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# Evangelism, Theology and the Church

Thorsten Prill

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TO THE SUCCESSFUL 19th century American evangelist D. L. Moody one woman said that she did not like his method of evangelism. Moody replied, 'I agree with you. I don't like the way I do it, either. Tell me, how do you do it?' The woman replied, 'I don't.' Moody retorted, 'Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.'

This well-known story suggests that evangelism is a pragmatic hands-on business. Whilst it is true that there is the danger of too much talking (and writing!) about evangelism and not enough evangelism itself, one must not overlook the fact that evangelistic practice and attitudes are determined not only by the gifts, limitations and the commitment of an evangelist, but also by theology. It is the theology of evangelism of a church, that of a local

congregation or a national church body, which deeply impacts the evangelistic strategies, the church chooses. Consequently, any church that is committed to evangelism, needs to have a clear understanding of its theology of evangelism.

## Models of Evangelism

At the heart of every theology of evangelism lies a certain basic model or definition of evangelism. When we turn to the Bible to look for the terms evangelism or evangelisation we face a dilemma. Neither terms appears in the Bible nor is there a clear cut definition of what they mean. What we do find in the New Testament are the verb *evangelizesthai* and the nouns *evangelion* and *evangelistes*. *Evangelion* is unusually translated 'Gospel' (i.e. good message or good news), but it can also describe the activity of proclaiming or announcing that good news. The verb form, likewise, refers to the activity of telling the gospel. The term *evangelistes* derives from the verb

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**Thorsten Prill** is Assistant Pastor of the German-speaking Synod of Lutheran, Reformed and United Congregations in Great Britain (Midlands District), and International Chaplain at the University of Nottingham. He studied theology at St John's College Nottingham and Cliff College, Calver, Sheffield, and holds a Master of Theology degree (British Open University), Certificate in Theology and Ministry (University of Nottingham), and Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership, Renewal and Mission Studies (University of Sheffield). He is currently studying for a Doctor of Theology degree with the University of South Africa. He has published articles on evangelism and postmodernity and children's evangelism.

*evangelizesthai* and means literally messenger of good.

When we look at the use of these words in the New Testament, it becomes clear that evangelism must be closely linked with the proclamation of the gospel. However, it should not surprise us that different models of evangelism have been construed which more or less take into account the proclamation aspect and claim to be truly biblical. There are many such models, but the following are probably the most prominent ones.

### Proclamation Model

The traditional Protestant model of evangelism is the proclamation model. The reformed Anglican theologian J.I. Packer, a prominent contemporary exponent of this approach, writes: '...evangelism is just preaching the gospel, the evangel. It is a work of communications in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces of God's message of mercy to sinners.'<sup>1</sup> This transmission of the message can be achieved through formal preaching and teaching in a church environment but also in personal contacts. For the many supporters of this model, which equates evangelism with verbal gospel proclamation, the ultimate aim of evangelism is conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. By taking the ministry of the apostle Paul as an example that Christians should follow, Packer concludes: 'Evangelizing, therefore, is not simply a matter of teaching, and instructing,

and imparting information to the mind...It is communication with a view to conversion...It is an attempt to gain, or win, or catch, our fellow-men for Christ.'<sup>2</sup>

An obvious strength of this model is its emphasis on sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and on the necessity of conversion and personal faith in Christ. Thus, the apostle Paul underlines the idea that 'faith comes from hearing the message' (Rom. 10:17), and that turning to Jesus in faith is the only prerequisite of salvation (Acts 16:31). Also, the proclamation model helps to determine if evangelism is actually taking place or not by examining if the gospel is preached or taught. Last but not least, the proclamation model seeks to do justice to the available biblical material on evangelism.

A weakness of the proclamation model is its view of the aim of evangelism. It is arguable whether conversion, i.e. turning to Christ in faith, is really the ultimate aim of evangelism. The great commission in Matthew 28:18-20, which is generally regarded as a mandate for evangelism, does not speak of converts but of disciples (*mathetes*), i.e. learners or followers. S.J. Grenz argues that this is in line with Jesus' practice as it is presented by the gospel writers: Jesus expected more from people than mere confessions. He called people to become his disciples, even if this was costly.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, it would be more appropri-

<sup>1</sup> James I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1961), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), p. 656.

ate to understand the ultimate aim of evangelism as making disciples, who are determined to become more like Jesus (Lk. 6:40, Rom. 8:29), to serve one another (Mk. 10:35-45) and to make more disciples of Christ (Mt. 28:18-20).

In *Transforming Mission* D. Bosch writes that the whole Gospel according to Matthew points to the final verses of the Great Commission. These verses are a kind of theological programme or summary of the teaching that is contained in this gospel. Because of this, Matthew 28:19-20 must not be taken out of context and thus be degraded to a mere slogan.<sup>4</sup> These verses must be interpreted in the light of the whole gospel, but especially in the light of the ethical teachings that can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the process of disciple-making also involves the teaching of kingdom values such as justice, peace and righteousness.

### Power Model

The model of power evangelism goes back to the American pastor John Wimber, who argues that Jesus himself exercised power evangelism, and therefore it is a model which Christians must follow. Wimber defines power evangelism as a highly effective evangelistic method, in which the verbal proclamation of the gospel is accompanied by supernatural signs and wonders. These signs and wonders include words of knowledge, physical heal-

ings, prophecies and exorcisms.<sup>6</sup> Their main function is to help people to overcome their resistance and thus to make them more receptive to the Christian message.<sup>7</sup>

The strength of power evangelism is its emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. It is undoubtedly true, that Christians must reckon with the work of the Holy Spirit when they share the gospel with non-Christians. Such an attitude guards them against a purely technocratic approach to evangelism.

Besides this strength there are also significant weaknesses. Firstly, there is the underlying kingdom theology, which overemphasizes the conflict between the kingdom of God and Satan. Power evangelism views all physical and psychological illness as caused by Satan. It leaves little room for the personal responsibility that human beings have for their health. It forgets that sickness is part of human life, or, as the apostle Paul writes, that our bodies are perishable (1 Cor. 15:42). Secondly, there is no proof from the New Testament that Jesus' main ministry was power evangelism and that he expected the church to get involved in it. It is true that Jesus performed miraculous healings and that healing is an important part of the church's ministry, but as L. Newbigin writes, Jesus' calling was 'to the way of suffering, rejection, and death, to the way of the cross.'<sup>8</sup> Newbigin goes on to say that Jesus bore witness 'to the

<sup>4</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> John Wimber, *Power Evangelism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> Newbigin L., *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 37.

presence of the reign of God, not by overpowering the forces of evil, but by taking full weight upon himself.<sup>9</sup> For his disciples Jesus is more than a model of divine power. He is the model of coping with the hardships of life. How else can we understand Jesus' remark in Matthew 16:24: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.'?

### Witness Model

The witness model defines evangelism as anything Christians do in order to bear witness to their faith. This may include the verbal proclamation of the gospel in public or privately, but it focuses on the way Christians live, i.e. their lifestyle, and the socio-political involvement of individuals or the church. All these activities qualify as evangelistic witness as long as they are done out of commitment to Jesus Christ. Consequently, every Christian is an evangelist, whether he or she is aware of it or not.

A great strength of the witness model is that it underlines the holistic character of the church's mission. Furthermore, it stresses that evangelism should form an integral part of the Christian life. On the other hand, this definition of evangelism seems to be too broad. W. J. Abraham comments: 'If everything we do is an act of witness, and every act of witness is a form of evangelism, then everything we do is evangelism. This invariably allows us to pretend that the church has fulfilled

its obligations...when in reality it has reduced evangelism to acts of mercy.'<sup>10</sup> In other words, there is the danger that the verbal proclamation of the gospel is neglected. But verbal proclamation is essential, since social action and personal lifestyle alone cannot communicate the content of the good news. They must be accompanied by appropriate explanation.

### Social Action Model

Related to the witness model is the social action approach. The basic idea of the social action model is that Christians respond to human needs and thus demonstrate God's love. This demonstration of God's love by human deeds will then lead to a positive response to Christianity.<sup>11</sup> This model has its roots in the social gospel movement, which developed at the end of the 19th century in the USA. One of its most prominent exponents was the Baptist theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch regards social and political power as sin.<sup>12</sup> Since capitalism is based on these powers it must be considered as a sinful system. Therefore, the largest evangelistic task of the Christian Church and of every single Christian is to convince people of this sinfulness and to awaken the desire in them to save the community

<sup>10</sup> William J. Abraham, *The Art of Evangelism* (Calver: Cliff College Publishing, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Webster, *What is Evangelism?* (London: Highway Press, 1959), p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, first published 1917, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), pp. 45-50.

<sup>9</sup> Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, p. 37.

from it. This salvation can be reached only by an intensive act of love, i.e. a collective action of the community to change the economic order.<sup>13</sup>

The action model is based on a completely horizontal understanding of salvation. Salvation is perceived as the liberation from unjust social and economic orders that oppress people. There is no idea of salvation that was accomplished by Jesus' death on the cross. There is no idea of salvation as reconciliation with God (2 Cor. 5:18-21) or as redemption from personal sin (Rom. 8:3, Col. 1:13-14). Sin is mainly understood as structural sin. Therefore, the subjective basis of salvation, i.e. personal repentance, conversion and faith, play only a minor role in this approach and are even considered with some kind of suspicion.<sup>14</sup> For Rauschenbusch the touchstone of Christian regeneration and personal salvation is a high social consciousness and not personal faith in a personal saviour.<sup>15</sup>

### Church Growth Model

According to the church growth model, which was first construed by Donald A. McGavran, evangelism must have its focus on the growth of local churches. This growth of churches can be achieved by following certain principles, which are based on biblical truths

and sociological and anthropological insights. Christian A. Schwartz, a contemporary German church growth theologian, identifies eight qualities, which show a strong correlation with the numerical growth of a church. These characteristic qualities are: an empowering leadership, a gift-orientated ministry, a passionate spirituality, functional structures, inspiring worship services, holistic small groups, need-orientated evangelism and loving relationships.<sup>16</sup> Schwarz speaks of a natural church development, which he defines as 'releasing the growth automatisms by which God himself grows his church'.<sup>17</sup>

One of the great strengths of the church growth model is that it emphasizes the importance of discipleship and the need of cultural sensitivity. Evangelism is considered to be more than verbal gospel proclamation. It is also seen as equipping and establishing new Christians in a particular culture. The great danger of this model is that numerical growth becomes the primary goal of the church. Also, it can foster the belief in human principles and thus reduce 'the role of the Holy Spirit to that of a sociological caretaker'.<sup>18</sup>

13 Walter Rauschenbusch, 'Christianizing the Social Order', in John Atherton, ed., *Social Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1994), p. 181.

14 Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, pp. 96-100.

15 Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, p. 108.

16 Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook* (Moggenhanger: BCGA, 1998), pp. 22-36.

17 Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook*, p. 21.

18 A. Scott Moreau, 'Church Growth Movement', in Walter A. Elwell, ed, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 260.

### Initiation Model

Having examined the strengths and weaknesses of the main evangelistic models, the Methodist theologian W. J. Abraham argues that evangelism should be construed as the initiation into the kingdom of God. Abraham sees evangelism as a variety of actions, which all share the intention of initiating people into God's reign.<sup>19</sup> Among these actions are the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom, the call to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ, a basic teaching of Christian theology and Christian moral tradition, the act of baptism as a prerequisite for full participation in a Christian community, as well as the equipment of new Christians to serve God in the church and the world by helping them to discover and to develop their spiritual gifts.<sup>20</sup> As the main agent for such a process of initiation Abraham calls for a new form of catechumenate.<sup>21</sup>

The initiation model seeks to do justice to the limitations and weaknesses of other prominent models of evangelism. Thus, it takes into account that the Great Commission in Matthew 28 actually speaks of disciples, baptism and instruction. Furthermore, it pays tribute to the fact that the 'kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven' is the central theme of Jesus' teaching. Also, it recognizes that the church and the kingdom of God are not identical. With the

emphasis on the kingdom it emphasizes that evangelism is a Christ-centred activity. Another strength, especially from a postmodern, post-Christian western perspective, is the idea of a revived catechumenate, which deals with all the activities of the evangelism process. However, the initiation model leaves an important question unanswered: How can the church make contact with those catechumenate candidates who have no church links in the first place?

### Evangelism in the German Protestant Church

#### The (Re-) Discovery of Mission

A good example of how much theology impacts evangelistic attitudes and practice of a church can be seen in Germany. It is the example of a church that has only recently (re-) discovered its evangelistic task.

In November 1999 the synodical meeting of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD), a community of then twenty-four Lutheran, Reformed, and United regional churches, took place in the East German city of Leipzig. The theme of the EKD synod was 'To Tell the World About God—The Task for the Mission of the Church at the Threshold of the Third Millennium'. It was the first time ever that the EKD synod had discussed the missionary task of the church in depth. At the close of the meeting the Synod made a public declaration, calling upon all congregations, full-time church workers and the laity to remember the mission-

19 William J. Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 103.

20 Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, pp. 104-105.

21 Abraham, *The logic of Evangelism*, pp. 174-179.

ary task of the Christian church.<sup>22</sup>

Members of the evangelical camp within the EKD regarded the outcome of the Leipzig synod as a kind of dawn of a new era. One well-known evangelical even spoke of a miracle, which had happened at Leipzig.<sup>23</sup> The positive reaction of some people to the Leipzig synod is understandable. In the past the areas of mission and evangelism were fairly neglected by the German Protestant Church as a whole. Evangelism was basically regarded as the ministry of evangelical Christians. Today, several years later, the question is whether the positive response to the Leipzig synod and its effect for mission and evangelism in the regional churches were justified.

### Evangelism and Proclamation

A good indicator for the role evangelism plays in the EKD regional churches today is the use of three high-profile contemporary evangelistic strategies, which are recognized and recommended by national and regional Protestant church leaders. These strategies are ProChrist, Willow Creek and Alpha.

**ProChrist** is a classic mass evange-

lisation campaign, which is held every three years. For eight days evangelistic programmes, which consist of music, interviews, drama and a sermon, are transmitted from a main venue live via satellite to locations in Germany and other European countries. At the local level, churches and para-church groups organize specific supporting programmes, but the central part of the programme comes from the main site. ProChrist 2003 was transmitted to more than 1,300 locations and attended by 1.8 million people. The organisers claim that about 30,000 people came forward to make a commitment of faith in Christ or expressed an interest in the Christian faith. Altogether, 3,712 German churches and groups were involved. Among these were 1,898 free churches and 816 EKD congregations. In addition to that, 706 congregations and youth groups of the Gnadau Union, the largest evangelical movement within the EKD, took part.<sup>24</sup> In other words, 22% of the groups involved were parish churches belonging to one of the 24 EKD regional churches, whilst 51% were free churches.

At the heart of the **Willow Creek** concept are seeker-friendly or sensitive services, which are aimed at so-called unchurched people. These services avoid traditional elements such as hymnbooks or clerical robes. Instead, they are characterised by an extensive use of modern technology (e.g. video clips), songs, which are modelled on popular music, as well as

22 Kundgebung der 9. Synode der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland auf ihrer 4. Tagung zum Schwerpunktthema 'Reden von Gott in der Welt—Der missionarische Auftrag der Kirche an der Schwelle zum 3. Jahrtausend', published in *Das Evangelium unter die Leute bringen* (Hannover: Kirchenamt der EKD, 2001), pp. 42-50 (p.42).

23 Hartmut Barend, *Worte von oben in der Praxis vor Ort—AMD Studienbrief A60* (Stuttgart: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Missionarische Dienste, 2000), p. 2.

24 ProChrist e.V., (ed.) *Berichtsheft Unglaublich. Lesen und Staunen* (Kassel: ProChrist, 2003), pp. 15-21.



messages, that show a high grade of application. To promote this specific approach Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago has spawned a global network of churches from many different denominations. In addition, it holds regular conferences and seminars. The first German conference took place in Hamburg in 1996. Since then the number of participants has grown constantly. At the last church conference (together with Alpha Germany) in 2003 28% of all conference participants were affiliated with EKD parishes while 14% belonged to the Gnadau Union and 57% were members of free churches.<sup>25</sup> In the Willow Creek Association Germany 70% of its 188 partner churches are free churches and 22% are EKD congregations.<sup>26</sup>

**Alpha**, is a process evangelism course, which is used in more than 23,000 churches around the world. Whereas in the United Kingdom there are currently Alpha courses running in 7,215 congregations,<sup>27</sup> the number of German churches registered with Alpha is relatively small. In January 2004 there are 784 churches and groups registered with Alpha Germany. 67% of these churches and groups are Baptist, Methodist, or Pentecostal free churches, and only 16% belong to the EKD.<sup>28</sup>

The survey of these three well-

known evangelistic initiatives shows that the number of EKD parishes which use these strategies are very small. Willow Creek, Alpha and ProChrist are more or less dominated by evangelical and charismatic free churches, which represent only 900,000 people or 1,5% of all church members in Germany. For the majority of EKD churches with a total membership of 26.2 million, Willow Creek, Alpha, and ProChrist are apparently not evangelistic methods they are willing to use. This raises the question of what kind of evangelistic strategies there are in the Protestant churches.

## Evangelism and Social Action

To find out more about the evangelistic situation at grassroots level a closer look at the Protestant congregations in the Rhineland can be helpful. With three million members, the Protestant Church in the Rhineland is not only one of the largest regional churches but it is also one that has been encouraged by the Leipzig Synod to take mission and evangelism seriously. The analysis of a questionnaire on the understanding of mission and evangelism, which was distributed among Rhenish pastors has led to the following results<sup>29</sup>:

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**29** In 2003 I constructed a written questionnaire to survey the understanding of mission and evangelism in selected congregations of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland. It was sent to 100 incumbent pastors, and received 52 responses. It asked for the pastors' views on the Leipzig Synod and their attitude towards contemporary forms of evangelism and mission and mission training offered by their regional church. At the time, the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland had 817 parishes and 1,491 incumbent pastors.

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**25** 'Kongress-Statistik', WillowNetz 4/2003, p. 30.

**26** Willow Creek Deutschland, <[www.willowcreek.de/gemeinden.html](http://www.willowcreek.de/gemeinden.html)>, accessed 17th January 2004

**27** *Alpha News* (March-June 2003), p. 31.

**28** Alpha Deutschland, <[www.alphakurs.de/kurse/register\\_search.php](http://www.alphakurs.de/kurse/register_search.php)>, accessed 17th January 2004

46% of the pastors asked believe that the Leipzig synod has had positive effects on the missionary work of the twenty four regional EKD churches. The majority of these ministers think that the Leipzig synod has helped to put mission on the church's agenda. The term 'mission', as one pastor puts it, has lost its 'negative flavour'. 54% of the pastors do not see any clear positive effects of the Leipzig meeting. 49% do not agree with the statement by the synod that 'the Protestant church sets the theme of faith and the missionary calling in first place'. Instead, they see the following areas as at least of equal importance: finances, church structures, diaconical and social work, peace, justice, environmental issues, pastoral care, unemployment and homosexuality. One pastor even says that he is against any specific evangelistic work by the church. The way Christians live, he argues, has either positive or negative effects on others.

When asked about particular evangelistic strategies, 83% name social projects and services, such as second-hand shops, homeless ministries, advice bureau for people in need or hospital chaplaincies, as appropriate evangelistic tools. 65% think that so-called 'Kircheneintrittsstellen' and Protestant academies are useful. 50% consider bookshops and cafés run by congregations as good methods of evangelism. Only 12% believe in church planting and 13% think of ProChrist as an adequate method. 17% find the Alpha course to be helpful. Concerts, festivals and church choirs are named by 44% and mission weeks by 15%.

When we look at the answers of those pastors who do not regard the

missionary task of the church as a priority, the results are slightly different. None of these pastors considers Alpha or ProChrist as suitable strategies. Among those who agree that mission is the priority of the church, 28% think of Alpha, and 24% of ProChrist as appropriate ways to evangelise, while 28% believe in mission weeks. Only 45% regard social action as an important part of mission.

### Evangelism and Theological Training

Regarding the training of EKD ministers, the Declaration of the 1999 Leipzig synod states: 'We urgently need to give mission training new impetus. This is true not only for special mission training centres but also for basic and further vocational training of our ministers at the theological faculties and the preaching seminars.'<sup>30</sup> A survey of the twenty two university departments and church faculties in Germany at which EKD ordinands receive their academic training reveals that a chair of evangelism studies does not exist at any of the departments. At five universities there are chairs of practical theology, that are supposed to cover studies in 'Gemeindeaufbau'. At the University of Greifswald the launch of an institute for the research into evangelism is planned for April 2004.

An analysis of the syllabus of the twenty two theology departments for the years 2002 and 2003 has led to the following results: At six universities

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<sup>30</sup> *Kundgebung* (Hannover: Kirchenamt der EKD, 2001), p. 47.

lectures or seminars in evangelism or 'Gemeindeaufbau' were part of the curriculum.<sup>31</sup> At the three Rhenish theology departments that train ordinands for the ministry in the Protestant Church in the Rhineland, evangelism studies or 'Gemeindeaufbau' respectively are more or less non-existent. At the University of Bonn there has not been a single lecture or seminar in this field for the last five years. Instead, students at Bonn have had the opportunity to attend 17 seminars or lectures in diaconical studies since 1998.

### Evaluation: Evangelism—a Grassroots Ministry!?

The results of the surveys seem to confirm K. Schäfer's evaluation that mission 'has reappeared as a central term in the vocabulary of the Protestant churches'.<sup>32</sup> The term 'mission' is no longer disregarded among the majority of the clergy, but it is questionable whether this is true for the term 'evangelism', too. According to Schäfer the churches have rediscovered the 'evangelistic dimension of mission',<sup>33</sup> i.e. the necessity to invite people to a living faith in Christ. While this may be right for some of the national and regional church leaders, the survey shows that willingness to get involved in evangelism at grassroots level is still very low.

Evangelistic strategies which

clearly aim to evoke personal faith in Jesus Christ, such as seeker services, evangelistic courses, or evangelistic campaigns play only a minor role. The main emphasis is still on social action. Also, one can still see a kind of Constantinian state-church mentality among the majority of pastors. Mission and evangelism are understood as inviting people to join the church by contacting a 'Kircheneintrittsstelle', a kind of church recruitment office, which gives advice about the formal steps one needs to take if one wants to become a church member. Furthermore, the laity seems to play a minor role in evangelism. Evangelism is seen, if at all, as the responsibility of the ordained clergy.

The surveys show that a fresh understanding of mission and evangelism at leadership level does not necessarily cause local congregations to make evangelism a priority. Schäfer rightly underlines that 'missionary renewal has never come from the top but from the bottom'.<sup>34</sup> He goes on to say that it is not clear how church leaders can help the whole people of God to rediscover their role as witnesses for the Christian gospel.<sup>35</sup>

The surveys show that this problem, which Schäfer identifies, is more than a question of the right strategies and initiatives, i.e. a purely practical issue. The issue is also a highly theological one. Schäfer seems to recognize this by saying that there are two camps: those who pursue a secular mission through political and social action, and those

31 Erlangen, Greifswald, Halle, Jena, Leipzig, and Tübingen.

32 Klaus Schäfer, 'Mission in Secular and Postmodern Societies: The Example of Germany', *International Review of Mission*, No. 364, (January 2003), pp. 40-44 (p.40).

33 Schäfer, 'Mission', p. 40.

34 Schäfer, 'Mission', p. 42.

35 Schäfer, 'Mission', p. 42.

who understand mission as inviting people to join the church.<sup>36</sup>

As a matter of fact, the problem is more complex than that. There are basically three main groups, who hold different views of evangelism, which are more or less rooted in Scripture. All these views are, to some extent, reflecting the theologies of evangelism of influential German theologians.

### Secular 'Evangelism' and the Gospel of Liberation

Firstly, there are undoubtedly those who understand mission and evangelism in an almost secular way. They emphasise kingdom values such as social justice and peace but pay no real attention to the personal dimension of mission. Their model of evangelism is basically a social action model. For them the Christian gospel is the good news of liberation from political and social oppression. They are in danger, as Abraham writes, of reducing evangelism 'to acts of moralistic witness which are orphaned from the lights and powers of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>37</sup> They fail to see that God's kingdom cannot be established by human endeavour.

A contemporary German theologian who has fostered this view of evangelism is Jürgen Moltmann, who restricts the call of conversion to the rich and influential of society. Referring to the beatitudes in Matthew and Luke, he argues that there is no need for the poor to be converted since God's kingdom already belongs to them, while all

those who are converted join the poor in the community of the messiah, i.e. the church.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, he stresses the horizontal dimension of conversion and neglects the vertical aspect. 'Conversion', he writes means to '... turn from violence to justice, from isolation to community, from death to life'.<sup>39</sup>

For Moltmann the gospel is the gospel of the kingdom, i.e. 'the gospel of the liberation of the people'.<sup>40</sup> In *The Future of Creation* he writes that this liberation includes liberation from economic exploitation, political oppression, alienation between human beings, destruction of the environment and human apathy.<sup>41</sup> He even claims that social and political action groups can find their way into the community of Christ through mere cooperation with Christian congregations.<sup>42</sup> If this is true, there is no real need to call people to faith in Christ. Moltmann overlooks the fact that the New Testament also speaks of personal sin and the need for forgiveness regardless of peoples' social standing (e.g. Rom. 3:23). It looks as if Moltmann in his attempt to show the social dimension of mission has fallen into the trap of neglecting the individual side of faith. Stephen Williams expresses this quite clearly when he writes: 'The importance of attaining faith in Christ in this world, reiterated in the New Testament, is

38 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 102-103.

39 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 102.

40 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 96.

41 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 110.

42 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (London: SCM Press, 1992), pp. 242-243.

36 Schäfer, 'Mission', p. 42.

37 Abraham, *The Art of Evangelism*, p. 35.

scarcely given its due place in Moltmann's theology.<sup>43</sup>

### Growth 'Evangelism': Church Membership without Commitment

Secondly, there are those who stress the importance of infant baptism, church membership and community, but seem to be less interested in the spiritual side of evangelism. They follow a kind of secular church growth or witness model. They welcome evangelistic initiatives, which lead people into the church or make them stay. Evangelistic tools, which call upon people to believe in Jesus Christ, are either refused by them or accepted only because they are seen as useful methods against a further decline in church membership. They are in danger of concentrating on numbers and human fellowship regardless of whether or not people are really committed to Jesus Christ.

Much of this can be found in Paul Tillich's theology of evangelism. Tillich argues that evangelism, which consists of apologetics and evangelistic preaching, belongs to the so-called church functions of expansion. As such it mainly serves two purposes. The first purpose is self-preservation. Evangelism, Tillich writes, must be cultivated to prevent churches from diminishing in extension. The second purpose of evangelism is helping peo-

ple to find one's self.<sup>44</sup> The ultimate goal of evangelism is the transformation of 'the subjectivity of the listener'.<sup>45</sup> In other words, evangelism helps people to overcome their estrangement from themselves. Tillich's gospel is an existentialist gospel. The concept of inviting people to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour is strange to Tillich. This becomes clear when he writes that there is no universal Christian message and that 'it is the silent witness of the community of faith and love which convinces the questioner'.<sup>46</sup> Tillich rejects strongly the idea of conversion and salvation through faith in Christ alone.

It is Tillich's unorthodox view of the person of Jesus Christ, which is basically an adoptionist position, that causes him to understand evangelism in such a limited way. Tillich distinguishes between the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ who brings the New Being. While the person Jesus was received as the Christ, he is not the subject of faith. The meaning of Jesus, as A.E. McGrath puts it, 'lies in his being the historical manifestation of the New Being'.<sup>47</sup> For Tillich, this manifestation could have happened in any other human being.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Stephen Williams, 'Jürgen Moltmann: A Critical Introduction' (Duce Philip and Daniel Strange, (eds.) *Getting Your Bearings* (Leicester: Apollos, 2003), p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (London: SCM Press, 1978) vol.3, p. 194-196.

<sup>45</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 196.

<sup>46</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 346.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols (London: SCM Press, 1987) vol.2, p. 114.

### Proclamation Evangelism: Evangelism as Mere Gospel Communication

Finally, there are those, who adhere to the proclamation model of evangelism. For them the christological character of the gospel is central. They stress the importance of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, conversion, salvation, a personal relationship with God and church membership. They also acknowledge the role of baptism and discipling (personal prayer, devotions, etc.), but do not understand these as being part of the evangelistic process. The teaching of the intellectual heritage of the Christian faith, as it can be found in the creeds or the denominational confessions of faith, is less important to them. The same is true for the teaching of kingdom values. Like the other groupings, they tend to ignore the teaching of spiritual gifts. They are in danger of forgetting that 'salvation is made present in the acts of the Holy Spirit carried out through the agents of the kingdom who are grafted into the body of Christ'.

In his introductory lecture given at the Leipzig synodical meeting, Eberhard Jüngel promotes such a proclamation model of evangelism. Referring to the biblical meaning of the terms 'mission' and 'evangelism', he says: '*Missio* means sending and evangelising simply means proclaiming the evangel, the gospel. *Missio* happens for the sake of *evangelizesthai*, which in turn happens because of mission.'<sup>49</sup> He goes on to say

that the mission of the church is the mission of Jesus Christ who sends her and commands all believers to be his messengers.<sup>50</sup> The final goal of all missionary activity, Jüngel argues, 'is to help people to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and that means knowledge of a truth that sets them free'.<sup>51</sup>

### Towards a Biblical Theology of Evangelism

The German example shows that people who belong to the same church can use the same terminology without actually meaning the same thing. In such a situation it is less helpful to state, as German church leaders have done, that liberal and evangelical groupings in the church are equally committed to mission and evangelism, when in fact these groups have totally contradictory views in these areas.

The situation in Germany makes clear how important it is for every church to develop a theology of evangelism, which is faithful to biblical truths, principles and concepts. Like every theology it will be shaped by many different aspects. It will be shaped by its understanding of God, the kingdom of God, the church of Christ, the gospel, salvation and conversion, as well as its attitude towards culture. Since it would go beyond the scope of this article to look at all these aspects I will focus on four areas, which are crucial for any theology of evangelism that deserves the attribute 'biblical'.

49 Eberhard Jüngel, 'To Tell The World About God', *International Review of Mission*, No.353 (April 2000), pp. 203-216 (p. 207).

50 Jüngel, 'To Tell The World', p. 238.

51 Jüngel, 'To Tell The World' p. 239.

## The Gospel of Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom

As discussed earlier, the verbal proclamation of the gospel plays a central role in evangelism. But what is the gospel, what is its content? For the advocates of the prosperity gospel<sup>52</sup> the good news of the Christian faith is that people who put their trust in Jesus Christ and give to the church generously will be blessed by God through health and wealth. For liberation theologians the good news is that God

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**52** At the heart of prosperity or word of faith theology, which has its roots in Latin and North American Pentecostal circles, lies the conviction that God blesses people not only spiritually but also materially and physically when they trust him and show obedience to him. Often generous financial support of those who deliver this good news of prosperity is seen as an expression of this trust and obedience. In other words, faith in Jesus guarantees a successful life. Consequently, poverty or ill health become signs that there is something wrong with one's faith. In 1995 the World Evangelical Fellowship made clear that such teachings are not in line with the biblical teaching on prosperity. The WEF stated: 'Wealth and prosperity can be a blessing from God, but they can also be Satan's temptation (Lk. 4:5-7). Wealth can be used in a manner that brings great glory to the Lord and great blessing to his people, or it can supplant the place of the Lord in one's life... Jesus warns us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Wealth) (Mt. 6:24)... Jesus taught us to trust God for our daily bread, i.e. the necessities of life rather than the luxuries.... Whatever wealth an individual Christian or a Christian community has provides an opportunity for *koinonia*, for sharing.' (Statement of the World Evangelical Fellowship on Prosperity Theology and Theology of Suffering, in Andrew Perriman, *Faith, Health, and Prosperity* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), pp. 240-241.

wants to set us free from political and economic oppression, while for the supporters of an existentialist theology the gospel tells us that we can overcome the estrangement from ourselves.

The New Testament actually speaks about the 'Gospel of Jesus Christ' (e.g. Mk. 1:1) and the 'Gospel of the Kingdom' (e.g. Mt. 4:23), but it would be wrong to interpret these terms in such a way as to infer that there are two different kinds of good news. The Gospel writers leave us with no doubt that the good news of the kingdom of God, i.e. of God's reign, is centred on Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God finds its expression in Jesus' deeds (e.g. Lk. 11:20), through Jesus' teaching (e.g. Mt. 18:3-4), and last but not least in the person of Jesus (e.g. Lk. 17:20-21). To receive or to enter the kingdom, which is closely linked with being saved and inheriting eternal life, requires faith in the gospel and in Jesus (Mk. 10:17-31) Melvin Tinker concludes: 'It is therefore not a strange shift that the one who proclaimed the good news becomes... the one who is proclaimed as the good news.'<sup>53</sup>

That the person of Jesus Christ is actually the gospel which needs to be proclaimed is also at the centre of Paul's letters. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 Paul defines the essence of the gospel message by listing five gospel truths. Firstly, Jesus is the Christ (v. 3). Secondly, he died for our sins, was buried and was raised to life again (vv. 3-4). Thirdly, we can know this through the Scriptures and the reports of many wit-

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**53** Melvin Tinker, *Evangelical Concerns* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2001), p. 70.

nesses, including the apostles (vv. 4-8). Fourthly, we need to respond to this message 'by holding firm to it', i.e. by faith (v. 2). Fifthly, if we do so, we receive salvation (v. 2).

### Salvation

In his book *Good News For A Suffering World*, Philip King tells the well-known story of a Salvation Army worker and a bishop who were travelling on the same train. After a while the Salvation Army worker feels urged to ask the bishop, 'Are you saved?'. The bishop's reply takes him by surprise, 'It depends what you mean; I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved.'<sup>54</sup> This story indicates that salvation is a rather complex biblical concept, which has more than just one meaning.

Thus, we can find in the Old and the New Testament examples of individual and corporate salvation. Furthermore, both Testaments deal with the physical and spiritual aspects of salvation. However, there seems to be an emphasis on the physical dimension in the Old Testament, while the New Testament seems to emphasize the spiritual side. While there are examples of salvation in the Old Testament, which can be interpreted as liberation from political and economical oppression, salvation in the New Testament does not involve political or economic liberation.

### Spiritual and Physical Salvation

In the Old Testament there is obviously

a strong emphasis on the physical dimension of salvation. Salvation includes deliverance from illness (Is. 38:20) or from enemies (Ps. 22:21, Neh. 9:27). But it would be wrong, as Michael Coogan does, to deny categorically the existence of a spiritual dimension in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>55</sup>

Firstly, the framework of salvation in the Old Testament is generally, though not exclusively, Israel's covenant with Yahweh. The Sinai Covenant was the foundational element of Israelite religion and its religious ethic formed the basis of Israel's social life.<sup>56</sup> Terms like 'priestly kingdom' and 'holy nation' in Exodus 19:6 underline this spiritual character of the covenant. Secondly, the Old Testament teaches neither a division of a human being into soul and body nor a division into soul, body and spirit.<sup>57</sup> The term *nefesh* for example, which basically means 'breath', represents the whole person, the physical and the non-physical elements.<sup>58</sup>

Michael Green rightly points out that this holistic view of human beings

<sup>55</sup> Michael D. Coogan, 'Salvation', in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, Michael D., eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 670.

<sup>56</sup> Gary A. Herion, 'Covenant', in Freedman, David Noel, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 291.

<sup>57</sup> Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 408.

<sup>58</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol 3 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Philip King, *Good News for a Suffering World* (Crowborough: Monarch, 1996), p. 83.



has consequences for the understanding of salvation: 'It safeguards the unity of human existence, it stresses God's involvement in history, and it guards the divorce of the sacred from the secular and the spiritual from the physical.'<sup>59</sup> Green goes on to say that in the Hebrew Bible human beings are presented as social beings. For them salvation was a social matter. It not only involves the whole person but also the whole society. They understood salvation as the 'reign of God in a redeemed community on earth'.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, the acts of physical salvation, such as the liberation from enemies or the deliverance from sickness, which take place within the covenant relationship also have a spiritual dimension.

In their article, 'How Broad is Salvation in Scripture', R. Sider and J. Parker argue that in the Gospels the idea of salvation involves more than the forgiveness of human sin. They write: 'The language about salvation in the Gospels is applied to more than what we normally think of as "spiritual concerns".'<sup>61</sup> Sider and Parker rightly point out that in many healing stories which are recorded in the synoptic Gospels the word 'save' is used to describe not only acts of physical healings but also physical rescues from dangerous situations.<sup>62</sup>

While salvation in the Gospels has undoubtedly this holistic character, Sider and Parker are in danger of overemphasizing the physical dimension and ignoring the predominance of the spiritual dimension of salvation. Most of the New Testament passages in which the words 'save' or 'salvation' are used deal with the ultimate salvation of human beings in Jesus Christ.<sup>63</sup> Both the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John present Jesus Christ as the saviour. Matthew 10:21-23, for example, tells us that followers of Christ can expect to experience hatred, rejection and betrayal, but everyone 'who endures to the end will be saved'. In other words: salvation is for those who are loyal to Jesus to the end. Those who are faithful, 'will be saved...and will enter finally into the blessed peace promised to the participants in the kingdom'.<sup>64</sup>

This emphasis on the spiritual aspect of salvation can also be found in Paul's theology. As L. Morris points out, salvation from sin and its consequences is a predominant theme in Paul's writings.<sup>65</sup> In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul writes 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners', and in his letter to the Romans he argues that Christians are no longer slaves of sin, since they have been set free from it (6:17-18). This spiritual understanding of salvation can also be clearly seen in those passages that link salvation with

<sup>59</sup> Michael Green, *The Meaning of Salvation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), p. 40.

<sup>60</sup> Green, *The Meaning of Salvation*, p. 40.

<sup>61</sup> Roland J. Sider and James Parker III, 'How Broad is Salvation in Scripture?', in Bruce Nichols, ed., *Word and Deed* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1985), p. 93.

<sup>62</sup> Sider and Parker, 'How Broad is Salvation in Scripture?', p. 93.

<sup>63</sup> Michael D. Coogan, 'Salvation', p. 670.

<sup>64</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), p. 278.

<sup>65</sup> Leon Morris, 'Salvation', in Gerald F. Hawthorne, ed., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 858.

faith, such as Romans 1:16, 1 Corinthians 1:21, or Ephesians 2:8.

### Individual and Corporate Salvation

While in the Old Testament salvation is mainly within the covenantal relationship with God, Paul stresses that salvation is open to all people. There is no distinction between Jews and non-Jews (Rom. 10:12). All salvation requires is personal faith in Jesus Christ. In Romans 10:9 Paul writes: '...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' Consequently, there is quite a strong individual aspect in Paul's understanding of salvation. But there is also a corporate, spiritual dimension. In his letter to the Ephesians 2:13 Paul says that those who have been saved through faith are 'in Christ Jesus'. For Paul this means that they are citizens and members of God's household.<sup>66</sup> They are part of a community in which all members intimately relate to Christ and thereby relate to each other,<sup>67</sup> or, as S. Travis puts it, 'I cannot be "in Christ" without at the same time being in deep relationship to all others who are "in Christ"'.<sup>68</sup>

In the Gospels there are many passages which portray salvation as something totally individual. Thus the writers of the synoptic Gospels tell us how

Jesus forgave a paralytic man (Mt. 9:1-8, Mk. 2:1-12, Lk. 5:17-26) and a woman who anointed his feet (Lk. 7:36-50) their sins. In the Gospel of John we are told that a personal new birth and faith in Jesus are essential in order to avoid destruction and to gain eternal life (3:1-16). In John chapter 10, verse 9 we read, 'I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved.' Salvation is personal and it is through Jesus alone. Besides the individual nature of salvation, the corporate aspects of salvation are clearly presented in the gospels, too. Thus we can read in Luke's accounts of Simeon's Song: '...for my eyes have seen your salvation...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (2:30, 32). The Gospel of John makes it clear that God sent his son to save the world, and not only the people of Israel (3:17).

### Salvation and Political-Economic Liberation

The key story of salvation from oppression in the Old Testament is located in the book of Exodus. For G. Gutierrez Israel's exodus is clearly a political event. Gutierrez rightly underlines that the situation of the Israelites in Egypt is one of political persecution and economic exploitation.<sup>69</sup> The Israelites are not only forced into slavery (Exod. 1:11-14) but the Egyptian rulers also try to keep their numbers low by killing every Israelite male child (Exod. 1:15-22). Consequently, there is an element of political liberation in this story.

<sup>66</sup> Ephesians 2:19.

<sup>67</sup> Sider and Parker, 'How Broad is Salvation in Scripture?', p. 96.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen H. Travis, *The Scope of Salvation* (Sheffield: Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, 1974) p. 156.

However, it would be wrong to rule out any spiritual aspect. The starting point of Israel's liberation is that 'God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Exod. 2:24). The basis of this covenant is undoubtedly an act of faith. Thus we can read in Genesis 17:7 that God not only established a covenant with Abraham, who had become a believer (Gen. 15:6), but also with Abraham's descendants. In other words, God entered into a covenant with Abraham's descendants on the basis of Abraham's faith.

According to Gutierrez the idea of political liberation is also part of the New Testament message of salvation. He argues that political liberation forms one of three different levels of liberation, the other two being the liberation of humankind throughout history and the liberation from sin through Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>70</sup> For Gutierrez political liberation involves an active transformation of the social order. He holds that the abolishment of unjust structures is part of the work of Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Against this S. Travis rightly argues that neither in the Gospels nor in the Pauline letters is salvation presented as political and economic liberation. For Paul salvation is about forgiveness and the possibility of a relationship with God through Christ.<sup>72</sup> Thus we can read, for example, in Ephesians 1:7: 'In him (Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.'

This theme of forgiveness, Travis writes, is also the central theme of the Gospels.<sup>73</sup> Mark and Luke tell us that John the Baptist offered forgiveness to the people of Israel on the condition that they would repent (Mk. 1:4, Lk. 3:3). Mark, Matthew and Luke also report how Jesus forgives sins because of people's faith (Mk. 2:5, Mt. 9:2, Lk. 5:20; Lk. 7: 48-50). In Luke 7:34 and Matthew 11:19 Jesus is called 'the friend of sinners', and in John 20:23 we can read the following promise Jesus gives to his disciples: 'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

### Salvation, Evangelism and Social Responsibility

For evangelism, which proclaims salvation through faith in Christ, this means that it must neither be equated with social action nor must it be seen as separate from it. Social-political action is not a substitute for evangelism. Socio-political action does not lead to salvation as it is first and foremost understood in the New Testament. But at the same time it is also true that a church, which wants to evangelise, must also be a church that recognizes its social responsibilities. Jesus cared for the human soul and the human body. He showed a deep social concern for those at the fringes of society. Consequently, word and action belong together. If a church denies its social responsibility it puts its credibility at stake. If it ignores the spiritual dimension of salvation it runs the danger of being no longer church.

<sup>70</sup> Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 176.

<sup>71</sup> Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 177.

<sup>72</sup> Travis, *The Scope of Salvation*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>73</sup> Travis, *The Scope of Salvation*, p. 12.

### Conversion: Process or Event?

Both in the New and the Old Testament conversion basically means turning. The main meaning of conversion in the New Testament is that of a person turning to God (e.g. Acts 9:35, 15:19). Often such turning is associated with repentance (Acts 3:19, 26:20) or faith (Acts 11:21).

With regard to the nature of conversion we have seen quite a dramatic paradigm shift over recent years.<sup>74</sup> While in the past conversion was generally understood by the majority of evangelicals as instantaneous turning to God, i.e. a decision for Christ made at a certain point in time, it is nowadays conceived by many as a gradual progress.<sup>75</sup> In other words, finding faith is seen as a process or journey and not as an event.<sup>76</sup> This has consequences for the way evangelism is viewed. If coming to faith is a process, then evangelism, too

must be a process rather than an event. In this case the evangelistic strategies a church chooses are more likely to be process strategies such as the Alpha course. But if conversion is seen as a crisis rather than a process then evangelism will be more likely regarded as a one-off event. In this case appropriate methods will be Willow Creek style seeker services or campaigns, such as ProChrist.

When we look at the New Testament we can actually find both aspects of conversion—the journey model of conversion and the crisis or event model. In Acts 16, for example, Luke tells us about the business woman Lydia and the Philippian jailer who both experience sudden conversions. Both hear the gospel message and respond to it immediately. There is no hint that the jailer had had any contact with Christians or the local Jewish community before he met Paul and Silas in his prison.

When we look closer at Lydia's conversion we can see that there is a wider dimension to it. Lydia, we are told, was a worshipper of God. As such, she believed and behaved like a Jew without actually having become one. In other words, she was a spiritual seeker. Her journey of faith had begun, long before she met Paul and Silas. It was only when she met the two missionaries and heard the good news, that God opened her heart to accept the message. Her conversion was still an instantaneous change, but it was a change at the end of a longer journey of change.

Consequently, one can speak of conversion as an event and a process. There is no need to polarise the two, or as Robert Warren puts it: 'In fact a

74 Stephen Cottrell, *Catholic Evangelism* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998) p. 19.

75 M. Booker comments about the idea of conversion as a process and the importance of relationships within that process: 'These two themes have become accepted within the Church in Britain with a speed and to a degree that is quite remarkable.' (Mike Booker, 'Mission, Evangelism and the Church of God', in Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, eds., *Evangelism—Which Way Now?* (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), p. 4.

76 'Belonging before Believing' has become a prominent slogan. M. Moynagh writes: 'Encouraging non-believers to feel some kind of ownership of the church as they travel into faith is vital...Christians must become not recruiters but friends—fellow-travellers...' (Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2001) p. 113.

process is a sustained series of events. It is important therefore not to set 'event' (in terms of moments of decision/choice) in opposition to process.<sup>77</sup> For our evangelistic practice this means that we should always seek a mixture of event and process evangelism strategies.

### The Evangelist—the Forgotten Office!?

Finally, if we asked different people the question 'Whose responsibility is evangelism in the church?' we would probably get many different answers. Some would rightly argue that every Christian has the responsibility to share his or her faith. Thus the apostle Peter tells us to be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we Christians have (1 Pet. 3:15). Others would stress that it is the task of the pastor or preacher to evangelise. They are undoubtedly right, too. The apostle Paul was a pastor and a church planter, but that did not stop him from evangelising. To the church in Corinth he wrote: 'Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Cor 9:16). And to his pupil Timothy, also a pastor, Paul gives the following command: 'But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry' (2 Tim 4:5). Roger Carswell comments: 'The pastor has many responsibilities—to feed the flock of

God, to pray, to lead, to comfort, but he must act as an evangelist also. The pastor is to strive to lead souls to Christ, not only through the public ministry, but in one-to-one encounters.'<sup>78</sup>

While it is true that evangelism is the obligation of all Christians, it seems that many churches, like the German Protestant Church, have forgotten that the New Testament also speaks of evangelism as a ministry in its own right. In Ephesians 4:11 Paul mentions five categories of ministers, which have been given to the church by Christ: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. Their task is to build up the body of Christ. P.T. O'Brien writes: 'Ephesians 4 focuses on the exalted Christ's action of giving these "ministers" to the church. We may assume that they regularly functioned as apostle, prophets, evangelists, and the like, and that their ministries were accepted and recognized in the churches. It is appropriate, then, to speak of them as "officers".'<sup>79</sup> In other words, the early church had ministers who had specific evangelistic gifts. They could preach evangelistic sermons, make the good news relevant to unbelievers, or help them to make a commitment to Christ.<sup>80</sup>

What does this mean for the evangelistic practice of a church today? First of all it means that evangelism studies must be part of the curriculum at theological seminaries and univer-

<sup>77</sup> Robert Warren, *Signs of Life* (London: Church Publishing House, 1996), p. 66.

<sup>78</sup> Roger Carswell, *And Some Evangelists* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2000), p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Leicester: Apollos, 1999), p. 301.

<sup>80</sup> John R. Stott, *Essential Fellowship* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), p. 163.

sity theology departments. A church cannot afford to have its future ministers trained at universities or church seminaries without having received any training in mission and evangelism. Also, it cannot rely on theological students to gain evangelistic competence on their own initiative. If a church is really serious about evangelism, then evangelism studies must become compulsory for the theological training of future pastors.

Secondly, it is simply not enough to help pastors to gain an evangelistic competence. Evangelism is not only the task of the clergy. The church must make sure that the whole people of God are trained, encouraged and empowered to share the good news. Process evangelism courses, such as *Alpha*, *Christianity Explored*, or *Emmaus*, are a good opportunity to involve many church members in evangelism. Mark Ireland writes: 'On every Alpha course approximately one-third of the people involved are leaders and helpers, most of whom would run a mile from knocking on doors, but who are happy to do evangelism through cooking, serving, washing up, leading worship, leading small groups, putting out chairs.'<sup>81</sup>

Thirdly, the church needs to identify people who have the gifts of an evangelist and recognize them as ministers in their own right. Carswell writes:

My plea is for the setting aside of gifted believers to be devoted to the fulltime work of evangelism, in the same way that pastors and mis-

sionaries are appointed for their task. They will spearhead evangelistic endeavour in their locality and beyond. Their emphasis will be the proclaiming of the gospel. Christ crucified will be their abiding theme.<sup>82</sup>

## Summary

The German example shows how much theology impacts the evangelistic practice of a church. A theology which is not really grounded in scriptural truth or has an unbalanced understanding of it can easily lead to a secular 'evangelism' that is not interested in inviting people to a living faith in Jesus Christ. If Jesus is seen only as the New Being or the political liberator, the message of his substitutionary death and resurrection, of forgiveness and eternal life becomes a minor matter. The call to follow and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour degenerates to the appeal to become a better person.

The German example clearly shows how essential it is for every church to have a biblical theology of the nature and practice of evangelism. To put evangelism on one's agenda is undoubtedly laudable, but frankly not enough. Neither is it necessarily helpful to adopt existing evangelistic models uncritically. Instead, every church that is serious about evangelism, needs to develop a theology that takes into account what the Bible has to say about the aim, the message, and the agents of evangelism, as well as the relationship between evangelism and social action.

<sup>81</sup> Mark Ireland, 'Alpha', in Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, eds., *Evangelism—Which Way Now?* (London: Church House Publishing, 2003), pp. 17-18.

<sup>82</sup> Carswell, *And Some Evangelists*, p. 91.

Last but not least the example of the German Protestant Church shows how important it is that such a biblical theology of evangelism is owned by the whole church, i.e. the clergy and the laity. Evangelism is a grassroots ministry. Another story of D.L. Moody illustrates that quite vividly: Once,

when walking down a certain street in Chicago, D.L. Moody stepped up to a man, a perfect stranger to him, and said, 'Sir, are you a Christian?' 'You mind your own business,' was the reply. Moody replied, 'This is my business.' Evangelism needs people who make it their business.

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