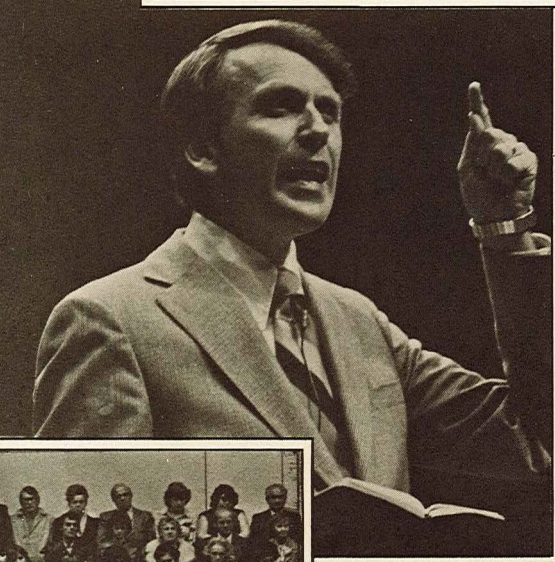


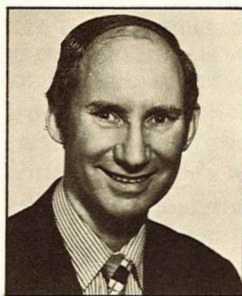
The Scope of Mass Evangelism

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FUNCTION OF MASS EVANGELISM

These words are written on the refectory wall in a theological seminary for home mission priests at Lisieux, France: "I have not to search for the subject of my meditation. It is always the same. There is a wall which separates the church from the masses; the wall must be broken down at whatever cost to give back to Christ the crowds who are lost to him."

Mass evangelism aims to do just that—break down the wall which separates the church from the masses. It seeks to give back to Christ the crowds who are lost to him. In this sense, the term "mass evangelism"—the gathering together of people for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel—is not a misnomer. The term may be misunderstood, however, unless we point out that we engage in mass evangelism so that people may come into the Kingdom of God.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS FOR MASS EVANGELISM

The objection is sometimes raised that a large percentage of those who attend evangelistic meetings are already church-going people. How does this relate to the goal of reaching those who are separated from the church? Several aspects of the question need to be examined.

1) Far more people come to a commitment to Christ from outside the church, even when the audience for the most part comprises church-attending people, than is generally appreciated. Dr. Robert Ferm found in his study of 14,000 Graham Crusade converts living on four continents, that 46

percent were unchurched prior to their decisions.

2) Some time ago Archbishop William Temple stated, "We cannot separate the evangelization of those without, from the rekindling of devotion of those within." It is obvious to the objective mind that evangelism must begin among those within the framework of the church before it can have a significant impact on those outside. In a mass evangelistic meeting, there is unparalleled potential for communication to both groups.

3) The number of people separated from the church who are present at a mass evangelistic meeting is ultimately the responsibility of the local congregation. If the participating churches have motivated and mobilized their congregations effectively, large numbers of unchurched people will be present.

4) The impact of a series of mass evangelistic meetings is not confined to the meeting time. Such meetings open the way for the gospel to be communicated by radio, television, and newspaper to every possible area of the city and surrounding communities. The evangelistic team and other Christian workers take the message to schools, service clubs, offices, factories, and other strategic social structures not normally open to such a witness. In other words, the venture should be seen not as people attending a series of meetings for a set time, but as the whole people of God penetrating every possible sphere of life that may be opened to receive the witness of the gospel during the designated period.

THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR MASS EVANGELISM

Mass evangelism finds its source in the great commission of Matthew 28:19-20: "Go preach...make disciples of all people." The population explosion means that in the world today, there are more people than ever before who know nothing of Jesus Christ.

Yet the Lord Jesus never gave a command that could not be fulfilled. His great commission can be achieved, but only if the Body of Christ functions as its Lord intended (cf. Ephesians 4:1; 1 Corinthians 12—14; Colossians 1:24—2:7).

Ken Strachan of the Latin America Mission made a study of the fastest-growing movements in their field: the Communists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Pentecostal churches. Their common denominator was obviously not their message. The three groups are respectively an anti-Christian ideology, a heretical cult, and a Christian fellowship. Strachan concluded that the growth of any movement is in direct proportion to its ability to mobilize its entire membership for continuous evangelistic action.

Mass evangelism provides a basis for the mobilization of the whole church. It calls all believers to rediscover the power of personal and group prayer. Prayer cells are multiplied in churches and homes across the area while Christians are equipped to share their faith. Contacts with non-Christians are encouraged as believers try to build bridges of friendship to those who are separated from the church. People are enlisted to sing in the choir, usher, or serve in a variety of ways that relate to their particular gifts.

For the first time in many congregations, Christian leaders learn that the church is a body of related believers called to achieve God's purpose through discipleship and witnessing. The church is summoned to action—to advance against the enemy, tear down Satan's strongholds, and establish the Kingdom of God.

When the Body of Christ rises to its true calling, the oneness of the church is demonstrated by the believers' love for each other (cf. John 13:34,35). In other words, Christians best express the nature of the church when they work together in evangelism. Mass evangelism provides an excellent basis for a demonstration of Christian love and unity.

FIVE MODELS OF MASS EVANGELISM

Model A—Mass Evangelistic Effort as Climax of Preparation

One approach to mass evangelism views the evangelistic effort as the climax of a defined period of preparation. This approach is expressed in the crusades conducted by Billy Graham and his associates around the world.

When the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association works with local churches in a given city or area, the two basic objectives of a crusade are to evangelize the community, and to strengthen the local churches. The four phases in this method of mass evangelism are labeled preliminary, preparation, penetration, and preservation.

In the preliminary stage, churches which desire to cooperate in a given city or area are drawn together to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible through a corporate witness. At this point, a crusade committee may be formed, agreement reached concerning the evangelist to be invited, the location and dates for the crusade decided, and responsible working committees established (prayer, finance, counseling and follow-up, visitation, Operation Andrew, youth, publicity, ushers, choir, etc.).

Next follows the preparation period designed to lay a foundation for the whole crusade effort. A network of prayer cells is established. Plans are implemented to raise the budget. People are trained in special classes to share their faith and counsel inquirers who will respond in the crusade meetings. Visitation of the total area is organized to invite people to attend the crusade. Believers are encouraged to follow the example of Andrew, who brought Simon Peter to Jesus, and invite their friends to attend. Young people are urged to bring their peers. Ushers are recruited for the meetings. Practical details of the auditorium setting are given proper attention. Publicity and advertising to promote interest in the witness is planned and developed, with special attention given to mass media communication.

When the crusade starts, the penetration phase begins. The focus centers on the evangelist's message. It also opens other areas of opportunity for the gospel to penetrate the life of a city. Doors are opened to the evangelist and his team which are not normally open to local believers. High schools, college campuses, service clubs, factories, office canteens, and homes provide a basis for community penetration because interest has been aroused by the crusade event.

As Christian people work together, the media take notice. Access to radio, television, and newspapers normally generated by a crusade provides an excellent forum for bringing the gospel to people who have not planned to attend the crusade.

The preservation phase begins when the first inquirer indicates an interest in making a commitment to Christ. This person is counseled personally so the way of salvation is clear. The counselor also takes the person's name, address, and other pertinent information to aid a local congregation in their follow-up. The new Christian, then, is usually guided into a neighborhood Bible study or local church. Because the goal of evangelism is the formation of mature Christians (cf. Colossians 1:28), the work of the crusade only begins with a person's commitment to Christ.

Model B—Evangelism as an Ingredient of Comprehensive Witness

A second approach sees mass evangelism as one ingredient in the mobilization of the church with all its resources for a comprehensive witness in the world. The movement responsible for laying the foundation of this concept is known as Evangelism in Depth (EID). It had its formal inception in an experiment in the Republic of Nicaragua in 1960.

The Latin America Mission has prepared the following outline stating the basic presuppositions, principles, and program of Evangelism in Depth:

- 1) Presuppositions or Convictions. a) Abundant reaping requires saturation sowing. b) Christians can and must work together in evangelism. c) When Christians pool resources for evangelism, God multiplies those resources. d) A dedicated minority can make an impact on an entire nation.
- 2) Principles. a) Mobilization of every Christian in witness. b) Mobilization within the framework of the church. c) Mobilization by local leadership. d) Mobilization with global objectives.
- 3) Program. a) Principles of determining methods—match resources with needs. b) Basic program ele-

ments are prayer, training, visitation, special projects (including social action projects), evangelistic meetings, and continuation.

Mass evangelistic meetings form an important part of the EID program. These meetings include local campaigns in each church, a united campaign in each city, and regional campaigns in which churches of surrounding cities cooperate. The climax of the year is a national campaign when Christians converge on the capital city for a great parade and final meeting.

However, the flip chart of the EID movement comments:

It is often surprising to the person first hearing about Evangelism in Depth to learn that before the evangelistic meetings even began more than half the total new converts of the year have already made their decision for Christ. It is well to keep in mind that all the phases of the program which precede the evangelistic meetings are in themselves evangelistic efforts and are not to be construed simply as preparation for the evangelistic meetings.

The theological foundation of Evangelism in Depth could be described as an ellipse whose two foci are the great commission of the church and the unity of the Body of Christ.

The basic philosophy of the Evangelism in Depth movement has been crystallized in the following statement:

In-depth evangelism is two things: a set of biblical goals rooted in the fundamental purpose or mission of the church; and a plan for moving a church toward these goals. The first goal is total evangelism, which has to do with mission. The second goal is total mobilization, which describes the church functioning as the Body of Christ. The third goal is visible unity, emphasizing the need for making visible the oneness of the Body of Christ.

In the years that followed the 1960 Nicaraguan experiment, the strategy was developed in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador. What happened in Latin America subsequently

inspired similar efforts by Christians in other parts of the world.

Almost simultaneously with the Evangelism in Depth developments in Latin America came the New Life For All movement in Nigeria. This indigenous evangelistic effort aimed to bring the gospel to every person, first in Nigeria and then in all of Africa. It was born in the heart of the Reverend Gerald O. Swank, a missionary of the Sudan Interior Mission, who worked at that time in the Bible Institute at Kagoro, Nigeria. The burden for total evangelization of Nigeria arose out of Jesus' words: "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Also, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 4:34 and 17:4).

Dr. George Peters points out that the secret behind the movement, besides the gracious and sovereign ministry of the Holy Spirit, was the rediscovery of some simple and basic scriptural evangelistic principles. These, in turn, demanded a drastic rethinking of the method, gradually leading to a new pattern of evangelism.

Those principles may be stated in two basic formulas: 1) The total church worshipping must become the total church militant in Christian witness and evangelism. Total evangelization of the lost requires the total mobilization of all believers. 2) The practice of centripetalism must be changed into the practice of centrifugalism if the task is to be accomplished. The church must become a "going" and "sending" church. It must cease living to itself.

The method by which this idea could be realized gradually developed in the mind of Mr. Swank. In 1962, he met with Dayton Roberts of the Latin America Mission. He was encouraged by the similarities between the Evangelism in Depth movement and New Life For All, as it was unfolding. Later, as New Life For All progressed and matured, the formula for evangelization was stated as "mobilization X witness."

The plan followed in implementing this understanding was based on these premises: 1) Every Christian, without exception, according to talents and circumstances, is called

upon to be a witness for Christ. The first goal, then, even though the final result may fall short, is the mobilization of the total membership. 2) Every Christian's fellowship must center in the fellowship of the local church. The church then begins to function as it should. 3) This personal and church witness must relate to the total witness of the entire Body of Christ in the area or city. Therefore, in some practical way, a living witness must be given to the unity of the Body of Christ. There is only one gospel, so it is imperative that those who believe in Christ should unite in their testimony to him. 4) The aim must be nothing less than total and complete outreach. Therefore, we should think in terms of natural geographic or language areas. In this way, we can face the problem of fulfilling our responsibility.

A city-wide evangelistic campaign is recommended in the manual for the New Life For All movement toward the end of the year's efforts. But again the manual sounds a warning:

It has happened that the churches in a city have thought of the City Campaign as being the entire program of New Life For All. In these cases, they did not reap the benefits they would have if they had established the work on a proper basis and carried through all the steps as outlined. The City Campaign must be considered as the climax only of a long, persistent and determined effort to reach everyone in it.

Model C—Evangelism as an Extension of Celebration

A third approach to mass evangelism enables evangelism to become an extension of celebration. This is a current model of mission being developed by African Enterprise around the concept, "Festivals of Faith."

Michael Cassidy is founder and South African Team Leader of African Enterprise, an interracial organization dedicated to evangelization. In the 1970s he was joined in this task by Bishop Festo Kivengere of Uganda, who became the leader of a team of nine evangelists in East Africa.

The idea of a Festival of Faith developed from a discus-

sion that Michael Cassidy had with Dr. Ralph Winter, Director of the United States Center for World Mission. Winter expressed the view that the church ought to have moments when it could really perceive, feel, and experience its togetherness. "Why," asked Dr. Winter, "don't you try to mount a sort of combination of a country fair and an evangelistic campaign?"

The idea appealed to Cassidy. He observed that in a number of parts of the world the term "festival" has greater appeal than that of "mission" or "crusade." This title for mass evangelism has been used by other evangelists, such as Leighton Ford, who found it more acceptable in the affluent North Shore area of Chicago than the term "crusade." To many people, it is a less threatening title and depicts more succinctly the concept of Christian togetherness as the context for evangelism and mission. In this way, evangelism becomes an extension of celebration.

Kimberley, South Africa, was the location of Cassidy's first "festival" experiment. The organizations involved were pleased with the result. Here was instituted the plan for having a meeting each night of the week in a different community, followed by one meeting when all gathered at a central stadium on the weekend for an experience of Christian celebration.

This model of mass evangelism may be especially appropriate to South Africa. It helps to overcome the problem of how to have a major campaign in an area where the residential restrictions make it difficult for blacks to get to a central meeting area in the middle of a town. At the same time, it provides the opportunity for Christians of all races to experience togetherness.

In Kimberley, for example, four thousand people were present for the closing Communion service and some two thousand stayed the whole afternoon for the music festival. Michael Cassidy comments, "South Africans in many ways seem starved for this kind of experience, and they basically need and long for opportunities to relate. Perhaps our Festivals of Faith can constitute at least one type of opportunity."

Model D—Evangelism for Church Growth and Church Planting

Still another approach may aim to use mass evangelism in the context of church growth plans for existing churches, as well as for actually starting new churches. One exciting experiment along these lines has been undertaken in Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia in crusades conducted by Luis Palau.

Objectives for these city-wide evangelistic crusades were the growth of participating churches and strategic planting of new churches in Rosario, Argentina.

Specific goals were delineated in a workshop held fourteen months prior to the crusade. The combined membership of the twenty participating churches was 1,769. Six months after the November 1976 crusade, these twenty churches had grown to 2,566—a 42.5 percent increase in seventeen months, the equivalent of a 25.3 percent annual growth rate; in contrast, during the previous ten-year period, the annual growth rate was 1.4 percent. But more significantly, the participating churches planned for external as well as internal growth. They started 42 new congregations now thriving in strategic sections of the city.

Similar efforts to achieve church growth were made in Uruguay and Bolivia and succeeded in combining church growth approaches with mass evangelism. Luis Palau comments:

I consider this a real breakthrough in mass evangelism. We've concerned ourselves primarily with moving vast acres of grain, i.e., securing public decisions. Far too often these have resulted in gleaning only a few sheaves of responsible members. We've considered follow-up as something that takes place after the evangelistic harvest is over. What we really need is to build into every phase of our evangelistic planning a goal-oriented concept of follow-through. And the difference is more than semantics. It's the basic difference between gathering grain into barns or leaving it in the fields to rot.

Model E—Evangelism as a Catalyst of Continuing Outreach

A recent variant on all these approaches has utilized mass evangelism as a catalyst to develop evangelistic outreach to the community on a continuing basis.

In addition to continuing with Model A, Leighton Ford and his team have recently developed another model which seeks to enable the local congregation to develop a life-style of reaching out. In this concept, the crusade phase becomes a catalyst to inspire continuing evangelism, rather than the climax of efforts.

The theme of this reach-out process is "Reach Out Now" (cf. John 4:35), and all activity points to that end. It is hoped that this life-style may be achieved by a local congregation prior to the celebration or crusade phase. The crusade then becomes one more way for the local church to reach out to others, rather than the expression of the sum total of the church's evangelistic endeavor over a period of time.

Principles of the reach-out process are based on the understanding that the church is the extension of the Incarnation. It must therefore embody in its life and ministry the principles of the ministry of Jesus (cf. Matthew 9:35-10:7; Luke 10:17-22).

These principles have been defined as:

1) Establishing Specific Objectives. Helping the local congregation (not just the leadership) to discover together what specific goals the Lord is calling them to achieve in the Kingdom of God.

2) Identifying People's Needs. Assisting the local congregation to break through the barriers which isolate the church from people in the community and enable Christians to "build bridges of friendship" to people.

3) Equipping the People of God. Motivating the entire congregation to be the people of God and enabling them with confidence to share their faith.

4) Reaching Out and Discipling. Encouraging Christians to relate to people in their life situation, with special emphasis on the use of the Christian home in this connec-

tion, sharing their friendship and faith in a way that will stimulate spiritual growth.

5) Celebrating and Evaluating. Joining together in worship and thanksgiving to celebrate God's working in his world and to reach out to others in the context of praise and fellowship.

Reach-out resources have been developed which are offered to enable churches to implement the principles outlined.

The effect of these concepts upon the crusade is to provide Christians with a keen sense of participation arising from their prior involvement at the congregational level. They are less inclined to come to the crusade as "spectators" of what others are doing, having already experienced the joy of reaching out to others.

Another important aspect of the reach-out process is that after the crusade, in the context of the celebration phase, less of a letdown is experienced by the participants than in Model A. Christians return to their churches and continue to implement the principles to which their congregation is committed, having regarded the crusade as another enabling resource.

THE QUALITY OF THE EVANGELIST

As a communicator of the Christian gospel, Leighton Ford possesses unusual gifts which make his ministry particularly suited for preaching to contemporary society.

The content of his addresses has a wide appeal to people of all ages and backgrounds. It embraces those who have an academic and intellectual approach to life as well as people whose educational experience is more limited. Its focus is always to the whole man, his intellect, conscience, emotion and will.

Factors inherent in this popular response to his preaching are:

- (1) Leighton Ford's subjects and starting point are at a significant level of interest on probable felt-need of a cross section of his audience, e.g., "Loneliness," "Youth's Questions," "Love, Sex and Marriage," "Happiness."

He is able to sustain interest in his topic with a logical development of the theme, illustrations which are relevant to life today and appropriate humor.

- (2) Another quality of his preaching is in the choice of language. Words are used which are easily understood by the total audience. Evangelical clichés are avoided. When an occasional doctrinal or scriptural phrase is used which may not be understood by some of the audience, he clearly explains the meaning by the use of an apt illustration.
- (3) The style of his preaching is also different from that of the generally accepted stereotype of evangelistic preaching. It is compellingly authentic without being dogmatically authoritarian. With a strong biblical emphasis throughout, Leighton Ford elucidates the truth in a way that carries his audience along with him. It is frequently affirmed in the evangelist's own personal experience, in a way that enables him to maintain empathy with people to whom he is speaking.
- (4) Leighton Ford has also impressed vast crowds around the world by the clarity and restraint of his evangelistic invitation. Often, at the outset of a message, Leighton Ford will explain why at the end he will give an opportunity for people to make a public response. The invitation is always expressed in terms which clearly establish to whom it is addressed. It is never prolonged nor emotionally manipulative.

Another area in which the evangelist excels is in TV and radio interview programs. Often, people are invited to phone in their questions by a program compere and Leighton Ford responds. In both of these situations, the feature of the dialogue is the way the evangelist not only gives convincing answers to the questions raised, but at the same time disarms any antagonistic attitude by warmly identifying with the questioner.

This gift of responding to people against the background of their life's experience is never more evident than when Leighton Ford is asked to address special groups such as teachers, doctors, university students, civic clubs, and in-

insurance groups. His ability to relate the Christian faith to the particular background and understanding of the group he is addressing is exceptional. A typical comment once made following a luncheon of insurance men at which Leighton Ford was the guest speaker: "Before Leighton Ford went into the ministry, was he in the insurance field?"

Leighton Ford's special gifts and calling as an evangelist place him in the tradition of another of whom it was said, "They heard him [John] speak and followed Jesus."

CRITICISMS OF MASS EVANGELISM

1) Concerning the method. Despite its use by our Lord and by great evangelists of the past, there are some critics of mass evangelism who would describe it as a social anachronism with limited appeal in the contemporary world.

While mass evangelism will not appeal to every person, it does provide an opportunity for non-Christians to hear an explanation of the gospel within the context of a crowd and without becoming self-conscious. Rarely does another opportunity exist to do this in today's society.

The appeal of mass evangelism to a wide cross section of the community, including young people, depends largely upon those planning each program. It must relate to each subculture it seeks to reach.

2) Concerning the messenger. There are those who claim that mass evangelism fosters a personality cult which many people find distasteful. Let us agree that mass evangelism at this point is open to the obnoxious self-promotion of the charlatan. But if an evangelist is carefully chosen whose authenticity and integrity are above question, there is no reason why the New Testament formula cannot be repeated. "They heard John speak and followed Jesus" (John 1:37).

Some claim that apart from Billy Graham very few evangelists have sufficient charisma and drawing power to attract whole communities to mass meetings. But is personal charisma an essential qualification of an evangelist? Surely the response in attendance should arise basically from the action taken by the Christians in the churches

sponsoring the evangelistic witness. Any added contribution made by the personality of the evangelist is a plus factor.

3) Concerning the message. Critics of mass evangelism often state that the evangelist's message is too simplistic and void of social relevance. The question is, "What is the gospel?" The Lausanne Covenant described this "objective thrust of the Gospel," this "good news," this way: "that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe."

The Lausanne Covenant goes on to state: "...We affirm that evangelism and sociopolitical involvement are both part of our Christian duty.... The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead."

A basic premise is, then, that the central message of evangelism is personal as it relates to the individual. The outworking of the response to this message must be seen in society as obedience to Christ, incorporation into the church, and responsible service in the world. These three emphases should find expression in evangelistic preaching as they highlight the nature of Christian discipleship; otherwise, the evangelist's preaching may produce decisions but not disciples.

SUMMARY

The foregoing outline of various mass evangelism models being implemented around the world today highlights the importance of urging churches to carefully seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discerning the following: 1) What are the objectives desired? 2) Which model of mass evangelism embodies the approach most appropriate for the participating churches at this time? 3) Which evangelist will present the gospel in a way that is relevant to the receiving community, and make the demands of Christian discipleship an integral part of the message communicated? 4) How can the most help be given local churches to mobilize their congregations for the ventures contemplated?

This brief survey of the various models of mass evangelism has highlighted one factor above others: that the effectiveness of any mass evangelism model is ultimately measured, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, by the extent to which Christians in local congregations can be motivated and mobilized to be the people of God and achieve established objectives.

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