

EXPANSION ON DR. ROBERT DONAHUE'S PAPER ABOUT EVANGELISM

By A. Brent Cobb

What could possibly be a higher priority for us than *evangelism*? I recall the time, many years ago, when the Church of the Nazarene had a great denomination-wide slogan that announced, “Evangelism First!”

In his paper's opening statement—“Evangelism is the proclamation or telling of the good news of the death, burial and resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ on the third day”—I *hear* Dr. Donahue saying that this aspect of evangelism, drawn from 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, is foundational. Certainly, I do not hear him claiming that it is a complete definition for “evangelism.” We know an exhaustive one-sentence, one-paragraph, or even one-page definition is not possible. Dr. Donahue would likely say that his definition is a departure point for evangelism not a destination—a springboard not an all-encompassing, limiting definition.

God's love for humankind moved his great heart to give his only begotten Son to save lost people. The grand Incarnation event was essential for God the Son to seek, find, and rescue unlimited numbers of “perishing” people from the peril of ultimately being forever lost from God and his love. Jesus—Immanuel, “God with us”—personified the right mindset, meaning, and methods for effective evangelism. Surpassing the costly rescue effort undertaken by the Good Samaritan who saw a man—hopeless, helpless, and dying—lying beside the road in the ditch, and did what he could, is Jesus' painful participation in the plight of perishing people.

1. FURTHER DEFINITION AND FOCUS FOR EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Effective evangelism involves a winsome witness as well as the witness receivers' personal responses to the Holy Spirit's faithful work that precedes and accompanies the evangelist's efforts. Witness-sharers must verbally, convincingly communicate with people about the wonderful Savior as well as make their own lives attractive advertisements of Christ's redeeming love. Personal *engagement* between witness-givers and witness-receivers should occur so that the human witness-givers and witness-receivers should occur so that the human

witness-givers, along with the Holy Spirit's unseen confirming work and witness, may persuasively present to the receivers the Good News about Christ's love and power to transform *their* lives.

The noted Anglican (Episcopal) Church definition of "evangelism," by late Archbishop William Temple, first appeared at the beginning of a report titled *Towards the Conversion of England*. The definition states, "To evangelize is so to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Savior, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his church."

"Evangelism" is not merely the task of professional ministers. It is the task of every true Christian. All should seek to live out in everyday life the Good News in order to draw others to discipleship to Jesus. Salter advocates everyday-life, word-and-deed "lifestyle evangelism," a term made popular by Joseph Aldrich. It is evangelism accomplished in natural ways by all the people of God. "The greatest authority that a pastor has," Salter states, "is the right to commission men, women, and children for the work of ministry."¹

2. FURTHER DYNAMICS AND FORMS OF EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Watson describes supposed stages of evangelism that Peter Wagner and others presented as the "3 P's" of evangelism but that Watson expands with Snyder's help to the "4 P's" of evangelism. The following quote is from a website-uploaded article with my emphasis added to the four key terms:

Presence Evangelism is where the church by its worship, life, and witness brings to the world the sense of God's presence ... *Proclamation Evangelism* is when the truths of the gospel are proclaimed at every level to those who have already sensed the presence of God among his people. *Persuasion Evangelism* is when the evangelist endeavors to turn men and women to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith, on the basis of what they have by now sensed of God's presence and understood of the proclamation of his message ... Howard Snyder adds a fourth—*Propagation Evangelism*. In His view, the ultimate goal of evangelism is not to see people converted to Christ, nor even made into disciples. 'To do justice to the Biblical understanding of the church we must go one step further and say that the goal of evangelism is the formation of Christian community...' If disciples are not formed into the community of God's people, God's plan for the healing of creation cannot begin to be fulfilled.²

Dr. Donahue brings the “persuasion” and “invitation” aspects of evangelism into view. He cites Barrett’s statement about the New Testament use of the Greek term *euangelizo* and its cognates to mean “to spread the good news of the gospel—to preach, to persuade, to call to faith in Christ.”

Father-and-son writers, Win Arn and Charles, incorporate the “persuasion” aspect of evangelism into their definition. According to them, effective evangelism requires “proclaiming Jesus Christ as God and Savior and persuading people to become His disciples and responsible members of His Church.”³

Darius Salter emphasizes the “community” aspects of true evangelism, pointing up the reality that evangelism is not generally something done merely by individuals alone but by the people of God as a whole—the faith community. His working definition for *evangelism* is “whatever the community of God does to make people new creatures in Christ Jesus.”⁴ Sullivan would agree. He states, “To accomplish our mission, total participation is essential.”⁵

Donahue’s reference to the Greek word *anthropoid* (that appears in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17 about Jesus calling his early disciples to leave their fish-catching business and enter the people-catching business) is helpful. I share his view that Jesus’ use of *anthropoid* is an indicator that Jesus intended our fishing-for-people evangelism to occur among the whole of humankind. “The world is my parish”—John Wesley’s oft-quoted statement—reveals that the founder of Methodism saw the “big picture.”

I concur with Donahue’s view regarding Jesus’ words in John 4:35 about our seeing the fields as being “white already to harvest.” The announcement Jesus made to his followers about the “whiteness” or ripeness of the harvest stresses, as Donahue says, “the urgency and the timeliness for gathering the harvest.” Demographic data ought also to give enormous motivation and impetus to our evangelistic endeavors. Tens of thousands of people die daily without ever having heard one intelligible (to them) word about the world’s only Savior. Paul of Tarsus, the great pioneer missionary, powerfully makes this point with his rhetorical questions recorded in Romans 10:14-15. One of them that we know well, in verse 14b, asks “how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”

I agree with Oswald J. Smith's statement at mission conferences, "No one has the right to hear the gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once." My former Asbury Theological Seminary evangelism professor, Robert Coleman, agrees about the dire necessity for people who have never heard about Jesus to hear the Good News so that they may be "saved" from eternal death. He writes, "Many churchmen have such an all-inclusive view of discipleship that the specific work of rescuing perishing souls from hell scarcely receives attention."⁶

We must never view evangelism merely as something human—as simply what *we* do. We must see true evangelism as resulting from vital, Spirit-enabled, Christ-exalting person-to-person relationships. "Give me one divine moment when God acts," writes Dennis F. Kinlaw, "and I say that moment is superior to all the human efforts of man throughout the centuries."⁷ God is the sovereign initiator of all true evangelism. Kinlaw has sounded a clear note as to the supreme plans and power of God to guide and empower us in evangelism. When that occurs, questions about such issues as laity versus clergy relative to accomplishing the "supreme task of the church," as John T. Seamands calls our mission, become irrelevant.⁸

In a letter John Wesley sent to his brother Charles (dated March 25, 1772), he wrote, "You and I are called to this; to save souls from death; to watch over them as those that must give account!" In a later letter to Charles (dated April 26, 1772), John wrote, "Your business, as well as mine, is to save souls. When we took Priests' orders, we undertook to make it our one business."⁹

"You have nothing to do but save souls," John Wesley told his pastors. He explained the task as "to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord."¹⁰ Wesley would say, of course, that it is the Lord who actually does the "saving." But, he clearly meant that our *main* assignment is to bring people into the kingdom of God.

3. FURTHER DEPTH AND FEATURES TO EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Wesley did not stress evangelism to the neglect of disciple making, "social holiness" that helped to meet the needs of whole persons as vital to the transformation that Christ and his

church seek to bring to people and to society, theological education, or the rest of the gospel mandate.

To “save souls” is an all-encompassing assignment God gives to Christians. It includes for pre-Christian people the Holy Spirit’s work to help them become receptive, as well as to experience initial salvation, full salvation or “entire sanctification,” to grow in grace, and to be incorporated into the church as vital workers for our Lord. The motto of Asbury Theological Seminary captures the essence of John Wesley’s refusal to dichotomize or trichotomize persons or their life and work for Christ’s glory and for other people’s good. The motto is “Head and Heart go Hand in Hand.”

Bill Sullivan, while he was still the director of the Evangelism and Church Growth Department for the Church of the Nazarene, often said, “Evangelism is making disciples.”¹¹ The Master’s mandate to the church is a disciple-making mandate, not a mere convert-making one. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*¹², Robert Coleman’s classic book on how Jesus intends his church to fulfill the Great Commission, shows the strategy Jesus himself used and the strategy he intends the church to use for winning a world of people. It requires the church to devote itself to making converts into true disciples of Jesus.

This includes “the *oikos* factor.” Arn and Arn use this term to call us to practice the *oikos* evangelism that the early Christians “lived out.” You know that “*oikos*” is the Greek word for “household.” They explain, “In the Graeco-Roman culture *oikos* described not only the immediate family in the house but also included servants, servants’ families, friends, and even business associates.”¹³ This “natural” environment for evangelism, based on people’s homes and existing relationships with extended family members and people in the community, “works” if we “work our webs.” By “webs” they mean networks of common kinship, common friendship, and common associates.¹⁴ *Web* or *oikos* relationships offer us natural networks for sharing the Good News of God’s saving love and power in the normal context of our daily living and working.

Church of the Nazarene World Mission Department Director, Louie Bustle, promotes “natural church growth.” It is the main kind of evangelism and growth that is effective and that

lasts. Arn and Arn push their point further to show, similar to John Wesley’s view of “parish,” that any church’s potential congregation is “the cumulative group of church members’ extended families and webs of influence.”¹⁵

The world’s largest church—that is an immense cluster of mini-congregations—grew to include hundreds of thousands of congregants by doing its “web work” well. In his book about Seoul’s Central Full Gospel Church, former associate of Dr. Cho, John Hurston, describes how hundreds of people are “caught” for Christ every week of the year. A man, standing in front of the church, said to some people: “Once you get into one of these home cell units, you can’t get out, for you are caught in the web!”¹⁶

The church’s vast, intricately organized “home cell unit system” observes principles and employs strategies that McGavran called “the bridges of God.” Her people joyously keep their *kinship* and *friendship* bridges in good repair so that those they care about and naturally relate to closely in their daily lives may cross over those “bridges” to come to Christ. Particularly in Asia, and throughout the South Pacific for the most part, cultural factors and dynamics make the “natural” evangelism strategy, style, and lifestyle about as workable today as it was in the world of the first century.

Someone has said, regarding true teaching, “Tell them and they will forget. Show them and they will remember. Involve them and they will understand.” To be genuine and enduring, evangelism must be “existential.” By *existential*, I mean that we must wed theory and practice. Eugene Peterson, in his introduction to Ephesians for *The Message* translation of the Bible, aptly describes the essential unity that *belief* and *behavior* should share, illustrating the need to weave evangelism theories, methods, and strategies into a vital lifestyle tapestry of “doing” practical evangelism. About Paul’s blending of belief and behavior, Peterson uses a medical metaphor to say, “He begins with an exuberant exploration of what Christians believe about God, and then, like a surgeon skillfully setting a compound fracture, ‘sets’ this belief in God into our behavior before God so that the bones—belief and behavior—knit together and heal.”¹⁷

Christ commissions us to be real-life, Savior-and-salvation-bearing evangelists who “disciple,” mentor, and equip others to be real-life evangelists. Christ’s satisfied-customer,

human-advertisement, authentic witness-bearers about his great salvation, with convincing urgency tell everyone they can the exciting Good News about what Christ can do that no other person or power can do. They tell it well and compellingly by highlighting what he has done for *them*.

A prime New Testament example of this is the woman who met Jesus at Jacob's well. The tremendous transformation that Jesus' unconditional love, acceptance, and forgiveness produced in her sent her running to Sychar—her own village—joyously shouting to every available villager something like, “Come quick; meet a man who changed me completely. I can't keep it a secret; what he did for me he can do for you!”

This it's-too-good-to-keep-to-myself enthusiasm activated and energized Spirit-filled early Christians. In the Book of Acts—that powerful primer on personal and public evangelism—powerfully depicts the natural, Christ-revealing lifestyle of the followers of “the way.” People whose lives are living-and-breathing testimonies show the certainty and joy that spring from their personal relationship with the living Christ. They give silent and spoken witness to the saving, overflowing life of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Acts projects a fully animated “PowerPoint presentation” that shows the dynamic tension between the boldness of Christian witnesses and the blindness of Jewish status quo-preservers, plus an exciting evangelism environment in which entire communities sense that God is at work in their midst. Joy-filled heralds of Christ go from place to place gossiping the Good News about Jesus—God among us! Through them, God is speaking a language people understand—the language of unmistakable life change! God is acting in ways that heal, help, and save people!¹⁸ The supernatural working of God through his people helps other people to open their hearts and lives to God. Soon, they too get in on the mighty acts of God as he lives in them and acts through them. This is effective evangelism in action!

The Church of the Nazarene has a Book-of-Acts-style evangelism plan that is easy to miss or to mistake for a modern “discovery.” Its names include “Each One Reach One,” “Each One Win One,” and “Impact Evangelism.” It contains components like “Each One Pray for Ten” and “Big Brother / Big Sister” disciple-making and mentoring strategies. In fact, it is as old as

the Book of Acts and as new as the innovations Luz Tamayo's Taytay First Church—east of Manila, Philippines—has made in allowing each person to pray for *more* than ten people and allowing small groups to operate differently than the “Impact Evangelism” plan describes.

A part of the genius of “Each One Win One” evangelism includes its being like the evangelism described in the Book of Acts in its simplicity and in its mobilization and utilization of the *laos* (all the people of God), plus the fact that it is workable in any culture. Though it needs little adaptation, it is quite adaptable. Louie Bustle, Bruno Radi, Jerry Porter, and others designed key components of “Each One” evangelism to help draw everyone into personal participation regardless their talents, temperaments, or spiritual gifts.

The “Big Brother / Big Sister” strategy helps make converts into true disciples and harvest workers. In post-Christian, postmodern culture, according to Wes Tracy, “mentoring emerges as the most promising method of passing the Light to the next generation.” He explains, “That means spending more time with fewer people as we teach the faith by example, counsel, coaching, and modeling.”¹⁹ Tracey asserts, “That means that we must become intentional about faith mentoring.”²⁰

Timothy Jones calls this “The Friendship Factor” in his book by that title, stating, “Spirituality should always strengthen us for the battle of faith, not encourage a retreat into an insulated, isolated inner world. Helping another reminds us that the goal of Christian growth is greater than our own warm feelings. It reminds us that God cares deeply about a whole world of people.”²¹

Since this is a theology conference, I include an extended quote from Salter that abounds with sound theology. He writes the following:

Evangelism at its best is not defined as an activity but as a force for good, invading and beating back the powers of evil. It is the light where darkness prevails; it is the right where wrong dominates; it is the teacher where ignorance blinds; it is the truth where falsehood misleads; it is the liberty where self enslaves; it is life in the face of death; it is consolation in the midst of sorrow; it is bread in the emptiness of hunger; it is forgiveness in the grip of condemnation; it is the victor in the hour of defeat; it is peace in the rage of turmoil; it is the healer in the agony of affliction; it is the deliverer from the tyranny of oppression; it is the

savior when all else in life has failed. Evangelism is the personification of the victorious Christ in life's every deed and word.²²

Even with all of the colorful definition, description, and dynamics of evangelism that Salter has so vividly “paints” as word pictures we know that “the half has not been told.” In my conclusion and application section, I will let stories help tell more of the story of effective evangelism.

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

In my view, one may distill the essence of the theology of evangelism from biblical answers to the question: *From God's view, what is “evangelism”?* I believe it is—among other things—seeking what is lost, loving what is unloved, and rescuing the perishing. God cares about lost people!

In God's estimate, lost people are like *hidden treasure* of such exceeding worth as to send him searching and, when he finds it, make him willing to give up everything in order to buy the field in which it lies buried so he may make the treasure his very own. In the mind and heart of God, *people* are that treasure.

Lost people, to God, are like the *peerless pearl* a person pursues throughout a lifetime. The quest becomes his all-consuming passion and obsession, pushing him relentlessly onward to find the fabled pearl that is without peer. When finally he does find it, he gives up all that he has in order to possess that pearl of incalculable worth. In the mind and heart of God, *people* are that pearl.

To God, lost people are like one pathetic *sheep* that wanders off and becomes hopelessly lost, alone, in grave danger. The shepherd's compassion for the single sheep drives him—despite the fact that it is only one dumb sheep, and his unceasing care for many other sheep has left him exhausted—to search for it. He keeps searching, calling, and listening until finally he finds the sheep, and puts himself at risk in order to rescue it from certain death that would have come if *he* had not come. In the mind and heart of God, *people* are that lost sheep.

To God, lost people are like a single *silver drachma*, one of ten precious coins sewn into a young wife's bridal tiara. It came loose and became lost. Her search is anything but casual; it is desperate! She leaves no rug that is "unturned," no piece of furniture "unmoved," and no square inch of flooring in her house un-swept until she finally finds her special silver coin. Her spirit soars in having reclaimed what is so precious to her! In the mind and heart of God, *people* are that lost keepsake coin.

To the Lord, lost people are *two sons* lost from their loving father—an away-from-home son who has gone far and deep into sin; a stay-at-home son who has closed his heart to his loving father to cover his seething resentment. The father's deep, unconditional love for his sons moves him toward each of them. In the mind and heart of God, *people* are those two lost sons.

"Grove City Biker Ministry going full throttle" was the headlines for a NCN News on-line report about one of the many evangelistic outreaches of the church of which we are members.²³ Six years ago, the church observed its first "Biker's Weekend," bringing people on sixty motorcycles. Over 9,000 people came to participate in the latest "Biker's Weekend," and hundreds of people came to saving faith in Jesus. The Grove City (Ohio) Church of the Nazarene's Biker Ministry operates every day of the year and has its own website.²⁴

It is a church with 3,000 people in average attendance in its three worship services each weekend—one on Saturday night and two on Sunday morning. The congregation practices lifestyle evangelism as well as "event evangelism." Even if there were no special events to draw pre-Christian people to worship services, still many people would come to the Savior because of the winsome witness during the week by the members with their lives and lips. But, there *are* many special events, each designed to draw people into the web of redeeming love.

Dramatic productions prior to Easter and Thanksgiving, as well as at Christmas time, attract thousands and make an impact upon entire communities. Easter dramatic musical performances drew over 20,000 this year. Monthly interactive worship music "concerts" are a major drawing card for the church. The church operates its own school that touches whole families for Christ. The church leaves little to chance. All the members help one another discover ways to get involved in a concerted effort to, as Wesley put it, "wins souls." They know

that God is not willing for one person to perish, and *they* are not willing to *be* or *do* less than their very best at introducing people to Jesus.

Paul writes, in Colossians 2:6, “Now do what you’ve been taught. School’s out; quit studying the subject and start *living* it.”²⁵ The application for us with regard to evangelism is not that we should stop studying evangelism but that we must not merely *study* evangelism, we must *do* evangelism and do it well.

Dr. Donahue, in the beginning of his paper, listed a few of the myriad methods and strategies for evangelism that people seek to employ today. In ending this response paper, with its litany of words about evangelism, I leave you with a quote that suggests why we are not more successful, moving past mere evangelism principles and going farther into evangelism practice. “After all is said and done, more is said than done.”

I pray that it will not be true for us and for those we influence, but that we will be authentic pastoral educator-theologians who actually, effectively *do* the work of evangelism, and equip and empower others to do effective evangelism.

ENDNOTES

WITH OCCASIONAL BRIEF ANNOTATION

¹Darius Salter, *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 265.

²David Watson, *Called & Committed*, (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1982) [The Howard Snyder quote comes from his book, *The Community of the King*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977)].

³Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984), 129

⁴Darius Salter, *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 24.

⁵Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984), 10 [The Sullivan quote is from the book's introduction by Bill Sullivan].

⁶Robert E. Coleman, *Evangelism on the Cutting Edge*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1986), 137.

⁷Robert E. Coleman, *One Divine Moment*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1970), 5 [Note: The Dennis F. Kinlaw quote provides the title for this book and it appears in full at the beginning of the book].

⁸John T. Seamands, *The Supreme Task of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1964.

⁹John Wesley, *Wesley's Works*, 1872 Jackson edition, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1958), vol. 12, 138-139.

¹⁰Robert E. Coleman, *"Nothing to do But to Save Souls": John Wesley's Charge to His Preachers*, (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press), 1990 [Note: The title for this book and the full quote given at the very beginning of the book provides the quote].

¹¹Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984), 9.

¹²Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 18.

¹³Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984), 28.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶John W. Hurston and Karen L. Hurston, *Caught in the Web* (Seoul, Korea: Mountain Press, 1977), 12.

¹⁷Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 2125.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1966.

¹⁹Wesley D. Tracy, Gary Cockerill, Donald Demaray, and Steve Harper, *Reflecting God*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2000), 168.

²⁰Wesley D. Tracy, E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, and Morris A. Weigelt, *The Upward Call*, (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 179.

²¹Timothy Jones, *The Friendship Connection*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993), 111.

²²Darius Salter, *American Evangelism: Its Theology and Practice*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 378.

²³NCN News, September 12, 2003, website: <http://www.ncnnews.org>

²⁴Grove City (Ohio, USA) Church of the Nazarene's "Biker Ministry" website: <http://www.gccn.org/virtual/bikerministry/index1.asp>

²⁵Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 2146.