

EVANGELISM AMONG THE DEAF, BLIND, AND HANDICAPPED REPORT

1. *A lack of awareness of a vast need*

The group meeting to discuss this paper was small and consisted almost solely of those interested in evangelism among the blind; three participants themselves were blind. It was regretted (a) that there was not more representation in so large a Congress of workers among the deaf or other handicapped groups, and (b) that so few of the participants in the Congress showed interest in this strategy group. Admittedly, other groups were meeting concurrently, and work among the handicapped is only of peripheral interest to most church and mission leaders, since the handicapped are a minority in their countries. But minorities must not be neglected. The 30 million blind people in the world, countless numbers of deaf and physically handicapped, and increasing numbers with mental or multiple handicaps, demand the attention and concern of the Christian church. The Lord Jesus spent much time with the "handicapped" of his day!

2. *Major points of discussion*

It was felt unfortunate that work among all handicaps had been grouped together, since the needs of each group are so specialized, and require different approaches. Most of the discussion centered on the needs of the blind.

The basic ideas of the paper were endorsed and the following additional points were raised:

a. *Service with welfare authorities* in England provided Christians with a great opportunity of reaching the handicapped and sharing the Gospel. Too often this field of humanitarian concern has been left to the sociologists with no Christian convictions.

b. *Fellowship groups for the blind* should always attempt to be integrated with the sighted to avoid a sense of patronizing and to allow blind people a meaningful place in a world increasingly oriented toward the sighted.

c. The value of the *cassette recorder* was stressed in reaching the blind and physically handicapped, especially as it is being used increasingly in the education of the blind. Cassette production could well be considered as important as braille production for Christian societies.

d. *Work among epileptics* was also considered. As with the mentally handicapped, epileptics often have an acute awareness of God. The need for Christian institutions to care for and provide sheltered workshops for this often-neglected group was stressed. Specialists in this field need to be aware of the possibilities of demon possession.

3. *Agencies at work among the blind, deaf, and handicapped.*

In addition to those societies mentioned at the end of the paper, informal conversations with Congress participants revealed many countries where effective work is being carried on. Unfortunately, it was also

apparent that there are many countries where little or nothing is being attempted.

Further information has been provided by:

The John Milton Society for the Blind, 366 Fifth Ave., New York, New York, 10001, USA;

Lutheran Braille Workers, Inc., 11735 Peachtree Circle, Yucaipa, Calif., 92399, USA;

Southern Baptist Convention (Sunday School Board) 127 Ninth Ave.N., Nashville, Tenn., 37203, USA.

4. *Suggestions for future action*

a. The need for a *worldwide survey* of work within each handicap group was stressed, in order to provide information about what is being done, to prevent duplication and to pinpoint the gaps. Torch Trust for the Blind of England is already undertaking such a survey for the blind preparatory to an international conference in 1976.

b. This survey could lead to the production of a *directory of evangelical agencies*, and this in turn could lead to area-wide fellowships for the sharing of news and views.

c. The need for churches to become aware of the vast needs of the handicapped world both on their doorstep and overseas was considered essential. *A manual* listing the evangelical agencies within a country and giving suggestions about reaching the different handicapped groups should be prepared and distributed widely to churches so that local Christians can play their part in reaching the handicapped.