that this invites the hearer to use his or her sinful, autonomous reason to sit in judgment on God's central act in history and decide its truthfulness or otherwise--a procedure little short of blasphemous. Ungodly thinking cannot find its way to God; right thinking must *begin* with God, and for that, the revolution called repentance is necessary. While this is true theologically, it is not true pastorally. It seeks to credit conversion with what is normally the effect of sanctification. Thus, many have come to Christian faith because (in rationalistic, modernist fashion) they considered the evidence for the resurrection and found it convincing,[90] but, far from going on to live their Christian lives with this same attitude of unregenerate, autonomous intellectualism, in the school of Jesus they have gradually come to learn what intellectual repentance means, and the Holy Spirit

---

[90] A classic example is Who Moved the Stone? by Frank Morison (London: Faber and Faber, 1930; reprinted Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1980). The book's cover announces in classic modernist language, "A journalist's incisive investigation into the truthfulness of Christ's resurrection. . . . [H]is probings led him to discover the validity of the biblical record . . . fascinating in its lucid appeal to reason."

has formed in them "the mind of Christ" which begins with submission to God and the reality of the resurrection.

If the Holy Spirit can work in a person's life in spite of their arrogant, modernist understanding of rational autonomy, surely the same Spirit can work in spite of an inadequate postmodern understanding of truth and reason. The Holy Spirit works with all who come to the school, for whatever reason they come and with whatever unredeemed preconceptions. To believe otherwise is to abandon the doctrine of justification by faith.

Questionnaire responses

The respondents from EC'95 on the whole reflect the fact that society is in transition. Some are more aware of the issues of postmodernism than others; some continue to work in a fairly modernist framework; most oscillate, consciously or unconsciously, between the two.

At least one delegate feels sufficiently familiar with the postmodern world that she no longer feel it to be an alien culture: it is her culture, and its language her language: to this person it is modernism that feels alien. This respondent finds the questionnaire itself problematic, frequently indicating "Unable to respond" to its categories. The reason for her uneasiness is best expressed in her statement when asked for a definition of evangelism:

> I find the term/ideology of "evangelism" too freighted, too objectifying, too modernist.

"Freighted" refers to all the modernist baggage, both cultural and philosophical, that accompanies the term "evangelism." The term "objectifying" represents the post-modern concern that modernity has a tendency to treat people as objects. Far from seeing those outside the church as objects, this writer has identified sufficiently closely with the post-modern world that while every other respondent identifies (86% say "Very strongly") with the statement, **It is important to build bridges to the secular world**, she notes, "Unable to respond." After all, it is not necessary to build bridges to a place where you already live. Only outsiders need to build bridges. Lamin Sanneh describes how, in a manner reminiscent of this respondent, Robert de Nobili, a sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary to India, determined "to put on India like a natural hue, rather than as a temporary cloak."[91] One could argue that, while such missionaries run unusual risks,[92] they also have uniquely powerful credibility as they share the Gospel in their adopted culture.

More typical of responses in general, however, is one who describes evangelism as participation in the "great work of bringing humans back into a relationship with [God]." This is modernist language: evangelism is "work" (a project), and people are to be "brought back," an objectifying term which

---

[91] Sanneh, 98-100.

[92] According to Sanneh, Hindu concepts "all left their mark on the Christianity of de Nobili." Sanneh, 99-100. Newbigin comments that for later generations of Indian Christians, de Nobili's acceptance of the caste structure means that "[a] daring effort at contextualization has . . . betrayed the gospel." (The Gospel in a Pluralist Culture 143) This seems an unnecessarily harsh judgment. After all, every missionary's cultural judgments are fallible, and to avoid all possible compromise by not being involved in the host culture is a far worse betrayal of the Gospel. Stephen Neill is more tolerant: "The Indian Church is far from having solved the problem of caste, and de Nobili cannot be blamed for having held one particular view of it." A History of Christian Missions (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), 186.

suggests that people are like sheep, or prisoners, or perhaps the "target" of advertising. He also sees a clear dichotomy between the Gospel and the unbeliever. There is apparently no awareness of God already at work in the world:

> evangelistic preaching brings the truth of the gospel to bear on the mind, heart and will of non-believers, persuading them towards faith in Jesus.

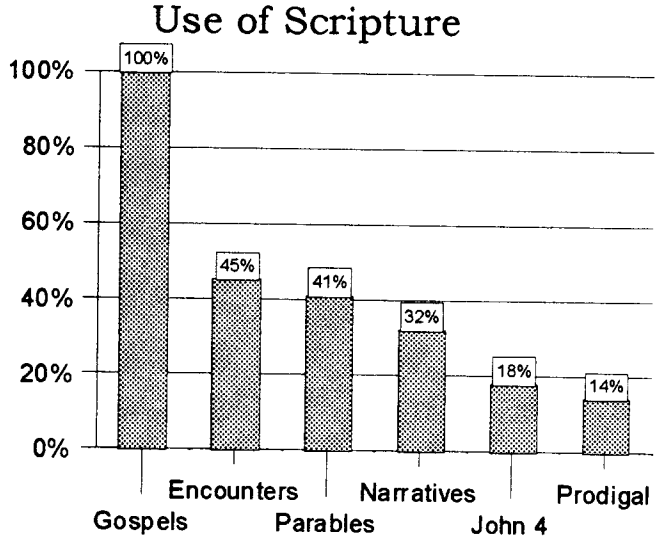
The language of "bring to bear," "exposing" and even "persuading" sounds suspiciously like a project in which something is done to someone who does not necessarily want it to be done to them. From a post-modern point-of-view, it is objectifying, oppressive, and paternalistic.

Yet in other ways the same respondent sounds sensitive to the post-modern world. For example, he seems to abdicate a position of spiritual superiority by indicating strong agreement that he is **a fellow-seeker for God with [his] hearers**. When asked the most significant influence in helping him relate to an audience, his answer more than anyone else's is strongly relational:

> The key for me in this area is knowing and having relationships with non-Christians. Relate to individuals, then the audience.

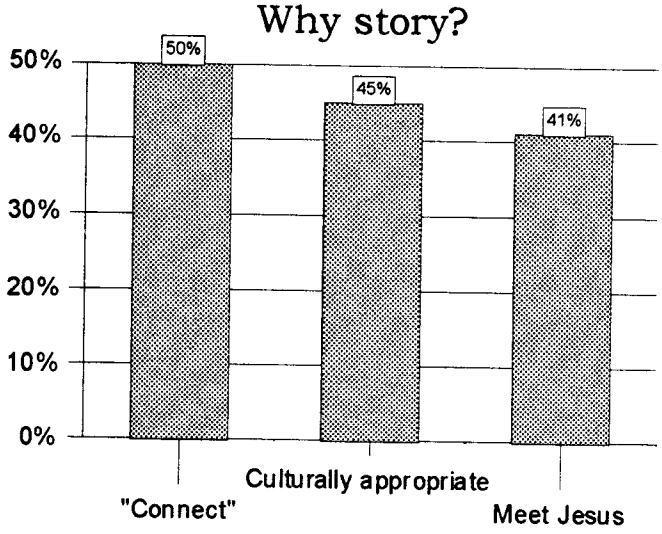
When he speaks evangelistically, his preference is to speak from the Gospels, with their emphasis on narrative more than proposition, and he is flexible in terms of the imagery he uses, choosing a "term that is consistent with the evening's theme." Thus, whereas this respondent's language and theology may sound modernist and depersonalizing, his practice sounds relational, modest and sensitive, appropriate to the post-modern world. Others are similarly attuned to the culture in their practice of evangelistic speaking, even when their theology sounds more appropriate to a previous generation.

On the positive side, when delegates are asked, **What Scriptures do you find you use most often in evangelistic talks?** all twenty-two single out the Gospels, or some part of the Gospels. Nine (41%) mention parables of Jesus, seven (32%) say they use narratives, and ten (45%) pick out stories of Jesus' encounters with individuals. Four (18%) specifically mention John 4 (the woman at the well), three choose Luke 15 (the prodigal son), two (9%) prefer Luke 5 and two (9%) John 5.



When asked why these passages of Scripture seem particularly appropriate, eleven (50%) use words which indicate that they "connect" well: words like "understand," "identify," "access," "listener-friendly," "dialogue," "relate," "remember," "fit." Eleven (50%) explicitly refer to the nature of contemporary culture, where story is valued more than proposition. They use phrases like: "easy to remember," "a story-telling culture," "stories more than concepts," "drama," "people can relate," "gives easy access," and "similar to my story." Finally, eight (36%) make the obvious but important point that by encountering the Gospels, hearers are enabled to encounter Jesus. They talk about "meeting Jesus," "Jesus the model," "who Jesus is," "Jesus as a real

person," "the heart of Jesus," and "Jesus surprises people." The Christianity these evangelists are communicating is clearly built around the person of

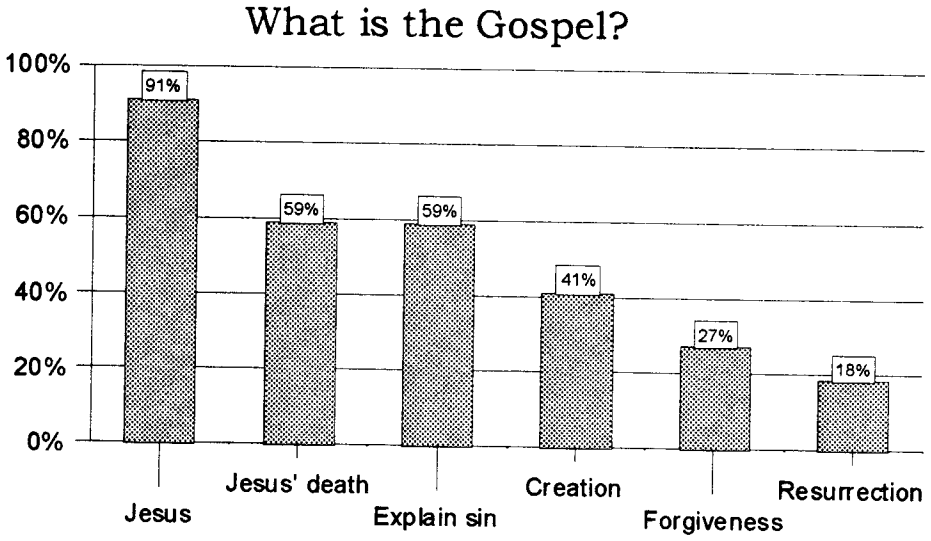


Jesus, rather than a set of ideas. This is consistent with their preference, when talking about conversion, to describe it in terms of "becoming a follower of Jesus" (82% either Somewhat or Strongly Prefer this phrase).

Delegates have not adjusted fully to the changes in the culture, however, and their ambivalence is indicated by their answers to the question, **What is the essence of the Christian Gospel?** Six (27%), for instance, respond in the language of sin and forgiveness.[93] While this may an adequate summary for those already inside the Christian community, among those outside the term "sin" is easily misunderstood, and the concept of "forgiveness"

[93] These six seem to have little in common apart from this answer, except that four are Baptists. They are very varied in age (from 23 to over 50), educational background (from Master's to High School), length of time on staff (from newly appointed to sixteen years), and the age at which they came to faith (between 6 and 21). Their answers to other questions are also varied and unpredictable.

is not highly valued.[94] Even when people do understand something of what is meant by forgiveness of sins, however, that is only one piece of the whole Christian metanarrative. Increasingly, our hearers do not know that story, and an important part of evangelism is simply to tell the Bible story and invite the listeners to become a part of the story God is telling about the world. In that context, "sin" might be explained as trying to be the author of my own story, "forgiveness" as God's willingness to have me back as part of God's own universal story, and repentance as agreeing to give up on my story and submitting my will to God's.



In fact, 13 other respondents (59%) go to some lengths to avoid technical language such as "sin." They paraphrase this aspect of the Gospel with some imagination:

* [we have] intentionally strayed from God's purposes

---

[94] While 75% of teenagers who attend church weekly consider forgiveness "Very important," their view is shared by only 48% of those who never attend. Reginald W. Bibby and Donald C. Posterski, Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion (Toronto: Stoddart 1992), 175.

* we rejected [God] and chose destructive relationships
* we have wreaked havoc on God's intentions
* human beings chose to go the opposite way from God
* we abused the freedom he wrapped that gift of love in and went our own way
* we blew it
* men asserted their independence from God[95]

The language of sin and forgiveness, of renunciation and submission, needs to be carefully expressed, as these respondents seek to do, in a postmodern culture. Indeed, the doctrines of sin and forgiveness illustrate precisely why postmodernism is opposed to metanarratives. Metanarratives are understood to be intrinsically oppressive of those who do not share them. The message of sin and forgiveness can easily be understood to mean, "We are right, you are wrong, you need to change and embrace our worldview."[96] From the evangelist's point-of-view, this creates a problem, since individual stories of Jesus only find their full significance as the centre-piece of the whole Christian metanarrative. Here the telling of the Gospel story conflicts directly with the emphases of postmodern culture. It is for this reason that Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh endeavour to vindicate the Christian metanarrative by showing how and why it is in fact not oppressive. They state that:

---

[95] The use of male language here is unusual in these responses. This comment is by a woman. Respondents' attitude to the use of inclusive language, both for people and for God, would be a worthwhile study.

[96] In a book generally sympathetic to Christianity, Bamber Gascoigne records the kind of story popularly recounted to illustrate the oppressive nature of the Christian message. A 16th century law implemented by Spanish soldiers in Mexico "required the Spaniards not to open fire on any hostile tribe of Indians until they read them an official document [in Spanish]. It explained that God was of the Christian variety and that the pope . . . has given this part of the world to Spain: it was the duty of the Indians to obey the church and the Spanish king. If this document had no effect, the Spaniards were allowed to open fire." Bamber Gascoigne, The Christians (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), 183-184.

> [i]t is our contention that the Bible, as the normative, canonical, founding Christian story, works ultimately *against* totalization.[97]

It is interesting, therefore, to note that a number of EC'95 delegates choose to explain **the essence of the Christian Gospel** by telling the whole story, the metanarrative. Thus, for example, nine respondents (41%) begin their account of the Gospel with the story of creation. Most of these also go on to explain that the goal of salvation is more than just "my relationship with God." As Middleton and Walsh advocate, these speakers justify the metanarrative in that it expresses God's creational purposes. Thus respondents express the goal of salvation as "enabling us to become who we were created to be," "restoring our full humanity," and "the restoration of creation." In this way, they set salvation in the broad context of the whole Christian metanarrative, but by explaining it in terms of creation lost and regained, they endeavour to avoid the postmodern charge of oppression.

In speaking about Jesus, 13 respondents (59%) speak of the death of Christ. Here there appears to be less effort to "translate" the message of the cross for a postmodern audience. The language is generally conventional:

* Jesus gave his life for me
* Jesus' death for us made our forgiveness real
* the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross
* Jesus and his work on the cross
* Christ took all the sin of the world upon himself at the cross
* his shed blood makes a way for sinners to repent
* he died a death that we deserved

There are many metaphors here which are unfamiliar to the unchurched imagination. The meaning of the word "for" (gave his life *for* me) is not clear, nor

---

[97] Middleton and Walsh, 87. See my summary of their argument, 155-156.

is the connection between death and sacrifice. Whole theologies are implied in concepts such as blood making a way; our deserving of death; or Christ taking sin on himself. This obscurity is particularly unfortunate in evangelistic speakers who are otherwise concerned to be sensitive to audiences which have no theological background. In fact, theological explanations more accessible to postmodern people are available, such as that of Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow:

> Suffering love is the way of salvation for sinners. Jesus takes the pain of divine love on himself in solidarity with all of us. . . . God elects to defeat his enemies by turning the other cheek. . . . On the cross God absorbs all the hurt our sins have caused. . . . Not lashing out, not retaliating, not holding out for satisfaction, God simply loves. The pain of the cross is the cost to God of restoring the broken relationship.[98]

This language of relationship, love, rejection and pain resonates with postmodern people far more than that of ritual sacrifice or the lawcourt. It also heeds the caution of Middleton and Walsh that the Gospel message is not an oppressive one but one which foregrounds suffering and weakness."[99]

If respondents are traditional in their understanding of the atonement, in posture they are far more willing to depart from traditional evangelistic orthodoxy in order to connect with postmodern culture. For example, when asked how far they agree with the statement, **I see myself as a fellow seeker for God with my hearers**, almost all respondents (91%) agree, ten "Somewhat"

---

[98] Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1994), 103.

[99] Having said that 13 respondents mention the death of Christ, only four (18%) mention the resurrection. This is very different from the Book of Acts, for instance, where the resurrection is a more common theme than the death of Christ.

and ten "Strongly." Traditionally the evangelist's posture might be caricatured as "We've found it, you haven't,"[100] which would confirm a postmodern's worst fears. The attitude of the EC'95 respondents, on the other hand, has become much less confrontational, a modest posture which seems to imply "Like you, we are looking for God and for truth: we think Jesus is where the answers lie." This posture of being a fellow-seeker tends to disarm the criticism that truth-claims conceal a bid for power.[101]

Such modesty is also appropriate in a culture where most people claim to believe in God already. Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski, for instance, discovered that among Canadian teenagers, 81% say they believe that God exists, while 34% said they have experienced God.[102] Debates about the existence of God are still well attended in Canadian universities, but it is probably more for their entertainment value than to settle an unresolved issue. One sign of the shift to postmodernity is that, with the decline of confidence in secular rationalism, it has become "cool" to believe in God. EC'95 delegates show sensitivity to this trend in the culture when nineteen (86%) say that they **see [themselves] as an affirmer of people's spiritual search**. They recognize the importance of tapping into that spiritual awareness and then suggesting that its source and fulfillment is in Jesus.

---

[100] There was a popular evangelistic campaign in the 1980s entitled "I found it." Among other responses, this prompted Jewish people to display bumper stickers proclaiming, "We never lost it."

[101] This connection is often traced to "Nietzsche's claim that every proclamation of a truth is the expression of a will to power." Stephen D. Moore, Post-Structuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 89.

[102] Bibby and Posterski, 55. The figures they give for adults are slightly higher: 83% believe in God, and 46% claim to have experienced God.

The ambivalence of the respondents' views of evangelism may be summarized thus: over 50% approve of traditional principles of evangelism such as: not compromising the Gospel, expounding scripture, we must expect opposition if we are faithful, and the image of the herald. Yet a high proportion--often the same individuals--also reject some traditional evangelistic concerns: ten (41%) either feel neutral about or disagree with the principle that one should always preach the cross; not one agrees with the principle that one should always include the "central facts of the Gospel" in an evangelistic presentation; twelve (54%) believe that one should not always encourage commitment to Christ, or feel neutral on the question. At the same time, they confidently espouse less traditional approaches, seeing themselves as fellow seekers with their audience (91%), affirming people's spiritual search (86%), pointing out signs of God's activity or truth in the culture (100%), nurturing seeds of faith (82%), and encouraging participation in the Christian community (54%). This is a kinder, gentler evangelism, one which some would see as a sell-out to contemporary culture and others would see as simply appropriate adjustments in view of the culture.

So far, these chapters have considered the contexts, biblical, theological and cultural, which frame the work of evangelistic speaking. What remains to be discussed is how evangelistic speaking can be taught within that framework. This will be the concern of chapter 6.

Chapter 5

LEARNING EVANGELISTIC SPEAKING

The first half of this chapter will consider two things: how professionals in general learn their skills, and then, specifically, how evangelistic speakers learn to speak. The study is based on two things. Firstly, I will consider two books. Donald Schon's 1987 work on the education of professionals, Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Towards a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions (1987), provides a theoretical base for considering how evangelistic preachers learn their craft. The second book, Lawrence Daloz's Effective Teaching and Mentoring (1986), complements Schon's work by expanding on the role of the mentor in professional formation. Secondly, in the light of Schon's and Daloz's writings, I will analyze interviews with a number of practising evangelists which I undertook between November 1995 and September 1996. The central question in each interview was how the evangelist had learned the skills of his or her ministry. I will highlight recurrent themes in the interviews and compare them with the findings of Schon and Daloz, adding, for further illustration, extracts from the biographies of evangelistic preachers. From time to time, I will add accounts of my own experience of being mentored and being a mentor in evangelistic speaking. Then, in the second half of the chapter, I will consider in the light of the foregoing material what the delegates to EC'95 said about their own learning of evangelistic speaking.

How Professionals Learn

Donald Schon's book, Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Towards a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions begins with observations about how people learn and know in everyday life. Schon notes that many of the skills we learn in life--riding a bicycle, for example--are known in practice but, typically, cannot be expressed verbally. In fact:

> if we are asked to say how we do such things, we tend to give the wrong answers which, if we were to act according to them, would get us into trouble.[1]

This experience of knowing how to do something Schon calls "knowing-in-action." However, while "our spontaneous knowing-in-action usually gets us through the day"[2], from time to time we come across new situations or problems where what we know-in-action is not enough to find a way forward. At this point, suggests Schon, one of two things may happen. One is that we may withdraw from the task we are involved in and "reflect on action" until we discover a possible solution, then return to the task and experiment. The other is that we do not stop the task at hand but, rather, we continue with it and "reflect-in-action" "to reshape what we are doing *while we are doing it.*"[3] The degree to which we are successful at reflecting-in-action is a measure of our competence in the particular skills involved in the task.

---

[1] Schon, 25
[2] Ibid., 26
[3] Ibid., 26. Italics mine.

Schon argues that these patterns of learning, which appear to be universal, exist just as much among professionals as in the population at large.[4] The difference is that:

> [a] professional's knowing-in-action is embedded in the socially and institutionally structured context shared by a community of practitioners[5]

--in a way that riding a bicycle, for example, is not. Like the practitioners of other skills, however, professionals frequently demonstrate reflection-in-action, that is, they make decisions in the course of their practice which bear little relation to what they learned during their professional training. Working in this way is not an optional extra, however. Indeed, the ability to respond competently yet intuitively to new or puzzling situations may in some instances be a life-or-death issue--for example, a physician responding promptly to a patient's unique array of symptoms.[6]

Since this skill of reflection-in-action is so important, and yet is not learned in professional schools, Schon asks where it is learned. His observation is that the ability to reflect-in-action is normally learned through a reflective practicum--the experience of working with and observing a more seasoned

---

[4] He defines a professional as "one who makes a claim to extraordinary knowledge in matters of great human importance." Ibid., 32, citing Everett Hughes, "The Study of Occupations," in R. K. Merton, L. Broom and L. S. Cottrell Jr. (eds.), Sociology Today (New York: Basic Books, 1959). For the purposes of this paper, I find it generative to assume that evangelists are professionals since, in terms of the Christian community, they are often regarded as having "extraordinary knowledge in matters of great human importance." Yet they do not fulfill generally-recognized criteria for professionals, such as "a license to determine who shall enter his profession" (Schon 32), and, obviously, it is difficult to compare them with generally-acknowledged professionals in society at large such as lawyers, doctors or educators.

[5] Ibid., 33

[6] Ibid., 33

professional. This tradition of practical learning is not found so much in "university-based professional schools" as in:

> such deviant traditions of education for practice as studios of art and design, conservatories of music and dance, athletics coaching, and apprenticeship in the crafts, all of which emphasize coaching and learning by doing[7].

This chapter will suggest that evangelistic preaching is just such a "deviant tradition" within the Christian world. Most Canadian seminaries and Bible colleges do not offer courses on evangelistic preaching[8], so it would be surprising if practising evangelists had learned their skills in such professional theological schools. The recurrent emphases of the evangelists I interviewed coincide with those observed by Schon in other professionals: their formation was not so much through formal professional training as through a blend of "coaching and learning by doing." By observing the process of formation in the professions of architecture, music and psychiatry, Schon is able to analyze the details of how reflection-in-action is learned, and, in particular, the mechanics of the mentor-student relationship. This chapter cites his observations as they are mirrored in the experiences of evangelists. In the next chapter, I will also suggest that, just as Schon applies his conclusions to the shape of professional training schools, so the experience of evangelistic preachers has implications for seminary curricula.

Lawrence Daloz's book, Effective Teaching and Mentoring, is an examination of the role and nature of mentoring in professional and other

---

[7] Ibid., xii

[8] While this was true when I conducted a telephone survey of Canadian seminaries in 1996, in the Spring of 1998 I taught a course on evangelistic preaching at Wycliffe College in the University of Toronto, with 23 students. See my description of this course in chapter 6.

education. Daloz defines mentors as those who "lead us along the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before."[9] Mentors are teachers, leaders, role-models and encouragers. They are very varied: Daloz's examples include Virgil, Dante's mentor in The Divine Comedy; the Skin Horse, mentor to the velveteen Rabbit in the book of the same name; and Henry Higgins, mentor to Eliza Dolittle in Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion.[10]

Daloz dissects the role of the mentor into support functions, challenge functions, and vision functions. In the first of these, the support role, mentors carry out such functions as listening, providing learning structures, and giving encouragement. As the student begins to learn new lessons from a mentor:

> Mentors give us the magic that allows us to enter the darkness. . . . [A]lways the mentor appears near the outset of the journey as a helper, equipping us in some way for what is to come, a midwife to our dreams.[11]

Because the mentor accompanies the student into new and challenging experiences, a good mentor will be a source of strength and encouragement:

> Under stress, we tend to slip back; we tighten our grip on what feels most secure. When we feel safe, on the other hand, we can relax and reach out. That's why a supportive tone to the relationship is so important.[12]

As sources of challenge, Daloz suggests that mentors set tasks, encourage discussion and reflection, and set high standards for the novice. Mentors will discern what a student is capable of and where a student needs to grow, and will suggest the means by which the student may do so:

---

[9] Daloz, 17
[10] Ibid., 16
[11] Ibid., 17
[12] Ibid., 219

> They call forth the best we have. They invite us to transcend ourselves. . . . [M]entors will . . . reinforce that growing fringe of a student's thought by listening for it and naming it.[13]

The relationship is thus one which causes the student to be stretched and to grow.

Daloz's third category is the mentors' visioning role. Mentors "cast light on the way ahead"[14], giving the novice a view of where he or she might be able to go. Part of this function is that mentors provide a connection with the "higher tradition"[15] the student is entering, not least as those traditions are embodied in the mentors themselves. Thus they offer a model of "the person whom the protégé wants to become"[16]:

> [M]entors are specially important at the beginning of people's careers or at crucial turning points in their professional lives. The mentor seems to manifest for protégés someone who has accomplished the goals to which they now aspire.[17]

All three characteristics of mentors thus highlighted by Daloz are exemplified in the autobiographical accounts which follow. For this reason, I will continue to draw on Daloz's observations as they serve to explain and illustrate the experiences of practising evangelists.

Interviewing Evangelists

A brief biography of each of the evangelists interviewed follows.

---

[13] Ibid., 213, 219
[14] Ibid., 17
[15] Ibid., 32
[16] Ibid., 213
[17] Ibid., 20

Lindsay Brown is General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, the umbrella organization which links evangelical student organizations like Canada's Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship around the world. In the past five years, Brown has sought to encourage evangelistic preaching in I.F.E.S.-related movements worldwide. He is also a popular evangelistic speaker in British universities. Brown has an MA in Modern History from Oxford University (1976) and studied theology at Vaux-sur-Seine Seminary, outside Paris, France, from 1981 till 1982. He was born in Wales in 1953.

Elward Ellis is the President of Dynasty Movement Inc., a ministry to mobilize African-American churches to mission. Ellis was formerly on the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) in the United States, and helped pioneer IVCF's ministry among African-American students. Most of his evangelistic preaching is either in local churches or in street meetings. Ellis has a B.A. in History from Shaw University and an M.Div. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He was born in 1948.

Leighton Ford was for many years associated with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, then began Leighton Ford Ministries, and, more recently, the Arrow Program for developing young leaders. He is the author of several books, including Sandy: A Heart for God, Transforming Leadership and The Power of Story (1994). Ford has a B.A. from Wheaton College (1952) and an M.Div. from Columbia Theological Seminary in North Carolina (1955).

Bernice Gerard was for many years an itinerant Pentecostal evangelist, and was then a pastor in Vancouver. She is currently President of Sunday Line

Radio and Television Ministries in Vancouver. Her television show, "Bernice Gerard Today and for Life," is seen across Canada. As well as interviewing Gerard, I read her autobiography, Bernice Gerard: Today and for Life.[18] She has a B.A. in literature and religious studies from the University of British Columbia.

Canon Michael Green, a New Testament scholar, has been Principal of St.John's Theological College, Nottingham (England) and Professor of Evangelism at Regent College, Vancouver. He is currently Special Advisor on Evangelism to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Of his many books, perhaps the best-known are Evangelism in the Early Church and Evangelism through the Local Church .[19] Although now based in England, he is a Canadian citizen. Green has M.A.'s in Classics and Theology, and a B.D., from Cambridge, an honorary D.D. from the University of Toronto, and a Lambeth D.D.[20]

Michael Horner is traveling evangelist and apologetics speaker with Campus Crusade for Christ. He received his B.Sc. and a teaching certificate from the University of Calgary. He received a Diploma in Theology from the Institute of biblical Studies at the International School of Theology (Campus Crusade's staff training college) in San Bernadino (CA) in 1974, and an M.A. in philosophy from the University of Toronto in 1986.

---

[18] Bernice Gerard, Bernice Gerard: Today and for Life (n.p. 1988)

[19] Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Crowborough, UK: Highland Books, 1970), Evangelism Through the Local Church (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990)

[20] A British B.D. is the equivalent of a North American M.Div. A "Lambeth D.D." is the gift of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is the equivalent of an Oxford D.D., and is considered the equivalent of an earned doctorate. See also John Stott.

Nigel Lee is Head of Student Ministries for the Universities and College Christian Fellowship--the British sister movement of IVCF Canada--and a popular evangelistic speaker on university campuses in Britain. He was born in 1948 and has an M.A. in English Literature from Cambridge University.

John Stott is an internationally known Bible teacher and author of many books, and has led over fifty evangelistic missions in universities in Canada and around the world. He was born in 1921, and has M.A.'s in Modern Languages and Theology, and a B.D. from Cambridge University, as well as several honorary D.D.'s and a Lambeth D.D.

T. V. Thomas is Director of the Centre for Evangelism and World Mission, a ministry of Every Home International. He is an accredited evangelist with the Christian Missionary Alliance and founding President of the Fellowship of Canadian Evangelists. Most of his evangelistic preaching is done in the context of local churches. He has a B.A. and a B.Sc. from Nagpur University in India, an M.Div. from the Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina, Canada, a D.Min. from Luther Rice Seminary (Florida), and is engaged in Ph.D. studies in missiology at Fuller Seminary in California. He was born in Malacca, Malaysia, in 1948.

Terry Winter (1942-1998) was an independent evangelist of Plymouth Brethren background, based in British Columbia. He had his own television show which was seen across Canada on Vision TV. Winter had a B.A. from the University of British Columbia and a Doctorate in Pastoral Theology (a predecessor of the D.Min.) from Fuller Seminary.

As well as interviewing the above-mentioned evangelists, I also read biographies of two other evangelists--Billy Graham and David Watson. Billy Graham (b.1918) is an internationally known evangelist. He has preached to more people than anyone else in history.

David Watson (1933-1984) was best known as pastor of St. Michael-le-Belfrey Church in York (England), as the author of books such as I Believe in Evangelism (1976), and as a popular evangelistic speaker in universities and city communities around the world. He had an M.A. in Moral Sciences and a B.D. from Cambridge.[21]

Despite the diversity of these interview subjects in ethnicity, nationality, denomination and gender, there was a high degree of uniformity in their recollections of how they learned the evangelistic preacher's craft. The five elements outlined in chapter 1--theoretical instruction, observation of experienced practitioners at work, practical experience and experimentation, evaluation of one's progress, and the love of mentors and colleagues--all played a part, though in different proportions and not necessarily in that order.

Just doing it

Some but not all of those interviewed recalled that their first forays into evangelistic speaking were completely spontaneous. They began with the

---

[21] "This was basically a humanist course, which . . . involved the study of, among other things, philosophy, psychology, logic, ethics and metaphysics." Teddy Saunders and Hugh Sansom, David Watson: A Biography (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), 20.

"practical experience" component of training. Their preaching was not part of an organized program, nor undertaken at the invitation of a mentor or trainer. There seems to have been an internal spiritual drive which simply made this seem an important thing to do. Leighton Ford is typical of these:

> Without any real tutelage or training, I began to speak. . . . Then when I went to Wheaton College . . . we started . . . what they called gospel teams at that time. Two or three of us would go out on weekends, and preach wherever we could . . . And this was not . . . an official function, it was something two or three of us felt we wanted to do.[22]

Michael Horner's story is similar:

> I looked for opportunities, as a student, to speak evangelistically, and I took them. . . . I recall standing up at the end of one class and saying, "Tomorrow for those of you who would like to stay after class over lunch, I'm going to be presenting a message on the difference between Churchianity and Christianity." And half the class came.[23]

A third example is T. V. Thomas, who began preaching as a young man simply because:

> [I felt] forced to, because of [spiritual] need--on street corners, in dorms, at university junctions, in small university groupings. That's where I started.[24]

Training may create preaching experiences, but it cannot by definition organize spontaneity such as this. There is something mysterious here which is humbling to the theological educator. There are practical lessons which seminaries and trainers can learn from the interviews described below, but it is helpful to be reminded that, ultimately, creating ministry will never be the sole

---

[22] Leighton Ford, telephone interview with author, Tape recording, May 17, 1996. In citing this and other Tape recorded interviews, the source will be footnoted the first time; in subsequent citations, the speaker's name will simply be given in the text.

[23] Michael Horner, telephone interview with author, Tape recording, May 16, 1996.

[24] T. V. Thomas, interview with author, Tape recording, Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills, BC, October 28, 1995.

preserve of seminaries or training programs, though they may nurture and hone it. Thus the theological trainer will always be on the lookout for those who are already engaged in ministry, and seek to co-operate with the Spirit of God by offering to train and shape those gifts.

Finding a Mentor

Whether or not the interviewees began their evangelistic ministry spontaneously, almost all speak of the importance of mentors. The beginning of the process is the connection of mentor with student. This happens in different ways: some mentors choose their student, in other cases the student chooses the mentor; and in at least one case the relationship happened naturally, without choice on either side.

This last category is illustrated by Bernice Gerard, who became a Christian at the age of thirteen through the preaching of an itinerant evangelist named Frances Layden. Almost at once, Layden became Gerard's role-model. Gerard writes in her autobiography that:

> [s]hining like a bright star in my dreams was the thought of going out preaching some day, just like Frances Layden was doing. I would go through the country districts preaching in school houses, telling others the same good news she had told me.[25]

As a young evangelist, T.V.Thomas did not have a role-model readily to hand in the way that Gerard did. Instead, he set about searching out the mentors whom he knew he needed. He comments that:

---

[25] Gerard, 14

> I got training because I forced [seasoned evangelists] to [give it]! No-one said, "Come on, T.V., let me take you." They didn't. When it came to practical training, you almost had to pull [ideas and skills] out of them.

With this same pro-active approach to finding mentors, John Anderson, a fourth year student at Queen's University, approached me in 1995, and said:

> For three years now I've been mentored by Doug Caldwell [senior Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship staff member at Queen's University in Ontario], and he says I have sucked him dry. Now I am wondering if you would be willing to mentor me for a year?[26]

I was happy to agree, and to be "sucked dry" for a year.

This practice of choosing a mentor has ancient origins. Seneca advised people to "choose a master whose life, conversation and soul-expressing face have satisfied you."[27] Not only Greek but also Jewish students:

> had to absorb all the traditional wisdom with 'eyes, ears and every member' by seeking the company of a rabbi.[28]

In other cases, rather than the student seeking out the mentor, it is the mentor, perhaps seeing special potential in the student, who takes the initiative to begin the learning relationship.[29] Terry Winter, for example, recalls that:

> the preacher who was preaching when I was converted, a businessman, Ed Turner, a pop bottler from Vancouver Island, took me under his wing, and, when I would speak, he would criticize me.[30]

A more structured approach to this kind of intentional mentoring is found in a camp for boys from private schools in England--the Varsity and

---

[26] John Anderson, personal conversation with author, Spring 1996.

[27] Michael Griffiths, The Example of Jesus (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 17.

[28] Ibid., 17.

[29] Jesus' disciples were chosen by him; they did not seek him out to be their rabbi, e.g. Mark 1:16-20. Griffiths, 16.

[30] Terry Winter, telephone interview with author, Tape recording, May 15, 1996.

Public Schools (V.P.S.) Camps, known affectionately as "Bash camps" after the nickname of their founder, the Rev. E. J. H. Nash. This camp has had a disproportionate influence on evangelistic preaching in Britain. Nash had a capacity for spotting and cultivating a teenage schoolboy's potential for leadership, teaching and evangelism, and, as a result of his initiative, such leading Anglican evangelists as John Stott, David Watson, and Michael Green all received the personal mentoring that was the backbone of the camp. More details of the kind of mentoring this camp provided will emerge in the interviews.

Although all of the evangelists I interviewed recalled individual mentors they had had, each one also reflected that, during the course of their professional formation, they in fact had more than one mentor, and that each one fulfilled a different role. For instance, drawing on his own experience of taking the initiative in seeking a variety of mentors, including Billy Graham, T. V. Thomas recommends to potential evangelists that they:

> [avoid being] stuck with one mentor. That may not be all you need. . . . You can spend shorter times with more people. I like the idea of having several people.

Lindsay Brown, of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, illustrates why this is helpful by listing three of his mentors and specifying the different things they were able to offer him. He recalls that:

> there was a group of at least three people...[David] Watson, [Michael] Green and [Martyn] Lloyd-Jones, all of whom had very different styles. I think Lloyd-Jones taught me the real importance of pressing a point home and getting it through to the conscience, as being something of the punch of preaching. Michael Green--I learned from him the value of really reading, trying to understand where people are coming from, starting with their questions, as it were, and working on to biblical content, which is what I think Paul did to some extent at Mars Hill. David Watson--brilliant

use of illustration, lightness of touch, gentleness, sensitivity, more gentle than the other two, softer touch.[31]

Leighton Ford speaks in similar terms of what he learned from different models:

> I think I learned from Billy Graham the power of simplicity and clarity, and certainly the urgency that he had. . . . With Joe Blinco, I learned the power of story: he was a wonderful story-teller. . . . From people like Chuck Templeton and the writings of Peter Marshall, the descriptive [use of] language. . . . James Stewart of Edinburgh was not an evangelist but he was a master of the craft of using words.

Mentors in evangelistic speaking are thus sometimes chosen by the learner, and on other occasions they themselves choose whom they wish to mentor. Normally, more than one mentor is involved in the formation of a professional evangelist. The question then arises: once this mentoring relationship exists, how does the formation actually take place?

The Love of a Mentor

Lawrence Daloz observes that the formation a mentor undertakes is not simply a matter of carrying out certain activities and teaching techniques. Rather:

> the evidence is strong that emotional engagement must be a part of the learning process. The recognition that passion is central to learning and the capacity to provide emotional support when it is needed are hallmarks that distinguish the good mentor from the mediocre teacher.[32]

The strongest statement of this kind of bond of support between mentor and student comes from Bernice Gerard's autobiography. Gerard had grown up with no mother and an abusive father, and she found that her spiritual mother and

---

[31] Lindsay Brown, interview with author, Tape recording, Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills BC, October 28, 1995.

[32] Daloz, 33

first mentor, Frances Layden, met her emotional needs in a powerful way. At the heart of the relationship was the fact that:

> I loved Frances Layden most because she had loved me when no-one else did. Since the hour of my conversion she had been mother, father, brother and sisters to me, sustaining me with her letters. Her interest helped me believe in myself.[33]

Elward Ellis, President of Dynasty Movement Inc., reveals a similar depth of emotion in describing his relationship with one of his mentors, Dr. Edward O'Neill, a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Ellis told me how:

> I preached at Andover-Newton about two years ago, and Dr. Eddie O'Neill was in the audience, and he came up to me and in a very sober way said, "You have made me so proud." I said to him, "I was so afraid to preach in your presence, because I know I haven't employed everything you've taught me.[34]

Other evangelists also speak of the importance of the emotional strength and support they received from their mentors. English evangelist David Watson says that Rev. John Collins, his first senior pastor, "was a great encourager all the time."[35] T. V. Thomas makes comment about his growth as an evangelist (though not of a specific mentor) that "everyone encouraged me. There was a lot of encouragement." Thus there seems a special quality of care which empowers the mentor-student relationship and which undergirds the learning process. In some ways, it has almost a familial quality. Gerard says it is like the love of "mother, father, brothers and sisters", and Dr. O'Neill's comment to Elward Ellis--"You have made me so proud"--sounds like a parental comment. In trying to pin down the uniqueness of this emotional bond, Daloz

---

[33] Gerard, 43

[34] Elward Ellis, interview with author, Tape recording, Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills BC, October 28, 1995.

[35] David Watson, <u>You Are My God</u> ((London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), 46

suggests that mentors "fill a psychic space somewhere between lover and parent."[36]

This kind of bond between an admirer and the admired naturally leads to close observation and then to imitation--both important means of learning. I will consider observation first and then imitation.

Observing a Mentor

Observation of a role-model is sometimes undertaken consciously and deliberately, but some of my subjects comment that it also happened unconsciously. English evangelist David Watson, for instance, is typical. He reflects on what he learned from a more experienced colleague in ministry, Rev. David MacInnes, now pastor of St. Aldate's, a large student church in Oxford, with whom he shared a ministry to young people in a rough dockland area near London in the early 1960s. Watson realised that:

> [McInnes'] fifteen minute talks during the club epilogues were quite brilliant. . . . Through David's undoubted skill I gradually learned a few tricks of the trade.[37]

Watson watched, listened and learned. McInnes probably did not realise that he was providing a model; quite possibly Watson did not appreciate at the time all he was absorbing from the older man's example. Schon refers to this process as:

> [l]earning by exposure, background learning [which] often proceeds without conscious awareness.[38]

---

[36] Daloz, 17
[37] Watson, 43-44.
[38] Schon, 38

Sometimes, however, there *is* an awareness that learning is happening through observation. There are ancient precedents for this manner of learning. Michael Griffiths finds in Birger Gerhardsson's 1979 book, The Origins of the Gospel Tradition, a description of first-century rabbinic teaching style. Gerhardsson writes that:

> [s]tudents learn much of the Torah tradition by *listening*; by listening to their teacher and his more advanced students as well as by posing questions and making contributions of their own within the bounds prescribed by modesty and etiquette. But they also learn a great deal by simple *observing:* with attentive eyes they observe all that the teacher does and then proceed to imitate him.[39]

In this tradition, T. V. Thomas says: "I have to say I watched people." Sometimes Thomas would ask a mentor:

> "Could I see the stages of your preparation?" It was encouraging to me, before the sermon emerged, to go with [former Billy Graham associate] John Wesley White and see how he prepares his sermon on that morning--with all the newspapers cut out and spread out on the floor.

The kind of sermon preparation Thomas observes in John Wesley White is an example of what Schon calls "knowing-in-action"[40]--the skills a seasoned professional like White knows, but does not necessarily stop to reflect on, because it is so obvious to him. In this kind of situation, Thomas learns by observation the sort of skill he would almost certainly never learn from a text-book or a classroom lecture.

Observation does not have to take place at close quarters, as it did in the above examples, however. Several evangelists give credit to mentors whose influence took place at a distance, and who were never aware that they were serving as mentors. A number, for instance, say that they have been influenced

---

[39] Birger Gerhardsson, The Origins of the Gospel Tradition (London: SCM Press, 1979), 17, in Griffiths, 23.

[40] Schon, 25

by the sermons of a previous generation of evangelists. These are still at least partially mentors in the sense of Daloz's definition, cited earlier, that mentors are those who "lead us along the journey of our lives. We trust them because they have been there before."[41] These models, through their printed sermons, provide examples of subject and approach, of the use of Scripture and contemporary illustration, and not least of passion, for the emulation of apprentice evangelists. The example of John Stott is typical when he reflects that:

> I'd read, I think, everything [R. A.] Torrey [the 19th century American evangelist] had written--*Real Salvation, Revival Addresses*, all those books. I loved them. I was an eighteen year-old convert but I loved all those books. Now this was [the influence of camp director] "Bash" [Stott's first mentor]: he loved Moody and Torrey.[42]

Clearly, difference in background was no obstacle to the influence on the reader: Moody was an American Congregationalist, while Stott is an English Anglican. Similarly, Michael Green, although Anglican, was very influenced by reading the sermons of C. H. Spurgeon, the nineteenth century Baptist:

> Somebody gave me *The Works of Spurgeon*, the sermons of Spurgeon, when I was still at theological college. When I was preaching evangelistically in my curacy, I would look to see if Spurgeon had spoken on that text. Now, if he had, I read it. I did not use Spurgeon but I learned from Spurgeon...So I modeled myself, I suppose, on that.[43]

Terry Winter read the same authors, acknowledging that:

> I read everything I could get my hands on by D. L. Moody. And then I liked Spurgeon, and I read everything I could get my hands on by Spurgeon.

---

[41] Daloz, 17

[42] John R. W. Stott, interview with author, Tape recording, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton ON, February 19, 1996.

[43] Michael Green, interview with author, Tape recording, Hamilton ON, August 18, 1996. Green adds this anecdote: "I remember once when I was very poor. I was only earning four hundred pounds a year. A man came up to me after I had preached in Holy Trinity Eastbourne, and he gave me ten pounds. He said, 'Young man, you preach like Spurgeon.' Wonderful ten quid that was!"

Leighton Ford too read:

> books by Billy Graham and then people like Moody; and the writings of Sam Shoemaker were also helpful to me. . . . I read a lot of sermons by gifted preachers across the centuries.

In the case of living mentors, as has been illustrated, a bond of love is normally present between mentor and student. "Love" hardly seems to be the appropriate word for the relationship between a living, aspiring evangelist and the books of a dead author, yet there is at least a uni-directional respect and even affection which is the counter-part of the love between living mentor and student.

A further expression of mentoring-at-a-distance happens when a student is able to observe an admired role-model at work. Terry Winter, for instance, describes how:

> I went down to Los Angeles in 1963 to the Billy Graham Crusade. I went...every night for ten days...I just was learning how he did it.

Billy Graham never knew that Winter was there, nor for what purpose, neither was Graham's intention to be a mentor, so the mentoring is no more than partial, yet it has had a significant and lasting effect. Leighton Ford had a similar experience with Billy Graham:

> I can recall being in Toronto for six weeks in the Fall of 1955, and almost every night, I'd be there on the platform, and I would listen to Billy Graham preach. I would take copious notes, and I would learn from him. That greatly influenced me.

In my own experience, I listened for ten years, as a student and later as a young IVCF staff worker, to evangelistic speakers like David Watson and Michael Green as they spoke in university settings. At the time, it never occurred to me that one day I would do the kind of preaching they modeled. It was "learning by exposure," which, as Schon points out, "a student may become aware of...later

on, as he moves into a different setting."[44] That was precisely true for me: it was many years later, when people asked me how I learned to give evangelistic talks, that I realized I had based my style on those models I had observed years previously.

Beginning to Practise

In learning any kind of skill, observation alone is not enough. At some point, there has to be a step from observing to doing. Where students have mentors, this generally happens through a transition from observing the mentor to imitating the mentor, a transition which may be initiated by the student but which is more often proposed by the mentor. This transition from observation to imitation is not always easy, and is frequently mentioned in the interviews as a significant stage in the acquisition of preaching skills.

There is a universal human instinct to observe those we love and respect--whether family members, lovers or teachers--and to want to become like them, so that the praiseworthy qualities we observe in them can be incorporated into our own lives. Early in the relationship of student and mentor, the degree of imitation may be very specific and unsophisticated. Gerard, for instance, wanted to preach in school-houses and nowhere else, exactly as she had seen her mentor Frances Layden do. This slavish kind of imitation may even extend to the mannerisms of the mentor. Billy Graham's

---

[44] Schon, 38

official biographer, John Pollock, for instance, says that, as a young man, Graham:

> made full use of the unrivaled opportunities to hear famous evangelical preachers of different denominations. John Minder [an early mentor] noticed some of their gestures and phrases coming out in Billy.[45]

At this stage, the student has not found his or her voice. It is rather the case that they have found someone else's voice--or that they are experimenting with another's voice. Yet speaking in the voice of the mentor is at least a first step on the road: for this reason, mentors are normally tolerant of imitation, at least for a time. Then, however, as confidence in one's own abilities develops, the security of using someone else's tone of voice or mannerisms is no longer needed, and those elements in the speaking style which are inauthentic drop away. David Watson recalls this process of observing role-models of good speaking, and beginning to speak in imitation of those models. In his case, this kind of practicum happened through involvement in Nash's VPS camps. Watson found that the camps:

> were tremendous opportunities for learning the very basics of Christian ministry...I learned, until it became second nature...how to prepare and give a talk...with strong emphasis being placed on clarity and simplicity. All this was being constantly modeled by those who were much more mature in the faith.[46]

Thus, in the camp setting, he was cared for by mentors, he observed them demonstrate the skills he wanted to learn, and he made those skills his own. His phrase "second nature" implies that what he learned was not in one sense natural to him, at least up to that point in his life. Yet he chose to absorb these lessons, to surrender what came naturally, in order to include what at first felt unnatural, so that he might make these new characteristics his own, with the

---

[45] John Pollock, Billy Graham: The Authorized Biography (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), 37.

[46] Watson, 39

result that a new person was produced, able to fulfill a new ministry. His statement is an apt summary of this aspect of the mentor-student relationship.

So far, evangelists have described how observing a mentor was followed by imitation. Sometimes, however, a mentor may consider practical experience a better place to begin learning than observation. African-American evangelist Elward Ellis was someone whose ministry did not begin in the security of observing a mentor at work. He recalls that his ministry:

> began the third day after my conversion. I accepted Christ at age fifteen on a Friday night . . .and on Saturday the pastor . . .called me and said "I want you to give your testimony in the evening service tomorrow." I was devastated by the request, but somehow I was out there. I think that was the starting point.

Billy Graham's experience was similar to that of Ellis, in that he was given responsibility for speaking before he felt adequate to the task, and with no preparation. Graham biographer John Pollock writes that at

> the Florida Bible Institute, where Billy Graham was a young student, [Dr.] John Minder [was the Dean and had] an exceptional gift for encouraging students. [On the way to church one evening, Minder was asked to preach, but replied:] "Billy's preaching tonight." "No sir," said a horrified Billy, "I've never preached before." "Well, you are preaching tonight," said Minder. "When you run out, I'll take over"... [The leader] introduced Billy, whose knees knocked and palms and brow were sticky. Billy began loud and fast... He ran out of words. He ran out of thoughts.[47]

These experiences of Ellis and Graham highlight the fact at the point where the student actually begins public evangelistic speaking, as with learning any new skill, there is a degree of risk and consequently a feeling of fear. Elward Ellis goes so far as to say that he felt "devastated." Schon explains this fear by saying that the student "must jump in without knowing—indeed, in order to discover—

---

[47] Pollock, 30-31

what he needs to learn." He compares the experience to "swimming in unfamiliar waters," adding that:

> the student risks the loss of his sense of competence, control and confidence. . . . He becomes dependent on his instructors.[48]

The promise of Billy Graham's mentor, John Minder--"When you run out, I'll take over"--illustrates this dependence. Daloz comments, "That's why a supportive tone to the relationship is so important. It lets the student move to her leading edge."[49] Billy Graham went ahead and preached that day because of the assurance of John Minder that he would take over if it became necessary, and as a result Graham began to "move to [his] leading edge".

Why is this often traumatic step of beginning to practice so important? Schon cites John Dewey's explanation that:

> "[t]he customs, methods and working standards of the calling constitute a 'tradition,' and...initiation into the tradition is the means by which the powers of learners are released and directed."[50]

In the practicum, the student's powers, however unformed, are "released": they are brought into the open and unleashed in a public setting, to begin developing into all they are capable of becoming. Those powers also begin to be "directed": instead of being formless energy or a vague urge to preach, the student's powers are directed, with the help of the mentor, into channels for their constructive use. No wonder this step feels intimidating. No wonder it felt to David Watson like learning a "second nature." Billy Graham even felt, after speaking for the first time, "[i]t reinforced my conviction that I would never

---

[48] Schon, 93-95

[49] Daloz, 219

[50] J. Dewey, John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings, ed. R. D. Archambault (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 151, quoted in Schon, 17.

become a preacher"[51]: he realised what a different and alien world he was stepping into, and what changes would be necessary to become fully part of it. When this step is taken, however, the "customs, methods and working standards" of the tradition begin to be the property of the novice. Without this step, nothing may truly be said to have been learned.

Performance Evaluation

First-hand initiation into the practice of evangelistic preaching is only the beginning, however. No student is going to perform perfectly a professional task when it is attempted the first time--or the second or the third. Normally, some form of evaluation by mentor and protégé takes place. Almost every one of the evangelists I either interviewed or read about spoke of the importance of the mentor's evaluation. Michael Green recalls his first such evaluation when he began to give talks at Nash's VPS camp:

> [A]fter the very first one of my addresses, Dick Lucas sat me down. He said, 'Brilliant stuff, but it's all over the place, got no backbone, got no structure.' I never forgot that. So I've always got a structure, though I may change it...But certainly that was a very helpful thing.

Terry Winter says of his first mentor, Ed Turner, that:

> he would go through [a talk] from beginning to end and say, 'Now, this story was good; this wasn't,' or 'You should make a story here,' or 'Not there, in this verse there.' 'You should talk a little louder, you should look at the audience.' It was an all-purpose evaluation after my sermons, to help me do better, and it turned out to be invaluable.

There is clearly potential for pain in this kind of evaluation. Once again, it is important that the mentor genuinely care for the protégé: because the surgery is painful as well as health-giving, the scalpel needs to be wielded by a

---

[51] Graham, 38.

compassionate hand. David Watson's first mentor, John Collins, showed a care that Watson appreciated:

> After every sermon I preached, John would take the time and trouble to comment thoughtfully on both the points that were good and those that were not so good. He never made more than three critical comments (even if he could think of thirty-three), so that I was never discouraged.[52]

Nigel Lee, Britain's best-known evangelist among students, shows the same pastoral sensitivity to this when he admits that in critiquing younger speakers:

> I am cautious...But if I see something, I ponder it for a bit, I might drop it in. I'm very gentle with that sort of thing.[53]

Terry Winter's mentor showed similar care in evaluating. After a talk by Winter, he would offer comments but "not that night, because he knew I would be too vulnerable."

In spite of the need for care in offering evaluation, the importance of evaluation is underlined by Green's comment, "I never forgot that...certainly that was a very helpful thing," and Winter's, "it turned out to be invaluable." Watson too calls this training "invaluable." This is the part of the backdrop to the word "reflective" in Schon's term "reflective practitioner". The literal meaning of "reflect" is "to bend back," as, for example, reflected light is bent back to its source. The purpose of evaluation is to "bend back" the elements of the practicum to the speaker, enabling us to look at ourselves and our performance with a degree of critical objectivity. The role of the mentor in this is to act as the mirror, highlighting what has been achieved in the practicum and pointing out areas that are still underdeveloped. It is in this context that the "customs, methods and working standards" of the profession are frequently passed on--

---

[52] Watson, 46.

[53] Nigel Lee, interview with author, Tape recording, Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills BC, October 28, 1995.

such as the comments of Terry Winter's mentor, "You should talk a little louder, you should look at the audience".

Moving to Equality

The relationship between mentor and student is never static. The dynamics described thus far--of observation, practical experience, and evaluation within a bond of care, with occasional flashes of fear when new risks are taken--create a powerful and constantly changing learning environment. However, in spite of the resulting fluidity and unpredictability in mentoring relationships, they do generally develop over a period of time from a clearly hierarchical, relatively formal arrangement in the beginning, to a friendship between virtual equals--a process Daloz calls "the full evolution of a mentorship from hierarchy toward symmetry."[54] One of the most significant factors which can catalyze partnerships toward equality is what Schon calls "co-experimenting", where student and mentor "sit, as it were, side by side"[55]. He gives the example of an architectural teacher and student working together in the architect's studio. The teacher asks what the student wants to achieve, sketches a range of possible responses ("opening up the possibilities"), lets her work on some options, then helps her figure out how she has achieved what she set out to achieve (or why not), and dialogues with her about what she might do next.[56]

---

[54] Daloz, 176
[55] Schon, 153
[56] Ibid., 142-153

None of the evangelists I have spoken to had that kind of mentoring experience. The pattern is much more that the student prepares and gives a talk, the mentor may critique the notes and suggest improvements, and afterwards the mentor and student evaluate what happened. Or the student observes the mentor in action and analyses (usually privately) the qualities of what was done. None of this comes close to "co-experimentation." Yet, from Schon's description, it is possible, and intensely formative. Reasons for this lacuna can only be speculative. It may be that the image of the individual preacher, studying in private to discover what God wants him to say, is so pervasive that the thought of sharing that process with another is unthinkable.[57] Our North American, Enlightenment culture strongly "espouses independence of thought and action,"[58] and it sometimes thrives in the church under the guise of piety. It may equally be that people avoid the process of co-experimentation because it requires vulnerability: after all, preparation of a sermon exposes the inner workings of the preacher's mind far more than does the final, polished product. As Schon points out, the mentor cannot:

> invite [the student's] confrontation of him or engage her in reflection on their dialogues without making himself vulnerable.[59]

In Western culture, vulnerability is to avoided to precisely the same degree as independence is to be sought: they are two sides of the same coin. Yet without

---

[57] A classic text on preaching such as John Stott's I Believe In Preaching divides the work of sermon preparation thus: "Choose Your Text; Meditate on it; Isolate the Dominant Thought; Arrange Your Material; Add the Introduction and Conclusion; Write down and Pray over your Message." All assume a private interaction between the individual preacher and the text of scripture. Phillips Brooks similarly says, "The elements which determine the make of any particular sermon are three: the preacher, the material, and the audience." Thomas F. Chilcote Jr. ed., The Excellence of our Calling: an Abridgment of Phillips Brooks' "Lectures on Preaching" (New York: Dutton and Company, 1954), 77.

[58] Schon, 120

[59] Ibid., 137

that degree of vulnerability, the mentor-student relationship fails to mature into a partnership of equals. Failure to be vulnerable simply perpetuates the original power dynamic of the relationship. Thus Daloz observes that:

> [s]elf-disclosure from the mentor seems to play a crucial part in the full evolution of a mentorship from hierarchy towards symmetry.[60]

The closest to the co-experimenting process I have come experienced was at the University of Vermont in spring of 1996. I was speaking at a mission there, and invited two "protégés", John Anderson (a senior student from Queen's) and Jason Eygenraam (an IVCF staff colleague) to accompany me. Apart from inviting them to listen to my talks and to offer constructive criticism, I set an exercise for the three of us. I handed out the words of the then-popular song by Joan Osborne, What if God was One of Us?[61] and invited them to spend twenty minutes sketching out how they might make an evangelistic presentation based on the song. I did the same (never having spoken on the song before), and at the end of the time, we discussed what we thought the song meant and how we might treat it as the focus of a presentation before an audience. As Schon says, "[c]oach and student stood side by side before the same problem."[62] Each of us found insights in the others' observations which we had not discovered for ourselves. In fact, I did give a talk based on the song at the end of week, and used some of Anderson's and Eygenraam's insights. We all agreed that the exercise had been a valuable one. It fulfills the three criteria Schon recommends for true learning: "freedom to learn by doing in a setting relatively low in risk, with access to coaches."[63] One: we did something together.

---

[60] Daloz, 176

[61] "What if God was One of Us," written by Eric Bazilian, sung by Joan Osborne.

[62] Schon, 180

[63] Ibid., 17

Two: there was little risk involved. And three: I was present as coach. Anderson and Eygenraam had heard me give evangelistic presentations on several occasions, but were only familiar with the polished final product. In this context, they were able, firstly, to see, hear and participate in the process by which I create such a presentation, and, secondly, were able to take the first steps towards creating their own presentations. Schon describes these two steps as the student:

> experiencing from the inside the patterns of action she had observed from the outside, and [producing] a new product that may be compared with the one [the mentor] has made.[64]

The result of co-experimentation, suggests Daloz, is that:

> [t]he power that seemed at the outset so overwhelming has moved inward, and the student has become her own teacher.[65]

I believe that Anderson and Eygenraam are now better equipped to prepare and give their own evangelistic presentations: they have moved a step in the direction of being their own teachers.

Experience of this kind is then an important step towards the final stage in a mentoring relationship: the student finding his or her own voice. Although the first instinct of a student is to imitate the teacher, as we grow:

> we come to realise that their gift is not the opportunity to become like them but the challenge to become more fully ourselves through them."[66]

Some students quickly develop a sense of what may be learned from the mentor and what may not. For instance, I asked T. V. Thomas after he described the sermon preparation he saw John Wesley White do: "Have you ever done what you saw him do?" He replied:

---

[64] Ibid., 113
[65] Ibid., 33
[66] Daloz, 213

> No...Simply because I couldn't do that!.. After reading fifteen [news]papers on that day, he'll be quoting left and right... I don't have the capacity, the memory that he has... There's no way I could imitate him. I admired him, I was happy to see another way to do preparation, but then I said, That's not me.

What is necessary at this stage is the ability to take from the skill of a mentor and to adapt it to one's own ministry needs. Nigel Lee, for instance, explains how, while he appreciated a role model like David Watson, he has moved beyond what he learned from him:

> [Watson] didn't use Scripture in the way that I have begun to use it--he's a verse here and a verse there man. I think I've taken the teaching evangelism thing one stage further by limiting myself to one Gospel, and then within the Gospel really to one passage.

Though influenced by Spurgeon, Michael Green now has some reservations about him:

> A lot of [his preaching] was terribly undisciplined stuff--it was all over the place. I've got more discipline than Spurgeon had, but he had got this wonderful picturesque way of speaking. I said, I'm going to learn from that.

These students observed and learned, but they discerned what was appropriate to keep and not to keep, and what could simply be adapted. In the 1980s, a group of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship staff in Ontario, comprising David Knight, Larry Offner, Robert Harding and myself, was mentored by Don Posterski. While each one of us has a very distinctive voice in public speaking, at the same time all of us carry indelible and recognisable traces of Posterski's style. In the same way, John Anderson, a Queen's student learning to be an evangelist, frequently uses inflections of voice and hand gestures very similar to those of Doug Caldwell, the IVCF staff member at Queen's and his most influential mentor--yet Anderson is gradually developing his own voice.

Stages in growing-up are often emotional. Elward Ellis speaks with strong feeling of the time when one of his mentors, Dr. Edward O'Neill, told him that he (Ellis) had reached the stage of finding his own voice. After they had worked together for some years, during which Ellis had moved from dependence to interdependence in the relationship, Dr. O'Neill said:

> I can't teach you everything God wants you to know. God has added the things he wanted you to know. You preach in your own voice.

Daloz comments on the significance of such statements:

> Such benedictions, which mentors often provide, serve as little graduation ceremonies to mark the change in the terrain.[67]

It is not surprising, therefore, that Ellis comments on this exchange, "And then I felt adult, about ten feet tall."

The Role of Seminary Training

Few of the evangelists I have interviewed were helped in their formation by their experience of seminary, if any. The experiences described above, of such factors as mentoring and practical experience, almost without exception, happened in an informal, personal setting. While this was certainly valuable, as the stories told in the interviews eloquently testify, the absence of connection between seminary training and formation for evangelistic preaching merely serves to underscore the marginalization of such preaching from the mainstream of the church's life. There are two exceptions to the rule that seminary did not help to train the evangelists I interviewed. Terry Winter

---

[67] Daloz, 170

received sympathetic training at Fuller Seminary in California, though it was not directly in evangelism or in preaching. He says that:

> I happened to like systematic theology, so I did my doctorate in systematic theology and evangelism...My Professor, Paul Jewett, [said,] 'Terry, we want you to be a better evangelist, so let's study systematic theology with an evangelistic application. We need more systematic theologians who are evangelists or evangelists who are systematic theologians.'

Winter's story suggests that even the mainstream of a seminary curriculum--a subject like systematic theology--can be brought to bear on the needs of developing evangelists. Elward Ellis also speaks with gratitude of his seminary experience, in particular of two very significant mentors he had in preaching--Dr.Gardner Taylor and Dr. Edward O'Neill at Gordon-Conwell. Ellis says of them, "I had two of the finest men, and I've never measured up to what they tried to teach me." Ellis' testimony demonstrates that the kind of mentoring which most evangelists found so crucial is possible in the seminary setting.

One person who has pioneered the teaching of evangelistic preaching in seminaries is Michael Green, formerly Principal of St. John's (Anglican) Theological College, Nottingham, England, and then Professor of Evangelism at Regent College, Vancouver. He described to me how, when he first went to teach at St. John's College:

> I started to do [evangelistic] missions, and...would take students off on those. When I became Principal, I'd take them off in term time and, boy! they were good at their Hebrew verbs when they got back because their motivation was so high.

He continued this model of education when he was Professor of Evangelism at Regent College in the 1980s, combining classroom teaching with church-based or city-wide missions, where students would form Green's team, and participate in the speaking, testifying and other evangelistic activities.

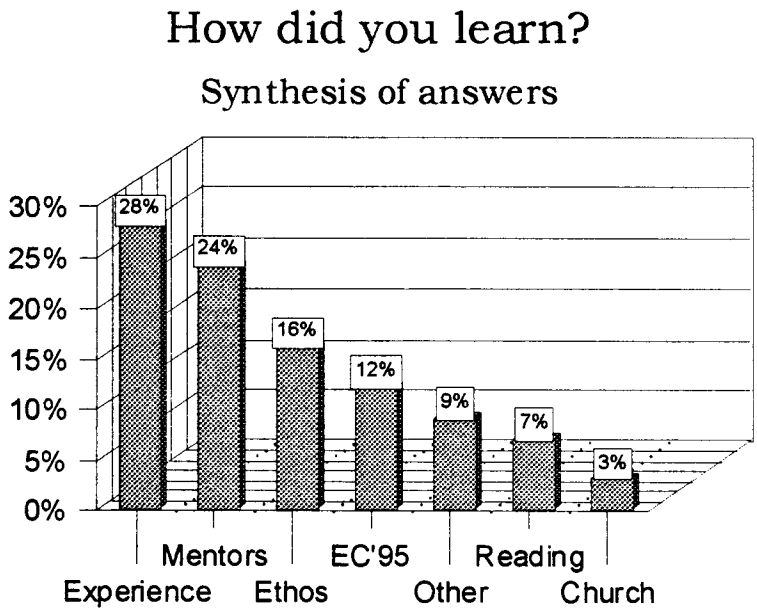
These three testimonies--Michael Green, Elward Ellis and Terry Winter--demonstrate that there is no intrinsic reason why seminary education and training in evangelism should not go hand in hand. In particular, Green (as teacher) and Ellis (as student) show that the reflective practicum in evangelistic preaching can take place in the seminary context.

Questionnaire Responses

Delegates to EC'95 were asked how they had learned their understanding and skills in four areas: evangelistic preaching, preparing an evangelistic talk, relating to an unchurched audience, and their theological understanding of evangelism. Answers to the first three questions showed a high degree of consistency, and, in the analysis that follows, I will combine the three.[68] In the areas of learning evangelistic preaching, preparing an evangelistic talk, and learning to relate to an audience, Experience is reported to be the most significant learning influence, followed by Mentors, and then the Ethos of IVCF. Answers to the fourth question (how did you learn your understanding of evangelism?), however, are markedly different, and I will consider those answers separately.

[68] To obtain the following figures, I converted a rating of "Very important" to a 3, "Somewhat important" to a 2, "Fairly unimportant" to a 1, and "Unimportant" to a 0.

In each of these four areas, respondents were offered seven possible answers: I asked if they had learned their skills and understanding from their own reading, EC'95, their church/denomination, their own experience, the ethos of IVCF, role models/mentors, or "other." The results are as follows:

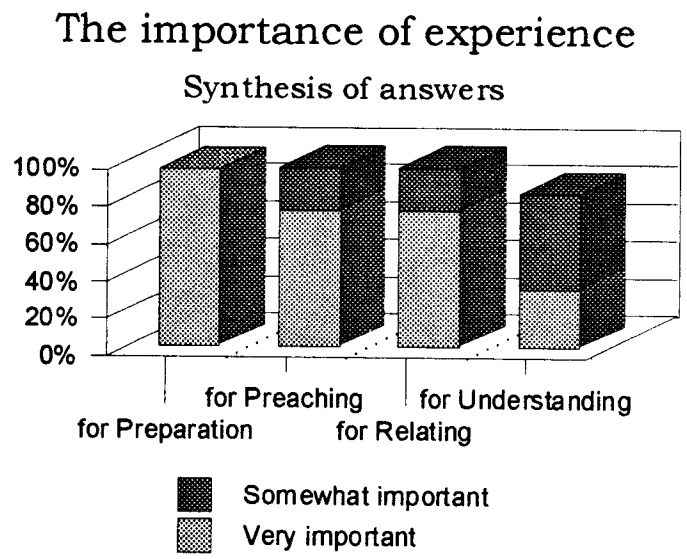


Analysis of what respondents wrote about each of the seven influences follows, in order of ranked significance.

Personal experience (28%)

The high priority EC'95 delegates give to "Personal Experience" is startling, at least in three of the four categories about which they were asked. When asked, **How did you learn evangelistic preaching?** 16 (73%) said "Very important" and 5 (23%) said "Somewhat important." When asked, **How did you learn preparation?** 21 (95%) said "Very important." And in answer to the

question, **How did you learn to relate to an audience?** 16 (73%) said "Very important" and 5 (23%) said "Somewhat important." In other words, all but one [69]--95% or 96%--said that personal experience was either "Very important" or "Somewhat important" for their learning in these areas.



In response to the fourth question--how they learned their understanding of evangelism--the ranking is dramatically different, with Experience reduced to sixth place out of seven. Here only seven delegates (32%) said experience was "Very important" and eleven (50%) said it was "Somewhat important." Perhaps this is because in our culture we do not look to experience to teach us theology. Hence Reading and Church score higher as sources of learning an "understanding of evangelism" than they do in the other three areas.

Where have delegates found their practical experience? EC'95 is at least one of the contexts. Although the conference is ranked only fourth overall out of

[69] It is probably worth noting that the one who answered differently was not the same individual in the three cases.

the seven possible influences, the fact that it provided practical experience is frequently mentioned when delegates describe what was helpful about it: they write such things as "having to write my own talk"; "the opportunity to DO it"; and "practical experience."

Some also refer to practical experiences of evangelism under "Other training." (See category below.)

Mentors and models (24%)

Several respondents mention multiple mentors. This accords with the experience of the seasoned evangelists interviewed above, that more than one mentor is helpful for developing one's own style of evangelistic speaking.[70]

Who are these mentors? Seventeen delegates (77%) name other IVCF staff as mentors. In fact, eleven (50%) name between two and five staff mentors. Often these staff mentors work in the same geographical area as those they influence, or they have an itinerant ministry. Non-staff mentors include seminary professors such as Andrew MacRae (Acadia), Clark Pinnock (McMaster), Michael Green (then at Regent), and Haddon Robinson (of Gordon-Conwell seminary) through his textbook on homiletics. This last example is reminiscent of those experienced evangelists who also found mentors and models in books.[71]

The experience of women in being mentored in significantly different from that of men. In particular, it appears to be difficult for women to find

---

[70] see page 186-187 above
[71] see page 191-192 above

female mentors. The eight women surveyed list a total of thirty-two men and only nine women as mentors. In fact, three of the women do not list a single female mentor.[72] When one considers the opposite scenario--how far men have been mentored in evangelism by women--the figures are once again striking. Only three out of fifteen men (20%) mention women mentors, and all three men are under twenty-five years old. Only two women are thus named (one is mentioned twice). Presumably part of this imbalance is due to the shortage of female role-models in evangelism. We may expect this to change as the voices of women evangelists (including those at EC'95) are increasingly heard.

The Ethos of IVCF (16%)

Overall, delegates chose "the Ethos of IVCF" as the third most important factor in their learning about evangelism, following Experience and Mentors. Those who ranked "the Ethos of IVCF" as "Very important" or "Somewhat important" more than once were a typical cross-section of respondents in terms of their age, time on staff, and denominational background. The only unusual factor about this group is that they were 50% more likely than the average delegate to have a Master's degree in theology (five out of the eight in this group, 62%, compared with 41% overall). It is not clear, however, why this should be.

The questionnaire did not offer a definition of "ethos," but it may be defined as "the distinctive character, spirit, and attitudes of a people, culture, era, etc."[73] Like any other cultural characteristic, the ethos of an organization

---

[72] It is interesting that three of the four married women at EC'95 rank their husbands as "Very important" in mentoring them. One also mentions her mother.

[73] Collins Dictionary of the English Language, 1979.

like IVCF consists not only of things which are made explicit but, just as importantly, of things which are taken for granted. The ethos consists in part of those assumptions which form the mental backdrop to everything from official policies to casual conversations. As a result, although (or because) it is so important, the ethos is difficult to articulate and is "more caught than taught."[74] It is closely related to what Daloz describes as:

> [l]earning by exposure, background learning [which] often proceeds without conscious awareness."[75]

Although "Ethos" is ranked as third most significant influence, it rates far less strongly than the two most powerful influences--Experience and Mentors, those things Schon describes as "coaching and learning by doing."[76] One might argue, therefore, that Experience and Mentors are the essential factors in any program of training in evangelistic speaking. An institutional Ethos conducive to the development of such skills, on the other hand--whether in seminary or parachurch--while certainly preferable, cannot be considered essential to the same extent.

The Usefulness of EC'95 (12%)

When the 1995 Evangelism Consultation is considered more than two years after the event, and its effectiveness as a form of evangelism training is compared with that of other influences, the event never rates higher than fourth in overall significance. At the same time, the components of the conference which were considered most valuable, such as mentoring and practical

---

[74] In the same way, one respondent specifically credits "the ethos of Regent [College]" rather than any specific training at Regent as teaching him evangelistic speaking.

[75] Schon, 38

[76] Schon xii

experience, are those that were ranked the most important overall. In other words, EC'95 was useful, if nothing else, as a framework within which delegates could experience those elements which they find most helpful for training.

It is interesting to compare the comments of EC'95 delegates with those of the experienced evangelists interviewed above. The latter spoke of the importance of observing their role models at work.[77] EC'95 delegates also mentioned the importance of observation--not only observing their mentors, however, but equally observing their peers as they gave their "sample" talks within the small group. They use phrases such as "hearing others' talks," "observation of peers' presentations," "examples, different models," and "new methods of speaking." In fact, "observation" is the most frequently mentioned benefit of EC'95. Maybe this is because EC'95 made available such a number and diversity of models to observe. One delegate refers to "the whole spectrum of styles." Most participants would have heard five or six different evangelistic speakers, most of them peers, in the course of the conference.

Just as experienced evangelists appreciated those mentors who had taken time to critique their speaking,[78] so EC'95 delegates generally speak appreciatively of the evaluation they received at the conference. Although one or two mentioned at the time that their evaluation was too negative in tone,[79] in general what is recalled of the evaluation at this point is positive encouragement: evaluation "gave me confidence to see the gift and use it";

---

[77] see pages 188-189 above

[78] see pages 196-198 above

[79] Some mentors neglected the context of pastoral care described on page23.

evaluation resulted in "realizing one could follow one's own style"; and there was "community encouragement to speak."

The fact that delegates were in small groups receives less comment now than it did at the end of the conference. What is remembered and valued now is simply the fact of being with other learner-practitioners. This suggests that there is nothing magical about being in a small group, but that community in some form, and of some size, is still crucial.

In terms of the fourth question, their learning of evangelism, delegates rank EC'95 last of their seven options. Probably this is because people arrived at EC'95 with their understanding of evangelism already formed. In fact, one respondent probably speaks for others when he says, in response to this question, "groundwork already intact." Indeed, they were probably selected for attendance at the conference in part because they had a fairly clear understanding of evangelism already.

I considered whether there were particular delegates who were more likely to have benefited from EC'95 than others. However, those who ranked EC'95 "Very important" or "Somewhat important" more than once were a typical cross-section of respondents in terms of their age, time on staff, denominational background and formal theological education.

Other Means of Training (9%)

A number of EC'95 delegates look back to early experiences in ministry as "Very important" times of training. Training was not always the explicit intention of these experiences, but in retrospect, respondents realise that they

were in fact formative. One cites work with Teen Challenge ministries in the early 1970s. Another recalls street evangelism projects organized by her Bible college. A third credits the preparation and leading of numerous evangelistic Bible studies at Pioneer Camps. A fourth also mentions leadership at a Christian summer camp. One respondent worked with me on various university missions while he was a student in the mid-1990s, and considers that to have been "Very important" in learning to prepare a talk and relating to a non-Christian audience. All of these are practical by nature, and reinforce respondents' conviction that Experience was their primary teacher of evangelism.

Not all such formative experiences are in Christian ministry, however. Three (14%) draw attention to their university education as teaching such skills as clear thinking and writing, and how to relate to people who think differently from oneself. One speaks of the importance of simply having friends who are not Christians.

The influence of theological education

Nine delegates (41%) have a Master's degree in Divinity, Theology or Christian Studies. Three of these are from Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, two from Regent College in Vancouver, two from McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, one from Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia, and one from Denver Seminary in Colorado. Four have a Diploma, either of Christian Studies or of Ministry, one has a Licentiate in Theology, and nearly all others record that they have taken individual courses in theology, though not a full program.

Of the nine with a Master's degree in theology, four never mention their theological studies as important in any aspect of their learning about evangelism in theory or in practice. Of the other five, three mention general preaching courses as "Very" or "Somewhat important."[80] One mentions twice the importance of the "ethos" of Regent College for learning about evangelism. The fifth simply notes in three places that "seminary" has been either "Very" or "Somewhat important" with no further explanation.

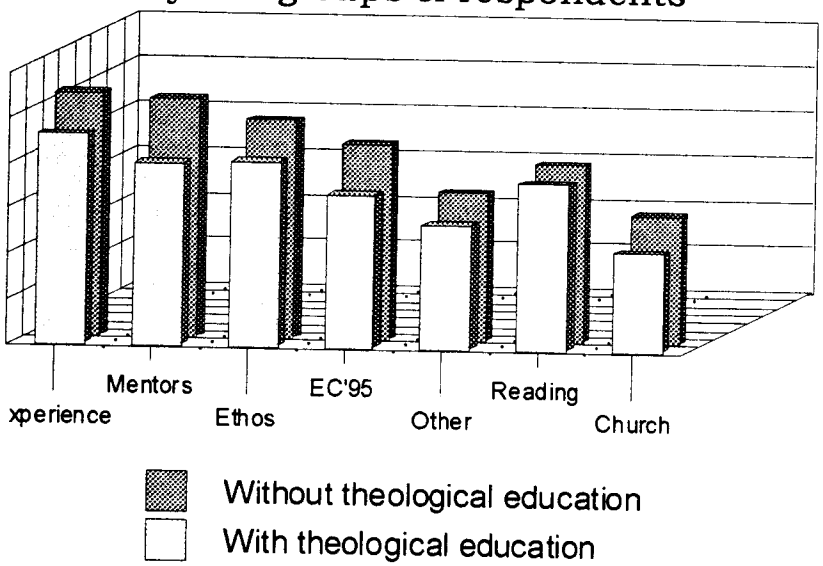
Is there a difference between those who have completed a Master's degree in some theological discipline and those who have not? In order to discover this, I synthesized the rating which delegates gave for the influences which had helped them learn the four aspects of evangelism. What emerged was that those with a Master's degree consistently ranked these influences as less important than did other delegates. They even rate the helpfulness of "Other training" as less important than did other delegates, which is surprising since their Master's training would be rated in this category. (In fact, the question not only asks about "Other training" but explicitly offers "seminary" as a sample answer to this question.) It is also surprising that "church" and "reading" rate lower as helpful influences in the estimation of this group.

The following grid indicates the contrast between how the two groups rate their learning experiences:

---

[80] This parallels the experience of evangelist Elward Ellis, who benefited from professors of preaching, though not of evangelistic preaching, as described on page 31.

How learning experiences are rated
by two groups of respondents



One can only speculate about the reasons for this pattern, though it is a subject worthy of further research. There appears to be no correlation between those with Master's degrees and such factors as age, length of time on staff, denominational background or geographical location. One is tempted to ask in what ways these findings are directly the *effect* of studying theology. Perhaps these people have simply been trained to think more critically--which would include thinking about the formative influences on their lives. Perhaps the differences could be accounted for by the fact that this group has simply had more opportunities for training, and that therefore the overall value of each influence decreases somewhat. Or perhaps this group are more highly self-motivated to find suitable training (after all, they followed the discipline of a Master's program), and thus do not attribute their learning to outside influences so much as to their own motivation. However, this group also rate their "Own experience" lower than other delegates, so that seems unlikely.

Reading (7%)

Very few books are in print specifically about evangelistic speaking, so it is hardly surprising that no-one mentions their influence. Twelve people (54%) however, cite classic books about evangelism in general, such as Paul Little's How to Give Away Your Faith (1966), David Watson's I Believe in Evangelism (1976), Rebecca Manley Pippert's Out of the Saltshaker (1979) and Don Posterski's Reinventing Evangelism (1989).

Eight people (36%) rate as helpful books which are themselves evangelistic in intent, and which thus serve as models in evangelism. C. S. Lewis, Peter Kreeft and Michael Green (You Must be Joking) are mentioned in this respect.[81]

Others list authors as diverse in background, style and intent as Dostoyevsky (The Brothers Karamazov) and Henry Nouwen (The Wounded Healer), Walker Percy and John Stott, G. K. Chesterton and Philip Yancey, Frederick Buechner and Lesslie Newbigin. Since the books cited do not deal with evangelism in any direct (or even, in some cases, indirect) way, these are presumably authors whose writings have influenced the respondents' general approach to life and faith--Daloz' "background learning" again. As a result, they have helped to shape the cultural ethos out of which EC'95 delegates speak. This background formation is in general informal and undirected, and to some extent unconscious, and it takes place over a number of years (almost none of it was part of a academic program): its importance is therefore easy to overlook.

---

[81] This is similar, though not quite identical, to the value experienced evangelists placed on reading books of evangelistic sermons. See pages 191-192 above.

When, in answer to the fourth question (about learning an "understanding of evangelism" in general), respondents were asked what books had influenced them, the list is different. The tendency, though not universal, is towards more theological works. Thus J. I. Packer's Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God (1961), John Stott's Christian Mission in the Modern World (1975), Clark Pinnock's A Wideness in God's Mercy (1992) and Stanley Grenz's Theology for the Community of God (1994) are each mentioned once. One person mentions Dietrich Bonhoeffer's The Cost of Commitment (1st edition 1949), and two list a recent book on evangelism, Speaking of Jesus by Mack Stiles (1995).

What is surprising is the small number of books mentioned which reflect on contemporary culture. One respondent lists Kevin Ford's book, Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in the Language of X-ers (1995), as "Somewhat important." Only two mention the influence of non-Christian writers: one lists Douglas Coupland, Quentin Tarantino, John Irving and Jane Siberry (a contemporary musician). The other also lists Coupland, as well as Michael Adams' Sex in the Snow (1997) and Rolling Stone magazine. This should not be taken as indicating that respondents are out of touch with culture--the titles and topics of their talks would strongly indicate otherwise--but rather that they do not consider that reading about those influences has shaped their evangelistic speaking. Judging from the titles of their talks, these respondents are more likely to be influenced by movies, songs or television than by books.

Church or denomination (3%)

As a source of learning evangelistic skills, "church or denomination" rates lower than any other influence. This is true as much of delegates from evangelical traditions as much as of those from mainline backgrounds. The twenty-two delegates each have four opportunities to choose "church/denomination" as helpful, and out of those eighty-eight occasions, only fifteen are marked "Very important" (compared, for example, with Experience, which is ranked "Very important" forty-eight times). Further, those fifteen ratings come from only six respondents (27%). Ten respondents (45%) simply do not consider church/denomination as either "Very" or "Somewhat helpful" in answering any of the first three questions.

Two comments of those who do select "Very" or "Somewhat helpful" are somewhat ironic, since they have to do (in one case) with a negative influence and (in the other) with the absence of any influence, good or bad. The first, who grew up in Brethren Assemblies, was, in his own estimation, helped by "many, many examples of poor presentations of the Gospel." The second, who grew up in the United Church of Canada, credits as a formative influence the "lack of structure . . . Left me open to explore truth and meaning and God's presence more freely."

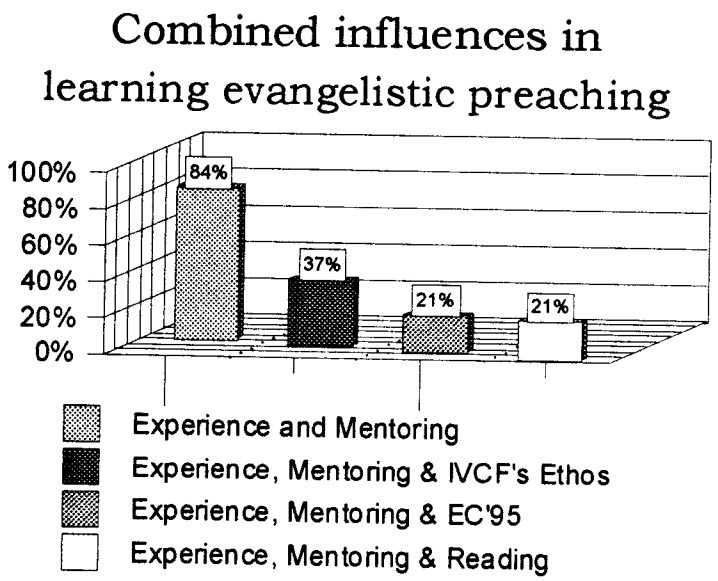
Those who found positive models of evangelism in their churches include a woman whose husband, an ordained Anglican pastor, is also a gifted evangelist. One high school worker has been very influenced by her Pentecostal pastor, also a well-known evangelist in the denomination. A member of IVCF's university staff rates his Anglican church as "VERY helpful in helping me see how to effectively connect with the culture, watching it modeled every week." If

there is a pattern here, it is that church is a helpful influence where the pastor modeled evangelism or evangelistic speaking. Unfortunately, few pastors or churches seem to have provided such models.

However, when delegates were asked how they developed their understanding of evangelism (the fourth question), as opposed to developing evangelistic skills, ten (45%) rate their church as being either "Very" or "Somewhat" important. Not surprisingly, those four who learned practical evangelistic skills from their church also learned an understanding of evangelism from their church, but, more surprisingly, six who did not find their church helpful practically nevertheless found it "Very" or "Somewhat important" for shaping their understanding of evangelism. This may simply be a reflection of the fact that, as so often, our theoretical understanding of the Christian life far outstrips our practice of it: respondents had heard sermons or attended Bible studies about evangelism, but not actually experienced the church being involved in evangelism.

Combined influences

It is clear from the questionnaire results that no one influence was responsible for the entire training of any individual. Each respondent states that, on average, 2.75 influences were "Very important" in forming their views and practices, and a further 2.17 were "Somewhat important." Answers to the question of what helped respondents to learn evangelistic preaching are typical:



Clearly, there is no single key to training evangelistic speakers. Any effective training needs to be multi-dimensional, and offer a variety of influences--although the foundations need to be experience and mentoring. The next chapter will consider ways in which such training may be provided.

Chapter 6

A MODEL FOR TRAINING EVANGELISTIC SPEAKERS

Delegates to EC'95 and experienced evangelists testify that the most powerful factors in their training were practical experience and mentors. An effective model for training evangelistic speakers will therefore centre around a combination of these two influences. The challenge for the theological educator is to find or to create environments in which experience and mentoring may be found, ideally together, without reliance on the model of the special conference provided by EC'95. Extrapolating from the lessons of EC'95, this chapter proposes that two environments in particular lend themselves to the embodiment of this model—a parachurch body as such as IVCF, and a theological college or seminary. These will be considered in turn.

The model expressed in the IVCF environment

A parachurch organization like IVCF, which has evangelism as a stated goal, is a fruitful context in which learners and mentors may connect, and for experience in evangelistic speaking to take place. Since the first Evangelism Consultation in 1992, an increasing number of staff (particularly those who attended EC'95) have had positive experiences of speaking at evangelistic events, and are equipped to act as mentors to younger staff and students. In fact, IVCF is in the process of creating a network to connect new staff with experienced staff mentors for the communication of many professional skills, of which evangelistic speaking is one.

Further, university campuses provide possibilities for the practical experience which is essential to this model. Student chapters of IVCF are usually sufficiently flexible, non-institutional, and enthusiastic to organize imaginative, thought-provoking, culturally appropriate evangelistic events for their unbelieving friends. This is encouraged by the atmosphere of the university campus where meetings, lectures, informal meals, and lively discussion of different viewpoints is a central part of the culture.

Evangelistic campus missions provide one kind of practicum in which evangelistic speaking can be taught and learned. To use a personal example, when I lead a campus mission, I try to take one or two younger staff or senior students with me. Partly this is for support and fellowship in preparation, prayer, organization and evaluation, but it is also an opportunity for them to speak by giving a testimony or a talk, or part of a talk. At a mission to Cornell University in 1994, for example, the two staff who came with me stood on the steps of the students union during one lunch-hour and announced, "Make Me An Atheist", offering to respond to the difficult questions thrown at them by students passing by. Since then, both these staff have gone on to give many other evangelistic talks in other contexts, without my presence.

IVCF is also fortunate to have camps as part of its organization.[1] Howard Guinness, founder of IVCF Canada, had been deeply influenced by the same camp which later contributed to the training of John Stott, Michael Green

---

[1] Pioneer Camps, owned and operated by IVCF, exist in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. There has been a Pioneer Camp in the Maritimes in the past, and IVCF Quebec is exploring the possibility of beginning one.

and David Watson--Varsity and Public Schools Camps in England.[2] As a result, when he came to Canada in 1928, he was determined to start not only evangelical ministries in universities and high schools but also camps where students could be evangelized and trained as he himself had been trained.

The informal yet protective environment of camps makes it possible for young leaders to find practical experience and personal mentoring from senior leaders in many ministry skills, from teaching canoeing to leading a Bible discussion. Such a setting fulfills the requirements laid down by Donald Schon for a practicum:

> A practicum is a setting designed for the task of learning a practice. In a setting that approximates a practice world, students learn by doing, although their doing usually falls short of real-world work. They learn by undertaking projects that simulate and simplify real-world work . . . A practicum . . . is a virtual world. It seeks to represent essential features of a practice to be learned while enabling students to experiment at low risk, vary the pace and focus of work and go back to do things over when it seems useful to do so.[3]

A camp setting is precisely such a "virtual world"—a small community of perhaps a hundred young people, together for a week or two, living in close community, with limited goals. Young leaders in such a context learn a variety of skills through "experiment at low risk" since more experienced leaders are always on hand.

---

[2] Guinness' comments on the camp's influence are very similar to that of the other three evangelists: "Many school boys owed much to [the leader of the camp] in training them for Christian leadership. At these camps I learned the essentials or Bible study and personal work which, by my last year at school, helped me think of my fellow prefects as potential Christians. One of them I helped to become a believer by directly passing on to him what I heard at camp the previous holidays." Howard Guinness, Journey Among Students (Sydney, Australia: Anglican Information Office, 1978), 28.

At present, evangelistic speaking is not a skill which is intentionally taught at camp in the careful and systematic way other skills are. However, it could very fruitfully be incorporated into the training of younger leaders, simply by assigning them a short evangelistic talk to prepare and give, say, at the end of an evening campfire. They would be paired with a senior leader who would act as mentor, offering help with preparation beforehand, providing prayerful encouragement throughout, and giving evaluation afterwards.

The model expressed in a seminary environment

It is unusual for seminaries to provide training in evangelistic preaching. With the exception of the course described below, there is currently no seminary in Canada which offers training in evangelistic preaching.[4]

There are at least three contributing causes for this absence. Firstly, the priority for a seminary (at least in the Western world) has for centuries been to produce professional pastors to serve existing churches. Particularly during the time of Christendom, evangelism was not perceived to be necessary. Even today, it could be argued that the weight of seminary training in still towards maintaining existing churches, rather than towards leading churches into growth through culturally-appropriate evangelism. [5] A second reason may be

---

[3] Schon 37, 170.

[4] One seminary told me they had a course on evangelistic preaching listed in their catalogue. When I asked who taught the course, I was told that since no students had ever asked to take the course, they had never had to find a professor to teach it, and did not know who they would ask.

[5] I recently received a copy of one seminary's Curriculum Review Study questionnaire for students. Under the question, "Who should be admitted to the Master of Divinity Program?" I am offered the following options: (1) Those

that mutual distrust often exists between evangelists and seminaries. Seminaries are likely to regard professional evangelistic preachers as non-academic, even anti-church, mavericks, while evangelists are likely to perceive seminaries as not practical enough, particularly in the area of evangelistic expertise. Thirdly, since the early nineteenth century, under the influence of the secular university, training for ministry has generally privileged theoretical over practical learning. Evangelism and evangelistic preaching in particular have traditionally been seen as belonging at the practical, non-academic end of the spectrum.[6]

Yet in the spectrum of evangelistic activities which Scripture exemplifies, evangelistic preaching is one of the most central, as Jesus' own ministry and the Book of Acts demonstrate. If the declining numbers of active Christians in Canada are to be reversed, culturally sensitive, theologically

---

intending to be ordained ministers, pastors, chaplains; (2) Those training for lay ministry [unspecified]; (3) People of other religious traditions; and (4) Anyone for any reason. Question 14 asks: "How important to the success of a minister's vocation is each of the following topics and core skills?" Out of forty-seven possibilities, three relate directly to outreach (evangelism, world mission, church planting). Seminarians are further asked, "What were your occupational goals when you entered seminary?" The only options provided are: (1) To gain a better understanding of Christianity as a lay person (2) To become an ordained minister (3) To become a pastor of a church congregation (4) To minister to people in various communities (5) To teach in a divinity college (6) To become a chaplain (8) To teach in a university (9) To become a Christian educator in a church congregation. The questions reveal a strong bias towards the maintenance of existing congregations, and almost none toward evangelism.

[6] This last point is discussed at length in David Kelsey, Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). An different paradigm for theological education, one which would bring the teaching of evangelism closer to the heart of theological education, is set out in Charles M. Wood, Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Studies (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1985).

formed, evangelistic preaching is one of the God-given strategies which will need to be revived, and seminaries can be a key in that reversal.

In the Spring of 1998, I taught a course on Evangelistic Preaching at Wycliffe College, an Anglican seminary in the University of Toronto. This course attempted to incorporate the lessons of EC'95 and the insights accumulating through my research into a regular seminary course of a single semester. In particular, I wanted to provide for the students the five-fold learning experience discussed above[7]: models of evangelistic preaching to observe; practical experience of evangelistic experience in the classroom, followed by evaluation, by peers and myself; an atmosphere of personal interest and care; and all of this under the guidance of a mentor or mentors.

In this course, I also tried to correct some of the weaknesses of EC'95, in particular by being more sensitive to cultural concerns (postmodernism, for example), by being gentler in the area of evaluating students' performances, and by setting as an assignment a visit to a "real-life" evangelistic event. A feature of the course not used at EC'95 was making videos of the students' practice evangelistic presentations. One problem identified at EC'95 remained a problem, however: finding venues where students could practice their gifts in a "real-life" setting. I will return to this problem later.

Twenty-three students took the course. The majority were M.Div. students from Wycliffe College training for ordination in the Anglican Church of Canada, two were from Emmanuel College, training for United Church

---

[7] Chapter 1, pages 9-11.

ordination, and four were IVCF staff taking the course as professional development.

Classes were two hours in length. In general, the first hour was given to lecture and discussion and the second to in-class evangelistic presentations and evaluation. In the first hour, I or a visiting lecturer dealt with a summary of the content of chapters 2 through 5 of this thesis. This was a significant part of the "theory" aspect of the course. (Class notes for the course form Appendix 2.)

I also made provision for students to observe three different models of evangelistic speaking. In the first two classes, I gave evangelistic talks I had previously given on university campuses, and invited the students to critique them. As they did so, I tried to model how to receive criticism without being defensive. Models of other kinds of evangelistic speaking were provided by two guest speakers. Paul Henderson speaks on behalf of Campus Crusade for Christ, talking about his hockey fame and his faith in Christ. He gave his standard presentation in front of the class, and then led discussion about his style and content. Harold Percy, rector of Trinity, Streetsville, modeled and led discussion about how to address a regular Sunday congregation that includes a significant proportion of unchurched folk. He began by preaching the sermon he had preached at Trinity the previous Sunday. One of the assignments was for students to attend an evangelistic event and report on it. This gave them further opportunities to observe other models of evangelistic speaking.

Students began giving their own evangelistic presentations in the fourth class, and thus began the "practical experience" aspect of their learning. A few gave talks they had already given in different contexts. Some already had an

invitation to speak, and made use of the class to rehearse their presentation. The range of talks and audiences was very wide. One man used to work for a TV company before beginning his ordination training, and expected to be invited to be the company's monthly "inspirational speaker" in the near future. One woman had been asked as part of her pastoral placement to teach a four-part series for parents wanting their babies baptised. Another had been invited to be a speaker at a conference for survivors of sexual abuse and to address the place of spirituality in recovery. One IVCF staff member gave a talk on "The Spiritual Journey of U2", which he had recently given on his campus. All these were evangelistic in intent in the sense described in Chapter 2--not calling for instantaneous Christian commitment, but encouraging their hearers to move towards Christ.

The evaluation component of their learning took two forms. I provided a sheet of guidelines for students to follow in critiquing one another (see Appendix 3). After the talk, the class took a few minutes for reflection and note-taking, and then I would initiate the evaluation, wanting to model the kind of sensitivity that was not always present at EC'95 (see chapter 1) and that seasoned evangelists so much appreciated (see chapter 5). Without exception, students were gentle in their evaluation of one another (the fact that roles would shortly be reversed may have contributed, of course), though each person also received practical suggestions for improvement. Each talk was recorded on video, and, as the notes describe, students were asked to watch the tape and write down their own self-evaluation as part of their final assignment. This was the second form of evaluation.

The second theme is the concern best summarized as, "What happens next?" This is expressed a number of ways. For example, when the evaluation asked, "What questions has this course raised for you?" students respond:

* How, when and where I can do it.

* Can I be effective as an evangelist? Will I be able to use the techniques in my church?

* How I can continue to improve on Evangelistic Preaching.

* Where can I do more to improve evangelistic speaking skills?

* [How] to place the focus on evangelistic preaching in a parish setting.

Another adds wistfully:

* Hopefully I can use this realization in my role as pastor.

This is a significant concern. The delegates from EC'95 continued with what they had learned in evangelistic speaking where they had encouragements from students and peers, and where there were ready-made opportunities for evangelistic speaking. IVCF is also a body which has evangelism as a stated goal, and an ethos which encourages it. The seminary students, on the other hand, are going to be ordained into a local church setting where evangelistic speaking opportunities do not readily present themselves, and where there may be few who will understand or give the necessary support. In most mainline denominations, there is certainly not an overarching ethos which encourages evangelism.

My evaluation of the course

This course had several advantages over EC'95. In particular, I appreciated the extra time to interweave theory and practice, and for me to

build relationships with the students. More time also allowed for the students to be exposed to other models of evangelistic speaking (Henderson and Percy), and to undertake extra-mural assignments such as attending an evangelistic event. Making videotapes of the students' presentations and encouraging them to watch and evaluate themselves was also helpful.

Some of the disadvantages of this course when compared with EC'95 have already been alluded to, such as the size of the class, and the lack of opportunities to continue practising once the term was over. To this I would add the isolation of this course from the rest of the students' theological formation. Three possibilities exist to make evangelism and evangelistic preaching a more significant part of the students' preparation for ministry.

1. Wycliffe College has a tradition of sponsoring an annual evangelistic mission to a local parish. I recently led a team of four Wycliffe College students on such a mission to an Anglican parish in Port Colbourne (Ontario). During the weekend we worked as team: while I did most of the preaching, each of the students gave a testimony at least once; we all sang together; we organized and led games for a youth night; and we performed dramatic sketches.[9] A similar event is being planned for the Fall of 1999 in two parishes on Manitoulin Island in Ontario. I hope also to take seminary students with me when I lead evangelistic missions on university campuses. It is also possible that in future all M.Div. students seeking ordination will be required to take part in a mission event of this kind as part of their training.

---

[9] One student has since asked if I will mentor him for a period of two years, and in particular help him work on his preaching.

2. At present, Wycliffe requires its M.Div. students to take one course in evangelism, yet one course hardly prepares them for a lifetime ministry of leading congregations into becoming healthy evangelizing communities. The college is currently evaluating the possibility of offering an M.Div. with a specialization in evangelism and congregational development. This would mean three or four courses in this area, a context in which a course on evangelistic preaching would comfortably fit.

3. Wycliffe is also considering a proposal for more integrated teaching of evangelism, stressing the integral connections between evangelism and other theological disciplines, including biblical studies, ecclesiology, doctrine, liturgics, history, homiletics and cultural studies.[10]

Summary and Conclusion

I have tried to argue that the ministry of evangelism is a ministry of the whole Christian church. Evangelism begins in the heart of God, and takes place as God's people learn to co-operate with God in God's work of reaching out to sinful men and women. Evangelism takes place as the church speaks the words and performs the deeds which reflect the words and deeds of God in Christ. Evangelism takes place as the Christian community learns to function as the Body of Christ. Evangelism takes place as each member of the Body of Christ

[10] I was encouraged while teaching a course on evangelism and culture recently to hear students talking excitedly about the connections they were noticing between that class and their concurrent ecclesiology course.

then plays his or her part in the process that helps unbelievers in the direction of faith.

The role of the preacher in this matrix of evangelistic life is to speak publicly to unbelievers on behalf of the community, explaining the unique reality which is the Christian Church, and portraying the Jesus in response to whom it has come into being. The evangelistic preacher has also to discern the activity of the Holy Spirit in the surrounding culture, to name it as such, and to make explicit connections between that activity and the Jesus of Scripture. The evangelistic sermon, talk or presentation thus offered provides a step, and often a powerful catalyst, in the process by which a person comes to faith in Christ. The evangelistic preacher, like any other Christian, is therefore a member of the body of Christ, the exercise of whose distinctive gifts is necessary for the Body to fulfil its calling.

Like any member of Christ's Body, evangelistic speakers require help and nurture in order to fulfil their calling. What is needed to train people in evangelistic speaking (as with training in most other skills) is a blend of practical experience and mentoring. The church, and particularly seminaries, charged with training the church's future leadership, have a responsibility to provide opportunities for at least some future leaders to develop in this ministry by providing opportunities for both practical experience and mentoring. In some cases, the training may be more easily provided in parachurch agencies which have a specialized ministry in evangelism. Without the provision of such training, wherever it may be found, the church's evangelistic ministry will be

* Models of evangelistic preaching.
* Exposure to numerous talks and the chance to do our own.
* Practical presentations.
* Attending an evangelistic presentation.

Twelve specified the evangelistic speaking assignment as the "most valuable" aspect of the course; seven indicated observing others speak (including the guest speakers); and six mentioned the "feedback" they received on their presentation.

Three students explicitly commented that giving their own talk had an integrative effect on their learning in the course [italics mine]:

* The evangelistic talk was great because it was practical and kept us honest and *focused.*

* Sermon forced me to *bring together all* I have seen and heard.

* Doing my own evangelistic sermon--*built on all lessons* learned.

This sense of "bringing everything together" is more clearly expressed by these students than by delegates to EC'95. This is probably because EC'95 delegates prepared their talks before coming to the conference, so that the shape of their presentations was not significantly affected by the conference input. The Wycliffe students, on the other hand, prepared their talks during the course, so that the lectures, the reading, the models and the examples of fellow-students were all present in their minds as they prepared their talks. This is an advantage of training which is spread over fourteen weeks instead of five days.

If this kind of training is to continue influencing these students after they are ordained and involved in the everyday life of a parish, one pre-requisite is that the contents of this course be integrated with other aspects of theological education. Thus their answers to the question, "Did you find that that your

work in this course has had an effect on your understanding of other theological disciplines?" are encouraging in that at least some indicate a growing understanding of how evangelism is an integral part of theological studies in general:

> * This course has forced me to think how God works and reveals in our world.
>
> * In helping others understand God it forces me to understand I don't have to have all the answers.

One, when asked, "Did lectures provide stimulation for further thought and study?" responds, "Too much at times."

Two suggestions for improvement emerged from the student evaluations. Firstly, in different ways they ask for more time--time for more lectures, more discussion, and time for more practical experience. Three explicitly ask for more time for the course:

> * I would have welcomed writing 2 talks to gain even more experience.
>
> * Not really enough time, since it was supposed to be a 2 hour lecture and 1 hour got cut out for the sermon time, this course should be listed as 3 hours a week, so we get 2 hours of lecture time and input.
>
> * Could it be a two-term course--get to do 2 talks and more time on each topic.
>
> * Another sermon presentation would be better [than another written assignment].

Two others suggest a smaller class to achieve the same end:

> * Limited enrollment.
>
> * Smaller class with more opportunity for discussion.
>
> * The size of the class and the subsequent time restraints prevented a certain amount of conversation.

The course outline given to the students follows, with later annotations of my own in italics:

Wycliffe College

WYP2302S EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

Winter Semester 1998

COURSE STATEMENT

Using models from Scripture, history, and contemporary church life, this course examines the role of evangelistic preaching in communicating the Christian faith within a secular society. Students will develop their own style of proclamation in comparison with other contemporary practitioners and models.

The reference to "history" was overambitious. I had hoped to use evangelistic sermons of previous generations of evangelists (recalling how the evangelists I interviewed had been encouraged by such reading), but was daunted by the size of the task of finding suitable material, and then of explaining the cultural context of each one. I concluded that trying to include this historical dimension, though worthwhile, was too much for either the teacher or the students in this particular course.

The reference to students developing "their own style of proclamation" was an allusion to the stage in the development of evangelistic speaking described in chapter 5 as "finding one's own voice." In fact, in many cases it was over-optimistic to hope that students could reach this stage within the limits of a fourteen week semester—although some had clearly found their own voice already.

The "other contemporary practitioners" were the two invited guest lecturers, other students in the class, and myself.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

January 8 Learning to preach evangelistically: the experience of seasoned evangelists
Sample evangelistic talk (JB)

"Learning to Preach Evangelistically" was a lecture which summarized the contents of chapter 5, including parts of the interviews with evangelists.

This led into an explanation of the rest of the course and why it was structured the way it was.

January 15 A theology of evangelism, and the place of preaching
Sample evangelistic talk (JB)

The notes for this and the following classes which were taught by me (rather than by visiting lecturers) are contained in Appendix 2.

January 22 Communicating the Gospel in a Postmodern World
Guest lecturer: Les Casson (IVCF staff, Queen's University)

I endeavoured to build an awareness of cultural issues into every class, but this one was an opportunity to focus on the question of postmodernism and its importance for evangelism with an IVCF colleague who has done a lot of work in this area. Some of the material covered in this class is the same as much chapter 4.

January 29 The place of Scripture in evangelistic preaching
Evangelistic presentations by students

This was the first class in which students gave their evangelistic presentations. The first students to speak had thus had three weeks for preparation, and had heard two sample talks by me by this time.

In order to give every student an opportunity to speak, students were divided into three smaller groups of seven or eight, and met weekly in those small groups, at different times, to hear one another speak.

February 5 The use of media in evangelistic preaching
Evangelistic presentations by students

February 12 Guest lecturer: Paul Henderson

February 19 (Reading Week: no class)

February 26 The place of imagination in evangelistic preaching
Evangelistic presentations by students

March 5 Theological language in evangelistic preaching
Evangelistic presentations by students

My intention in this class had been to talk about the necessity and the difficulty of "translating" theological language into words and metaphors that unchurched people understand. However, one student had asked the previous week for more models of different ways to speak evangelistically (her image was "more tools for [her] toolbox"). Other students concurred, so I postponed the lecture, and gave another evangelistic talk, this time using video, which was then discussed. If I

teach the course again, I would seek to include more models of different kinds of evangelistic presentation, offered either by me or by other visiting speakers.

March 12 Contexts for evangelistic preaching
Evangelistic presentations by students

March 19 Inviting commitment in evangelistic preaching
Evangelistic presentations by students

March 26 Guest lecturer: Harold Percy

April 2 Co-experimentation exercise
Evangelistic presentations by students

In this class, I wanted to use the teaching strategy described by Donald Schon as "co-experimentation" and already used by me at the University of Vermont (see chapter 5). I had collected and photocopied various pages from different editions of "The National Enquirer" and other tabloids, all discussing the end of the world, the return of Jesus, or judgment day. I distributed these to the students, and asked them to work individually and in pairs for fifteen or twenty minutes, trying to think of a way to use these stories as a basis for an evangelistic presentation. I had deliberately not prepared such a presentation in detail, so that when they volunteered their ideas, I also contributed mine. I felt the session went well[8], though no student specifically mentioned this session in their evaluation.

April 9 Evangelistic presentations by students
Evaluation of course

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read two books from the reading list, at least one on evangelistic preaching, and write a critical review. If you choose two books on evangelistic preaching, please compare and contrast the approaches of the authors.

Length: 1000-1500 words (4-6 pages) **Weight:** 20% **Due:** February 26

2. Prepare and then present before the class a 15-20 minute evangelistic presentation/sermon. Before you begin, explain clearly who your intended audience is, both sociologically and spiritually, and what your goal is. Your presentation will be

---

[8] One student commented that in three years in seminary, it was the first time she had participated in a discussion of the second coming!

critiqued by the class. You will also be expected to hand in either the script or legible notes of the presentation for marking. A videotape will also be made. Please view this at home (preferably with a friend who can give honest feedback) and include your own evaluation of your presentation in your final assignment.

Weight: 30% **Due date:** Please sign up for a date convenient to you.

3. During the duration of the course, attend an event which includes evangelistic speaking (a Sunday service, an evangelistic crusade, an outreach dinner party, a formal debate, etc.). Write a description and evaluation of the event, critiquing such things as the suitability of the presentation for the event and for the intended audience, the cultural sensitivity of the speaker, the use of Scripture, how you would feel if you were an unbeliever attending the event, and the degree to which you believe the event achieved its goals.

Length: 1000-1500 words (4-6 pages) **Weight:** 20% **Due date:** April 9

This assignment was not as effective as I had hoped, mainly because the events attended were for the most part badly done, according to the students' reports. Of course learning takes place when a thing is done badly, but for too many of the students, the event merely reinforced their negative stereotypes of what evangelistic speaking is. In particular they attended events they considered emotionally manipulative, intellectually weak and culturally insensitive.

Another time, I would specify pre-selected evangelistic events for students to attend which I could be sure would be of high quality.

4. Write a reflective paper on evangelistic preaching. This should include such things as:

* your theological understanding of evangelistic preaching: how do you understand the place of evangelistic preaching in the work of God through the church?
* your understanding of biblical material on evangelistic preaching
* reflections on the experience of preparing and giving an evangelistic talk in class: what did you learn from the experience? what will you do differently next time? how do you sense you are developing in finding your own voice?
* reflections on the presentations of the other students and of the instructor(s): what did you learn from them, either good or bad?
* in summary, what you have learned through this course, and how you hope to make use of it.

Length: 2,000-2,500 words **Weight:** 30% **Due date:** April 9

Student evaluations of the course

Twenty-one students filled out an evaluation form in the last class, following the outline prescribed by the college. On the whole they clearly enjoyed the course. When asked, "What did you find most valuable in the course?" one at least indicates a new awareness of what evangelistic preaching is and can be:

* Discovering that evangelistic preaching can be done anywhere, anytime, and can be non-threatening.

Students' answers indicate that they have become sensitive to issues around being a missionary in a foreign culture, and the need to look for points of contact with that culture. Thus, when asked, "What questions has this course raised for you?" answers include:

* How I adjust my style and thinking to most effectively address an unchurched or pre-Christian audience.

* Questions about being in tune with what society in general is thinking, how to reach and connect with people.

* The centrality of evangelism in the healthy church.

* How to find the high energy areas in culture, as this is where God is and this is where evangelistic folk must make contact.

Out of twenty-one responses, the majority singled out the importance of the practical aspects of the course. They singled out as significant such aspects as:

* Having to prepare and present an evangelistic presentation.
* The guest lecturers.

significantly weakened. On the other hand, while training in evangelistic speaking is no panacea for the evangelistic weakness of the church, its provision means at least that one significant aspect of the church's evangelistic ministry will be strengthened. And that is cause for rejoicing.

WORKS CITED

Abraham, William J. The Logic of Evangelism. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

Baldick, Chris. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Barclay, Oliver R. Whatever Happened to the Jesus Lane Lot? Leicester UK: Inter-Varsity Press 1977.

Bazilian, Eric. "What if God was One of Us." Sung by Joan Osborne.

Beasley-Murray, George R. John. Milton Keynes: Word Publishing, 1987

Berger, Peter L. A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural. Garden City NY: Doubleday & Company 1969; Anchor Books 1970.

Bibby, Reginald W. and Donald C. Posterski. Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion. Toronto: Stoddart 1992.

Blaiklock,E.M. Acts: an Introduction and Commentary. London: Tyndale Press, 1959.

Blomberg, Craig L. Interpreting the Parables. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

Bosch, David. Transforming Mission. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Brow, Robert. "Go, Make Learners": A New Model for Discipleship in the Church. Wheaton IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1980.

Brown, Colin. Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas and Movements, vol.1. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1990.

Brown, Raymond. The Message of Deuteronomy. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1993.

Bruce, F.F. The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary. London: Tyndale Press, 1951, repr. 1970.

Brunner, Emil. Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946

_____. The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics Volume I, trans. Olive Wyon. London: Lutterworth Press, 1949.

_____. The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics Volume II, trans. Olive Wyon. London: Lutterworth Press, 1952.

_____. The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith and the Consummation: Dogmatics, Volume III, trans. Olive Wyon. London: Lutterworth Press, 1962.

Calvin, John. The Acts of the Apostles, vol.2, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Campbell, Charles L. Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Capra, Fritjof. The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism. Berkeley: Shambhala 1975.

Chilcote, Thomas F. Jr. ed. The Excellence of our Calling: an Abridgement of Phillips Brooks' "Lectures on Preaching". New York: Dutton and Company, 1954.

Daloz, Lawrence. Effective Teaching and Mentoring. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986.

Defoe, Daniel. Robinson Crusoe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Davies W.D. Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology. London: SPCK, 1948; rev.ed. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Descartes, Rene. Descartes: Philosophical Letters, trans. Anthony Kenny. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

_____. Discourse on Method and The Meditation. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1988.

Dewey, John. John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings, ed. R.D.Archambault. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Dodd, C.H. The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

Donald, Melvin V. A Spreading Tree: A History of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada, 1928-29 to 1988-89. N.P. [1991].

Donovan, Vincent J. Christianity Rediscovered. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1978; repr. 1985.

Douglas J.D., ed. The New Bible Dictionary. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962.

Ferguson, Sinclair B., David F. Wright and J.I.Packer, eds. New Dictionary of Theology. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1988.

First Things 44, (June/July 1994): 18.

Ford, Kevin Graham. Jesus for a New Generation: Putting the Gospel in the Language of Xers. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Foster, H. Recodings: Art, Spectacle and Cultural Politics. Port Townsend, Washington: N.P. 1985.

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

Frye, Northrop. The Great Code: the Bible and Literature. Toronto: Academic Press, 1982.

Gascoigne, Bamber. The Christians. London: Jonathan Cape, 1977.

Gerard, Bernice. Bernice Gerard: Today and for Life. N.P. 1988.

Gergen, Kenneth J. The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Green, Michael. Evangelism in the Early Church. Crowborough, UK: Highland Books, 1970.

Grenz, Stanley J. A Primer on Postmodernism. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Griffiths, Michael. Cinderella with Amnesia: A Practical Discussion of the Relevance of the Church. (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

_____. The Example of Jesus. Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985.

Guinness, Howard. Journey Among Students. Sydney, Australia: Anglican Information Office, 1978.

Gunton, Colin E. The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity: the 1992 Bampton Lectures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Harvey, David. The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

Hauerwas, Stanley. Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Have You Heard of the Four Spiritual Laws? Arrowhead Springs: Campus Crusade for Christ, n.d.

Hunsberger, George R. and Craig van Gelder, eds. Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1996.

Kant, Immanuel. Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment? trans. Lewis Beck White. Indianopolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959.

_____. Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan, 1933.

Kelsey David. Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.

Keneally, Thomas. Schindler's List. Hemisphere Publishers, 1982; Toronto: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone Books, 1993.

Kidner, Derek. Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.

_____. Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary. London: Tyndale Press, 1967.

Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.

Kolb, David A. Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984.

Kraft, Charles H. Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books 1979.

Kuhn, Thomas. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; 2nd ed. 1970.

Lewis, C.S. Out of the Silent Planet. London: The Bodley Head, 1938; Pan Books, 1952

_____. Surprised by Joy. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955; Fontana Books, 1959.

_____. Reflections on the Psalms. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958; London: Collins Fontana 1961.

Lightfoot, R.H. St.John's Gospel: A Commentary. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Lindars, Barnabas. The Gospel of John. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

Lohfink, Gerhard. Jesus and Community: the Social Dimension of Christian Faith. Philadelphia: Fortress Press and New York: Paulist Press, 1982.

Long, Thomas G. The Witness of Preaching. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.

Longnecker, Richard N. The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Acts. Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995.

Lyon, David. Postmodernity. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981; 2nd edn. 1984.

Manson T.W. The Teaching of Jesus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945.

Marshall, I. Howard. Acts: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980; repr., 1994.

Marty, Martin E. A Short History of Christianity. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

McDowell, Josh. More Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Arrowhead Springs CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975.

McGrath, Alister E. Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics. Leicester UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992.

_____, ed. The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993.

_____. Christian Theology: An Introduction. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994.

McLaughlin, W.G. Jr. Modern Revivalism: From Charles G. Finney to Billy Graham. New York: Ronald Press, 1959.

Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh, Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Moberg, David O. The Great Reversal: Evangelism and Social Concern. Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott, revised edition, 1977.

Moore, Stephen D. Post-Structuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Morison, Frank. Who Moved the Stone? London: Faber and Faber, 1930; reprinted Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1980.

Motz Arnell, ed. Reclaiming a Nation: The Challenge of Re-evangelizing Canada by the Year 2000. Richmond BC: Church Leadership Library, 1990.

Murphy, Nancey. Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics. Boulder, CO: HarperCollins Westview Press, 1997.

Neill, Stephen. A History of Christian Missions. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964.

Newbigin, Lesslie. The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

_____. Foolishness to the Greeks. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

_____. The Gospel in a Pluralist Society. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989.

Noll, Mark A. A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Peterson, Eugene H. Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997.

Pinnock, Clark H. A Wideness in God's Mercy: the Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

_____ and Robert C. Brow. Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Pollock, John. Billy Graham: The Authorised Biography. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967.

Richardson, Don. Peace Child. Ventura CA: Regal Books, 3rd ed. 1976.

Rosato, Philip J. The Spirit as Lord: the Pneumatology of Karl Barth. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981.

Rowley, H.H. The Missionary Message of the Old Testament. London: The Carey Press, [1945].

Russell, Bertrand. Why I Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects. London: Unwin Books, 1957; 2nd edition 1967.

Sanneh, Lamin. Translating the Message: the Missionary Impact on Culture. Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Scherer, Paul. The Word God Sent. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Schon Donald. Educating the Reflective Practitioner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988.

Sire, James W. The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976; 2nd edn., 1988.

Snyder, Howard A. The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1980.

Spong, John. Born of a Woman: a Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus. HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.

Stackhouse, John G. Jr. Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character. Toronto: University of Toronto Press ,1993.

Stimulus. Vol.1 No.1, February 1993.

Stott, John R.W. Christian Mission in the Modern World. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975.

_____. The Lausanne Declaration: An Exposition and Commentary. Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, 1975.

_____. I Believe In Preaching. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982.

_____. The Spirit, the Church and the World: the Message of Acts. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

Taylor, Charles. Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity. Cambridge MA: Havard University Press, 1989.

Taylor, John V. The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission. London: SCM Press, 1972.

Thiselton, Anthony C. Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Tillich, Paul. Systematic Theology I

TIME Magazine. July 17, 1995

_____. July 27, 1998

Torrance, Thomas F. Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian. Edinburgh: T.&.T.Clark, 1990.

Urmson, J.O. and Jonathan Ree. The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers. New York: Routledge, 1960, new ed. 1989.

Walsh, Brian J. and J. Richard Middleton. The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

Warren, Max. I Believe in the Great Commission. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

Watson David C.K. I Believe in Evangelism. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976.

_____. You Are My God. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983.

Wells, H.G. A Short History of the World.

Wenham, Gordon J. Word Biblical Commentary : Volume 1: Genesis 1-15. Vancouver: Word Communications Ltd. 1987.

Willimon, William H. and Stanley Hauerwas. Preaching to Strangers. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Willimon, William H. Acts, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988.

_____. Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1994

_____. The Intrusive Word. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Wright, N.T. The New Testament and the People of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.

_____. Who Was Jesus? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

_____. Jesus and the Victory of God. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.

Interviews

Brown, Lindsay. Interview with author, Tape recording. Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills BC, October 28, 1995.

Ellis, Elward. Interview with author, Tape recording. Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills BC, October 28, 1995.

Ford, Leighton. Telephone interview with author, Tape recording, May 17, 1996.

Green, Michael. Interview with author, Tape recording. Hamilton ON, August 18, 1996.

Horner, Michael. Telephone interview with author, Tape recording, May 16, 1996.

Lee, Nigel. Interview with author, Tape recording. Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills BC, October 28, 1995.

Stott, John R.W. Interview with author, Tape recording. McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton ON, February 19, 1996.

Thomas, T.V. Interview with author, Tape recording. Pioneer Chehalis, Harrison Mills, BC, October 28, 1995.

Winter, Terry. Telephone interview with author, Tape recording, May 15, 1996.

Appendix I

QUESTIONNAIRE

for delegates to
IVCF's 1995 Evangelism Consultation

February 1998

McMaster Divinity College
Doctor of Ministry Program

QUESTIONNAIRE ON EVANGELISTIC SPEAKING FOR DELEGATES TO IVCF'S 1995 EVANGELISM CONSULTATION (EC'95)

Section A: Your background

It would help me in thinking about your answers to this questionnaire if you could please tell me:

1. Your name..... 2. Your age:.....

3. Length of time you have been on IVCF staff (to the nearest full year):...

4. The denomination in which you grew up (if any):.....

5. The denomination of the church you currently attend.....

6. If you remember a moment when you would say you became a Christian, what age were you? (If you do not, write N/A.).....

7. Educational level attained (circle one):

   High School Bachelor's Master's Doctorate

   Professional degree (eg. LL.B., B.Ed.: please specify).....

   Other (please specify).....

8. If you went to university, what was your major?.....

9. Do you have any formal theological education? If so, what program and where?.....

   .....

10. Did you have professional ministry experience before coming on IVCF staff? Yes/No. If Yes, what was it (eg. youth pastor) and how long were you engaged in it?.....

    .....

Section B: Your understanding of evangelistic speaking

(1) Please indicate how far the following statements express or contradict your convictions about evangelistic speaking by circling the appropriate number:

	Strongly agree 4	Agree 3	Neutral 2	Disagree 1	Strongly disagree 0
a) It is important to build bridges to the secular world	4	3	2	1	0
b) We must be careful not to compromise the Gospel	4	3	2	1	0
c) My task is to speak, it is God's responsibility to create faith	4	3	2	1	0
d) I see myself as a witness to the Gospel	4	3	2	1	0
e) I try to talk in the language of the culture	4	3	2	1	0
f) The heart of my evangelistic talk is generally the exposition of Scripture	4	3	2	1	0
g) I see myself as an affirmer of people's spiritual search	4	3	2	1	0
h) My job is to present the truth, not to make it palatable	4	3	2	1	0
i) I try to identify the questions in my hearer's lives and show how Christ answers them	4	3	2	1	0
j) I try to identify the needs in my hearer's lives and show how Christ answers them	4	3	2	1	0
k) I think it is important to mention all the central facts of the Gospel in every talk.	4	3	2	1	0

[continued on next page...]

	Strongly agree 4	Agree 3	Neutral 2	Disagree 1	Strongly disagree 0
l) My job is to nurture the seeds of faith in the hearer	4	3	2	1	0
m) I see myself as a herald for the Gospel	4	3	2	1	0
n) If I am faithful, I expect that some people will be offended by what I say	4	3	2	1	0
o) I try to help the hearer recognise the activity of God in their lives	4	3	2	1	0
p) Whatever else may be in a talk, I will always speak about the cross	4	3	2	1	0
q) I try to ensure that people are attracted to Jesus rather than to me	4	3	2	1	0
r) One of my goals in speaking is to encourage the hearers to check out the Christian community	4	3	2	1	0
s) My main task is to encourage my hearers to make a commitment to Christ	4	3	2	1	0
t) I see myself as a fellow seeker for God with my hearers	4	3	2	1	0
u) Other (please specify)	4	3	2	1	0

(2) I am interested to know *how you learned* the skills and understanding you have described in this section. Please circle the number that seems closest to your experience:

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important 0
I learned my understanding of evangelistic speaking through:				
a) my own reading	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please name three of the most formative titles:				
.....				
b) EC'95	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please specify what about EC'95 helpful:				
.....				
c) my church/ denomination	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please specify what about your church or denomination was helpful.....				
.....				
d) my own experience of evangelistic speaking	3	2	1	0
e) the general ethos of IVCF	3	2	1	0
f) role models/mentors	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please specify who:.....				
.....				
g) other training eg. seminary	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please specify what the training was:.....				
.....				

Section C: Your involvement in evangelistic speaking in the past year

(1) How many times have you given evangelistic talks in the past 12 months? .....

(2) Please give three examples of your titles or topics, the setting in which you gave them, and the type of event each was:

	Title	Setting	Event
EG.	"Will the Real Jesus please stand up?"	Private home	Dinner party
	"Exploring your spirituality"	High school gym	School assembly
a)	.....	.....	.....
	.....		
	.....		
b)	.....	.....	.....
	.....		
	.....		
c)	.....	.....	.....
	.....		
	.....		

(3) Do you prefer your talks to be followed by questions and discussion? (Please circle one)

Always Usually Sometimes Seldom Never

(4) What passages of Scripture do you find you use most often in evangelistic talks?.....

.....

.....

(5) Why do you use these passages more than others?.....

.....

.....

(6) What metaphors do you most often use to explain aspects of the Christian faith?.....

.....

.....

(7) Why do you use these metaphors more than others?.....

.....

.....

(8) What has the response to your talks been from people who identify themselves as not being Christians? Please indicate which phrase comes closest to describing your experience by circling the appropriate number:

I find that people respond to my evangelistic talks by:

	Very often 5	Quite often 4	Some-times 3	Almost never 2	Never 1
a) becoming Christians	5	4	3	2	1
b) joining follow-up groups to investigate further	5	4	3	2	1
c) beginning to attend regular IVCF/ISCF group meetings	5	4	3	2	1
d) beginning to attend church	5	4	3	2	1
e) discussing spiritual issues with me afterwards	5	4	3	2	1
f) discussing spiritual issues with Christian friends afterwards	5	4	3	2	1
g) asking questions of Christians afterwards	5	4	3	2	1
h) engaging in argument whose value I question	5	4	3	2	1
i) walking out of my presentations	5	4	3	2	1

continued on next page...]

j) actively opposing my presentations	5	4	3	2	1

(5) Would you say evangelistic speaking is (please check one):

a) your main spiritual gift? [ ]

b) one of your spiritual gifts? [ ]

If you checked this one, what <u>do</u> you consider your main spiritual gift? .....

c) not really one of your spiritual gifts [ ]

(6) How important have the following influences been in encouraging you to give evangelistic talks? Please indicate the answer that best describes your experience by circling the appropriate number:

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important at all 0
a) your ministry supervisor	3	2	1	0
b) colleagues in IVCF	3	2	1	0
c) the students you work with	3	2	1	0
d) your pastor	3	2	1	0
e) your mentor from EC'95	3	2	1	0
h) Other (please specify).....	3	2	1	0

Section D: Preparing an evangelistic talk

(1) Please list the four most important steps by which you prepare an evangelistic talk. You may wish to use the three talks you listed above in Section C.(2) as models.

(a).....

.....

.....

(b).....

.....

.....

(c).....

.....

.....

(d).....

.....

.....

(2) I am interested to know *how you learned* the skills and understanding you have described in this section. Please circle the number that seems closest to your experience:

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important 0
I learned how to prepare an evangelistic talk through:				
a) my own reading	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please name three of the most formative titles:

.....

[continued on next page...]

b) EC'95 3 2 1 0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> about EC'95 helpful:

.....

c) my church/ denomination 3 2 1 0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> about your church or denomination was helpful.....

.....

d) my own experience of evangelistic speaking 3 2 1 0

e) the general ethos of IVCF 3 2 1 0

f) role models/mentors 3 2 1 0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>who:</u>.....

.....

g) other training eg. seminary 3 2 1 0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> the training was:.....

.....

Section E: Relating to the audience

(1) When you are preparing an evangelistic talk, how important are the following considerations to you? Please indicate which phrase most closely matches your experience by circling the appropriate number:

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important at all 0
a) Explaining theological terms in non-technical language	3	2	1	0
b) Telling Bible stories in contemporary form	3	2	1	0
c) Pointing out signs of God's activity and/or truth in the culture	3	2	1	0
d) Showing that you identify with the culture to which you are speaking	3	2	1	0
e) Finding culturally intelligible ways to explain doctrines such as sin, etc.	3	2	1	0
f) Reading and explaining something from Scripture during the talk	3	2	1	0
g) Using appropriate video, song or other current material	3	2	1	0
h) Other (please specify).....	3	2	1	0

(2) When you speak about making a Christian faith-commitment, what terminology do you prefer? Please circle the appropriate number:

	Strongly prefer 5	Somewhat prefer 4	May use occasionally 3	Somewhat dislike 2	Strongly dislike 1
a) becoming a Christian	5	4	3	2	1
b) becoming a follower of Jesus	5	4	3	2	1

[continued on next page...]

	Strongly prefer 5	Somewhat prefer 4	May use occasionally 3	Somewhat dislike 2	Strongly dislike 1
c) being saved	5	4	3	2	1
d) being born again	5	4	3	2	1
e) turning to God	5	4	3	2	1
f) committing your life to Christ (or Jesus, or God)	5	4	3	2	1
g) joining the Christian community	5	4	3	2	1
h) joining God's family	5	4	3	2	1
i) other (please specify).....	5	4	3	2	1

(3) I am interested to know <u>how you learned</u> the skills and understanding you have described in this section. Please circle the number that seems closest to your experience:

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important 0
I learned how to relate to an audience through:				
a) my own reading	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please name three of the most formative titles:				
b) EC'95	3	2	1	0
If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> about EC'95 helpful:				
c) my church/ denomination	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> about your church or denomination was helpful.....

.....

[continued on next page...]

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important 0
d) my own experience of evangelistic speaking	3	2	1	0
e) the general ethos of IVCF	3	2	1	0
f) role models/mentors	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>who:</u>.....

.....

g) other training eg. seminary	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> the training was:.....

.....

Section F: Your understanding of evangelism

(1) Please state in one or two sentences what, in your understanding, is the essence of the Christian Gospel?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(2) How do you understand the place of evangelism in the work of God in the world? In other words, what is your theology of evangelism?

.....

.....

.....

[continued on next page...]

.....

.....

(3) What do you consider the role of evangelistic speaking in evangelism as you described it in (2)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(4) I am interested to know <u>how you learned</u> the skills and understanding you have described in this section. Please circle the number that seems closest to your experience:

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important 0
I learned my understanding of evangelism through:				
a) my own reading	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please name three of the most formative titles:

.....

b) EC'95	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> about EC'95 helpful:

.....

c) my church/ denomination	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> about your church or denomination was helpful.....

.....

[continued on next page...]

	Very important 3	Somewhat important 2	Fairly unimportant 1	Not important 0
d) my own experience of evangelistic speaking	3	2	1	0
e) the general ethos of IVCF	3	2	1	0
f) role models/mentors	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>who:</u>.....

.....

g) other training eg. seminary	3	2	1	0

If you checked 3 or 2, please specify <u>what</u> the training was:.....

.....

Thank you for your time and contribution!

John Bowen
Email: ce072@freenet.carleton.ca
Phone and fax: 905 524 0902

February 1998

Appendix II

JOB DESCRIPTION

for a mentor in Evangelistic Preaching,
at IVCF's Evangelism Consultation

November 1995

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR AN EVANGELISTIC SPEAKING MENTOR

For purposes of the Consultation, the working definition of evangelistic speaking is "teaching the Christian faith to outsiders". If we envision people on a continuum from 1 to 50 in terms of coming to Christ, the aim of evangelistic speaking is that the hearers should have moved towards 50 by the end.

The purpose of a specific talk will vary according to the audience. It may be to help them move from 49 to 50 ("Three steps to becoming a Christian") but may equally well be to help them move from 7 to 23 (or any other distance) by such things as:

* arousing their curiosity about spiritual matters
* creating intrigue around the person of Jesus
* showing the spiritual implications of a popular movie, or
* encouraging them to consider critically their present philosophy of life in the light of Jesus' teaching.

1. YOUR PREPARATION

* please pray for delegates, that God will give them increasing confidence and competence in evangelism through our time together

* prepare for item 2.(b)

2. DURING THE CONSULTATION

(a) Lead a small group of 5 or 6, meeting for three hours on each of the three full days

(b) At the first session:

* Talk for 10 minutes about yourself, your history in evangelism, eg. how you got into evangelism, what your ministry now consists of, what you think your main strengths and weaknesses are as an evangelist; answer questions

* Give a 15-minute evangelistic presentation (as explained above) to the group and receive critique from the group.

(c) Hear each member of the group give a 15-minute evangelistic presentation, and lead critique (affirmation AND constructive criticism) of both content and style by the group. You will probably get through 2 or 3 in each session.

(d) Immediately after each talk (including yours), ie. before any discussion, hand out copies of the Evaluation Sheet (a sample is attached) and give the group a few minutes to fill it out. This can be the basis for your critique. At the end these should be handed to you (not to the speaker) and can provide material for your one-one-one conversations later (see (e) below).

(e) Invite members of your small group to spend time one-on-one with you, over a meal or during a walk, to have more personal discussion and feedback on the presentation.

3. FOLLOW-UP

(a) Pray for members of your small group, particularly as they experiment in the area of evangelistic speaking once the consultation is over.

(b) Keep in touch with members of your small group for 12 months. This may involve things like:

* writing each a personal letter and/or phoning them three or four times to find out how they are doing personally as well as in their ministry;

Each delegate will be challenged to give an evangelistic talk within three months of EC'95, incorporating what they have learned. You can have an important part in this by:

* critiquing their notes for the presentation, which they will be encouraged to send you beforehand;

* critiquing a video or audio tape of the event, which they will be asked to send you along with a report of the event. Of course, if you were able to be present for the event, that would be even better!

Thank you for this ministry of mentoring. It has a crucial part to play in equipping the next generation in the Kingdom of God.

John Bowen
EC'95 Director

Phone and fax: 613 746 3273
E-mail: ce072@freenet.carleton.ca

Appendix III

CLASS NOTES

for a course on Evangelistic Preaching,
taught at Wycliffe College, Toronto

Spring 1998

Wycliffe College

WYP 2302S EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

A THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM

1. Genesis 3:9

"Where are you?" God pursuing sinful humankind with words and actions.

2. Genesis 12:1-3

The call of Abraham for the blessing of the world.
Midrash: "I will make Adam first, and if he goes astray I will send Abraham to sort it all out. " [Wright 251]
A spoken promise and the gift of a child.

3. Deuteronomy 4:5-6

When God's law is incarnated in human community, the world will take notice.

4. Isaiah 49:6, Micah 4:1-4

Prophets foresee a great turning of the nations to the God of Israel.

5. Jesus

"The Gospels are...the story of Jesus told as the history of Israel in miniature...Matthew gives us...a Genesis (1:1), an Exodus (2:15) and a Deuteronomy (5-7); he then gives us a royal and prophetic ministry, and finally an exile (the cross) and restoration (the resurrection). What more could we want?" [Wright 402]

6. John's Gospel

The Father sends the Son (5:23) to do the Father's will (4:34) by word (12:49) and work (9:4): thus the Father becomes visible (14:9). Jesus' followers are "sent" in the same way (20:21). The Father (14:26) and the Son (16:7) send the Spirit to empower them.

7. Acts 2:41-47, 4:31-35

The community of Jesus followers continue his ministry by works and words.

8. Evangelism as process

Matthew 13, John 4:35-38.

Bibliography

N.T.Wright *The New Testament and the People of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1992.

Wycliffe College
WYP 2302S Evangelistic Preaching

THE USE OF THE BIBLE IN EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

Principles:

* Goal: to show how Scripture addresses us, so that people are confronted with the Word of God and attracted to find out more--or, in some cases, repelled.

* There is nothing magical about quoting Scripture. Better read a little well and explain it, than read a lot that is unintelligible! Even when Scripture is not used explicitly, we seek to have "the mind of Christ".

* Choose the approach most appropriate to the audience. Compare Acts 2 and Acts 17. Choose the most appropriate version eg. NRSV for inclusivity, TEV for simplicity, The Message for idiomatic English.

Strategies:

1. Read with expression. Look for drama, humour. (Exodus 1:15-22)

2. Distribute and read from "one of the earliest biographies of Jesus".

3. Read the story with running commentary (Luke 19:1-10)

4. Specific texts on overhead (how Jesus answers the questions of Robin Williams; Matthew 11:18-20, Revelation 3:20)

5. Tell a story from memory or act it out. ["Zacc's for Tax" from Lightning Sketches, by Paul Burbridge and Murray Watts]

6. Tell a contemporary version of the story (Curt Cloninger and Luke 15:11-24)

John Bowen
January 1998

Wycliffe College
WYP 2302S Evangelistic Preaching

THE USE OF MEDIA IN EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

Principles:

1. Using media is not a gimmick to gain a hearing! It is built on the premise that God is active and vocal in the "secular" world, calling people to pay attention.

2. Finding suitable media requires active looking and listening with "the mind of Christ." Cf. Acts 17:23

3. Using media requires use of electrical equipment, which is often temperamental. You need to be competent yourself or to have a competent assistant. Cf. Murphy's Law.

Examples of media use:

1. Video clips
   May be used to:
   * make one point eg. "Dave" the outsider
   * show a progression through the film, eg. three kinds of freedom in "Groundhog Day"
   * show a theme through different movies, eg. the search for home in Robin Williams

   (Health warning: counters are not the same on different VCRs!)

2. Cartoons
   Good humour is built on truth, and where there is truth, God has a foot in the door, eg. sin in *Calvin and Hobbes*.

3. Songs
   Put words on overhead. (Simply playing the song is difficult because there is nothing visual.)

4. Read (or tell from memory) stories
   (eg. many people know *Narnia* stories.)

6. Video clips from TV shows

7. Magazine/tabloid covers
   eg. Elvis and Jesus, Second Coming

John Bowen
February 1998

Wycliffe College
WYP 2302S Evangelistic Preaching

THE PLACE OF IMAGINATION IN EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

The importance of the imagination

If I were asked what has been the most powerful force in the making of history, you would probably judge me of unbalanced mind were I to answer, as I should have to answer, metaphor, figurative expression. It is by imagination that men [sic] have lived; imagination rules all our lives. The human mind is not, as philosophers would have you think, a debating hall, but a picture gallery.

Macneile Dixon quoted by John Stott in I Believe in Preaching page 238-239 (US title: Between Two Worlds)

The sin of boredom

The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore--on the contrary: they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him "meek and mild", and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies. To those who knew Him, however, He in no way suggested a milk-and-water person; they objected to Him as a dangerous firebrand.

Dorothy Sayers Creed or Chaos page 5-6

People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is to be more dramatic than to be mad. It was the equilibrium of a man behind madly rushing horses, seeming to stoop this way and that, yet in every attitude having the grace of statuary and the accuracy of arithmetic...[I]n my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.

G.K.Chesterton Orthodoxy, page 99-100

Imagination and evangelism

Our greatest public sin is that we are boring...[Our lessons] are not so heretical as they are uninteresting.

Bishop David Preus, quoted in Friedeman The Master Plan of Teaching, page 163

The best teacher is the one who can turn the ear into an eye.

Arabian proverb in Friedeman page 170

Poetry takes something we already know, and turns it into something new.

T.S.Eliot

I thought I saw how stories of this kind [Narnia] could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings...But suppose that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency. Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.

C.S.Lewis Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said, in This and Other Worlds page 73

Challenges to the evangelistic imagination (and Jesus' metaphors)

(a) Creation

(b) Sin (disease, Luke 5:30-31)

(c) Incarnation (descent, John 3:13)

(d) Grace (foot-washing, John 13)

(e) Atonement (Barabbas, Matthew 27:15-26)

(f) Church (family, Mark 3:31-35)

(g) Conversion (born again, John 3:3)

(h) Kingdom of God (party, Luke 14:15-24)

(i) Lord (landowner, Matthew 25;14-30)

(j) Faith (following Jesus, Mark 1:16-20)

John Bowen
February 1998

Wycliffe College
WYP 2302S Evangelistic Preaching

CONTEXTS FOR EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

1. Regular Sunday services

For most people, the worship service is the door through which they enter the church. When people are invited by a friend...their first experience is usually a worship service. (Harold Percy Good News People p.90)

2. Guest or alternative services

Over a period of nine years in York...we have held fifty services of this nature, with many hundreds committing their lives to Christ. (David Watson, I Believe in Evangelism p.143)

3. Rites of passage

Baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals...

4. Family services

[A] good many parents are concerned that their children should have a godly and moral foundation laid for their lives, even if they themselves have little or no personal Christian faith...In this way, many parents come to church for the sake of their children. (Watson p. 146)

5. Parish missions

A mission is not an invasion from outer space by some supposed expert, but an overflow of Christian life, an extended attempt over a number of days, or even weeks, to make the Christian gospel the major issue in a given area. It is not propaganda, but celebration. (Michael Green Evangelism Through the Local Church p. 341)

6. Special events: Valentine's, Hallowe'en

Because Christmas and Valentine's Day have seasonal appeal for the non-Christian, churches can combine the fun of the season with testimonies of how Christ can change one's life. The idea is adaptable to any situation and doesn't even require outside resource people. (ed. Arnell Motz Reclaiming a Nation p.183-184)

7. Beginners' groups eg. Christian Basics, Alpha

In advertizing this course, we say it is "for people interested in learning what Christianity is all about, and for Christians who feel that they would benefit from a refresher course in the basics of the Christian faith." (Harold Percy good idea! Autumn 1995

John Bowen
March 1998

Wycliffe College
WYP 2302S Evangelistic Preaching

INVITING COMMITMENT IN EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

HISTORY OF "THE INVITATION"

* **John Wesley, George Whitefield** (the Evangelical Revival in UK, 1742 on), **Jonathan Edwards** (the Great Awakening in USA, 1726-1745) used no "invitation", though Wesley promoted small groups

* **Second Evangelical Awakening** (1785-1830): "the mourner's bench"

* **Charles G. Finney** (1792-1875): "the anxious bench": instantaneous conversion

* **D.L.Moody** (1837-1899): enquiry room; singing

* **Billy Sunday** (1862-1953): "the sawdust trail", shake my hand, sign this card

* **Billy Graham** (1918-): come forward, pray "the sinner's prayer"

THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. God's grace invites a response of heart and life

"Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters!" (Isaiah 55:1-9) ... "Follow me"(Mark 1:17)..."Come to me"(Matthew 111:28) ... "Come and see"(John 1:39) ..."Whoever comes to me" (John 6:35) ... "Let anyone who is thirsty come" (John 7:37) ... "He called to him those he wanted, and they came to him" (Mark 3:13) ... "Zaccheus, hurry and come down" (Luke 19:5)

2. Modern/postmodern variations

Modernist (American 19th century) approach
* Demanding 100% commitment. Model: marriage.
* Often formal: "Giving your life to Christ"
* Means one thing: "becoming a Christian", "being saved"
* Emphasises personal, private choice
* Focus on salvation as instantaneous

Postmodern adaptation
* "Giving as much as I know of myself to as much as I know of Christ" (Sam Shoemaker) Model: a growing friendship.
* Often informal: "Tell God where you are at."
* Means many things, according to point on the scale.
* Emphasises checking out/joining the Christian community
* Focus on salvation as process

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

* It foregrounds the (often unconscious) spiritual process
* It focusses a few central spiritual issues
* It encourages the person to relate to God
* It introduces prayer as a means of communication with God

NITTY-GRITTY STUFF

* **Do** give warning of what you are doing
* **Do** use an overhead projector or handout if you can
* **Do** give people time to reflect
* **Do** give an alternative (double question)
* **Do** remember questions come at last minute
* **Do** consider encouraging immediate action
* **Do not** manipulate or create emotion

NEW TESTAMENT (AND OTHER) MODELS

Matthew 11:28-30
* Jesus' offer to be our teacher
* Taking his yoke
* "Come"

Luke 15:11-24
* We "come to our senses": see things from the Father's perspective
* We "come back to the Father" and apologise
* We begin to live life in the Father's house

Luke 19:1-10
* Zaccheus was curious about Jesus...from a distance
* He found Jesus was interested in him
* He came out of hiding and met Jesus
* Knowing Jesus changed his priorities

Revelation 3:20
* Jesus knocks outside the door, wanting a relationship with us
* The handle is inside: we have to open it and invite Jesus in
* Life with Jesus "in the house"

Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
* *The Breath of God*: only the penitent man may pass (repentance)
* *The Word of God*: only in the footsteps of God will he proceed (acknowledging Jesus)
* *The Path of God*: only in the leap from the lion's head will he prove his worth (commitment)

A Child's Prayer
* *Sorry* (for sin)
* *Thank you* (for coming to this world for me)
* *Please* (receive me into your family)

John Bowen
March 1998

Wycliffe College
WYP 2302S EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

Peer evaluation of speaking assignment

These are some of the broad categories we will be considering as we listen to one another's evangelistic talks. Of course, the categories will apply differently according to the topic, the audience, the approach etc. In general, however, some things to keep in mind as you prepare are:

* **Development of thought**: does it flow, is it easy to follow? Is there a beginning, a middle, and an end?
* **Beginning**: does it grab the listeners' attention? does it introduce the topic well? **and end**: is it thought-provoking? does it make you want more?
* **Use of Scripture**: is it appropriate? too much? too little? alive and relevant? make you want to read it for yourself?
* **Use of story, illustration and media**: is it appropriate? too much? too little? does it help or distract?
* **Use of language**: is it appropriate for the intended audience? is the vocabulary level appropriate? how are biblical concepts explained? what metaphors are used?
* **Diction**: is enunciation clear? Is the **pacing** suitably varied? is it appropriate? Is the **volume** about right?
* **Creating rapport** with the audience: is eye contact made appropriately? is the approach friendly and inviting? is the hearers' interest engaged?
* **Overall impression**: does it work? how do you think a secular audience would hear and respond to this talk?

If you want to run an idea or an outline by me at any point in your preparation, just ask.

John Bowen
January 1998

Appendix IV

STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

Doctor of Ministry research is intended to be reflection on active ministry. My chosen area of ministry for reflection was an Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship evangelism training conference in 1995 referred to as EC'95, and in particular the delegates to the conference who chose to be trained in evangelistic speaking.

I administered a questionnaire to those delegates 18 months after the conference, and, following grounded theory methodology, considered the issues, trends and premises raised by the 22 responses. In my opinion, the data highlighted five key areas for further study: theological (a Biblical consideration of evangelism and evangelistic speaking), missiological (evangelistic speaking as cross-cultural communication), cultural (evangelistic speaking in a post-modern world) and pedagogical (how may people be trained most effectively for this kind of ministry).

I did further research in these five areas, and then considered the data from conference delegates in the light of that research.

In conclusion, I formulated a model of training in evangelistic speaking, and field-tested it in a seminary setting.