

DOCTRINAL PRIORITIES FOR EVANGELISM

R.M. Baerg

The essential content of the gospel largely determines the methodology of evangelism. Any departure from the basic structure of the gospel will also result in a perversion in the evangelistic effort. The gospel message is not open ended, pliable to the cross-currents of contemporary thought, theological, or otherwise. Beneath the surface of the evangelistic message is the foundational theology of the Scriptures. Every doctrinal truth serves as the bedrock for evangelism, and therefore suggests that none can be jettisoned without serious damage to the clarity of our message.

Just like the continental divide which determines the direction of the drop of water falling to the one side of the divide ending in one ocean, while another landing inches from the first ends up in another ocean, so there are decisive issues in theology which spell life or death to evangelism, depending on the position taken in relation to them.

It is apparent that theology and evangelism cannot be divided, neither can the theologian and the evangelist be indifferent to each other. The evangelist needs theology to make him more sure of his message, and the theologian must be evangelistic lest his theology becomes coldly academic and purely intellectual. If we are vitally concerned about evangelism, we must not, nay, we dare not ignore the theological foundations.

Of the many theological premises upon which a vigorous and vital evangelism is based, I should like to select the following doctrinal priorities: the authority of the Word of God, the incarnation of the Son of God, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the desperate need of man, the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in the new life, the goal of Christian discipleship, and the eschatological urgency.

I. THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

According to the Scriptures, we must proclaim the message of the gospel in response to the call from God through His Word, the Scriptures. This divine imperative is evident in the claims of the great commission of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20). "Let us not be afraid to be dogmatic about the message of evangelism, for to be dogmatic is not to be dictatorial. To be dogmatic is simply to be confident (italics mine) concerning that which we know to be the truth."²

Christianity is a historical religion, but those who have rejected her historical character have substituted a philosophical, not biblical, position which undercuts the very nerve of evangelism. In the place of propositional revelation, that is, the fact that God has spoken through the prophets and apostles, and that the Bible is God speaking, the new approach endeavors to limit revelation to personal encounter. The fallacy of this misleading assumption is not merely that it virtually eliminates the need for the truth of God communicated infallibly in the Bible, but also divorces the only true basis for a true knowledge of God. Personal encounter by itself is purely subjective experience without the solidarity of objective truth of God revealed in the Scriptures. It is no doubt granted that God's personal self-disclosure to man comes by faith, but such self-disclosure is communicated by the Spirit of God on the basis of the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures (John 16:13-15).

If a personal encounter with God by faith can be achieved without propositional revelation, it is at once apparent that the gospel message is voided and there is no hope for evangelism in the sense in which it is to be understood from the Scriptures.

A second substitute for the gospel confrontation is the unbalanced

idea of God's acts in history. "God is where the action is," we are told. Every movement in history is an act of God whether good or bad. Even the act of God in the event of redemption must be understood mythologically.³ But, any act of God in isolation from the Word of God cannot be intelligible to the mind of man. God's Word explains His acts and His acts substantiate His Word. To separate propositional truth (revelation) from the acts of God in redemption downgrades the necessity of proclaiming the gospel message. If men are to be called to repentance from sin and to faith in Christ, it must be by the message of the gospel as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, for it is the gospel message which explains the divine acts of redemption.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, is reported to have made a remarkable prophecy before his death. "He warned that a day was coming when there would be a preaching of religion without the Holy Spirit, a Christianity without Christ, a forgiveness without repentance, a salvation without regeneration, and a heaven without a hell."⁴ And, we might well add, a personal encounter without propositional revelation! It appears that item by item of Booth's prophecy have come true. Is it any wonder that when the new evangelism places its emphasis on social action and involvement, the backbone of evangelism is broken and its impact for the salvation of men is totally absent? If evangelism is to make an impact on society as it does where the Bible as the Word of God is proclaimed, it must be fundamentally grounded in the Scriptures. The biblical doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures is of paramount significance to biblical evangelism.

II. THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

A second doctrinal priority is implicit in the revealed truth regarding the incarnation of the Son of God. Suffice it to say that the

Scriptures speak of one Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures. By divine revelation He is declared to be the God-Man. The facts of His unique deity and true humanity are grounded in the deliberate and repeated teachings of the Scriptures, leaving no place for the speculations about the "Christ of faith" and the "Jesus of history." (See I Tim. 3:16; Phil. 2:6-8; John 17:1; I Cor. 2:18; John 10:30.)

It was in the very nature of God to give Himself to save the human race from their sins. When His created beings were threatened by sin's devastating power, love could not hold itself back when life was at stake. It was to a lost humanity that Jesus came, and He came to it, as God in true humanity, yet without sin, that He might save it. "He was manifested to take away our sins...", and "that He might destroy the work of the devil" (I John 3:5, 8). "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (II Cor. 5:19). That was the supreme and primary purpose of the incarnation.

The spiritual basis for evangelism lies in this great "mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16), in the very nature of God Himself. Strange, indeed, that Neo-orthodoxy chooses to create a Christ who is primarily "existential." Christ is said to be God because He chose to be God. According to the Scriptures He did not choose to be God, for He is God, God the Son, essentially, by nature. But as God, He chose to become man, God incarnate, "God manifest in the flesh."

When evangelism is divorced from biblical theology, it will readily serve in the direction of the "world-centered" evangelism. Advocates of secular Christianity condemn a supernaturalistic view of the Scriptures, and so of the incarnation, and therefore find the acts of God where the action is, in the gospel of urban renewal, economic, political, and social reform. If the church is but the "extension of the incarnation,"--a philosophical phrase which is cryptic, to say the least--it is at once

apparent that involvement in social action, and not evangelism on biblical terms, is the summons to reshape the social structures of society without regard to the individual's relationship to God in Christ. The incarnation of Christ imposes upon the evangel the proclamation of its supreme purpose, namely the salvation of individual sinners who turn in repentance from sin and appropriate by faith the Redeemer.

With respect to the deity of Christ, biblical theology speaks forth with unmistakable clarity. Contemporary theology, in contrast, is not merely ambiguous about the deity of Christ, but adoptionistic. It sees the deity of Christ as something He acquired rather than something He possessed.

Because He was a pattern of perfection or a model of ethical uprightness or an "image of existential freedom," He became divine. In whatever form this modern approach to the person of Christ is made it denies His essential, "ontological" deity, His eternal pre-existence with the Father as a distinct person of the Trinity. A mutilated Christ produced a mutilated gospel, and as such, it does not reach the whole man; it touches the physical only.

What shall we then say about theological evangelism, biblical evangelism, in relation to social action? Suffice it to say that the gospel does carry with it social implications; it does so by reaching the individual rather than by seeking to reform the power of structures of society. The New Testament knows nothing of a church devoted to political affairs. Bishop Leslie Newbigin has rightly said, "There is a terrible danger that the church should become a large social service organization with its center in a modern streamlined office rather than God's family with its center in 'the apostles teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.'"

III. THE REDEMPTIVE WORK OF CHRIST

The incarnation of the Son of God was for a redemptive purpose; that is, Christ became the divine provision for the guilt of sinners by his own precious blood (I Peter 1:19; I John 4:10). The New Testament consistently speaks of Christ's death as propitiation, that is, an expiatory sacrifice for the satisfaction of God's holiness and justice, a sacrifice whereby God's wrath was diverted from the sinners to the Saviour (Romans 3:25; I John 2:1-2). The New Testament speaks with equal emphasis of Christ's death as reconciliation, that divine act of God in grace whereby He removed the enmity between God and man and restored man to divine favor (Romans 5:11; 11:16; II Cor. 5:18,19; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20; Romans 8:7). The New Testament likewise declares the death of Christ to be a substitution for the sinner. Although the terms "substitution: or its equivalence is not found in the Scriptures, the concept is biblical. Such expressions as "Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), "Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6), "the just for the unjust" (I Peter 3:18), et al, amply illustrate the substitutionary character of His death.

What bearing does all this have on biblical, theological evangelism? Just this: Whereas liberalistic theologies hold that Jesus died for some reason other than that of satisfying the holiness of God, reconciling the sinners to God, and taking the place of the sinner in God's judgement on sin, the cross becomes a contentless symbol. "The cross in its redemptive aspect is. . . an event whose meaning has 'cosmic' importance."⁵ The cross takes on existential significance, that is His cross becomes an ever-present reality. "The abiding significance of the cross," says Bultmann, "is that it is the judgement of the world, the judgement and the deliverance of man so far as this is so, Christ is crucified 'for us', not

in the sense. . . of sacrifice or satisfaction"⁶ (Italics, mine). In a word, such preaching about the cross of Christ is not so much His cross as my cross. The cross of Christ is merely an existential symbol, emptied of its saving value and redemptive power. The effect of an existential gospel is only too apparent. Instead of the good news that Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost, the new approach is that all men are elected in Christ and that consequently the church is urged not to take unbelief seriously. This implied universal election and the cosmic significance of the cross disembowels the entire gospel of its urgency and imperative to personal salvation.

Theological, biblical evangelism turns on the fact of God's holiness and man's sinfulness, emphasizing that man's only approach to God is because of the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). From Christ's own words we know that seeking and saving the lost involved the giving of His life in the payment of a supreme sacrifice (Luke 19:10; Matt. 20:28). The great doctrine of the atonement is a doctrinal priority for evangelism.

IV. THE DESPERATE NEED OF MAN

According to the Scriptures, man's basic need is restoration to fellowship with God. Because of his alienation from God, his primary need is salvation from the consequences of sin: its penalty, its guilt, and its power. Having become a sinner through Adam's fall (Rom. 5:12, 19), man is the child of disobedience and of wrath, under the controlling powers of the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:23), in desperate need of deliverance. Guilty, lost, and condemned--that is man's despair outside of Christ's redeeming grace. But in Christ, and through Christ man's sin is imputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer (II Cor. 5:21; Rom. 4:24). By an appropriating faith in the redemptive

work of Christ, the sinner is released from his guilt and declared to be righteous in his standing before God (Rom. 8:1; 3:25, 26; 5:1).

Diametrically opposed to this biblical portrayal of man's basic need is the twentieth-century mentality. The new morality seeks to undercut the concept of man's responsibility, for he is seen as one who is the victim of his environment rather than an agent responsible for his deeds. What he does is ultimately tracable to his parental influence, to the social conditions of his childhood experiences, to the impressions he has received in the classroom. As a victim of circumstances he is not to be penalized, rather pitied, for he is not considered to be a sinner in need of salvation through Christ, but a patient who is merely emotionally sick in need of the psychiatric couch-treatment. Everybody is sick today, according to this concept, and no one is guilty. Based on the evolutionary concept, sin becomes the "heritage of man's animal ancestry," not the consequence of the fall of Adam from a state of perfection, as God has originally created him. Having brought with him some of "the moral standards of the jungle and the barnyard" man is not to be discredited nor labeled "a sinner," but congratulated for the progress of overcoming his animal heritage. So considered, man becomes the object of glory and not God.

The Bible speaks of man as a sinner, desperately in need of the cleansing and healing of the atonement. Because of an objective guilt for sin, as it violated and outraged the holiness of God, man is under the sentence of condemnation and can expect the impending wrath of God (Ps. 2:12; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 2:8; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; I Thess. 2:16). If the guilt and sinfulness of man is minimized and the wrath of God is denied, as the latter is downgraded in the new concept of propitiation (C.H. Dodd, for example), we might as well ring the death knell for evangelism. With the softpadding of man's guilt and God's wrath evangelism is dead.

The burden and awareness of man's lost condition sent the apostles of Christ to every part of the Roman world. The knowledge of the terror of the Lord incited Paul, and countless other evangelists, "to persuade men," beseeching them, as "ambassadors for Christ" to be reconciled to God! (II Cor. 5:11,20). Man's desperate need of salvation, once grasped and gripped by it, places upon the evangel the divine imperative of heralding the gospel of Christ to lost men everywhere.

"There can be no effective evangelism," as Wood so aptly says, "unless sin is faced, together with its consequences. For the sinner must be plainly warned whither his sin will take him. It is unfashionable in these so-called advanced and enlightened days to preach about judgement and hell to follow. The wrath of God is so reinterpreted as to have become unrecognizable. But it is indelibly written into the pages of Scripture, however contemporary exegetes and translators may endeavor to conceal it. . ."⁷

V. THE DYNAMIC OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many Christians have quite clear ideas of God the Father and God the Son, but only vaguely indistinct ideas about God the Holy Spirit. Even ministers often share this indefiniteness about the Holy Spirit and almost dread occasions that call for special sermons on this subject. Uneasy about his lack of knowledge of the Holy Spirit, little realizing the possibilities of knowing Him personally, experientially, and dynamically, many a witness and preacher of the gospel is devoid of Holy zeal and spiritual power. Contemporary theology is given more to posing questions and pondering problems than to promulgating the faith. It was otherwise with the Apostolic Church. It relied on the reality and power of the Holy Spirit for vitality; and undoubtedly, we, too, would do well to take a fresh look at Pentecost to see the folly of relying on scholar-

ship methods, organization, and human skills. Not to open our lives to the Holy Spirit for illumination from the Scriptures, sanctification through Christ, and enduement for effective service is to invite defeat, gloom, and tragedy in our work for Christ.

Only as we realize the dynamic of the Holy Spirit in communicating the salvation of God, only as we recognize that God takes the initiative in the salvation of men and women can the message of evangelism be seen in its true perspective. It may be the tremendous concentration these days on man's own energy and activity which deceives us into the neglect of the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of men and women.

The teachings of Christ our Lord and of Paul indicate that the most vital truth in the communication of the gospel message is the Holy Spirit. Granted that the theology of the evangel is biblical, evangelical, and theologically sound, that the preacher employs the latest techniques of communication with scientific skill and psychological efficiency, the message of the gospel falls far short of the real essence of spiritual communication. Although "scientific studies and research in semantics and the contributions of psychologists and anthropologists have rendered invaluable service to an effective use of the technological aspects of communication,"⁸ we must recognize that the spiritual character and content of the gospel message must be spiritually communicated. This is to say, the Holy Spirit must communicate the soteriological content of the gospel to the minds of men.

As the Divine Communicator of the Triune God the whole process of the Christian life from beginning to end is the marvellous work of the Holy Spirit who brings it to us as sinners and makes it ours. He reproves the sinner (John 16:8-11), so that every stab of conscience brings the sinner to a moral consciousness of his guilt and sin. It is He who opens

the sinner's eyes to see "the truth as it is in Jesus" for his personal salvation. It is He who effectively causes the sinner to turn from his sins and affects in him the new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). It is He who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). It is He who enables us to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13). It is He through whom the "sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience" is made positional and experiential (I Peter 2:2).

Of what significance is all this to evangelism? Simply this: If there is to be an effective communication of the gospel we must rely on the Holy Spirit to take the initiative in the miracle of spiritual awakening and renewal.

Moreover, the ministry of the Holy Spirit relates to the messenger as well. He it is who anoints the messenger with spiritual power to bear effectively the witness of the gospel. "Of all the marvels accompanying the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost, none is greater than the change wrought in the disciples themselves. Previously they had met behind closed doors for fear of the Jews, but now their shrinking timidity gives place to lion-like boldness."⁹ The Jewish Council, rulers, and elders of Jerusalem "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men . . . marveled and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Among the many effects and benefits which accompany and flow from being filled with the Holy Spirit, particularly with regard to the proclamation of the gospel, is the holy boldness in witnessing, in reaching the masses for Christ (Acts 2:41; 5:14; 6:7; 8:6; 9:35; 10:44; 11:21; 13:44; 16:1; 14:21; 18:8). "So mightily grew the Word of the Lord and prevailed!" aptly summarizes what happened when evangelists are "anointed with the Holy Spirit and power" (Acts 19:18-20; 10:38). If the church is to reach this generation with the gospel of

Christ, the individual members of the church must be filled with the Spirit, witnessing of Christ and proclaiming the gospel message in His power and presence.

VI. THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A further doctrinal priority for evangelism is that of the new life in Christ. It is almost trite to say that there "can be no effective evangelism unless the fact of sin is faced, together with its consequences."

The Bible clearly describes the lost condition of man as "none that doeth good" (Psalm 3), as "sheep . . . astray" (Isa 53:6), as having "sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), "for all have sinned" and "by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). These are but a few select passages of Scripture which declare the universal sinfulness of man.

It is to this desperate need of man to which evangelism, in its truest sense, is directed. Much is made of the love of God in the salvation of the sinner, but it must also be remembered that the prodigal son returned in repentance and faith to his loving father against whom he had sinned. It was the confession of a self-condemned sinner son who was taken back to the father's loving heart. It was the confession "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight" that made his return actual. And until that confession was made, even before his return, new life was not possible. (See Luke 15:18ff.) In that confession the sinner stands face to face with Him whose holy love and tender mercies he has trampled under foot. In that confession he does not seek, by positive thinking, to attain to peace of mind. In that confession and self-judgement he opens his life to the Father whereby the forgiveness of sins is made experientially real!

In a day when people prefer the psychiatric couch to that of the sinner's bench, we need to emphasize the biblical priority of the forgiveness of God which alone can restore true peace of heart (Rom. 5:1) and mind (Phil. 4:70). Many yearn for peace of heart, but are not willing to confess: "I have sinned."

In any soul, awareness of his sinfulness begins by the initiative of the Holy Spirit, for He it is who "convicts the world of sin" (John 16:8-11) and brings the sinner to a moral consciousness of his sinful condition. Once convicted unto salvation, the path for contrition, repentance and faith is prepared. Contrition need not be prolonged. But long enough to be real (Ps. 34:18).

Since the initial purpose of evangelism is to bring men and women to "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21), it is at once apparent that evangelism is directed toward the individual and not toward the power structures of society. Conversion, the broader term of personal salvation, including repentance, which is a turning away from sin, and faith, which has for its object the Person and work of Jesus Christ, may be designated as man's response to the Holy Spirit's initiative of conviction of sin. When the conversion experience is viewed from the perspective of God's implanting of the new life and the imparting of the "divine nature," it may be designated as "regeneration." Regeneration and conversion are like two sides of the same coin, and it is therefore insignificant to ask which precedes the other. Logically speaking one might be disposed to say that regeneration comes first, but experientially, in the practical consciousness of the sinner, it appears to be conversion. Irrespective of the theological stance one may take on a trivial question

as this one, it is definitely certain that the Holy Spirit takes the initiative in both regeneration (Tit. 3:5) and conversion (Jer. 31:18-19).

This doctrinal priority for evangelism is, perhaps, nowhere as imperative for evangelicals as right here. While the emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ may be strongly affirmed among evangelicals, and rightly so, there is, perhaps no place in the entire field of biblical theology for the need for clarification as to what constitutes faith in Christ. There exists a confusion, widespread and costly, as to what saving faith is. To some faith is merely an intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel. It is possible to assent to all the truths of the Bible, to know the facts about salvation, and yet not be born again. True, saving faith does include belief in the revelation of God and in the historical facts and revelation of the Scriptures, but it involves much more than this. It includes the emotional and volitional constituents of faith. As to the emotional element in faith, the soul is awakened to its personal need and its personal applicability of redemption provided in Christ. With reference to the volitional constituent of faith, the soul is brought to the place of personal appropriation of Christ's Saviourhood and surrender to His Lordship.

How saving faith operates is probably best seen in the word "through," as in the expression, "by grace are ye saved through faith . . ." (Eph. 2:8). On God's side it is all of grace, grace unmerited. On man's side it is through (DIA) the channel of faith. There is no merit in the channel of salvation, any more than there is vitality in the pipe through which water is brought to one's home. Faith is a personal commitment and trust, involving an intellectual assent to the truths of salvation, an emotional awakening to a personal need of salvation, and a volitional commitment directed

to the Christ (John 3:16; 1:12, 13). Thus knowledge passes into conviction and conviction into confident trust. The transference of a reliance from self to the Saviour embodies the great transaction of self-dethronement and Christ-enthronement. The efficacy of faith does not reside in itself, but in the supreme object of faith, which is Christ and His redemptive work.

"It is undoubtedly quite easy to explain faith," even saving faith, from a theological and academic perspective, but, as C.H. Spurgeon so pertinently said, "and so it is, but it is easier still to confound people with your explanation."¹¹ It is not so much, therefore, the quality or strength of one's faith that saves, rather it is the Christ in whom a sinner may trust for his own salvation.

VII. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL URGENCY

The urgency of "the latter days" is upon us. Time is fleeing. We are here in this world only seventy or eighty years. Life is so brief and eternity is so long. Many may have to say what Cecil Rhodes said at the end of the road, "So little done; so much to do." "I must work," said Jesus, "while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4). Not only is time fleeing, not only is life short, but the "signs of the times" indicate that the Lord's coming is drawing very near. The imminency of Christ's return is one of the incentives for a speedy evangelization of the world.

There has been a considerable discussion about the end of history during the past ten or fifteen years. This discussion has been almost universally pessimistic and in a morbid mood, sometimes even predicting the end of human life, even of the world itself, by nuclear destruction. So universal is this discussion that even a Harvard professor, in an article in Land Reborn used the phrase repeatedly "Israel and the End of History."

This phrase is all the more surprising in the context of a university where the Abrahamic Covenant of the Scriptures would hardly be accepted in a literal sense (Gen. 12:1-22:18). It is, moreover, a welcome surprise to know that Israel should be brought into discussion again. So far as God's purpose and goal with Israel in History is concerned we are assured by the "prophetic word made more sure" that history has a divine purpose, the end of which will be consummated with the second coming of Christ. As already mentioned in an earlier paragraph, the great commission includes the promise of Christ that He would be with His followers "unto the end of this age" (Matt. 18:20). Mark links the "consummation of the age" with the universal proclamation of the gospel (Mark 13:10). When our Lord ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to carry on His program of evangelism, and promised to return when that program was fulfilled.

The vital relation between the great commission and the second coming of Christ is one of solemn responsibility "to preach the gospel to every creature" with a glowing inspiration of His imminent return. Although this "blessed hope" is not the only motive for evangelism, it is, nevertheless, one that contributes dynamically to the evangelist's zeal and dedication to witness of and proclaim Christ as Saviour and Lord.

An expectant attitude toward His advent will prove an ever compelling incentive to maintain all the integrities that belong to a separated life of the believer (I John 5:1-7). Separated and cleansed, the believer becomes "meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:21). The hope of Christ's glorious return provides the only promise of reward for the faith and service of His believing saints (Rev. 22:12).

For forty days Jesus came to His disciples intermittently to teach them concerning the kingdom of God; and leaving them with the great commis-

sion, while they were still "gazing up into heaven," suddenly two men in white appeared saying, "This same Jesus, which is taken up into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). And waiting for "the promise of the Father," the Holy Spirit empowered them. Sinking knees were straightened, drooping heads were lifted, and fainting hearts began to bound with courage and purpose as they went forth to do exploits for God. What motivated them was the breath of the Saviour's promise that He would come again and the refreshing breeze of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

In one of his poems, Browning makes a young artist, upon whose head Michaelangelo had laid his hand say: "Now I go back to paint upon my poor canvass forevermore proudly because the breath of the master has been upon my head."

Dare we assume, moreover, that when the evangelistic message has served to lead the soul to Christ, that the goal of evangelism is thereby attained? Far from it, for the conversion of the individual is but the beginning of the new life. As the new life is "born" within the soul of the believing sinner, the Word of God through the personal agency of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of vital communion with the Triune God become the divinely appointed means whereby the believer can grow and mature to "the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13, NEB). "Growing up into Him in all things" (Eph. 4:15) predicates the principle of maturity as a life directed towards (EIS) Christ, the process of which is one continuous exercise during the earthly life of the believer, and the pattern for it being consummated in the "image of the Son of God" (Rom. 8:29).

CONCLUSIONS

Much is being said and written these days about the "new evangelism,"

about "re-thinking missions," about a "new theological approach to evangelism" and the like; but what we need today, I am convinced, is not a "new evangelism" but a concerted re-affirmation of the "old evangelism," biblical evangelism, the evangelism of Christ and His apostles. Accepting the doctrinal priorities of the Scriptures for evangelism, if we are really intent on being serious about it, we cannot escape the divine imperative and the urgency of the day of becoming very deeply involved in evangelism. The supreme mission of the church, and not merely the "church in mission," is the proclamation of the gospel to the unconverted everywhere, according to the command of Christ. "If everything is mission," as Stephen Neil has so well and pungently said, then "nothing is mission. If everything the church does is mission, we will have to find another term for the church's responsibility for the 'heathen' those who have never yet heard of the name of Christ."¹² Evangelism, or "missions," in the biblical sense of confronting the unsaved with the claims of Christ for His Saviourhood and Lordship, is the primary task of the church. Any social service we would undertake, in the name of "missions" or "evangelism," must be viewed from the perspective of the church's primary responsibility. Evangelism knows of no geographical or racial or cultural boundaries and must be placed highest on the priorities of every church.

Again, evangelism must become the united task and involvement of the entire church. Too long has there been a reticence on the part of pastor and people to become personally involved in evangelism confrontation. As Christians we ought to have an individual, evangelistic motivation. Oh yes, we are quite willing, as preachers and speakers, to thunder with powerful rhetoric and articulated skill everything about evangelism from our pulpits on Sundays, but we are reluctant, even unwilling to speak to our fellow-man on a person-to-person basis. Is it not pathetic that

churches can submit their membership and activity reports at the annual conventions without reference to having disturbed the baptismal waters once! Reluctance to confront people personally with the gospel of Christ seems to thrive among those who pride themselves of sound, evangelical theology. Could it be that our theologizing about evangelism has made no significant impact upon us and our people? Have we, perhaps, in the pursuit of theology of evangelism kept on "laying on the wood" without the fire of the Holy Spirit? Have we, perhaps, even substituted academic scholarship for spiritual power in the proclamation of the gospel? What a tidal wave of evangelism and missions could flood our churches once again if we were once more inundated by the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit! The impasse in evangelism can be overcome if we are genuinely open to "the times of refreshing . . . from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

Moreover, these doctrinal priorities for evangelism make imperative the enlistment of every member in the evangelistic outreach. The successful enlistment of workers for Christ is no menial task; it requires prayer and hard work. What can be done by an effective training of workers for the evangelistic outreach of the local church has been abundantly demonstrated in the "Lay Institutes for Evangelism" as conducted by Campus Crusade for Christ, International. People, of whom one had least expected to become zealous for Christ, when shown how to approach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, have come to be ardent soul-winners.

Finally, evangelism is our task. We must evangelize or perish! Our own experience of salvation make it imperative: for to know personally the saving grace of our Lord and then not to share the good news with those who are lost and eternally doomed without a Saviour is basically criminal! If we have tasted that the Lord is good, then we desire others to share this

same salvation. To be saved predicates soul-winning.

If evangelism among all churches is to flourish once more, it is urgent that pastors, evangelists, missionaries, teachers, and "laymen" alike sustain the highest regard for the doctrinal priorities of the Scriptures for evangelism. Biblical evangelism ought never to become a shibboleth, a mere slogan or password of conservative theology. It must be a conviction, rooted in the teachings of the Bible. It must be inspired by the dynamic power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The effectiveness of our evangelism depends upon it.

FOOTNOTES

¹A. Skevinton Wood, Evangelism--Its Theology and Practice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), p. 27.

²Walter Barlow, God So Loved, The Spiritual Basis of Evangelism (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1952), p. 43.

³Rudolf Bultmann and Five Critics, Kerygma and Myth, A Theological Debate (New York: Harper & Brothers, Torchbook edition, 1961) p. 35.

⁴Wood, op. cit., p. 62.

⁵Bultman, op. cit., p. 36.

⁶Ibid., p. 37.

⁷Wood, op. cit., pp. 66, 67.

⁹J. Oswald Sanders, The Holy Spirit of Promise, The Mission and Ministry of the Comforter (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Ltd., 1940, fifth impression, 1959), p. 43.

¹⁰Wood, op. cit., p. 66.

¹¹C.H. Spurgeon, What Is Faith? (Chicago: Moody Press, 1897), p. 13.

¹²Stephen Neil, Creative Tension (London, S.W.I.: Edinburgh House Press, 1959), p. 81.