

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

main areas in reply: strategy, message, methods, and motivation.

I. Strategy

Many of you commented that my paper was thin on the strategy of the early Christians. You are right. You see, I don't believe they had much of a strategy. It has been argued by some theologians that the Jewish Christians stayed working in Palestine because they hoped that the Gentiles would flow to Mount Zion when Israel responded to her Messiah; and that the Gentile mission of the Pauline church believed that it would work the other way round, and if they concentrated on evangelizing the world Israel would then turn to Christ within their lifetimes, and the Lord would return. If Jewish and Gentile missions had those strategies, then both were wrong! But I believe it was much less cut and dried than this. Just think: which of the advances in mission sprang from the planners in Jerusalem? The Gospel spread out in an apparently haphazard way as men obeyed the leading of the Spirit, and went through the doors he opened. Nobody among the apostolic circle said, "Let's evangelize those horrid Samaritans down the road." They never thought of it; and when one of their chief cooks, a Greek-speaking fellow called Philip, got on with the job, they were so surprised that they sent a commission of top people to make sure that it was all OK. Nobody among the apostolic circle thought it would be a good idea to tell the Good News to a colored eunuch from Ethiopia, or run a crusade in the third city of the empire, Antioch, or start a mission to Europe. All these developments are specifically attributed in Acts to the Holy Spirit who led men, usually very ordinary men, little men, sometimes against their will even — and certainly without the planning of their leaders, to break fresh ground in this way. So while it is right to set our sights high, and aim to spread the Gospel throughout the globe in this generation, we must remember that it is Christ, not Lausanne, that holds the key of David. It is he alone who shuts and no man opens; who opens, and no man shuts. We must not organize him out of the picture.

I sense two real dangers in this Congress in the whole area of strategy, areas on which the early church can supply a corrective:

a. The danger of triumphalism. The impression that we alone among Christians have the right message and the right know-how: let's finish the job. The sense that efficiency on the evangelistic production lines will inevitably produce results. The preoccupation with numbers. Are we not dangerously activist, even Arminian? Have we forgotten the appalling fall-out from shallow evangelism which is all too often man-centered and need-oriented? Have we reflected that by success-measurement techniques the Cross would be rated the greatest failure in history? I fear we evangelicals often look arrogant, self-confident in our strategy and techniques. If so, we shall rightly incur the judgment of God.

The church at Corinth was rather triumphalist. They thought they had already arrived. And Paul uncompromisingly reminds them of the Cross, not merely in their message but as a way of life. Sarcastically he chides this arrogant triumphalism of theirs. "Already full! Already rich! Already entered upon your kingdom! I wish you had — so that we might share it with you . . . We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are such

wise Christians. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. Right up till now we are hungry, thirsty, ill-clothed, buffeted about, homeless. We have become the refuse of the world, the off-scouring of all things" (I Cor. 4:8 ff.).

The theology of crucifixion (of the messengers no less than the message) must never be elbowed out by the theology of triumph — this side of heaven. Let us beware of this subtle danger.

b. The danger of isolating evangelism. Don't misunderstand me. Evangelism is the church's first priority. I pray that Lausanne will recall evangelism to the top of the church's agenda. But you cannot isolate the preaching of Good News, without destroying the Good News itself. You cannot remain true to the New Testament and say, "Evangelism is primary: fellowship, worship, and service are quite distinct and nothing to do with it." No. What God has joined together we are not at liberty to put asunder. We are called to be the church as well as proclaim the Good News: the two are inextricably connected. It was when the worship, the teaching, the prayer, the fellowship of the earliest church at Jerusalem was so hot, that God added daily to their number. The end of Acts 5 brings us almost to a revival situation in Jerusalem . . . and then comes Acts 6, with a little matter of social justice and fellowship.

They could so easily have brushed it aside and said, "Don't fuss about the widows: let's get on with the preaching. That is what matters." If they had done that, God's Spirit would have been grieved, the fellowship would have been ruined, and the outreach would have ceased to be effective. People would no longer have been converted into an unjust, unloving church. Or think of the church at Antioch. The church which launched the first missionary journey overseas, the church which first won the nickname "Christian" because its members were always talking about Christ — this church made such an impact because of the quality of its life.

Bishop Dain has already reminded us of the reality of their worship and their sacrifices. Notice also two other things about that church. It has a remarkable fellowship. Master and slave ate together. Jew and Greek ate together: unparalleled in the ancient world. Their fellowship was so vital that their leadership could be drawn from different races and cultures and colors and classes. Here was a fellowship in Christ which transcended all natural groupings and barriers. There was nothing like it anywhere — and there still isn't.

Don't tell me that fellowship is not in itself an evangelistic agency! Of course it is. And the same applies to the social concern at Antioch. It was so lively that they had a collection for Christians hundreds of miles away in Jerusalem who had used up their capital by pooling it in community living. They might have said, "We are not sure they are sound. They are deplorably High Church in their practices, their circumcision, their law-keeping." But they said nothing of the sort. They gave instead. This church at Antioch which is the fountain-head of Christian mission combined gossiping Jesus at home and backing missions overseas with a freedom in worship, a depth in fellowship, and a practical social concern which embodied the message they proclaimed. So, you see, it is not enough to say that social action should be the fruit

of Gospel preaching: sometimes it is not, as Latin America knows all too well. But in a profound sense the church's social concern, worship, and fellowship either demonstrate or deny the message that is preached. We cannot escape from the fact that the church is itself part of the kerygma.

Let me put this another way. We see the danger of isolating the proclamation when we look at the work and the influence of Rudolf Bultmann. He is not interested in the life, the healings, the teaching of Jesus, for that, he thinks, is not the Gospel. The Gospel has been shrunk to a formula of justification, proclaimed with authority and to be believed in faith — then a man will find authentic existence. Not many here would go along with that. But are we not in danger of doing the very same thing? We tend to isolate what we call the Gospel from what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. How much have we heard here about the Kingdom of God? Not much. It is not our language. But it was Jesus' prime concern. He came to show that God's kingly rule had broken in to our world: it no longer lay entirely in the future, but was partly realized in him and those who followed him. The Good News of the Kingdom was both preached by Jesus and embodied by him. Both were essential. Neither was secondary. So it must be with us. Our life-style, our attitudes, our concern for the sick and the suffering, the under-privileged and the hungry, either confirm or deny the message of salvation, of wholeness, which we proclaim. Let us beware of separating proclamation from life. Remember that the church is the sign of God's Kingdom in our world, not just the body of folk who talk about it!

2. Message

There are a couple of points I must briefly touch on in the area of the message of these early Christians.

a. *The place of the Creator.* Often in current evangelism we present Jesus almost as a washing powder who washes whiter, or as a trip to end all trips. We isolate experience from truth. We leave a holy Creator God out of the picture. We must not do it: or our shallow converts will keep their religious faith carefully insulated from their thinking about daily life. We must not do it: for this would be untrue to the Gospel and its early preachers. Remember how in atheistic and polytheistic situations, at Lystra, at Athens, at Rome, they prefaced their preaching about Jesus by establishing the reality of the infinite, personal, holy God who created both the world and man, the God who is our sustainer and our goal. God is Creator no less than Redeemer. Daily work is as much his concern as Sunday worship. Creation at the beginning, redemption at the middle, and the new creation at the end are three aspects of the Gospel of salvation which hang together. Yet we leave out creation, and wonder why Christians don't integrate their faith with their daily, workday lives. We leave out the end, heaven and hell, and wonder why Christians are so earthbound and pagans so unmoved.

b. *The place of flexibility.* There was the fear in some of your responses that I was opening the door to syncretism. Not at all. I simply mean that there are hundreds of roads to Jesus Christ. Don't

confine yourself to one. The New Testament writers used masses of pictures — new birth, new vision, wholeness, joining up in a new army, liberation, marriage with Christ, being drowned in Christ, welcoming Christ into the life. They used fear, love, faith, and hope — four of the classic attitudes to life they found in different types of people, as avenues to Jesus. Jesus himself did not begin with heavy texts from the Old Testament, much as he respected its authority. He started where people were, with their concerns about ploughing, cooking, fishing, farming, and so on in order to lead them to the place where they would face up to the mystery of the Kingdom of God. We need equal flexibility.

Now I am a fly fisherman. I love the March Brown fly. There is nothing to compare with it on a Welsh river in March. But it is useless in September. If I flog the water in September with my March Brown fly, and catch nothing, I could conclude that the fish were all hardened against my offering, that they would never respond. Or I could change my fly! That is what I mean by flexibility. This is what I mean by translating the Gospel into thought-forms people use. That is what I mean by letting the world set the agenda. You have to find out where a man lives, mentally and spiritually, before you can show him how Jesus relates to his life. It is not much good talking to a schizophrenic about pardon — what he needs is to be integrated. It is not much good showing a man plagued with demonic forces that Christ is his substitute on the Cross. True, but not that part of the truth which will help him at that point. He needs to know that Christ is the conqueror, that he stripped off principalities and powers and triumphed over them in the Cross. In a word, be totally committed to the biblical Christ in your message; and for the way you present him, be totally flexible. Personally, I have found that I can get in very easily to many modern men by a discussion of "What is the point of living?" "What is freedom and how do you get it?" "Is violence inescapable?" "What does it mean to be human?" "What is the meaning of love?" All these are questions of our age, at any rate in my country, and they all lead straight to Jesus.

3. Methods

I do not want to say much about methods. The early Christians were very varied in the methods they used. We should be equally varied. We get hung up on methods and techniques — but quite wrongly. Once there is a burning passion to share Jesus with others inside your heart, you'll find a way of doing it all right, without reading a manual on the subject. I would like to underline five, however:

a. *Personal conversation.* Philip running after the eunuch in his chariot, Paul chatting up the jailors who were chained to him, that is the way it spread. You have done it, I have done it, in cafes, airplanes, television studios, cars, on roadsides, and so on. But when this chattering the Gospel becomes a *habit* for Christians, it will make a powerful impact, as it did in the early Church.

On the flight out here, a police inspector told me of one of his Christian colleagues who has recently been killed in Northern Ireland. As he lay dying from a bomb, the sergeant came up to him. "Sarge,"

he said, "I've often talked to you about Jesus. I'm going to meet him now. Will I see you there one day?" Those were his dying words, and they led that sergeant to Christ. This was the method most used in the ancient world. It is effective as no other method is. For it hits the individual need. Yet we evangelicals prefer to go to endless congresses on evangelism rather than do it! Or we kid ourselves that careful training is needed.

I have recently helped in a mission near Heathrow Airport. Well over 100 people have come to Christ, and they are busy chatting to their friends about the Lord.

Often the vicar gets rung up by a young Christian who is actually talking at that moment to a non-Christian friend. He says, "Hey, vicar, what do I say to a chap who says this?" Is it surprising that in that congregation people are coming to the Lord every day?

b. Open air work. This is largely discredited in the main-line churches of the West these days, but why? The Pentecostals know its power. So did the ancient church. There is a lovely description of an open air in a third century writing, the *Clementine Recognitions*. I think you would enjoy it. (I shall now read parts of p. 198 and 199 of *Evangelism in the Early Church*.) Let us develop this method again. When people see us coming out of the church into the street they will begin to sit up and take notice.

c. Body life. Do you recall how in the Corinthian assembly everyone brought his hymn, his prophecy, his prayer? Well, I was preaching in an Anglican church like that recently. It was very full. The worship was lovely — led not by an organ but by an orchestra of new converts. Overhead screens were used for the choruses; two contrasting and carefully prepared testimonies were given; praise came up from all over the building; the prayers were based on cuttings from the newspaper; and at the end, after the call to repentance and faith, coffee came round the pews and I asked every Christian to counsel the person sitting next to him. It went on for about two hours, and many people came to the Lord. Even more important, the whole body of Christ in that church was mobilized. They expect, and they get, converts daily.

d. Home meetings. This was a prime way in the early Church: it still is. I must tell you about the development of one I've been involved in recently.

It began last Christmas when a couple came to church on their annual visit. I happened to be preaching, and God must have used it to them. They wrote and asked me to come and discuss God with them. I found that Brian, the man, had invited his adult brother and sister. It was a ready-made home meeting. We had four hours, starting with the existence of God and ending on commitment to Christ. We agreed to meet again. By the next time, Brian, a builder, had asked Christ into his life. His wife and accountant brother did so soon afterwards. The sister is still not there yet. We have had several Bible studies in the past weeks, and then three days ago they threw open their home and gave a supper party for their friends to meet me and hear about Jesus. Three from that supper are now interested and the Bible study going which will now include his mother who came to the Lord about

two weeks ago. The value of the house meeting, the chance for dialogue, the friendly atmosphere, the joy of discovery, the chain reaction is clear to see. That's what they realized in the early Church.

e. Neutral ground. How can we come out of the ghetto and be seen on neutral ground? How can we be a Paul in the school of Tyrannus, a Justin outside the baths of Rome? I do not know. I love taking a public hall for a debate with a local atheist, and giving plenty of chance for the Christians on the floor to bear testimony. I love holding dialogue with university students outside on the grass, or in the bar of the student union. The lunch break in a factory sometimes gives opportunities. What I do know is that we must, like the early Christians, find ways of coming out into the neutral ground, and let our Gospel be heard, discussed, and argued over by those who at present dismiss it or are ignorant of it.

I would like to dwell on other facets of the early Church in evangelism — their joyful sense of discovery, their expectation that the Holy Spirit would really change lives, their self-sacrifice and willingness for persecution, their dependence on the message of the Scriptures and prayer. I would like to speak of the need for research centers in different parts of the world, such as they already have in India, to help Christians in the area think through the perilous but necessary task of translating the Gospel without diluting it. But time does not allow. I end with a few words on:

4. Motivation

I neglected this vital area in my paper, and some of you asked how we could motivate Christians to share the Gospel. Make no mistake about it. This is the key to the problem of continuous outreach. If this could be burnt in on our souls, a Congress like this would not be necessary. I think the early Christians would answer something like this if we asked them why they did not lose heart.

a. The example of God who cared so much that he sent his Son to be a missionary to our world.

b. The love of Christ that grips us. He went to the Cross for us. He tells us to go and pass it on. Evangelism is the obedient response to the love of Christ which has gripped us.

c. The gift of the Spirit, who is specifically given us for witness bearing. The task of world evangelization and the equipment of the Holy Spirit are the two characteristics Jesus gave of the time between his ascension and his return.

So the early Christians would ground their evangelism fairly and squarely in the nature of the triune God. At his heart lies mission. But they had three other reasons which drove them on.

a. The privilege of being Christ's ambassador, the representative of the King of Kings. We have received this ministry. Amazing privilege!

b. The need of those without Christ. This rings through the New Testament and the early fathers. Like Bishop Dain, it was when I realized that men without God were lost now and would be lost forever — even nice folk, even my family and friends — that I vowed that I would burn up my one life in telling others of the fabulous Good News that Jesus has brought to our world.

c. Lastly, there is the sheer joy of it. It radiates out from the New Testament. It is infectious. You could put these Christians in prison, and they sang praises. You could tell them to shut up, and they talked all the more. Persecute them, and they spread their message in the next town. Kill them, and they went to their deaths with joy, and called down blessings on their murderers. That is why I would not exchange this business of spreading the Gospel for any occupation on earth. It is an enormous privilege. It is desperately needed. And it is utterly fulfilling. It is what we were made for.

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF EVANGELISM

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It is readily admitted that the evangel — the Gospel — is the central message of the New Testament. Historically, the church has believed with considerable consistency and fervor that God has dealt effectively and adequately in Christ Jesus — his life, death, resurrection and enthronement — with the sins and sin of mankind and provided an eternal salvation for all who will believe.

The Gospel is God-wrought in history. It is revelation-given for history. It is absolute, perfect, and final. Therefore the Gospel message is one and abiding. The method of the dissemination of the Gospel and the practices of proclamation are man-related and therefore are relative. They are conditioned by the messenger and the psychology and sociology of the people to whom the Gospel is being proclaimed. The methods of operation and the patterns of communication vary greatly. Methods are people-related. The Bible therefore does not lay down absolute patterns and methods in evangelism.

Because of this, a method which may be very effective at one time, at one place, among one people, may not be effective at another time, another place, another people. In fact, it may prove disadvantageous if not disastrous. Therefore, a method-bound movement cannot become an effective *world* movement. Neither can it last very long. It will soon be relegated to the outdated and the outworn. We do not need renewal of the Gospel, but we do need continuous renewal of methodology to communicate the age-old Gospel in an intelligible, meaningful, and purposeful manner.

Methodology must also be distinguished from abiding principles and ideals in evangelism. The Gospel must be orally communicated, the Gospel must be demonstrated in life and action, the Gospel appeal must be made personal, it must be made intelligible, meaningful, attractive, persuasive, and inviting. Man must be confronted. Gospel communication must be preaching and speaking for a verdict. These are principles of Gospel communication. They are qualities of communication and are biblically constant.

Whether such communication is in the *form* of private conversation, public proclamation, group teaching, or door-to-door witnessing is not the important question. There is a quality which rings out the genuineness of the Gospel, reality of experience, and depth of conviction and concern.

In contrast to this, methodology is only a quantitative vehicle to make known the Gospel relevantly, effectively, and attractively. There