

TRAINING BELIEVERS TO EVANGELIZE THEIR COMMUNITY

John Peters

Rev. Peters, Manitoba, Canada, has been teaching Evangelism and Christian Education with the Janz Team in Switzerland and Germany.

Constant change characterizes the world about us today. Revolution rides rampant over one continent after another. Affluence and starvation are co-existent on earth. Technology is widely worshiped. Political corruption has shaken most governments. Confusion and despair are evident. Suicide rates continue to climb. Crime and enslavement to self and Satan are on the increase. Meaninglessness and lack of purpose portray man as lacking a cause to live for. Moral degeneration and divorce are increasing. Dr. Carl Gustav Jung wrote, "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness." Existentialist theology and philosophy have brought widespread frustration, delusion and heartache. People are hurt, wounded, and lonely. Millions are looking for reality, meaning, and purpose for life. This is the condition of our world, the community that has no one but the Christian Church to communicate to it the life-bringing message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was and is the task that our Master has entrusted to us.

Biblical basis for evangelism

God's Word clearly teaches us the privileges and the duties of his church in fulfilling the task he has left it:

- As his flock the Church must *hear* and *follow* its Shepherd (John 10).
- As Christ's bride she must *love* and *wait* for her bridegroom (John 21; Rev. 22).
- As his servant she must *obey* and *watch* for her Master (Matt. 25).
- As his wife she must *submit* to and *revere* her Husband (Eph. 5).
- As his family it must *fellowship* and *live* for him (I Thess. 1; II Cor. 5).
- As God's temple it must be *holy* and *edifying* (I Peter 2; Eph. 4).
- As Christ's body it must *work the will* of its Head and *witness* for him (I Cor. 12; Luke 24).

We live in the age of the Church. It holds the key to world evangelization, the task that her Master began (Acts 1:1) and then committed unto her for completion (Acts 1:8). Evangelism must be the Church's passion. Paul expresses that great manifesto of evangelistic motivation in II Cor. 5:10-21. With holy compulsion he cried, "Woe is to me if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9:16). In *The Inescapable Calling*, Dr. E. Kenneth Strachan states that

"...the essential mission of the church of Christ for which it has been equipped by the Holy Spirit is to proclaim the good news of salvation to every creature in all the world, and to attest the reality and power of the Gospel through the holy lives and genuine love of

its members, their devoted service to mankind everywhere, and their patient endurance of suffering. The church fulfills this mission so that men may be led to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and thus be incorporated into the fellowship and service of his church; while it gives faithful warning of coming judgment to the nations in the sure expectancy of his return to reign."

Evangelism must be the order of the day in the church's ministry. D.T. Niles beautifully defines evangelism as, "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread" — the Bread of Life. In *The Christian Persuader* Leighton Ford writes,

"Evangelism is a cross in the heart of God. Urgency comes as we share the mind of Christ and His apostles, who plainly saw man as lost or found, as blind and perishing, or enlightened and saved, as dead in sin or alive in Christ. These phrases of Paul also tell us something about God: that God is light, and that God is love. The man who is not deeply convinced of the holy and righteous wrath of God; the inevitability of judgment — that it is 'appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment' (Heb. 9:27) — is not likely to make an effective evangelist.

"We find evangelistic compulsion in the knowledge that God 'so loved the world.' His love was not a vague and sentimental benevolence. It was a costly and holy love in action. 'God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8). There is an historical exclusiveness about Jesus Christ. God has spoken a loving Word, but a unique and final Word, in Him. This is the 'once-for-all-ness' of the Gospel, the 'offense of the cross,' the 'hard particulars' of the kerygma. God sent His Son into the world not to condemn, but to save. But there is a condemnation if men love darkness and reject the light.

"When the Christ of the judgment seat and the Christ of the Cross becomes the Christ of the heart, we cannot help looking at others through new eyes — the eyes of Christ — and sharing with them the one who means so much to us.

"This then is the source of our urgency — not merely a cold, theological deduction; not frothy, unstable experience; not grim, stoic obedience; but the ready response of our entire personality to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. For He is the Great Evangelist. And it is Christ in my mind, Christ in my heart, and Christ in my will who makes me an evangelist."

Total evangelism is the strategy to which the Church of Jesus Christ must be committed today. Each member of the Body of Christ has been called to be a witness (Acts 1:8). The seed is the Word and field is the world, beginning with our own community. Only as Christians penetrate the world about them with the Gospel are they true to their calling.

Philosophy of the Church's Program

In order that this mandate can be fulfilled the church must carry on an effective Christian education program. In *An Introduction to Evangelical Christian Education*, J. Edward Hakes writes, "True Christian education is education that centers in God, not in man. It is education that begins with God and is carried on under the direction of God." True Christian education is therefore deeply involved with God's program of evangelism, and must base its aims and program upon the basic truths, meanings and values of God's Word.

Hakes also says: "It is in God and in His Son that the life of man has meaning; it is interpretation of facts in the light of the revelation of God that

gives man a sense of true values. This necessitates the relating of all of life to God so that it may be lived in fellowship with Him to His glory. True education keeps paramount this relationship, seeking to bring all of man's experience under the control of God.

"Since God is the source of all truth and reality and since education therefore is inescapably Christian, its purpose must be Christian. That is, its purpose is inherent in Christianity, God's revelation of His will given man in the Bible. God gave man this revelation that each individual to whom it is made known may live as he was created to live and become what his Creator intended him to be. The sole purpose of true Christian education is one with the sole purpose of man's life, namely, that man may become like God."

Pertinent purposes defined

Inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, the Apostle Paul clearly and concisely states the aims of Christian education in the Church in II Tim. 3:15-17. The comprehensive aim, "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," is given in verse 17, but the specific aims which are prerequisites to its attainment are also outlined. As the Church faithfully teaches and proclaims God's holy Word we can expect:

- (i) to see individuals being brought to Christ for salvation (v. 15)
- (ii) doctrinal truths and standards being understood and accepted (v. 16)
- (iii) wrong attitudes and practices in the lives of believers being revealed and reprov'd (v. 16)
- (iv) the putting off of sin and unspiritual living (v. 16)
- (v) growth in righteous living and holiness (v. 16)
- (vi) attainment of Christian maturity (v. 17)
- (vii) equipping and thorough preparation and training for service (v. 17)
- (viii) dedicated involvement in the work of the ministry (v. 17), (Eph. 4:12).

This is what God's Word claims it is capable of accomplishing. The responsibility for the establishment of a climate in which this can happen rests with the Church and its leadership.

Preparing our personnel

In Eph. 4:11-12 we see that God gave to the Church men with special gifts, in order that "Christians might be properly equipped for their service" (Phillips), through which the body of Christ would be built up. In churches around the world this principle has been tried and proven.

That great Christian leader of Asia, Bishop Azariah of Dornakal; vigorously promoted the slogan "Every Christian a Witness." He believed that the Church is "the divinely appointed instrument of evangelism in the world." He depended on prayer, teaching of God's Word, systematic training of believers for right living, service, and evangelism; he used music and drama to implant truth and to evangelize, he inaugurated annual weeks of witness in which thousands of believers went out to the villages of their area to witness for Christ. Numbering 8,000 believers in 1912, the diocese of Dornakal came, by the time of his death

in 1945, to have the greatest number of Christians in any diocese of his church in India, with over 220,000 believers.

Melvin Hodges, speaking of the rapid growth of churches in South America says, "Basically their growth is the result of lay witness, not clerical activity."

Eileen Lager in her thrilling accounts of In-Depth Evangelism in Nigeria, in the book *New Life for All*, reports how "with every Christian telling" a lay movement of personal evangelism was born that touched much of the African continent.

W.A. Criswell says that the secret of the unbroken stream of converts during the past fifteen years in the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, is the involvement of his lay people in witnessing and personal evangelism from day to day.

James Kennedy, known through the Coral Ridge Program for Lay Witness, states that 95 per cent of those converted in his church are led to Christ by his members.

Principles for programming training

Each member of the church is a potential evangelist. Pastors and leaders must become trainers and coaches who expect their members to make the goals (Eph. 4:11-12; II Tim. 2:2). Training programs to equip Christians for the ministry of evangelizing their community and the world must be instituted. The programs used will vary with the country, the nationality, the denomination, and the social structure of the culture, but should answer to basic principles of true Christian education. All programs of the church should be:

- (i) Bible-based — II Tim. 3:14-17
- (ii) Christ-centered — Col. 1:18
- (iii) Spirit-empowered — Acts 1:8
- (iv) Leader-guided — Acts 8:31
- (v) Learner-g geared — Ezek. 3:15; Luke 10:23
- (vi) Church-edifying — Eph. 4:12, 16
- (vii) God-honoring — Eph. 3:20-21 — Highest Aim!

Robert E. Coleman has written a stirring book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, which graphically portrays Jesus' basic strategy of world conquest. He lists eight guiding principles of the master plan "not to be understood as invariably coming in this sequence...since actually all were implied in each and in some degree they all began with the first."

- (i) Men were Christ's method, "He chose twelve" (Luke 6:13): *Selection.*
- (ii) He stayed with them, "I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20): *Association.*
- (iii) He required obedience, "Take my yoke upon you" (Matt. 11:29): *Consecration.*
- (iv) He gave himself away, "Receive ye..." (John 20:22): *Impartation.*
- (v) He showed them how to live, "I have given you an example" (John 3:15): *Demonstration.*
- (vi) He assigned them work, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19): *Delegation.*

- (vii) He kept check on them, "Do ye not yet perceive" (Mark 8:17) : *Supervision.*
- (viii) He expected them to reproduce, "Go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16) : *Reproduction.*

Before Jesus ascended to heaven he said, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you," (John 20:21). In training believers to share in the task of world evangelization we do well therefore to apply the principles Christ used!

Proposed procedures in training

How can the Church train believers to evangelize? Various procedures have been used effectively by Christian churches and denominations around the world. Let us briefly look at a number of them:

a. *Bible teaching for all age groups in the church.* There will be variations in forms and manner of work but without thorough instruction in God's Word, the task of world evangelization will never be realized. (II Tim. 3:15-17; II Tim. 2:2; Rom. 1:16). The best known way is the church school or the departmentalized Sunday School. Family devotions, Bible clubs, home Bible classes, Bible memory programs, Bible camps, and correspondence Bible courses are further tried and tested means of Bible teaching. Workers are trained for teaching and leadership.

b. *Training in personal evangelism and soul winning.* All Christian parents, church workers, yes, even all church members, should be taught and helped to communicate the Gospel to others (I Peter 3:15). Courses can be prepared by pastors or leaders but there are excellent courses available such as:

- How to work for Christ*, by R.A. Torrey
- How to win Souls* by Eugene Harrison and Walter Wilson
- During the week witnessing* by Kaufmann
- Evangelism Explosion* by D. James Kennedy
- How to Give away your Faith* by Paul Little
- Transferable Concepts* by Bill Bright
- Ten Basic Steps toward Christian Maturity* by Bill Bright
- Personal evangelism* by Macaulay and Belton.

c. *A good literature program and library stressing evangelism.* Books and magazines that stress evangelism are a must. A few books in addition to those already named are:

- Born to Reproduce* by Dawson Trotman
- Don't Sleep through the Revolution* by Paul S. Rees
- The Romance of Winning Children* by F.G. Coleman
- The Art of Fishing for Men* by Percy B. Crawford
- The Inescapable Calling* by R.K. Strachan

d. *On-the-job training in evangelism.* This is a very effective means of training patterned after Jesus' method. Classes in counselor training for church evangelism or joint evangelistic crusades are a wonderful means of training for soul-winning. In the worldwide ministry in crusade evangelism the counselor training program of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association has helped thousands of lay people to become soul-winners. Dr. Parr used the house-to-house visitation plan, in which inexperienced members accompanied and were trained by experienced

Christians, to build up the great Gilead Baptist Church in Detroit. Campus Crusade takes participants in their seminars out for personal witnessing as part of the course. As in New Testament times, the Church today must move believers out to reach their neighbors, their community, the whole world, for Jesus Christ.

e. *Bible schools, institutes on soul-winning, special conferences, etc.* The church must encourage lay people to take time to attend training possibilities outside the church such as:

- Bible Schools — long and short term
- Campus Crusade Institutes
- Navigator Conferences
- Sunday School Conventions
- Basic Youth Conflicts Seminars
- Child Evangelism Classes
- Youth for Christ Retreats
- InterVarsity Training
- Gideon Conventions
- Christian Leadership Conferences
- Christian Businessmen's Organizations

f. *Well-prepared and suitable helps for witnessing.* Believers must be equipped with good tracts and booklets that will be effective in witnessing and in pointing seekers to Christ. Among others, the excellent booklet *The Four Spiritual Laws* (Campus Crusade), has been an effective tool in sharing their faith for thousands of Christians around the world.

g. *Music, radio and television.* Believers should be encouraged and trained where possible to use these wonderful means of communication to present the claims of Christ.

Practical programs and possibilities of evangelizing in the community

The church that wishes to become involved in evangelizing its community has a great potential both in its membership and in its use of different agencies and programs of outreach. Some means that have been successfully used in many areas are listed here:

- Systematic Bible teaching for all*
 - Sunday School
 - Cottage Bible Study Groups
 - Vacation Bible Schools
 - Deeper Life Seminars
- Visitation programs*
 - Surveys
 - "Christ for Everyone"
 - Literature Distribution
 - Invitation Distribution
 - Cradle Roll
 - Home Department
 - Absentee Follow-up
- Prayer meetings*
 - Prayer Breakfasts, etc.
- Camping and retreats*

Children's Camps
 Youth retreats
 Family camps, etc.
Good News Clubs
Club work
 "Boys' Brigades"
 "Pioneer Girls"
 "Awana Clubs"
Film ministry
 Evangelistic Films
 Moody Science Films
 Filmstrips
Coffee House Ministry
Missions
 Foreign Missions
 Rescue Missions
Street Meetings
Telephone Ministry
 Dial-a-Message, etc.
Reception
Transportation
Hospitality
 Teas
 Luncheons
Ministry in institutions
 Jails
 Senior Citizens' Homes
 Homes for the Retarded
 Children's Homes
Travel
 Guided Tours
 Study Tours
Music
 Bands
 Choirs
 Orchestras
Recordings
 Records
 Cassettes
Family education
 Seminars
 Counseling
 Training for family devotions

Conclusion

The urgent task of evangelizing the world's millions is the Church's inescapable calling. As we realize our indebtedness to God and man as Paul the Apostle did (Rom 1:14), and dedicate ourselves to the teaching and training of believers so that they too will be prepared and ready to communicate (Rom. 1:15) the powerful life-saving and transforming

Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16) in their community and throughout the world, we can expect God to move in a wonderful way in revival evangelism in our time.