

success in proportion to our efforts, we have to ask if the answer lies in the Christian community itself. We can watch — with the exception of a few groups or persons — conformism grow, striving for material comfort and the acceptance by many people of a cheap salvation without any real commitment. There are nominal evangelists, non-converted descendants, or the “decided” in a hurry in front of a simplified message. These are the groups geared to violent political contestation and to a neo-herodian adhesion with the loss of sense of a critical participation. These are preoccupying symptoms! The breath of the new theology, as well as the “siren’s song” of the new Rome, have dangerously touched most prophets’ houses. The ecclesiastical policy and the promotion or worship of personality has shocked the new generation. The biggest scandal is the denominational sectarianism, the non-cooperative mind, the lack of love, the mutual complaints on the part of leading people. Let us add to all this a narrow mind and poor missionary action by our potential, the lack of an up-to-date apologetic, of an autochthonous theological mind and a mental methodological alienation to the culture we live in.

If half-heartedness and failing reign, it is time for the Latin American Christians to repent and to change. It is time to join the hands, the hearts, the talents and the resources. It is time to open churches where they do not yet exist, and not where our denomination is absent. It is time for us to strive for the Divine Spirit whose power and manifestations seem to be, to some people, their exclusive property. Whereas others, who worship him with their lips and credos, are afraid that he may upset their inflexible doctrines, their lives, and their ministries. It is time to re-study and to proclaim, courageously, the whole Bible, or else history will classify us as being of a decadent era. And the Lord will not wait with his judgment.

## EVANGELISM OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES IN AFRICA

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### *Introduction*

“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” (I Cor. 16: 8, 9). RSV.

The Apostle Paul uttered this joyous and challenging statement at the peak of his successful ministry in Ephesus. Behind him was a dynamic church consisting of well-taught and consolidated believers with assurance of salvation (Acts 19:1-16). Within the same church were radiant Christians who had come out of utter darkness, having cut loose the cords that bound them with the pagan past to follow unreservedly the Lord who had bought them (Acts 19:7-20). “So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed” (Acts. 19:20).

In the midst of this tremendous success was a strong opposition. Demetrius raised the public conscience against Christianity through the use of economic (v. 25), religious (v. 26), cultural (v. 27), and political (v. 34) arguments. Their business was in jeopardy as the Christians refused to engage themselves any more in the art of making charms. The prestigious temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was losing its reputation.

The Ephesian situation is repeating itself in Africa today. The tremendous success of Christianity is being matched with religious, economic, cultural and political challenges.

With the exciting past of the first and second generation of Christians in Africa, we are now thrown into the adolescent third generation Christianity. Effective doors of opportunity continue to expand. Tools for the effective ministry increase at the rate of the technological and economic development of Africa. The rapid growth of population at 2.3 per cent adds to the door of opportunity. But the enemy of souls is not asleep.

### *1. Opportunities in Africa*

Let us look more closely at the factors favorable to the evangelization of Africa, before surveying the obstacles.

a. *Religious factors.* While in a man-made religious system the worshiper paradoxically presents a barricade between himself and the triune God, nevertheless it shows man’s craving for reality which Christianity alone can satisfy. The religious situation in Africa may be summed up this way:

(i) *Islam.* It is estimated that there are 70 million Muslims in black Africa. The strength of Islam, however, is many times exaggerated. Apart from an inflation of figures by statisticians, there are many nominal Muslims, perhaps at a higher rate than that of nominal Christians. Vil-

lages are known to have been declared Muslim whereas only the village head has made a conscientious decision. With a careful and enduring "friendship" evangelism, many of these superficial Muslims can be brought to Christ. Islamic Project for Africa has shown that this can be done without compromising the Christian principles.

(ii) *African traditional religions.* While there are certain areas in which these traditional religions are remaining, on the whole the pagan worship is losing its grip. The old men who have clung to the ancestor gods are passing away. The younger generation hates to be associated with pagan practices. Thus not a few Africans are left without a faith. Some attach themselves to either Islam or Christianity. The field is truly ready for rich harvest.

(iii) *Independent movements.* The estimated figure of 6,000 semi-Christian sects in Africa, growing at a rate of 100 new sects each year is alarming. Certainly there can be born-again Christians in some of these independent movements. But the legalistic and syncretistic approach of most of them makes it difficult for an average adherent to see clearly the way of salvation by faith in Christ. It is a problem to know what to do with some of the sects. Should well-instructed, born-again believers become immersed in their midst to guide individuals to salvation? Should we attract their leaders to the established Bible schools and cause a spiritual revolution that way? Whatever we do, here is a vast segment of African society running to several millions which has been touched by the Gospel yet in which the evidence of transformation remains dubious.

(iv) *Other sects and religions.* Buddhism, theosophy, and materialism are taking toll of Africans and expatriates. Jehovah's Witnesses have been outlawed in at least three countries but their number continues to grow elsewhere.

b. *Social factors favoring evangelism.*

(i) *Political atmosphere.* More than two-thirds of Africa's heads of states are professing Christians. I am not aware of any state in Africa where freedom of worship is outlawed.

(ii) *Family system.* The extended family system in Africa provides a great opportunity for reaching many people with the Gospel. The breadwinner of a family is quickly becoming the decision-maker. In the case of a committed Christian breadwinner, the whole family unit could be brought to Christ. African Christians should in a Cornelius fashion, share Christ, and not only material possessions, with their kinsmen.

(iii) *Urbanization.* While the movement into the cities creates countless problems, it also presents a wonderful opportunity for evangelism. Young people from well-sheltered Muslim homes become open to Gospel witness. Many single ladies in apartments present a wonderful opportunity for organized Bible study groups. Many young graduates have plenty of time after work for Christian ministry.

(iv) *Children's ministry.* Probably more than two-thirds of Africa's 300 million population are children under fifteen.

(v) *Church attendance.* In some parts of Africa today 70 per cent of the population go to church. This presents a great opportunity for

discipling the adherents into full involvement in the body of Christ.

c. *Academic Factors*

(i) *Religious knowledge in schools.* A popular adage in Africa today is "knowledge is power." This is a line with Solomon's wise counsel, "And with all thy getting, get understanding" (Prov. 4:7). Although the prevailing trend is the transfer of schools to the states, in most countries religious instruction is a part of the curriculum. Bible as a subject is very popular with many students. Correspondence courses appeal to thousands of ambitious youths.

(ii) *Literacy.* The average percentage of literacy in black Africa is less than 20 per cent. Almost every government sees illiteracy as an obstacle to progress. Every movement that seeks to promote literacy is not only welcomed, but may even receive government subsidy. Christians can utilize this method through the literature produced and the personal friendship established. The Women's Fellowship of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) in Nigeria has chosen for its theme in 1974 "Everyone teach one." This is worthy of emulation by women in other countries.

(iii) *Mass Media.* The Voice of Kenya (VOK) radio and television provides an opportunity for fourteen hours free religious broadcasting each week. The New Life for All in Nigeria is sometimes paid for the Christian programs it provides for radio and television stations in Nigeria. In Zambia the Southern Baptists cannot cope with the opportunities for free-time religious broadcasts.

Opportunities for the use of literature are even greater. Each copy of the well-known *African Challenge*, now *Today's Challenge*, published by ECWA Productions Ltd., in Nigeria is shared by ten readers. But non-Christian literature is more easily obtainable by the public as it is distributed free in many cases.

2. *Obstacles to evangelism in Africa*

When the church is at its peak of success, the enemy of souls emerges with greater animosity to swallow up the baby child.

a. *External obstacles.*

(i) *Islam.* The traditional methods of education, medicine, and mass media devised by Christian missions are now tools in the hands of Muslims. There are now many Muslim schools and colleges in Nigeria, and possibly in other countries too. For several years Al-azhar University in Cairo provided top-level Islamic education for Africa. But Bayero College in Nigeria today can boast of turning out scores of Islamic theologians each year.

The use of radio, television and literature is becoming more and more popular. Muslim councils have been formed in Uganda and Nigeria as a counterpart of National Councils of Churches. This united effort consolidates and promotes Islamic faith, making it relevant and appealing to the intelligent youths of Africa. The World Muslim Congress has made traumatic gains in Africa as a result of the Middle East situation.

(ii) *African traditional religions.* Syncretism is a realistic threat to biblical Christianity in Africa. "Pagan" worship is increasingly considered a part of African culture which must be preserved. Idols are

considered wonderful works of art that must not be destroyed. Missionaries are constantly attacked for "having destroyed our culture" even though some of the destruction might have been the burning of charms. In Kenya there is even a society for the promotion of "pagan" worship which is called "Waganga wa Miti Shamba Society."

(iii) *Government attitudes.* Some African governments are so sold on cultural revolution and the philosophy of authenticity that to stand for the uniqueness of the Christian faith is considered unpatriotic. There are, in fact, reports of persecution and intimidation of Christians in some countries.

b. *Internal obstacles.*

(i) *Liberal ecumenism.* A recent meeting of African church leaders, while advocating evangelism of frontier regions of Africa, did not provide the atmosphere that would promote evangelism. The traditional understanding of biblical salvation is now reduced to political and economic liberation. The primary task of the church now becomes a fight for liberation from political oppression rather than liberation from the bondage of sin. The spiritual atmosphere that should characterize a Christian leaders' conference was conspicuously missing. Such a secularization of Christianity cannot enhance biblical evangelism.

c. *Neutral obstacles.* Christian organizations working in Africa can be an instrument for evangelism or a hindrance. One sad thing with some Christian organizations working in Africa is that they know too much. They come to Africa with a packaged deal which must not be tampered with. Such an approach will not help evangelism. There is a great need of cooperation among evangelical organizations operating in Africa.

3. *Conclusion*

In closing, I want to emphasize that these are exciting days in Africa. The opportunities are unlimited. We are on the verge of either an unprecedented harvest of souls and a major breakthrough in discipling of thousands of believers, or Christianity is about to face its darkest hour in Black Africa. It depends on how sensitive and obedient Bible-believing Christians are to the Holy Spirit. May the Lord of the Church give us sufficient grace to face the challenge that is ahead of the Christians in Africa in particular, and in the world in general.

## METHODS AND STRATEGY IN THE EVANGELISM OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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When a movement grows from a dozen peasants in an unimportant corner of the world, to be the official religion of the civilized world inside 300 years; when it is sufficiently independent of that civilization to survive its fall, and indeed the fall of every successive civilization since; when it is universal enough in its appeal to win millions of converts in all sectors of the globe, among all types of men, belonging to every race, culture, and personality type — then it is arguable that such a movement has got something. It is also arguable that we have a good deal to learn from its strategy and tactics, its methods and approaches.

That movement is Christianity. The church of today is heir to the revolutionary forces which changed the face of the world in the decades following the death and resurrection of Jesus. And yet, one would never guess it. The idea of the modern church being a revolutionary, invading force is laughable in the West though readily understandable in Indonesia, Korea, Latin America, and many parts of Africa. Certainly a Western Christian such as myself can only hang his head in shame when comparing our own approach to evangelism with that of the early Christians, and with that of contemporary Christians in many developing countries. Let us just set out some of the more obvious contrasts.

The early church made evangelism their number one priority. Today it comes far down the list. It is widely agreed that one of the best reports ever prepared and presented in the Church of England was that entitled, *Towards the Conversion of England*, thirty years ago. It was masterly, but the trouble is that it has never been implemented. The matter is not deemed sufficiently important. The same can be said of most plans formulated in many denominations in many nations.

The early church had a deep compassion for men without Christ. Many sections of the modern church are far from convinced that it much matters whether you have Christ or not. Other religions are nearly, if not quite, as good a way to God; humanists live blameless lives; and in any case, it will all come right in the end — God is far too nice to damn anyone.

The early church was very flexible in its preaching of the Good News, but utterly opposed to syncretism (mixing other elements with the Gospel) of any sort. Many parts of the modern church tend to be rigid in their evangelistic categories, but are inclined to play a great deal with syncretism, as Lesslie Newbigin has forcefully pointed out in *The Finality of Christ*.

The early church was very open to the leading of the Holy Spirit;