

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;

in every evangelistic advance recorded in Acts it is the Spirit who is the motivator and energizer. In the modern church of the West, managerial skills, committee meetings, and endless discussion are thought essential for evangelism; prayer and dependence on the Spirit seem often to be optional extras.

The early church was not unduly minister-conscious. There is notorious difficulty in attempting to read back any modern ministerial pattern into the New Testament records. Today, everything tends to center around the minister. The paid servant of the church is expected to engage in God-talk, but not others.

In the early church, every man was expected to be a witness to Christ. Today witness is at a discount compared with dialogue; and it is only expected of certain gifted clergy at best, not of run-of-the mill Christians.

In the early church, buildings were unimportant; they did not have any during the period of their greatest advance. Today they seem all-important to many Christians; their upkeep consumes the money and interest of the members, often plunges them into debt, and isolates them from those who do not go to church. Indeed, even the word has changed meaning. "Church" no longer means a company of people, as it did in New Testament times. These days it means a building.

In the early church, evangelism was a natural, spontaneous "chatting" of good news. It was engaged in continuously by all types of Christians as a matter of course and of privilege. Today, it is spasmodic, heavily organized, and usually dependent on the skills and enthusiasm of the visiting specialist.

In the early church, the policy was to go out to where people were, and make disciples of them. Today it is to invite people along to churches, where they do not feel at home, and get them to hear the preaching of the Gospel. Today's church attempts suction, invitation, "in-drag"; the early church practiced explosion, invasion, outreach.

In the early church, the Gospel was frequently argued about in the philosophical schools, discussed in the streets, talked over in the laundry. Today it is not discussed very much at all, and certainly not on "secular" ground. It belongs in church, on a Sunday, and a properly ordained minister should do all the talking.

In the early church, whole communities seem to have been converted at once. In the atomized church of the West, individualism has run riot, and evangelism, like much else, tends to come to its climax in a one-to-one encounter.

In the early church the maximum impact was made by the changed lives and quality of community among the Christians. Today, much Christian life-style is almost indistinguishable from that of non-Christians, and much church fellowship is conspicuous for its coolness.

These are just some of the contrasts between the church of yesterday and the church of today in the matter of evangelism — contrasts which encourage us to examine afresh the message of the early Christians and the methods they adopted.

1. *The message*

I shall not expand too much on the pattern of the New Testament

proclamation, because so much work has been done on it in recent years, since the publication of C.H. Dodd's *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, Hebrews, the Pauline Letters, I Peter, and Acts, it is possible to discern the main bones of much early Christian preaching. The age of fulfillment has dawned. God has at last sent his Messiah, Jesus. He died in shame upon a Cross. He rose again from the tomb and is even now Lord, seated at the Father's right hand. The proof of his vindication lies in the gift of the Holy Spirit. And he will come again to judge the world at the conclusion of human history. Therefore, repent, believe, and be baptized into Christ and joined to the church. Such would be a rough summary of a pattern of proclamation which can be found, explicit or implicit, in a broad variety of strands within the New Testament. This was the Good News that they told men (our "evangelism" comes from the Greek word "martyr" which meant "witness" before it came to denote the witness who sealed his testimony with his blood). They varied a great deal in the stress they laid on different elements in the story. But they were all convinced that in Jesus, God's final act of deliverance, the climax of all his saving and revealing activity throughout Israel's history had begun. In particular, it was the death and resurrection (never the one without the other) of Jesus that formed the focus of their message. This Jesus, who had tasted death for every man, and himself had taken responsibility for human wrongdoing, was alive — indeed he was enthroned in the universe. As such, he offered both pardon and power to those who committed themselves to him. The long-awaited Spirit of God was his gift to believers.

Thus God's law was no longer something exterior to man, threatening him. The longings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were fulfilled in the inauguration of this New Covenant, wherein the Spirit of God became resident within the very hearts of his people, as the pledge of their acceptance, the helper in their prayers, the compass in their morals, the power for godly living, and the first installment of heaven.

This is the general gist of the message preached by those early evangelists. It was not an easy one for Jews to accept — no circumcision, no Torah, no sabbath, a crucified Messiah (contradiction in terms!), a church which included Gentiles, and was entered by baptism: all this was anathema to the Jew. It was no easier for the Greek world to accept — for it was Eastern, exclusive, new, of doubtful morality, politically suspect, socially disruptive, and intellectually ridiculous. Yet this was the message which the Christians continued to preach. When addressing Gentile believers they added three introductory themes: you can see them in the Acts sermons at Lystra and Athens, to backward and to intellectual alike. They were, first, an exposition of the one true God; second, an exposure of idolatry; and third, the story of Jesus, through whom alone this invisible God can be made known to us without any shred of idolatry.

There are three aspects of their message to which we might profitably pay attention.

a. *It was Christ-centered.* Jesus was the center of what they proclaimed. It might be Paul at Athens proclaiming, "Jesus and resurrection," or Philip in the desert, "telling him the Good News of Jesus," but always Christ was the kernel of their message. God had made Jesus both Messiah (Christ) and Lord (a name used both for heathen gods, and for Yahweh in the Old Testament). So central was "Christ" (Messiah — God's ultimate deliverer) to their interpretation of who Jesus was, that they earned themselves a nickname — *Christians*. Is this centrality of Jesus not something that the contemporary evangelist could well ponder? He might be interpreted as Son of Man, the High Priest according to the Melchizedek order, the Suffering Servant, the Prophet like Moses, or the author, sustainer, and goal of the whole universe (as in Colossians I and Ephesians I). No matter. It was to Jesus they returned, Jesus whom they announced. Incidentally it is interesting to notice, in view of the current radical divide between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, and the supposed irrelevance of the story of Jesus to the proclamation of the Gospel of the living Christ, that the early Christians would have none of it. They wrote and used the Gospel stories, the parables and miracles, to preach the historical Jesus as the Lord, the Christ, whom they worshiped.

b. *It was flexible.* This is where Dodd's book falls short: he does not sufficiently allow for the flexibility in preaching the Gospel which marked those early Christians. When studying the approaches of Christians to Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, clever and unintelligent, over the first two centuries I was amazed at the variety in their proclamation. The Gospel was born, of course, in a Palestinian milieu. Old Testament models came readily enough to hand. Jesus was seen as the fulfillment of Daniel's Son of Man, Isaiah's Suffering Servant, the anointed prophet, priest, and king of various Old Testament strands: he was the exalted Lord of Psalms 110:1, the prophet like Moses, and the ultimate successor to David.

But on Gentile soil it was different. The first evangelists engaged on extensive retranslation work, not so much of words, as of concepts. They did not begin by quoting Old Testament texts; they started from the felt needs of the hearers, and used imagery that would communicate with them. Thus we find Paul at Athens proceeding inductively from what he sees around him; the altar to an unknown God. In Rome we find him speaking of adoption, a concept as familiar among the pagans as it was alien to Hebrew culture. In I Cor. 15:3-5 we find the core of the primitive preaching to the Jews: Jesus died for our sins, and was raised the third day. Given the background of the profoundly ethical God of the Old Testament, "How shall a man be right with God?" was the critical question for any thoughtful Jew. Paul shows how it is answered in Christ crucified and risen. But he gives a very different interpretation of that Cross and resurrection to the Gentiles in Col. 2:15, I Tim. 3:16. Here it is not so much sin which oppresses (conviction of sin is rarely found outside a monotheistic culture) but bondage; bondage to the various demonic powers which hold men in control, particularly Fate (*heimarmene*) and Necessity (*ananche*). To men with

such a problem, the incarnation of Jesus and his triumphant resurrection were the key points to stress. Indeed, a whole theological emphasis depicting Christ as conqueror springs from looking at the resurrection in this light. And it certainly brought deliverance to pagan men, obsessed as they were with the sense of the demonic. "We are above Fate," cries Tatian, "and instead of the demons which deceive we have learned one Master who does not deceive." The very word, "Lord," so often attached to Jesus in the Pauline letters, is meant to distinguish him sharply from the "many lords" mentioned in I Cor. 8:5, who had held his readers in thrall. Similarly, the accent shifts from the Kingdom of God, which Jesus himself heralded so consistently, to "eternal life" or "salvation," words which conveyed the sense of Jesus' message more clearly to Gentile hearers. To a world which, under Stoic influence, conceived of a universal Reason (Logos) underlying the universe, a Reason in which all men naturally had part, Jesus is proclaimed in John I (and similarly in Col. 1:15ff; Heb. 1:1ff) as *the* universal Reason underlying all there is; this Reason was God himself, active since the creation of the world. But all men do not naturally partake of the eternal Logos; they are rebels, and only those who receive him have the right to call themselves sons of God. And thus the idea, common in Stoic circles, is made the vehicle of Christian preaching.

There were other men in antiquity who would have latched on immediately to this Logos idea; men of the neo-Platonist school, who conceived of it as the eternal order of pure reality, somehow copied, however inadequately, in all things that are good and true in this world of space and time. "Well," says St. John, "if that is how you think, let me tell you something: there is one single area in the universe where the ideal has become real, where the archetype has broken through, where the Word has become flesh. And that is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." John 1:14 is in fact, a powerful philosophical claim for the absoluteness of Jesus of Nazareth.

Clearly, there was nothing inflexible about these early Christians in the New Testament period. Nor was there in the succeeding century or two, as the Gospel spread. You find philosophers like Justin and Tatian retaining their philosopher's robe and arguing the truth of the Christian philosophy against all comers. You find them looking not only to the Old Testament but to the myths of Homer and Hesiod for truths that would help to illuminate the person and work of Jesus. They were convinced that all truth is God's truth. Therefore they rejoiced when they found that some of the ancient heathen poets or philosophers had spoken true things which were endorsed in the Gospel of Christ.

I used to think it was odd (if not worse!) of Clement of Rome in the nineties of the first century, to use the mythical bird, the phoenix, before I had seen the picture of the phoenix at Pompeii (a city destroyed in A.D. 79) and read what the painter, hungering for immortality, had written below it: "O phoenix, you are a lucky thing!" Then I realized how wise an apologist Clement had been in relating the resurrection of the Lord to the very symbol of need which the painter of the phoenix had revealed. Like Paul, Clement had become all things to all men, so that by all means he might save some.

Of course, the early Christians made two types of mistakes in this attempt to preach the Gospel meaningfully into their situation. Gnosticism which was a way of salvation through knowledge, was the fruit of uncritically accepting pagan frames of reference, just as syncretism is today. And Ebionism, which stressed the humanity of Jesus to the exclusion of his deity, was the fruit of rigid determination to preach Jesus as "Son of God" to Jews who could not possibly hear those words without the feeling that it was blasphemy (though other christological formulations, just as absolute, could have been acceptable to them). These two Christian heresies of the second century were the direct result in the one case of uncritical cross-cultural relativism, and in the other of soldiering obstinately on using the language of Zion and expecting people to understand it if they were not gospel hardened. The implications for today are obvious. *Honest to God*, by Bishop John Robinson, was a genuine attempt to communicate the Christian faith to men who were alienated by the way most clergy preached it: the fantastic sales of the book show what a vast number of people were touched by such an approach; unfortunately, it was no longer the Gospel of Jesus Christ that was communicated. (Robinson attempts to communicate the Gospel to the so-called "modern man come of age" by removing what are believed to be unpalatable supernatural elements.) Surely we are called back to that daring flexibility of the early Christians, letting the world set the agenda, and answering it imaginatively in the light of the New Testament witness to Jesus. If we take the variety of the New Testament itself as our model, we shall never be monochrome or dull; if we submit our retranslated message to the judgment of the New Testament we shall not erode the Gospel in the process of translating it. This is a perilously knife-edge operation, but every evangelist must undertake it if he is to be faithful both to Christ and to his own generation.

c. It was definite. Christianity took root in unwelcoming pagan soil. The old pantheon of gods was receiving constant additions as the Roman Empire expanded, and new deities were absorbed. It would have been easy enough to get Jesus accepted on these terms. Alternatively, there were the mystery religions; remarkably Christian in a way, with their stress on a dying and rising god — the year deity, the fertility god. Jesus could have been identified with such a deity. Alternatively, there was the imperial cult: Caesar was Lord, and if only Christians had been willing to accord him divine honors, they would not have been persecuted for the loyalty they gave to Jesus. Again, there were the philosophical schools, coming together a good deal by the first century, and having a more religious flavor about them, as Platonic idealism, mixed with high Stoic ethics, sought not only the Absolute but God.

Now it is interesting that the Christians used all these paths in order to bring men to Christ, but they did not surrender to any of them. Paul was willing to be misunderstood as adding two new deities to the pantheon when preaching "Jesus and Resurrection" at Athens, so long as he had the opportunity to explain to the assembled multitude that he

was doing no such thing! In that same address he used concepts familiar to both the Epicureans and the Stoics, and yet he was unfashionable enough to tell them both that the one thing they needed to do was to repent! And when Christians said, "Jesus is Lord," though it sounded rather like the imperial acclamations, in fact it was assigning exclusive divine honors to Jesus.

So while the early Christians would use any pathway to Christ, it was to Christ that these pathways unambiguously led. There was no hint of compromise, of syncretism. Paul addressed the Colossians when a syncretizing heresy was under way. "*Jesus and... a variety of mediators*" was their cry. Paul used much of their language. But he claimed an utterly exclusive position for his Lord. Whatever other "principalities and powers" there might be, Jesus was their creator and their Lord. He was the origin, the goal, and the principle of coherence in the whole universe, and his death on the Cross the only way of access to God. Did the false teachers speak of *pleroma*, the supposed habitat of these inter-mediating powers? Fine, says Paul, so long as you are clear about one thing. "In Christ lives all the fullness (*pleroma*) of the Godhead in bodily form." Great flexibility in presentation, then, but great firmness on content was his emphasis. And the content was Jesus, Creator, Savior, and Lord. To be sure they realized that other faiths contain much that is true. It would be strange if they did not. But they do not contain any truth about God that is not to be found in the Judaeo-Christian revelation, and they certainly contain a great deal of error. What is more, they do not provide any means of access to God whatsoever. That is provided uniquely by the One who came from God to reveal and to save.

The point is that no *man* can bridge the divide between the Holy and the sinful, between the Infinite and the finite, between God and man. The early Christians were convinced that God had visited his people in person, and accordingly were prepared to be martyred for their assertion that "there is salvation in no other; for there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Despite the flexibility of their message, it was always Christ-centered and always carried the implication of decision in repentance, faith, and baptism. Whether we look at the appeals to commitment in Acts, or turn to *2 Clement* (an early church document about A.D. 150) or the *Protrepticus* (an address to the Greeks by Clement of Alexandria, who wrote towards the end of the second century, seeking to win them over to Christianity), or to Gregory's fascinating account of the way in which that wise fisher of men and massive intellectual, Origen, hunted him out, taught him, intrigued him, and eventually brought him to Christ, the picture is uniform. The apostolic kerygma demanded a response. This was not something shallow or emotional, but touched the conscience, illuminated the understanding, brought the will into submission, and transformed the subsequent life. It was nothing less than a new birth.

2. The methods

There does not seem to have been anything very remarkable in the strategy and tactics of the early Christian mission. Indeed, it is doubtful if they had one. I do not believe they set out with any blue-

print. They had an unquenchable conviction that Jesus was the key to life and death, happiness and purpose, and they simply could not keep quiet about him. The Spirit of Jesus within them drove them into mission. The tandem relationship between the Spirit bearing witness to Jesus and the believers bearing that witness (John 15:26f, Acts 1:7, 8) was well understood among them, and the initiatives in evangelism which we read of in Acts are consistently laid at the door of the Lord the Spirit himself: effective mission does not spring from human blueprints. No, the nearest to a strategy those early Christians had was, perhaps, as follows:

a. They worked from the center outwards. "Beginning from Jerusalem" was the key word in Jesus' farewell charge to his disciples. And beginning from where they were, those twelve men swiftly grew by means of prayer, fellowship, a deep experience of the Spirit, and fearless preaching even in the face of persecution, into a body to whom God was adding fresh converts daily, and who filled the whole of Jerusalem with their teaching. Acts then traces, briefly, the spread of the Gospel into Judaea, then to Samaria, and from there to the uttermost parts of the earth. But always the policy seems to be to get the heart of the group hot, for only then will it be ready for fresh additions. The policy of so much modern evangelism is to drag people from the outside inwards; their policy was the opposite — to move from the inside outwards, and to evangelize, not on their own ground, but on other people's.

b. They were involved, yet mobile. They were indeed involved, totally involved. It is fascinating to find that in the early centuries of the church there was no division between those who told the good news and those who only listened to it. All were involved in the mission. You see this graphically portrayed in the spontaneous evangelistic sortie of nameless amateur evangelists from Jerusalem when Stephen had been killed and the remaining leaders were caught up in the city. The believers scattered, and "those that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the message." Celsus, in the second century, complains of the Christians at work, in the laundry, in the schoolroom, at the street corner, who were always jabbering away about their Jesus. Could any leading critic of Christianity today make the same charge?

Indeed, if one were to put it in a single sentence, the Early Church succeeded because every man was a missionary; the modern church fails because "missionary" has become a dirty word. These early Christians were all involved in the mission; and they were deeply involved in their communities as well. We read of doctors, teachers, agriculturalists, and others in normal jobs really caring for the communities in which they worked. Several times we have moving accounts of the way in which Christians tended victims in a plague at the risk of their own lives; and the love and self-sacrifice of Christians for their townfolk even in the face of fierce opposition and martyrdom, won grudging praise from the pagans.

But with this sense of commitment to the local community, and

involvement with its life, went a remarkable mobility. You got bishops like Irenaeus moving all around the known world. You got top intellectuals like Pantaenus leaving the Christian University at Alexandria of which he was the head, and going off to spread the Gospel among the "Indians." You got farmers moving from village to village to win fresh converts to their Lord. And you only need to glance back to the Acts, and look at Philip, Peter, Paul, or Aquila and Priscilla, to see how readily these early Christians were prepared to abandon home comforts for the sake of the Good News.

The question arises, are we? It would seem to me that the church today throughout the West at any rate, is paralyzed by a crippling lack of mobility. Granted that patterns of community, education and employment are so different, is there not, I wonder, a growing materialism that saps our total dedication to Christ and willingness to go anywhere and do anything for him if the Spirit should so lead?

c. They used their influence. It seems to me that many of these men planned their time with some care, conscious that they had but one life, and that they were determined to use it to the full for God. So they entered spheres where their influence would be felt to the maximum. That, presumably, helped to dictate the direction of the Pauline Missionary Journeys. Antioch was the third city in the empire; Philippi was a Roman colony and administrative capital; Thessalonica was the administrative center of Macedonia; Athens was the cultural center of the world; Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaëa; Ephesus, where he spent three years, was the largest city in Asia; and Rome, his goal in the west, was mistress of the world.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that Paul, for one, was determined to use his talents to the full in the places where they would do the most good. Of course, such planning can degenerate into worldly ambition, but it need not, if the guidance of the Spirit is sought. Perhaps we should look for more of it today?

d. They exercised oversight. This is one of the intriguing factors in ancient evangelism which is not always looked after so well today. They were out from the start to consolidate gains. New disciples needed to be strengthened. Converts needed to be added to the church as well as to the Lord. They continued in the fellowship of the apostles, in their teaching, in their worship, and in their evangelism. There was, at least in some circles, some communalism of goods and life-style which may have been economic madness but bore eloquent testimony to the oneness in Christ which they talked about. That unity was maintained even as the church grew. The ancient splits between Jew and Samaritan, between Jew and Gentile, between bond and free, between male and female were not allowed to spoil the unity given by the Spirit. To this end, the apostles revisited their converts; they set up presbyters to look after them, they wrote letters to them, they sent messengers to them, and they prayed for them. Their unity so impressed the pagans of antiquity that they gradually began to call Christians "The Third Race" — not pagans, not Jews, but something radically different. From the most

diverse backgrounds they had come together to form one new humanity in Christ. And wise diligent Christian oversight had been largely instrumental in maintaining this God-given unity.

e. *They produced witnesses.* This has already been touched on. It was the normal thing, not the pleasurable exception, for a Christian to become so thrilled with Christ that he had to find ways of expressing it to his non-Christian neighbors. Indeed, in contrast to much of our own effort these days, the early evangelists seem to have set themselves to increase the numbers of witnesses to Christ, not the number of those they could persuade to listen to addresses about Christ. They were out not to gather hearers, but to equip missionaries. This may not have been very self-conscious on their part, but it was a strategic decision of the utmost importance, and one which the modern church has scarcely begun to appreciate, unlike some of the sects, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.

If these five factors seem to have been influential in determining the overall strategy of the early Christians, we may conclude by pointing out some of their tactical approaches which might prove suggestive for us today.

Their methods on the whole, while varied, were unremarkable. There is no key to instant success to be found by ransacking the methods used by the early church. Like us, they spoke in church. Like us, they spoke in the open air, though more frequently and with more directness, humor, and comeback from the audience than is common in the West. I believe that the rise and strength of the Pentecostals in South America is due, partly at least, to their insistence that members should bear witness to Christ upon the streets. After all, that is how it all began; and I am not persuaded that the day of the open air is over.

Like us, they visited. Ananias' visit to Saul of Tarsus is perhaps the classic case in the Acts. This again is a method that has fallen on evil days, and ministers persuade themselves that in this busy television-addicted age, it cannot be done, by themselves or laymen. It can be done and it must. I have led people to Christ simply by visiting them in their homes without any exposure to preaching, and many of you have done the same. It is an important method of evangelism.

Like us, they made use of literary evangelism. The written word was not so easy and cheap to produce in the days of handwritten books, but they did use this method; what, after all, are the Gospels intended for? But in particular they employed the Old Testament Scriptures. Just as Philip used verses in Isaiah 53 to open the eyes of the Ethiopian eunuch, so countless missionaries of the next two centuries followed suit. Men like Justin, Tatian, Pantaenus, and Athenagoras in the second century were won to the faith through reading the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We would be foolish to underestimate the converting power of the Word of God even in the absence of any human interpreter.

But if you asked me to name a few of the main methods used in evangelism then which are not given sufficient weight now, I should want to isolate four:

(i) The impact of *fellowship*. Whether you look at Jerusalem or Antioch; whether you read between the lines of the Epistles to the

Philippians or Thessalonians; whether you pin your attention on Ephesus in the days of Paul and John, or Carthage in the days of Tertullian, the decisive importance of Christian fellowship is plain to see. These Christians embraced all the colors, all the classes, and all the untouchables of ancient society into one. They gave the impression of perpetual celebration, even in the face of death. Their services for worship gave rein for various spiritually gifted people to use their gift for the good of the whole. Their caring for each other in need became proverbial in antiquity. When people saw how these Christians loved one another; when they saw that in this society of Jesus the powers of the age to come were really exercised (prophecy, tongues, healing, alongside teaching, administration, and works of mercy), then they listened to the message of Jesus, who alone accounted for such a remarkable situation. Protestants for far too long have failed to recognize what the Catholics have appropriated, that the church is in a very real sense part of the Gospel. Unless the fellowship in the Christian assembly is far superior to that which can be found anywhere else in society, then the Christians can talk about the transforming love and power of Jesus till they are hoarse, but people are not going to listen very hard. There are a few churches in Britain that have learned this lesson. Their common life is so attractive and warm that outsiders are drawn to Jesus, and come to him whether or not the minister happens to be in residence. The work goes on without constant injections of life from the leadership. Because it is the life of the Body of Christ flowing out to folks in their need and loneliness. In churches like that men are daily added to the number of the believers just as they were in the first century. But let none of us think that we can "run" a church like that. It can only come as the Lord the Spirit is in control of ministers and people alike, as mutual trust grows among the members, and as the gifts of different members are recognized and given full play. Above all, Christians must be prepared to be honest with each other, and not keep up a facade of goodness. After all, we are accepted by God while we are sinners, and should not need to pretend to each other that we are anything different. When that costly "body life" is characteristic of modern Christianity, it may well have the same success as it did in the early centuries.

(ii) The value of *homes*. To be sure, the early Christians were driven to make a great deal of use of the home, because they were not allowed to possess any property until the end of the second century. They were not allowed to have large public meetings under the rule of a number of the emperors because of the possible political implications. In other words, the church in the first three centuries grew without the aid of two of our most prized tools: mass evangelism and evangelism in church. Instead, they used the home. In Acts we read of homes being used extensively, such as the homes of Jason and of Justus, of Philip and of Mark's mother. Sometimes it is a prayer meeting, sometimes an evening for fellowship and instruction, sometimes a Communion service, sometimes a meeting for new converts, sometimes a houseful of seekers, sometimes an impromptu gathering.

The value of the home as opposed to, or rather complementary to, the more formal worship in church, is obvious. It enables people to

question (and check) the leader. It promotes dialogue. It enables difficulties to be sorted out. It facilitates fellowship. It can so easily issue in corporate action and service in which all the different limbs in the body can play their part. Of course, some clergy don't like it. It takes the power out of their hands; it can fragment the congregation; the groups can become introverted. All of these dangers are real. But they are dangers the early church managed to overcome, for the most part. And so can we . . . if we will trust the people of God to be the people of God in and through the home. The growing use of homes in Christian work the world over is one of the most encouraging signs of a breakthrough in evangelism in the future.

(iii) The use of *apologetic*. A marked feature of the early evangelists is that they used their minds to relate the Gospel to the intellectual and cultural concerns of their day. I am greatly impressed by the way the apologists of the second century continued as teachers of philosophy, convinced that they had found the true philosophy that would avail for all men anywhere. They related Christ to the intellectual world of their day, in terms which made sense to those who started with no Christian presuppositions. They set out to demonstrate the existence of the one God from whom everything derived. They laughed at the foolish polytheism of the Greek and Roman pantheon. They showed the folly of Homer and Hesiod in their popular epics, attributing human sins writ large to the gods, and instead pointed to the holiness of God, a holiness which struck a chord in every man's conscience. They argued the reality of the resurrection: Tertullian in his *de Resurrectione* maintains with good reason that if God could fashion a human body out of the fusion of sperm and egg, it is not in the least difficult to suppose that he could fashion a spiritual body for Christians in heaven, which would combine the continuity of the ego with a new and far more wonderful form for its expression. Origen's famous catechetical school at Alexandria was not only a training ground for Christian intellectuals, but a place where the faith was debated, argued over, and pressed home to sceptics and inquirers. It was the same 150 years earlier when Paul argued the Christian way against all comers at Tyrannus' school in Ephesus. The very words used in the New Testament to express the Christian preaching denote a high intellectual endeavor: words such as *didaskein*, "to instruct" *kerussein*, "to proclaim like a herald," *euangelizesthai*, "to proclaim good news," *katangellein*, "to make careful announcement," *diamarturesthai*, "to testify," *katelenchein*, "to convince by argument," *dialegesthai*, "to argue," and so forth. They spent a lot of time on this intellectual commendation of the Good News. They were prepared to argue, to go out on to neutral or hostile ground. They gave testimony, they had constant reference to the facts of the Gospel and the teaching of the Old Testament (words like *sunzetein* and *sumbibazein* indicate this serious searching of the Scriptures). Sometimes this took a day or even a week. Sometimes they returned to the attack again and again. But of the serious intellectual content of the proclamation in the early days, there can be no doubt. They would have gotten nowhere without such an apologetic. Both the Jewish and Gentile cultures were thoroughly opposed to what they had to tell. And if their position could be undermined

by argument, they would soon have been driven off the streets. But it could not. It was the truth. And because it is the truth, followers of Christ need fear no truth, for it all belongs to him, and sheds some light on the truth made personal in Christ. It seems to me, therefore, that if we are to learn from the early Christians, we shall not be content with repeating louder and more often the "simple Gospel"; there is actually no such thing. For the truth is both so simple that a child can understand the bones of the matter, and so profound that no intellectual can ever plumb its depths. It is, of course, true that argument will never get a man into the Kingdom of God. The fact remains that many a man will never face up to the personal challenge of Jesus upon his life until he both sees an acceptable intellectual framework for belief, and has had his intellectual escape routes destroyed by a patient, efficient, convincing Christian apologetic. Men like Schaeffer, Guinness, and a few others are notable within our generation for attempting this most demanding intellectual and spiritual discipline of providing a Christian apologetic as a framework for proclaiming the Christian Gospel. We need a more widespread determination to follow their example if the Gospel is to be seen to be relevant to the intellectual as well as the cultural and moral needs of men. Personally, I always have a time for debate and questions in evangelistic work in universities throughout the world. I love meeting people in town halls, lecture theaters, dance halls, and pubs to debate the truth and the relevance of the Christian faith. I believe it is high time for us to emerge from the ghetto of intellectual obscurantism, just as we are beginning to emerge from the ghetto of evangelical shibboleths and church-building-centered ministry, on to the common ground, the neutral places, the places where men debate and congregate and argue. That is where the battle was won in the early days. Today, most of us have hardly begun to fight on this sort of ground.

(iv) I notice the priority of *personal conversation* among the early Christians. It was a method Jesus employed a great deal. St. John's Gospel has a particular interest in these personal encounters of Jesus with individuals, and the variety of approach he took with each of them, in every case finding a way to them through their felt need, and never bound to a system. It was Philip's way when he led the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ, Paul's way when he brought Onesimus to the faith. And so it continued. The personal witness of an old man who met him in the fields and brought the conversation around to Jesus marked the beginning of Justin's conversion, early in the second century. Cyprian was won through the personal conversation of a presbyter who visited him, Gregory through the personal work of Origen. There is a lovely passage at the beginning of Minucius Felix's *Octavius* which sheds a lot of light on the way these conversations might begin and be carried on, in this instance, along the seashore as two friends go for a walk.

Perhaps this is the greatest lesson we can learn from the early church in the very changed situation of our own day. The most effective method of evangelism and the most widespread, in the long run, in its results, is conversation evangelism, where one who has found Jesus shares his discovery, his problems, his joys and his sorrows with one who is still groping in the dark. There is no joy like introducing a friend to Christ

in this way. You do not need to be clever or experienced. You do not need to be an eloquent speaker, or capable of arranging your material in an orderly fashion. You just need to love the Lord, love your friend, and talk to the one about the other, in prayerful dependence on the Spirit, and then to the other about the one whom you have found to be alive and able to transform you. If all Christians set about doing this, they would not need much other methodology from the early church. The Gospel would once more spread like wildfire.

EVANGELISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Michael Green

If I were an Englishman I would mumble, "Good morning." As I am half Welsh and half Australian, I will use the greeting that the Orthodox Church gives to one another at Easter. "Christ is risen," to which everyone replies, "He is risen indeed." That greeting captures the conviction of the early Christians. Jesus is alive. That is the key to their evangelism.

Before taking up some of the points you raised in your response to my paper, I would like to remind you of the main bones of what I wrote. I began by pointing out a dozen contrasts in evangelistic priorities, attitudes and methods between the early Christians and ourselves. These alone, if taken seriously, could transform the world Christian scene. Just imagine what could happen if even half the Christians in the world were happy, loving, bold witnesses to Jesus; if we really cared for those without Christ; if our church life was so loving and warm that men wanted to know our secret; if we chattered the good news as naturally as the English talk about the weather and the South Africans about rugby football!

Second, I spoke about the message of these early Christians. There was nothing dull and repetitive about it. It was expressed in everyday language. It was clear and simple. But it was profound and thoughtful, too, providing a firm basis for understanding the world and God and man. They did not rely on slogans; no three quick points or four spiritual laws to make you a Christian. Their approach was varied and flexible, but it always centered on Jesus, through whom the world will be judged. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but the roads to him are infinitely varied. Those early Christians bent their minds to understand Jesus in all his many-sidedness; they took pains to understand the fears and needs and hunger of the folk they lived among; and then they tried to bring men with all their varied needs, and Jesus with all his varied resources together, as they urged people in no uncertain terms to repent, believe, and be baptized into the church of Christ.

Third, I spoke of the methods of the early Christians in evangelism. Their strategy was largely unselfconscious, but they certainly worked outwards in ever-widening circles from a live, warm center. They certainly conserved the resultant conversions with great pastoral care into a worldwide church; and they set out to enable spontaneous evangelism to occur by building up not merely disciples but witnesses.

I ought to have made more clear my distinction between these broad strategic aims, and the methods or tactics they used to achieve them. These were varied — preaching in synagogue and open air, visitation, literature work, and so forth. I laid particular stress on four areas which I believe have a great deal to teach us today: first, the sheer impact of a vital Christian fellowship; second, the incalculable importance of open Christian homes; third, the determination of these early Christians to relate their faith to the culture in which they lived; and fourth, the immense value they set on personal conversation about Jesus as the prime way of winning others to him.

So much for my paper. Thank you so much for your comments and most helpful criticisms. I think it is best if I concentrate on four