

CHAPTER 2

THE WORK OF EVANGELISM AND CHURCH PLANTING

A. The Work of Evangelism

What then is the evangelistic task of the Canadian church? Some would suggest that growth 'out' in service to meet the pressing temporal needs of the world is fully evangelism. Some would suggest that *everything* the church does, if motivated by the glory of God, is to be viewed, properly speaking, as evangelism.

Yet biblical evangelism which produces growth in the kingdom of God in and through its servant the church, requires more careful definition. Evangelism as God desires it, we would contend along with Dr. C. Peter Wagner,¹ involves at least four stages:

1. Presence: Evangelism begins with the dynamic presence of God's people in the world. This presence is never to be passive, but continually active and helpful to the real needs of all people. The presence of God's people should be salt and light responding to the hurts and needs of fallen humanity. The apostle Peter, in the first century, reminded

God's people of their unique identity:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. For once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (I Peter 2:9-10)

A Christian's awareness of his/her unique identity as a child of God, is to result in a significant positive effect on those persons who now live in his/her presence: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us" (I Peter 2:12).

The presence of Christians in society is to have the effect of letting its members know that the King reigns, and is surely coming to visit His people: an awareness which is one of the necessary effects of evangelism.

Being present in such a way that people understand that God exists, however, is not all that the bible means by evangelism. For those who "glorify God on the day He visits us" (I Peter 2:12), this passage implies, remain nevertheless pagans. More than a knowledge of God is required (James 2:19). People need to know not only that God exists, but that He has made provision and desires to be their Savior.

2. Proclamation: For this reason a specific, biblically defined, proclamation must be added to the dynamic, holy presence of God's people. The verb euaggelizesthai means

'to bring good news': as a runner, in the days before electronic communication, came running with news of victory.²

Specifically, the gospel is the 'good news' of the coming of the kingdom of God. It is good news *about* God *from* God for us. It is then God's good news, not ours. For this reason, as David Watson makes clear, "any twist, distortion, or alteration to the gospel made by man is extremely serious."³

Jesus Christ has come to bring the kingdom to those who are yet in rebellion against God, to save them from the eternal consequences of that rebellion: the wrath of God which is surely coming. God's means for averting His just wrath against those who participate in the rebellion, and of reconciling those who now respond in faith back to a righteous relationship with Himself, is the death of His own son, Jesus the Christ, on a cross, in behalf of all who repent.⁴

The cognitive content of this gospel is neither complex nor designed to titillate the creative capacity of the wise - it is, in fact, beneath the intelligence of some who consider themselves wise (I Corinthians 1:18-25). Rather it is basic information, planned and given by God, which even the simple can understand and to which all must accept or reject.

In order for even the simplest expression of the kerugma to be understood by and find response in the human heart, it

must be proclaimed clearly to those in whose presence Christians seek to live redemptively as salt and light. The gospel of God must further be proclaimed in such a way that individuals and groups who hear it have a valid opportunity to respond fully and accept Jesus Christ as eternal savior. The apostle Paul celebrates the gift of the One who proclaims the good news of the offer of God's salvation:

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

(Romans 10:14-15)

Is the joyous task of evangelism completed when the church has established its presence in the nation by establishing churches in Canada's larger communities and by proclaiming the gospel from those pulpits on Sunday mornings? No.

3. Persuasion: The goal of evangelism has not been reached until those who have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and have been given a valid opportunity to accept Christ as Lord have also been persuaded by the Spirit of the Living God personally to accept their Savior, to repent, believe, and join in worship, fellowship and ministry in a local church. Evangelism is not good news to those who have not yet accepted it.

Some argue that the task of evangelism is complete when the news of the coming of the kingdom of God has been

communicated and understood. Some of those who hold this view maintain that the task of persuasion is in fact God's, and not that of the church. This ideological extreme was seen when William Carey, the father of the modern missionary movement, stood to propose to a group of fellow pastors the formation of a missionary society. The chairman of the group countered: "Sit down, young man. When God is pleased to convert the heathen, He will do it without your aid or mine."

Leighton Ford suggests the theme song of this position might be celebrated in these words:

Sit down, oh man of God,
The Kingdom He will bring
Just how and when and where He wilt;
You cannot do a thing.⁵

The evidence of scripture however, particularly in the Book of Acts, reveals the evangelist as actively, boldly and directly participating in God's work of persuasion. We would cite some such passages:

Acts 13:43: Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabus, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Acts 17:2-4: As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,' he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks

and not a few prominent women.

Acts 18:4: And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

Acts 26:28: Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

Acts 28:23f: So when they had appointed him to a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

Passages such as these indicate the direct involvement of the evangelist in the work of persuasion. We must not be involved in God's work of persuasion in any lesser way.

The book of Acts challenges the church in another aspect of persuasion. Not only was verbal persuasion used but God added also the ministry of power through miraculous signs and wonders in persuading people to follow Christ. For an appreciation of the vital role of this biblical aspect of persuasion such passages as Acts 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 13, 14, 16, and 19 should be consulted.

Further some argue that evangelism is complete when a person has personally received Jesus as Savior. Not so. Evangelism is not complete until those who have heard the good news of the coming kingdom of God have become active worshippers of the Living God involved in extending His kingdom by contributing the exercise of their personal spiritual gifts for ministry in a local church.

In the scriptures, whenever a person responds to the good news of the coming of the kingdom of God that person is added to the church that is servant and representative of the kingdom. Each person who becomes a fellow citizen of God's people and a member of God's household is "joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:19ff). The scriptures know nothing of the modern concept of a theoretically evangelized Christian who remains outside of the Christian community. God cares about the formation of His church and wishes to add to it continually in preparing a bride for His son.

A most helpful biblical definition of the work of evangelism was framed for the church in 1918 by the Anglican Archbishops' Committee of Inquiry into the Evangelistic Work of the Church:

To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus 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.⁶

This careful definition can continue to serve the church of Jesus Christ in Canada well.

B. Extending God's Kingdom Through the Growth and
Reproduction of His Church

As the church becomes faithfully and redemptively present in Canada, actively proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God and persuading those who respond to serve Christ as their King in the fellowship of His church, God will extend

His dominion over Canada from sea to sea (Psalm 72:8).

This growth will take place in four balanced forms.

1. Internal Growth: critically important and takes place in several ways:

- a) Growth in grace and quality of relationship with Christ and obedience to his teaching.
- b) Many Canadians are church members but do not understand the kingdom of God and are not committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. When they die, they are not prepared to stand before the great white judgment throne of God (Revelation 20:11ff). These nominal Christians need to be converted and mobilized for useful service in the kingdom of God.
- c) The church needs also to grow in maturity in three dimensions:
 - (1) spiritual growth, through the disciplines of prayer, fellowship with God, personal and corporate worship, biblical literacy, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, ethical awareness and obedience, the development of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and individual readiness to enter eternity,
 - (2) growth in sharing community, by learning to develop and express mutual commitment, sharing materially with others, being vulnerable, giving and receiving the ministry of prayer, exercising discipline and spiritual gifts in interpersonal ministry, and fulfilling each of the many biblical 'one-another'

mandates,

(3) growth in service to those in the outside community and world, in ministering to the poor, to those who are ill, elderly, unwanted, or who function with other handicaps, through local service projects, crisis lines, counselling and many other practical expressions of help and kindness.

Internal growth in quality and quantity is called E-0 growth and is pleasing to God.

2. Expansion growth is net numerical growth in the number of persons in a local church who are coming to know Christ and to be trained to serve as his disciples in the kingdom of God. This growth in numbers can come from three sources:

- a) biological growth is growth which comes from children born into the believing community. As children and teens grow up in the church there comes for each a time of decision. God assumes no grandchildren. Each generation must decide for or against practical and active allegiance to Jesus Christ. Avoiding this critical decision, or neglecting careful subsequent nurturing by the church, produces dropouts during the teen years. The church is always but one generation from extinction.
- b) transfer growth is growth which occurs when Christians move from one local church to another. Usually this change takes place due to social mobility or because a

person believes he or she will better be able to grow in new church. Transfer growth is spiritually beneficial only if the person becomes a more effective disciple of Jesus Christ in his or her new church.

- c) conversion growth is the numerical growth in a local church when those outside the church hear the gospel, believe, repent, and become active members of that church. Conversion growth takes place as non-Christians are converted and join the church.

Expansion growth into a church from any of these means generally takes place within the basic social and cultural milieu of that local church. Growth into a local church from the outside community without the new believer crossing any social or cultural barrier is called E-1 growth and is pleasing to God.

What kind of expansion growth rate is to be sought by a local church as most desirable? The answer to that important question varies depending on the nature and circumstances of that particular church and its surrounding community, but Dr. C. Peter Wagner suggests the following guidelines as a basis of comparison:

twenty five percent growth per decade is to be considered marginal. It is a rate of growth which suggests that the church is not even retaining children born into the church.

fifty percent growth per decade is to be considered fair.

50% growth per decade is generally considered to be the average rate of biological growth in most cultures. Children are being retained but few people outside the church are being won to active discipleship.

one hundred percent growth per decade is satisfactory growth. Some outsiders are being regularly won to active discipleship.

two hundred percent growth per decade is commendable growth.

three hundred percent growth per decade is outstanding growth.

five hundred percent or more growth per decade may be considered incredible.⁷

Growth which is too rapid, if not well managed, may endanger the well-being of a church. However, Dr. George W. Peters suggests that a "creative and well-staffed church should be able to integrate and socialize an annual increase of 20 to 25 percent [i.e. 500% to 850% growth per decade] without endangering its quality."⁸

Such considerations may raise further questions such as, "When is a local church large enough?" and, "Is every church to grow indefinitely?" We may answer the second question in this way: few churches, if any, are called to grow indefinitely, and even the most successful churches normally do not continue their growth beyond a human lifetime.

When can a church be considered to be full-grown? A local

church, for our purposes, may be considered numerically full-grown when it is large enough for the efficient functioning of its own identified philosophy of ministry, including the accomplishment of its ministry goals, and large enough to participate effectively in the extension growth of the larger church.⁹

3. Extension growth takes place as the number of churches in a given social or cultural group are multiplied. Church planting is the most basic and effective evangelistic method devised by God for reaching any nation or people group. It was the primary task of the Apostle Paul and should be the foremost objective of the modern church. David Hesselgrave argues in an historical assessment: "Proportionally, too much emphasis has been placed upon multiplying converts - and not nearly enough emphasis has been placed on multiplying congregations."¹⁰

A further development of reasons for a priority focus on church planting must be deferred to chapter three.

Extension growth of the church within its social and cultural grouping is known as E-1 evangelism. Extension growth is essential for increasing the percentage of Canadians in any given cultural group who are being won into the kingdom of God. God is pleased with extension growth.

4. Bridging growth is the planting of new churches across significant social, racial, or cultural barriers. Extension growth must always cross at least one barrier; that of faith and repentance. In bridging growth, however, the barriers to

church planting are more formidable: in addition to those of faith and repentance, the barriers of language, race, or culture must be crossed.

Bridging growth which plants churches across a second barrier--race for example--is known as E-2 evangelism. Bridging growth which plants churches across a second and third barrier--race and language for example--is known as E-3 evangelism.

The Apostle Paul recognized the need to change church planting strategies to successfully cross cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers. Paul expressed his own commitment in these words:

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (I Corinthians 9: 22b-23)

In some cases, travel across significant physical distance will not involve even the methods of E-2 bridging growth. Such a situation would occur when a third generation Caucasian church planter from Halifax travels to suburban Calgary to establish a Caucasian congregation there. In other cases, travel across only a few blocks of urban geography will require E-2 or even E-3 bridging growth strategies and methods. An example of this situation would occur as one traveled from a yuppie suburb in Toronto or Vancouver, to plant a church in a first-generation section of Chinatown in either city.

In some cases, for political reasons, a Brazilian born

Canadian will be more effective in E-2 or E-3 bridging church growth to a Canadian urban community of Libyan background, than a Canadian of any other non-Caucasian background. E-2 and E-3 bridging growth relationships are challenging and always complicated.

For all these reasons E-2 and E-3 bridging growth strategies will continue to be vital to the re-evangelization of Canada. God is pleased with bridging growth.

Each of these means of church growth is necessary in order to reverse the decline of allegiance to biblical Christianity and to win Canada to obedience to the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Church growth includes "all that is involved in bringing men and women that do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership." 11

God requires, and we must do, no less.

Endnotes:

- 1 Dr. C. Peter Wagner. Lecture on "Defining Evangelism" in Church Growth I, June 1987.
- 2 David Watson. I Believe in Evangelism (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), p. 26.
- 3 Ibid. p. 33.
- 4 Roland Allen. Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours? (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 68.

- 5 Leighton Ford. The Christian Persuader (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 19.
- 6 Quoted by Dr. C. Peter Wagner, "Church Growth I" lecture notes, Fuller Seminary, June 1987.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Peters, p. 192.
- 9 Dr. C. Peter Wagner. Your Church Can Grow: Seven Vital Signs of a Healthy Church (Ventura, Calif: Regal Books, 1984), p. 106.
- 10 David J. Hesselgrave. Planting Churches Cross-Culturally (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 32.
- 11 Wagner, p. 14.