

EVANGELISM AMONG THE BLIND, DEAF, AND HANDICAPPED

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Jesus said, "Preach the Gospel to every creature." This command is all-inclusive, and means that every person, even those in the minority groups, which we call "handicapped," has the right to hear the Gospel — although the world's thirty million blind are scarcely a minority!

We must start with two basic definitions, to set the limits of this paper.

a. *Definition of evangelism* — We shall consider evangelism simply as "Reaching people with the basic message of the Bible, and presenting the facts of sin and personal salvation through the risen Lord Jesus, in such a way that the Holy Spirit can lead them to repentance and faith."

b. *Definition of "blind, deaf and handicapped"* — Degrees of handicap vary immensely; the problems of the partially-hearing or partially-sighted, solved by a deaf-aid or low-vision aid, are totally different from those whose handicap or sense-loss is more complete. This article will consider "handicapped" to mean those who are prevented, specifically because of their handicap, from hearing and responding to the Gospel through the normal channels. Included in this category would be those unable to mix freely with others or get out to church services or public evangelistic meetings, and also those suffering from a sense-loss which means that a special mode of communication is necessary, such as Braille for the blind person, and the manual alphabet for the deaf-blind. For sake of completeness we shall also refer briefly to the mentally handicapped, but really a separate study is needed to cover evangelism in this specialized area.

My definition is concerned with primarily the younger age-groups, i.e., those born handicapped, or those who become handicapped in earlier life. While it is true that statistically the majority of handicapped people in a country are in the eventide of life, their handicap is usually a direct result of old age; we could call them the "age-handicapped." During the earlier portion of their life they probably had opportunity to hear the Gospel. Special methods often are not applicable to them — e.g., they are too old to learn Braille, but the church nevertheless should have a caring ministry that rescues such people from spending their latter years in solitude and loneliness.

I. Attitudes in the Bible towards the handicapped

a. *Caring* — The Old Testament reveals the care of the people of God for those who were physically handicapped. "Don't curse the deaf or put a stumbling-block before the blind" (Lev. 19:14). "I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame," says Job (29:15). As well as physical help,

material help is stressed, "Open thine hand wide unto thy brother; to thy poor and to thy needy in thy land" (Deut. 15:11). Such was the effect of this concern that "it is significant that in the Old Testament scarcely a trace of beggars and begging in the street can be found."

While the handicapped, not being able to earn a living, were provided for adequately, there seems the possibility that they were regarded as second-class citizens. Lev. 21:16-23 states that no person with a "blemish" could be a priest, and a list of physical handicaps follows. I feel this is no reflection on the handicapped person, but rather a wonderful reminder of the holiness and whole-ness of God. The sacrificial lamb, too, had to be "without blemish," and both priest and lamb point forward to the Lord Jesus Christ, our passover Lamb and great high priest. So we can understand the reason for the prohibition.

By the time of Jesus, the commendable concern of the people of God in the Old Testament for the handicapped (e.g., II Sam. 9:13) seems to have broken down, and under the Roman occupation we meet many beggars in the streets as we travel around with Jesus, and so Jesus restresses the importance of almsgiving (Matt. 6:1-4), and of concern for the "poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind" (Luke 14:13). Paul, too, exhorts the Ephesian church to "support the weak," and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In the epistles, churches are urged to remember the needy, and these would naturally include those unable to work because of physical disability e.g., Heb. 13:1-2; Rom. 15:25-27. James re-echoes the strong warning of the Lord Jesus ("Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred and fed Thee?..." Matt. 25:33-39) with his equally strong "If a brother or sister be naked ... and ye give them not ..." (Jas. 2:14-17).

b. *Healing* — The few healing miracles of the Old Testament seem to concern those with diseases such as leprosy, or raising from the dead. The writers of the Gospels, however, include many instances of the blind, deaf, and lame being healed by Jesus. Indeed, part of the proof offered to John the Baptist that Jesus was indeed the Messiah was the fact that "the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear ..." (Matt. 11:5). It is not clear from the Gospels how widespread the healing ministry of Jesus was. About twenty healing miracles are recorded, but presumably there were many more. Luke 4:40 states that at sunset any sick were brought to Jesus, "and He laid hands on every one of them and healed them." Therefore the emphasis of the ministry of Jesus is more than merely care and compassion for the handicapped, or even the exercise of faith, and the administration of forgiveness; it is primarily physical restoration.

Moving into the Apostolic era, a number of cases of miraculous healing are recorded in the book of Acts. While the basis of Mark 16:18 for this ministry is disputed, the Lord's commissioning of the twelve (Matt. 10:1) and the seventy (Luke 10:9) included the command to heal the sick, and this ministry was presumably to be continued after the ascension. Acts 5:12-16 shows the remarkable extent of this ministry.

The giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marked the beginning of the Church era, and Paul records that included amongst the gifts of the Spirit to the Church are the gifts of healing and miracles (I Cor. 12:9,

10). That Paul himself possessed the gifts of healing and miracles is evident from the raising to life of Eutychus, and the "special miracles" which God performed through the pieces of clothing taken from him (Acts 19:11,12). However, there are no specific cases recorded of Paul's healing those with a physical handicap, and it is clear that his ministry of healing was insignificant compared with his ministry of teaching and preaching.

2. Attitudes in the church to-day

Following the biblical example, both *healing* and *caring* should be found in the church of today.

a. *Healing* is a difficult and controversial subject. If all the handicapped were healed, there would be no need for special societies. It seems that in many places today God is raising up those with a gift of healing. But reports of the totally blind or totally deaf being healed are almost negligible. "We personally have never known blind people who have regained physical sight through spiritual healing. God can do this, we are sure, but he has not chosen to in our experience," says Stella Heath of Torch Trust in England. Kathryn Kuhlman quotes many examples of healing, including that of a partially-sighted man, but none of restoration of sight or hearing to those totally impaired. Indeed, the foreword of one of her books mentions the financial help given by her organization to a school for blind children for whom Miss Kuhlman wanted to do "everything humanly possible." T. L. Osborn, however, quotes many examples of the blind and deaf being healed. During his thirteen-week campaign in Jamaica in 1949, "over a hundred deaf-mutes and over 90 totally blind people were healed." Up-to-date cases from, for example, churches involved in the charismatic movement, would be interesting. My personal conclusion is that there is a difference between *healing* and *miracles* (I Cor. 12:9, 10), and that the restoration of major sense losses or physical limbs requires a miracle rather than the more usual spiritual healing.

While both *healing* and *caring* must have their place in the full-orbed ministry of the church today towards the handicapped, the primary emphasis must be upon *evangelism*. We follow Jesus' example of "preaching the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18), and his command to "go into all the world, and preach ... to every creature." We follow Paul's emphasis on preaching rather than healing or caring, and his example of "travailing until Christ be formed in his hearers" (Gal. 4:19), rather than securing better social conditions for the oppressed. But obviously the Gospel cannot be presented in a vacuum; account must be taken of physical conditions of the handicapped, and practical help given in the name of Christ. Often, particularly in the less-developed countries, *caring* and *evangelism* must go hand in hand.

3. Why treat the handicapped in a special way?

a. *They are special people* — A Christian wishes to show the love of Christ to all men, therefore he is sensitive to the needs of the handicapped. It is no coincidence that it was the committed Christians who pioneered the cause of the deaf and the blind in England in the nineteenth century, with true Gospel aims as well as welfare activities.

The handicapped person has suffered certain "losses" which make him different, psychologically and physically, from a "whole" person. T.J. Carroll, referring to the blind in his chapter, "The Sighted Man Dies," cites the losses of psychological security, basic living skills, communication, appreciation, occupational and financial status, and concludes with a section on "losses to the whole personality." The Christian's help in getting to know the handicapped person as a friend, and in relating to him as man to man where physical differences are ignored, can be vital in restoring a measure of integrity. Genuine friendship has immense value in itself, as well as being a necessary prerequisite to effective evangelism.

b. ... *but they don't want to be different!* There is a real danger of insulting the handicapped by putting them in a special category to which there is a definite stigma attached, (cf. "leper" in the Old Testament). This leads to various complexes and wrong attitudes in the handicapped themselves, and resentment at being treated as "different," "the objects of charity," etc. Many handicapped people are fiercely independent! Unfortunately, much of the assistance they receive is in the form of "charity" from well-meaning people who are trying to "help" the less fortunate, from a superior position, possibly to ease their consciences, rather than from a position of equality and as an expression of Christian love. Even Christians and Christian societies working among the handicapped can be guilty of wrong motives. What if some of the blind could see some of the deliberately pathetic pictures of them published in Christian magazines, in order to attract funds? In order to produce lasting results, all Christian work among the handicapped must be based on the treatment of the handicapped person primarily *as a person*, not an "object" to be pitied, evangelized, or exploited.

c. *Special methods are needed* — There are two problems here — *reaching* the handicapped person in a physical sense; and *communicating* the Gospel to him.

(i) *Reaching* — In many countries a child who is blind, deaf, or physically handicapped is considered to be worthless, and a disgrace to the family. Many probably never live more than a few years; many remain shut in their homes, totally cut off from the outside world. While this happens primarily in less-developed areas, there are cases in Western countries where parents hide away their handicapped child and refuse to take advantage of the welfare services offered.

If the handicapped person is an adult, his life is often very restricted; possibly much of his time is spent at home. Therefore the problem of actually *finding* the handicapped people, both children and adults, is a very real one. The normal methods of reaching the non-handicapped are church services and activities; special evangelistic meetings; personal contact through friendship, e.g., at work, through social contacts; systematic visits to homes; Gospel literature, radio, and TV. The average handicapped person is unlikely to go to church or special meetings, and has a very limited social life, and therefore correspondingly little chance of having a Christian among his friends. Gospel radio is inapplicable to the deaf, though potentially a great blessing to the "shut-ins" with other handicaps. This leaves home visits as the only "normal" method of

evangelism that is likely to be effective in reaching the handicapped. Obviously this is a very slow, inadequate method, and therefore special methods are needed to seek and find the handicapped person where he is.

(ii) *Communicating* — Having found a handicapped person, there is the problem of communicating the Gospel to him. Barriers of bitterness and prejudice first have to be broken down. Physical needs may have to be attended to. Only then have we an adequate platform for the presentation of the Gospel. Here the deaf present a special challenge, as even the initial contact must be made by a specialist, and the message must be suited to the limited vocabulary that the average person born deaf possesses. In the case of the blind, verbal communication presents no problem, but follow-up literature and portions of Scripture must be in suitable medium; in Braille or Moon for those able to read, or on the cassette-tapes that are becoming universally available. The deaf-blind can only be reached by communication through touch, by those familiar with the manual alphabet. For those who do receive Christ, there are differing problems within each handicap-group with regard to Bible study materials, Christian literature, and integration into, and worship, fellowship, and service within a local church.

4. *Methods of evangelism*

To try to categorize and summarize all that is being done in outreach to each of the handicap groups is a vast and difficult task, requiring factual information on a worldwide scale. All I have been able to do since being asked to write this paper is to send letters and questionnaires to a selection of individuals and societies concerned with the handicapped, to pastors of churches, and to handicapped people themselves. Their replies have been most interesting and helpful, but I recognize that the picture given is far from comprehensive; further information is welcomed!

I shall summarize the main methods of outreach, and then consider their applicability within each handicap group.

Method 1: Through individuals and churches.

Method 2: Through Christian institutions, such as schools, workshops, etc. (this is the traditional approach of missionary societies).

Method 3: Through special societies organized for evangelism within a handicap group, (e.g., The Deaf Christian Fellowship (G.B.); Torch Trust for the Blind (G.B.); Christian Foundation for the Blind (Australia); Gospel Association for the Blind (U.S.A.); The Disabled Christians' Fellowship (G.B.).

Method 4: Through suitable literature, cassettes and tapes, records, etc. (This is part of the ministry of the above societies, and also of specialist societies such as Christian Literature for the Blind (England), and The John Milton Society for the Blind (U.S.A.). The major denominations in the U.S.A. also have departments for the production of literature in Braille.)

a. *The physically handicapped* — Method 1 should be the main method of outreach. There are usually no peculiar communication problems, and the task of reaching them where they are should be the responsibility of the local church. They do not want to be treated as "special

cases," but churches should recognize that special provision may be necessary in the following areas:

(i) *Transport* — Many churches organize transport for handicapped members; in other churches it is left for individuals to bring their friends. One church reported that "more would be able to attend if transport was laid on in an organized way." For handicapped people with their own cars, special parking facilities near the church door are necessary.

(ii) *Easy access* — Modern churches today are often designed with specially wide doors and no steps to give easy access for those in wheelchairs.

(iii) *A special room* — double-glazed, facing the pulpit, and with an amplification system, is provided by some churches. It can be used by those with distressing ailments that cause embarrassment, so that they can see and hear without disturbing others. Such a room can also be used by mothers with small children.

(iv) *Care for the "shut-ins"* — Many handicapped people, especially the "age-handicapped," are house-bound, and often very lonely. If they cannot come to church, the church should come to them. "Time to be friendly and kindly is an irreplaceable necessity in evangelism amongst the handicapped," said one minister. Regular visits and help in physical matters (shopping, etc.) provide a basis for sharing the Gospel. Tapes of Bible studies and church services can help the house-bound person to feel part of the church fellowship, and household communion services should be used much more than they are.

However, it must be recognized that not all churches are able to reach the physically handicapped in their area; that many handicapped people are conscious of being "different," and therefore avoid public gatherings; and that they do tend to enjoy the company of those similarly handicapped. Therefore there is a place for special societies, like the Disabled Christians' Fellowship (G.B.), using Methods 3 and 4, who have found a "vast field for evangelism amongst the disabled who have had little or no contact with Christian teaching." Their monthly magazine has a wide circulation, and many have been converted through their rallies and holidays. Other services such as a tape and cassette library are also available.

b. *The mentally handicapped* — Those who are severely handicapped mentally are usually in institutions. An individual approach is necessary (Method 1), with the truths of the Bible explained in very simple terms. Valuable work is done by individual Christians who visit such institutions, and also by hospital chaplains. Each local church should be aware of the mental institutions in its area, and alert its members to their need for voluntary helpers. However, I feel there is also a great need for "specialist evangelists" in this area, who are gifted and trained in methods of communication with the mentally handicapped.

c. *The blind* — Each of the four methods is being used in reaching the blind. In a survey of twenty-one blind Christians in England and Lebanon, eight were converted through a church, five through personal witness, (i.e., thirteen through Method 1); four through the influence of Christian schools (Method 2); one through a house party for the blind (Method 3). Three were already Christians before the onset of blindness.

Though this survey was very limited, it can be a pointer to the effectiveness of the different methods — 1 and 2 being used more to bring blind people to the point of conversion, whereas 3 and especially 4 are used more to help blind Christians in areas of fellowship and Bible teaching.

Method 1: The fact that a person is blind does not stop him from listening to a sermon, or to the personal witness of a friend. Therefore most blind people can be reached with the Gospel through an active local church. Problems encountered will include (i) actually finding the blind person, since often they live sheltered lives; (ii) overcoming suspicion and a “chip-on-the-shoulder” attitude, by friendliness and helpfulness; (iii) persuading the person to come to church or to a rally, where problems of transport, mobility, and mixing with people may have to be overcome; (iv) leaving suitable literature or portions of the Bible — the Christian worker must be conversant with what is available in large print, Braille, Moon, or on cassettes or records (see Method 4).

Method 2: Christian institutions. In the last century, the development of schools and workshops for the blind in countries such as England was often in the hands of Christians, who founded such institutions with evangelical aims. Now in most developed countries the welfare of handicapped groups such as the blind is in the hands of the state, hence institutions have become secular. Christian missions, however, have used schools for the blind to good effect as part of their evangelistic outreach in less-developed countries. In one place, work among the blind was in fact the spearhead used to open up a “closed” land. But as governments assume more responsibility for the handicapped, the Christian institution may find itself redundant, and new avenues of service sought, e.g., in areas of blind welfare not covered by the state, or in concentrating on a spiritual ministry on the lines of Methods 3 and 4. Well-established institutions must be prepared for such changes.

Christian institutions such as schools and workshops should be seen as a service to the community and to the individual blind person, as well as a means of spreading the Gospel. There will always be a tension between the educational and welfare aims of the institutions, and their evangelistic aims, but there need be no conflict between these aims if those responsible determine that their institution be run as effectively as possible, in service both to the Lord and to the community. There can be excesses on either side. The School for the Blind in Beirut used to teach Braille solely so that pupils could read their only textbook, the Bible, and become Christians. Fortunately we have progressed from that position! Perhaps the other extreme is more common today — some Christian institutions have regrettably departed from being actively evangelistic, and are secular in all but name.

Methods of evangelism within an institution vary greatly, from formal Bible teaching to the personal witness of dedicated staff members. Many schools for the blind are residential, and take children from an early age, therefore there may be ten or more years of Christian influence; this is a wonderful opportunity, and many respond to the claims of Christ. But the dangers inherent in any institutional work are often accentuated in schools for the handicapped, viz., (i) advantage must not be taken of a “captive” audience, and “decisions” pressed for, especially

among younger pupils; (ii) advantage must not be taken of the psychological dependence of many younger blind people, especially girls, who make “decisions” in order to please, or to be accepted; (iii) “hardness” to the Gospel can develop among older pupils, through constant exposure to the same message, or bitterness at being handicapped; (iv) those converted must be adequately prepared for living the Christian life outside the shelter of the institution, and linked up with an active local church wherever possible.

Method 3: Special societies. Reaching the blind through the local church (Method 1) assumes an ideal situation; in fact, most churches do not live up to this ideal! Therefore in recent years, societies have been formed to cater in a special way for the spiritual needs of the blind, usually in developed countries where their material welfare is cared for by the state. As well as providing literature, etc., (Method 4), these societies aim to supplement the outreach of the local church, by: (i) holding regular meetings specially for the blind in an area or town (e.g., the monthly “Torch” fellowship groups in Great Britain); (ii) holding outings, camps, and house parties for the blind; (iii) employing full-time traveling evangelists (often blind themselves); (iv) encouraging Christian unions within schools for the blind; (v) having a residential center where counseling and guidance can be given.

The fact that Torch groups in Great Britain have multiplied rapidly, from one group to thirty-five over the past five years, and seen much blessing, shows the effectiveness of such a method. Many blind people are gregarious and come to special meetings when they would not come to church. Others are determined to be independent, and avoid such groups! Most groups have a varied program, some meetings being evangelistic and others more for fellowship. Meetings are usually held in an easily-accessible central building, and other features are a willing band of sighted “helpers,” and refreshments after the meeting. Such groups should be careful to maintain an evangelistic outlook, as their existence is difficult to justify merely as a “fellowship club for the blind.” The monthly groups should not be regarded by members as a substitute for regular church attendance, and those converted should always be linked up with a local church.

Camps and house parties in suitable locations give an opportunity for a longer, more systematic presentation of the Gospel. Advertisements through secular channels insure that non-Christians are invited. If the speaking and the counseling are done by those experienced in evangelism among the blind, much good can result. Some societies have a residential center which is available for blind people to come to and stay for a limited period, to obtain help with emotional or spiritual problems; many have been converted, built up in the faith, and helped through times of adjustment, bewilderment, and crisis through these visits.

The use of an evangelist who travels to visit local groups, encourages school Christian unions, and brings the work of such societies before the Christian public, is an important development. The ministry of a man who is himself blind is especially relevant here, and God is using such men in effective evangelism among not only the blind but the sighted as well. From Ethiopia it is reported that “many people will listen to the

blind evangelist who will not listen to a sighted preacher. His joy in the Lord makes a deep impression..."

Method 4: Literature, tapes, etc. All Christian societies for the blind, many denominations in U.S.A., and a number of missionary institutions are involved in the production of literature, cassettes, tapes, and records. Most of the output is devotional rather than evangelistic, and the vast majority of it is in English.

(i) *Literature* — Not all blind people are Braille readers, therefore literature in Moon type, and in large print, is necessary as well. The Bible Societies have been responsible for the production of the Bible, or portions of it, in Braille in many foreign languages; however, much remains to be done. Secular societies such as the Royal National Institute for the Blind (G.B.) produce a selection of religious books and hymn books, but these need to be supplemented by evangelical productions from the Christian societies. Current productions are mainly of a "lighter" variety, and there would appear to be a need for more commentaries and books on Bible teaching. While the English-speaking world is well-served (our school for the blind in Beirut receives Christian magazines in Braille from at least seven sources!), the need for production in foreign languages is urgent.

(ii) *Cassettes, tapes, and records* — Many blind people cannot read Braille or Moon, or may be illiterate. The cassette revolution has, over the past few years, been utilized by Christian societies; many of the books brailled are also put on cassette or tape, and the Christian message carried into many more homes. One advantage is that the blind person can share this message with sighted friends. In less-developed countries where Braille literacy is low and little or nothing is available in Braille in the local language anyhow, tapes or records provide an immediate means of reaching the blind. The Bible on tape or records is of use to the Braille reader too who has storage problems with the bulky Braille volumes; in countries where whole families live in small houses, space is very important.

Libraries of cassettes and tapes, and also of Braille books for which there is a limited demand, are being effectively used in some countries, mainly by those already converted.

Christian societies are only just beginning to realize the tremendous potential of literature and tape in evangelism. Many blind people are voracious readers and ardent listeners. Material must be relevant, attractive, and well-produced, so that their thirst is met with the Water of Life.

d. *The deaf* — As with the blind, the degrees of handicap vary immensely, from the hard of hearing and partially-deaf, to the deaf-mute and deaf-blind. The effectiveness of the methods of outreach used varies accordingly. The problems of the hard-of-hearing and partially-deaf should be solved in developed countries by personal deaf-aids, and by amplification systems in churches. However, a survey of seventeen churches in Great Britain revealed that only eight were equipped with an amplification system. One minister commented, "One of the greatest failures in Gospel communication occurs when people with defective hearing fail to hear the preacher. If more preachers would pay attention

to voice production, the Gospel would be heard by more people who already come to our churches." Bearing in mind the large numbers of older people in the churches who are hard-of-hearing, preachers should speak loudly and clearly, and churches should cooperate by installing effective amplification systems.

For those born deaf or who lose their hearing in early years, the eye replaces the ear. In developed countries, these children pass through state schools for the deaf, and learn to lip-read, to speak as well as possible, or to use manual signs or finger-spelling. Their speech is usually limited, and their vocabulary small. Therefore, among all the handicapped groups, communicating the Gospel to the deaf presents most problems.

Method 1: Churches and individuals. Outreach to the deaf is a difficult task for the local church; if there is no one trained in communicating to the deaf, then the best that can be done is to show care and concern, and leave literature, such as *Joy*, the quarterly gospel magazine produced by the Deaf Christian Fellowship in G.B. For those converted, integration into the local church presents many problems too. In the U.S.A., many of the larger churches have a special section for the deaf, with an interpreter standing next to the pastor. The deaf group meets separately for Sunday School, and in midweek, and in some cases has a representative on the diaconate. This method may be satisfactory in a city church of large membership, but essentially it is not "integration," as the deaf really are acting as a "church within a church." Many feel that total integration into local churches is not practical for deaf people, because of the communication problem; their limited vocabulary and limited awareness of abstract concepts; and the proportion of music and singing in most services.

Therefore *Method 3, Special societies and churches*, seems to be the answer. In England the Anglican church has been foremost in Christian work amongst the deaf for over 130 years; they work through about 70 local voluntary associations throughout the country, with the object of "promoting the social, general and spiritual welfare of deaf people." The emphasis given to social or spiritual welfare varies from area to area. In some places the government welfare provision is far from adequate, so more time is spent on social problems, but "If we had more staff, we could and should do far more in the way of direct evangelistic and spiritual work," said one association. The general pattern for these Anglican associations is for pastoral work to be in the hands of an area chaplain, who also conducts services for the deaf, either in borrowed churches or in a special center for the deaf. It seems that they place little stress on direct evangelism.

More recently in England the Deaf Christian Fellowship, an inter-denominational, evangelical faith mission, has come into existence. Its aims are primarily spiritual, and through trained regional workers individuals have been converted and small fellowship groups, and "Churches of the Deaf" formed, which have their own elders and deacons, and function as a local church. Ideally, preaching is by those trained in communicating with the deaf, rather than by interpretation. The D.C.F. also organizes holiday conferences, groups for Bible study, and a short annual Bible School course, as well as producing literature.

In less-developed countries, a wholly "spiritual" approach is not practical, as basic social needs must first be met. For example, in Africa only one-third of the countries have special schools for the deaf, and hence countless deaf people are illiterate and lack any means of communication. Therefore, an evangelical society such as the "Christian Mission for Deaf Africans" combines an educational ministry with other forms of more direct evangelism through Christian centers, Sunday Schools, camps, and Bible correspondence courses.

The pattern for reaching the deaf, then, involves special societies leading on to special churches; in fact, the deaf are the only handicapped group who need something special when it comes to worship. The form of worship in deaf services needs to be carefully thought out. With the exception of "symbolic" services such as baptism and communion, most ordinary church services depend entirely upon hearing. For the deaf, other senses must be used, physical expression, such as a deaf choir singing with their hands; as much congregational participation as possible; visual aids for sermons; and ideas from the Anglican side include the use of vestments and incense as aids to worship.

The *deaf-blind* are a special category, for whom touch, either through Braille or the manual alphabet, is the means of communication. Although their numbers are small (about 3 percent of the blind in the U.S.A. are deaf too), they must not be neglected. In England there are a few services (monthly or bi-monthly) arranged in certain centers, but the most effective method of evangelism is through a dedicated friend learning the manual alphabet and communicating the Gospel individually.

Method 2: Institutions. As with the blind, missionary societies have pioneered work among the deaf in many lands, opening schools and engaging in welfare work. The points made about institutions for the blind apply equally to work among the deaf, except that most institutions will run their own chapel services rather than encourage their pupils to go to local churches. Reports of youth clubs for the deaf have come from England and Lebanon, where activities are pursued, and personal work done among the members.

Method 4: Literature. Many deaf people with limited vocabularies and knowledge of sentence construction find general literature incomprehensible. Therefore many societies for the deaf produce special literature; e.g., the Anglican church has produced a book of simple prayers; the D.C.F. produces its quarterly magazine *Joy*, aiming to present the Gospel message and Christian teaching in a way the deaf can understand. In Africa, Bible correspondence courses have been distributed. But much work yet remains to be done if the deaf are to be built up in their faith through literature; where church services or fellowship groups are few and far between, literature seems to be the key.

I have had no information about what versions of the Bible deaf Christians use; presumably the modern English versions are most helpful. One school reported that Bibles with good illustrations were greatly appreciated.

It seems to me that Christian work among the deaf is less developed than that among the blind, perhaps because of the peculiar difficulties involved, or perhaps because deafness does not evoke as much public sym-

pathy, or stir Christian hearts as much as blindness. This situation must be remedied, and the needs of the world's deaf publicized among the churches. Many countries lack any evangelistic work among the deaf. All societies feel that many more deaf could be reached if they had more workers. The need for suitable literature for the deaf is urgent, and two people separately have voiced the need for a Bible college for the deaf in England or Europe. Now is the time for prayer and action.

5. *The challenge of the future*

a. *Reaching the handicapped* — Developing technology has made the world's handicapped more accessible, and has improved communication methods. Governments are increasingly catering for welfare needs. The Christian church, through specialized societies, must provide for their spiritual needs, harnessing technical advances for the spread of the Gospel. At present, the approach throughout the world is fragmented. There is a need for a greater awareness of, and cooperation between, the agencies at work. Within each handicap group there appears to be a need for: (i) a world survey of evangelical work; (ii) the formation of a world-wide, or area-wide fellowship to share news, ideas, and prayer requests in an occasional magazine; and (iii) a directory of evangelical agencies, listing the services they provide.

b. *Alerting the churches* — Many churches are unaware of the needs of the handicapped in their own area, and of the evangelical agencies that could help. A simple booklet, such as "A guide to reaching the handicapped," could be produced and widely distributed in each country, giving hints on possible approaches, and names and addresses of relevant sources of help. Stemming from a greater interaction with the handicapped in their own area, the vision of the local church will be lifted to become a missionary concern for the handicapped in the world.

c. *Channeling the results* — Lessons from the past must be learnt; there is the danger of over-response by the emotionally sensitive, or by those who hope for material gain if they profess conversion. Then there is the danger, once some are really converted, of putting them in a showcase and spoiling them. Our aim should be so to present Christ that a real, intelligent decision can be made, and then so to strengthen the young Christian that he becomes active in his own right. Perhaps the key to evangelism among the handicapped in the future is for handicapped Christians themselves to be channeled back into the task of reaching their own group with the glorious Gospel which transcends physical barriers and makes each believer "a new creature in Christ Jesus."