

## EVANGELIZATION AMONG CHILDREN REPORT

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### A. The vastness of the need and opportunity among children

We reminded ourselves afresh of the extremely high (and ever increasing) proportion of the world's population which is under the age of fifteen years. According to the UNESCO report, in 1970 312 million people were under the age of fifteen in the developed countries of the world, and 1.1 billion in the less-developed world: a total of about 1,420,000,000, or almost half of the total world population at that time. What a vast mission field — a whole new generation to be introduced to Jesus Christ!

### B. Insensitivity of the church at large to this need and opportunity

We noted the lack of any sense of urgency for reaching the children of the world with the Gospel by pastors or church leaders. It seems hardly realized that the main lines of a person's character and life-style are already laid down by the time he enters the teen years, and that vast opportunities are missed if we wait until young folk reach their teens before attempting to bring them to commitment to Christ.

### C. Reasons for this comparative lack of concern

We endeavored to analyze this apparent blindness to the challenge of children's evangelization:

- a. A lack of understanding on the part of church leaders of the nature and psychology of children, their spiritual and mental capabilities, and the way their minds and personalities work.
- b. A failure to realize that children, at a remarkably early age, can experience Christ's salvation and be used in God's service, in spite of the fact that many of the leaders themselves were introduced to Christ in their childhood. It seems generally accepted that the most one can do is teach children the Bible in the hope that they will make a decision for Christ in their later teens.
- c. The complete absence of an evangelical theology of children and children's evangelization. This has resulted in theological confusion and has led to great uncertainty about the theological validity of children's evangelism.
- d. Inadequate training in children's evangelism by theological colleges and Bible seminaries.
- e. Lack of literature at a high academic level dealing with the objections of educationalists to the teaching of the Bible to children. A shortage of other well-reasoned literature on the principles of children's evangelization.
- f. The fact that converted children cannot for some years make a significant contribution to the church in terms of financial contributions or service on committees.

g. The great problems of follow-up, leading to the conclusion for some that if we cannot adequately follow up those who profess faith in Christ, we ought not to be evangelizing.

h. Disillusionment with children's evangelism because of the shallow, high-pressure type of work in which some engage.

i. Arising out of this, the fact that young people and adults spuriously "converted" as children are among the most difficult people to reach with the Gospel.

We did not feel that any of these causes need present an ultimate obstacle to the instatement of children's evangelization as a high-priority item in the church's concerns. We resolved to tackle each of them with great seriousness.

### D. The opportunities in many countries for evangelical work in the schools

In a number of countries it is still possible to teach the Christian religion in the state schools. Where these possibilities exist, we have access to almost all children in the country.

a. We must not fail to seize opportunities when they exist. At the same time, we must use them with due respect for the limitations imposed on us because we usually operate within a pluralistic state system.

b. We should encourage Christians to enter the teaching profession, and aim to have Christians on school boards, where they can influence syllabus development.

c. A need exists for training teachers in Bible teaching and in the evangelization of children.

d. We should explore the possibilities of setting up Christian groups in primary schools as well as in secondary schools, meeting during lunch hours and after school.

e. The need was stressed for Christian educators to maintain an evangelical position in the world of educational and social study.

f. Where religious teaching would be undertaken predominantly by unbelievers, it would be better to have none at all.

### E. The opportunities for children's evangelization in families and homes

Often the schools are closed to Christian witness. But even when they remain open to us we should remember that the family is the basic God-given unit. Throughout the Bible the normal setting for the instruction of children in the faith is the home.

a. God has laid the primary responsibility for introducing their own children to Jesus Christ on the parents. To this end we need much more training of parents in the Christian upbringing of children than we see at present in our churches.

b. We should encourage the production of suitable literature which parents can use in the home as a means of introducing their children to the Bible and to the Christian faith. Contemporary stories of God at work, in children's language and style, would also be of great value. There should be more pooling of resources, and cooperation in publishing between various language groups.

c. We commended the use of the home as a base for Christian outreach to other children in the community. Besides the well-known "Bible club" approach, we noted the possibilities of informal gatherings of four or five children, including perhaps friends of the children in the family.

d. In such informal home situations, the presentation of the Bible message must be simple and amply illustrated, and we appreciated examples given by Miss Annie Valloton about Bible story-telling accompanied by simple sketching.

#### *F. The opportunities for children's evangelization in the church at large*

The church has a twofold responsibility so far as children are concerned: a responsibility toward the children of its own people and toward the children of non-Christians in its community. We call attention to the following needs and opportunities.

a. The need for effective and consistent training of Sunday School teachers in the evangelistic aspect of their work with children. There is a responsibility to acquaint the children with personal faith and commitment to Christ Jesus.

b. The need for earnest prayer on the part of the church for children all over the world. We commended the idea of an annual day of prayer for children.

c. The opportunities presented in many cultures (but not all) for evangelistic campaigns among children, either in the church building itself or on neutral ground.

d. The proposal that public evangelists should include in their teams specialists in work among children, who would supervise the counseling and follow-up of children. In certain cases it might be possible to undertake parallel evangelistic meetings among children during the period of evangelistic campaigns.

e. The need for training children's evangelists in theological seminaries and Bible schools, and for better training in children's work to all students in such schools.

f. Increasing opportunities for reaching children through camps and other vacation activities in many countries. Use made of such opportunities should always be geared to the local cultural situation.

g. The urgent need for more and better evangelistic literature to use among children. Such literature must be imaginative, simple, clear, and colorful. Combined editions in various languages could substantially reduce costs.

#### *G. Conclusions*

a. We call for new awareness by all Christians of the challenge to reach for Jesus Christ that half of the human race who are children.

b. We call upon the church to devote its best brains to an urgent study of the theology, principles and practice of children's evangelization, relating these studies also to the subject of child development and educational theory.

c. We call for new emphasis at every level on training for children's evangelism, so that multitudes of children throughout the world may be faithfully and lovingly reached with the Gospel.

d. We call upon God's people everywhere to pray earnestly for these ends.

#### *H. Summary:*

The problem: Over one billion children, but the church is apathetic.

Reasons for apathy: Lack of understanding of spiritual and psychological aspects of children. Practical problems of follow-up, spurious conversions.

Opportunities: Increase number and efficiency of Christian teachers in schools so as to take full advantage of existing opportunities. Christian influence throughout the teaching profession. Supreme responsibility of the parents. Need for good literature. Use of home as center for child evangelism. Consistent training of Sunday School teachers. Campaigns either specifically for children or with special children's section. Specific training in seminaries. Evangelistic literature for children.

#### *Conclusions:*

1. New awareness of challenge to reach children.
2. Study of theology, principles, and practice of child evangelism.
3. Training for child evangelism.
4. Prayer.