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In this issue of the ACR, we're going to think about one area in particular, namely, evangelism and gospel mission. The question is: have we lost our way? ...is there any sense in which we run the risk of decline by corrosion?

EDITORIAL

HAVE WE LOST OUR WAY ON MISSION?

Nathan Walter

FOR SOMEONE WHO ENJOYS American politics, the last year and a half have been both enthralling and exhausting! It seems such a long time ago, given how many things have transpired between then and now, but in January this year I read an article that attempted to offer an evaluation of Trump's first year in office. There were many such pieces at the time. The perspective of this particular article was that whilst much of American life had continued as usual—stocks went up, taxes went down, the ATMs still dispensed cash—the chaotic nature of the Trump presidency was something that Americans could not afford to grow used to.

Agree or disagree with that as you choose. What caught my attention, however, was a distinction the article made between two different clauses of decline: decline by *crisis* and decline by *corrosion*. The author wrote:

When we worry about democratic decline in the United States, it's important to be clear what we are worrying about: corrosion, not crisis. In a crisis, of course we'll all be heroes—or so we assure ourselves. But in the muddy complexity of the slow misappropriation of the state for self-interested purposes, occasions for heroism do not present

themselves. On the contrary, the rhetoric of "resistance" comes to seem disproportionate, strident, cranky.

As I read this paragraph, I found myself considering how the same point is true with respect to the Christian faith, and to the ministry of the gospel. Decline by *crisis* will readily be met with heroic resistance. Or at least, that is how we like to imagine things. Decline by *corrosion*, however, can be much slower, much more subtle. It can, therefore, be harder to combat. In the face of incremental decline, heroic resistance can easily seem narrow-minded and uncharitable, strident and cranky.

At the level of the local church, for example, consider a scenario where an enthusiastic music leader has introduced a new song. The musicians love playing it; the melody is easy to sing; the rhythms are strong; it builds to an anthemic chorus; the congregation responds positively from the first. The lyrics do mention Christ repeatedly. But on closer examination, the way they talk about our approach to God through Christ uses almost entirely Old Testament categories that are completely overturned by the New Testament. Or they do mention Christ repeatedly, but in a way that directs our focus not to the love of God in

EDITORIAL (CONTINUED)

Christ's atoning death for sinners, but only to our love for him, our devotion to him, our following of him.

To regard the introduction of such a song as a *crisis* could easily seem like an over-reaction. After all, it's clearly a Christian song. It's not as if it advocates salvation by any way other than Christ! It's just a matter of slightly misplaced emphasis, is all. If anything, it's *corrosion*, but certainly not *crisis*. And at the end of the day, there's still plenty of other good songs on the roster that can cover for it.

How should such a situation be responded to? Heroic resistance, which in this case might look like pulling the song out of circulation and meeting with the music leader to explain the decision and set parameters for future song choices, may just feel too heavy-handed, too narrow-minded, too lacking in grace. It's that old problem of defining ever-narrowing circles that we Sydney Anglicans are so good at.

In many instances, therefore, it's not hard to imagine a church continuing to sing such a song, even in spite of a misplaced emphasis. If there was a *crisis*, the resistance would be swift. But faced with *corrosion*, the response can

The opposition seems to build constantly. There is now enormous pressure on Christians to keep silent rather than unashamedly to testify to Christ.

be much harder to get right.

In the local church, such hypothetical scenarios can be multiplied almost without end. But what about at the level of our diocese? Can not the same dynamic be at

work? In this issue of the ACR, we're going to think about one area in particular, namely, evangelism and gospel mission. The question is: have we lost our way? To use the categories we've established so far, is there any sense in which we run the risk of decline by *corrosion*?

Just about everyone acknowledges how difficult evangelism has become in our current climate. The opposition seems to build constantly. There is now enormous pressure on Christians to keep silent rather than unashamedly to testify to Christ. Yet this is not new. From the very beginning Christians have faced such pressure. Are we teaching believers to respond in our day with the same

boldness to proclaim Christ as the first believers did in theirs?

With mounting pressure to keep silent can come subtle shifts in how we think about the mission of the gospel. Very easily apologetics can start to dominate evangelism, so that our voice in the public square now pursues respectability through finely woven arguments about the reasonableness of Christian faith and ethics, rather than gladly accepting the dismissal as fools that comes from resolving to know nothing among people but the message of Christ crucified.

If the New Testament recommends bridge-building for gospel proclamation through Christian character and thoughtful communication, what does it mean if we start to find ourselves striving to build bridges by other means? Say by improving the world and community renewal? Or by striving to establish deep, 'incarnational' communities? Or by reducing the gospel to merely a gospel of love and avoiding any mention of God's judgement or the reality of hell?

Do we prioritise prayer, and call our people to prioritise prayer, in the way that we should? If we speak spiritual truths in spiritual words, how could we not? And what an indicator this would be to our own spiritual state. After all, given that the 'fear of men' largely disappears when we pray, it is surely harder to be dishonest in prayer than in preaching! If there is any sense in which we have lost it, we must believe again in the power of God to save.

Alongside all of these challenges are the many, many distractions from the mission of the gospel that come from administration and legislative compliance. Such things need not be in direct opposition to the mission of the gospel. In fact, if done well, they will often do a great deal to enable it. Yet still, what risk do we run if we allow such things to crowd out the priority of evangelism and gospel mission?

These are all important questions to ask, for through trusting in Christ one of our greatest joys, privileges and responsibilities is to be servants of the gospel. And the Scriptures are plain: *This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* (Luke 24:46-47). 🌐



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THE GREAT NEED OF THE HOUR

Kanishka Raffel



ON FRIDAY 9 MARCH, 2018 more than 650 people gathered at St Andrew's Cathedral during their lunch hour to give thanks to God for the life and ministry of the twentieth century's most famous and, arguably, most effective evangelist, Billy Graham. The congregation was glad to

give thanks to God for this man of humble origins who spoke to presidents and princes, as well as hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens at mass gatherings, and millions more through radio, television and eventually satellite and the internet.

Billy Graham 'finished his race' full of conviction and hope, and without any whiff of scandal. Anyone could recognise that this was in some sense the end of an era but some, on social media and in newspaper and online columns, sought to portray the death of Billy Graham as signalling the end not only of his generation of evangelicalism but of the Christian mission altogether. At least in the West, it was opined by some, science and technology, the indisputable moral failures of the Church, the triumph of personal and sexual autonomy and much more besides, mean that Billy Graham's message of 'the Bible says', and his preoccupation with 'winning souls' can no longer have a credible place in contemporary society.

So some have said, since the Athenians scoffed at the Apostle Paul's talk of resurrection. But far from being superseded, the task of 'testifying to the gospel of God's grace' remains the great need of the hour. While it is true that the evangelistic mission today faces social and cultural challenges different from those confronted by Billy Graham—global communism was a big theme for Billy—in reality, the dimly predictable sinfulness of the human heart, the breath-takingly gracious provision of God in the gospel of his Son, and the eternal purpose of God to unite all things in heaven and earth under King Jesus—mean that the work of evangelism at its most fundamental, spiritual level is just the same as it ever was.

Billy Graham embraced new technologies over more than five decades of global ministry—and in our day, there are new resources, methods and opportunities for evangelistic engagement—but the work of making known the 'glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' and calling on our hearers to 'repent and believe the good news' remains



image | Anthony Correia / Shutterstock.com

We can no longer assume, as Billy Graham could, that people know what we mean when we use words like 'God' and 'Jesus', or speak of 'the Bible' or 'the church'.

the same, and the necessity, urgency and priority of the task has not diminished in any way. How could it?

Jesus said,

This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witness of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. Luke 24:46-49

What God had planned from the beginning and anticipated in the Old Testament Scriptures, came to pass in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Now a way has been opened, through the atoning death of the Son and his glorious resurrection in triumph over sin and death and the devil, to forgiveness of sin, adoption into God's family, fellowship with the Father in the power of the Spirit. This is a gospel for all nations—to be preached to the ends of the earth—since Jesus has atoned for the sins of the world and been appointed by his resurrection, Lord and Judge of all.

No doubt, the contemporary context in which we proclaim this message is challenging. We can no longer assume, as Billy Graham could, that people know what we mean when we use words like 'God' and 'Jesus', or speak of 'the Bible' or 'the church'. People have a shallow understanding at best of 'sin', 'the cross', 'resurrection' and 'heaven and hell'. But we confront much more than biblical illiteracy. Contemporary attitudes to sexuality, gender, and identity are simultaneously amongst the most powerful

THE GREAT NEED OF THE HOUR (CONTINUED)

idols of our age and deeply contrary to the Bible's teaching on such subjects (notwithstanding the unconvincing accommodations and barren harmonisations offered by liberal theology). In the areas that our culture regards as preeminent in establishing our sense of self and identity, we are most deeply at odds with it.

Then, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has exposed not only a deep seam of evil within the life of most Christian

True, when it comes to the work of evangelism, our cultural context is challenging. But it is also needy.

denominations through the period nostalgically associated with the hegemony of the Christian worldview, but also a shameful failure on the part of those who were once esteemed as the guardians of morality and compassion to act to protect the

innocent and vulnerable. None of this can be denied. In the face of such failure and wickedness, the temptation for Christians to fall silent—out of shame, out of fear, out of a sense of needing to win back trust—is understandable. But we must not add to past failure to hear and care for survivors of child sexual abuse, a failure in the present to offer the gospel of light and life to our generation. The Lord will hold us accountable for both.

True, when it comes to the work of evangelism, our cultural context is challenging. But it is also needy. The culture of sexual autonomy and permissiveness is producing a whole new generation of victims. Consider the countless thousands of women who have claimed #MeToo as a vehicle of truth-telling in the face of power wielded for purposes of sexual exploitation and the tsunami of online-porn addiction distorting real relationships between real people. For those worn out with sexual exploitation and manipulation, tired of photo-shopped images and online intimacy, the gospel provides deep cleansing from sin, real connection with the God who alone can satisfy our deepest longings, and enduring and satisfying truth about ourselves and our value and place in the world.

It is not only those wounded by the gods of this age who need to hear of the Saviour who loved them and gave himself for them. The passing crowds, our neighbours and colleagues and fellow citizens are diagnosed by Scripture—'darkened in heart, without God or hope in the world'. They are just what every Christian was until we met the God who raises the dead and justifies the wicked. Jesus said 'wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it'. That's tweetable,

unpopular and deeply divisive—but spoken by one 'who had authority'. We must proclaim Christ in our generation because like every generation, without Christ, we are condemned already, alienated from God by nature and choice, and facing his just judgement.

We should not forget that the pages of the New Testament bear witness that from the outset, the gospel appeared foolish and offensive to those who rejected it. Offensive, because it gives no heed to our protests of self-justifying virtue; because it calls on us to repent of the autonomy we hold most dear; because it lays at our feet the blood of the most beautiful man to walk the earth. Foolish, because it offers life through death, power through weakness, glory through suffering; because it calls for purity, humility and generosity when our hearts move us to self-indulgence, self-exaltation and self-gratification.

From New Testament times the gospel has advanced despite external opposition and internal division, and in the midst of the suffering of Christ's church. From New Testament times the kingdom advances by the prayerful proclamation of the gospel by God's people, compelled by love and captured by a vision of his glory.

'Be devoted to prayer' says the apostle, but I fear we are not devoted to prayer. Jesus says, 'I will build my church' but we think, 'we will build the church'. We'll do it by the force of our logic or the depth of our scholarship; we'll do it by the eloquence of our preaching. We'll do it by the right marketing strategies or the right evangelistic tool or the correctness of our politics. Prayer seems so much like doing nothing. So we'll build the church by tapping into the consumerist or entertainment or ideological motifs of the culture that despises the gospel, rather than by seeking God's powerful, merciful intervention by his gospel in the lives of those who are as we once were, dead in transgression and objects of wrath. We must devote ourselves to prayer.

I'm confident that the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is being regularly preached in Sydney Anglican pulpits. But that is not quite the same as giving adequate, let alone urgent priority to the task of evangelism. How much of the ministry team's time is spent in relationship with people who are not yet followers of Jesus? I need to quite deliberately make time to spend with my friends of other faiths and none—and the same can be true for church members who can just as easily find themselves with few non-believing contacts.

Giving time and emotional energy and prayer and thoughtfulness to making Christ known in the circle of relationships that the Lord opens to us necessarily means having less time for other, worthwhile activities.

THE GREAT NEED OF THE HOUR (CONTINUED)

Here's the rub. In our cultural context of the rejection and marginalisation of Christianity as foolish or wicked, and in the face of our own institutional failures, there are numerous diversions to capture our attention and consume our energy.

Local churches have ever increasing (and important) requirements to administer compliance frameworks. We can silence ourselves—even while others labour to protect freedom of speech—out of a sense that we have lost the right to speak. We can turn our attention to matters of social concern that are more likely to win the approval or even esteem of the culture. Advocacy on behalf of those detained by our government indefinitely and inhumanely is properly an area for Christian involvement. So too is the problem of homelessness, the socially corrosive effects of gambling, the defence of the unborn and those in the final stages of life, climate change and certainly, Indigenous rights. Indeed, we must engage in such areas, in a distinctively gospel-shaped way so as to bring the blessing of the gospel to the culture at large. We are to 'do good to all'. Some will have special expertise to contribute, some will have unique opportunity or responsibility to do so.

But recognising the limit to how much time, energy, prayer and money can be devoted by Christians to activities beyond daily needs and immediate responsibility, especially in areas where others of good will are similarly involved, the work that *only* Christians can do should have first priority for most of us. Especially when this work, the work of evangelism, is the necessary and immediate consequence of the work of Jesus.

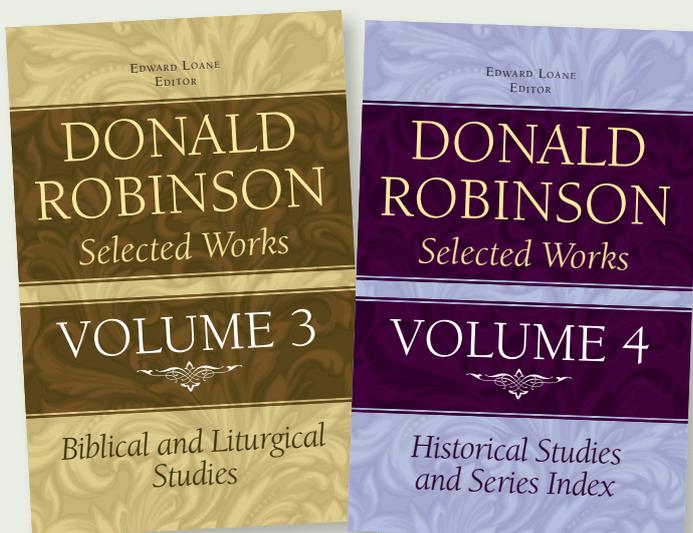
Jesus builds his church and brings the Kingdom as

people hear, trust, and obey the gospel. 'Gospels' are for proclaiming. Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah anticipated by Scripture, and has been declared Lord and Judge by his resurrection; therefore, repentance and the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

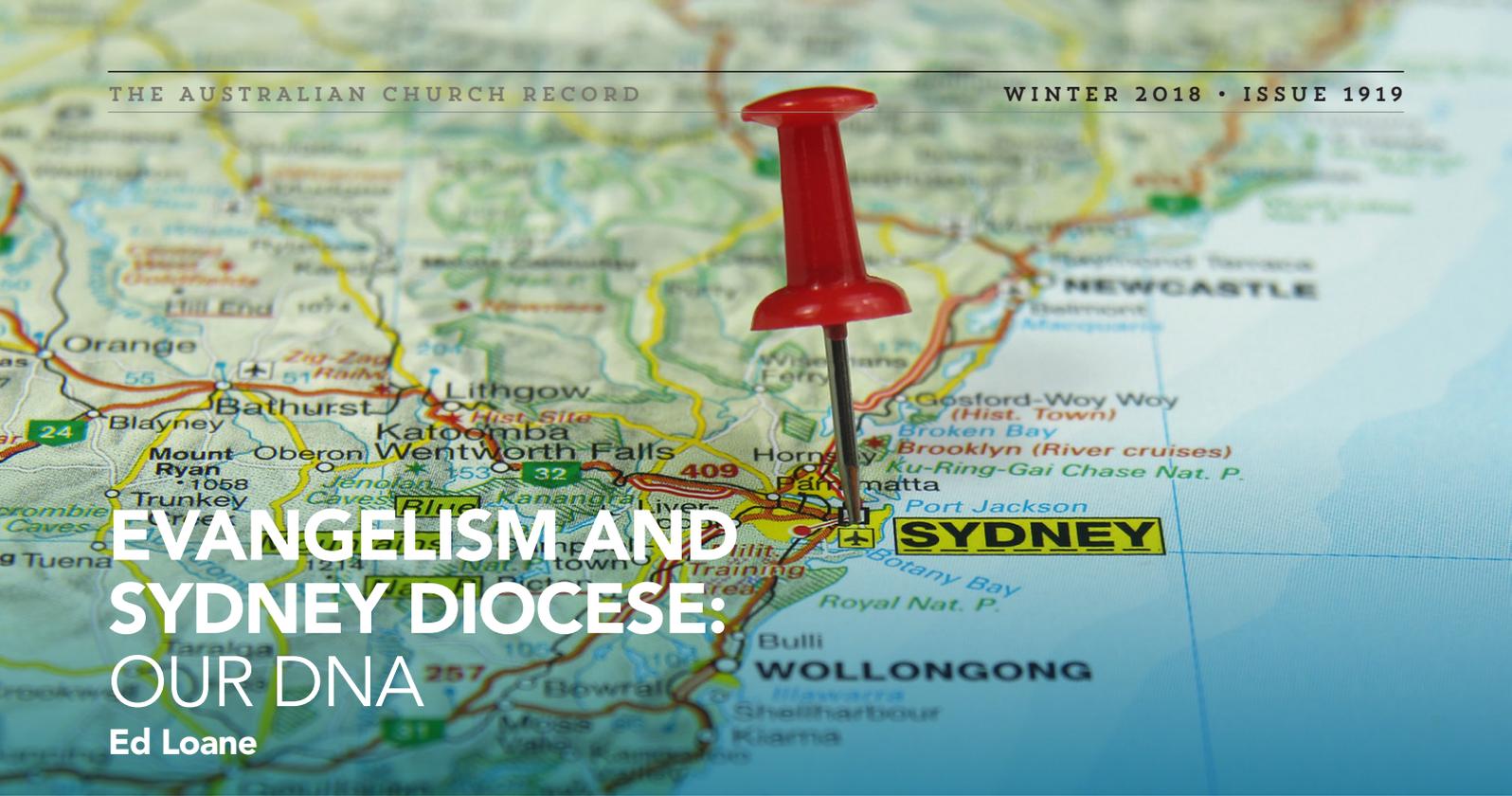
The Triune God is present as the word of God, the gospel, is shared with others. The New Testament is replete with the power of God's word to bring about salvation and righteousness in his people, to the praise of his glory and grace. It is by God's word and not by bread alone that we really live (Matthew 4:4). God's word judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12), saves (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18) and creates faith (Romans 10:17), sanctifies his people (John 17:17), brings about the new birth (James 1:18), performs God's work in believers (1 Thessalonians 2:13), gives wisdom (Colossians 3:16), builds up and preserves believers for their inheritance (Acts 20:32).

The gospel of Jesus is sufficient for God's purposes for his world and his people, powerful for salvation, bringing the new creation. It advances among us to the ends of the earth, according to God's perfect will, by the proclamation of his people in dependence upon his Spirit, in fellowship with one another, to the glory of God. The prayerful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus remains the urgent and essential priority of the hour. ☪

The work that *only* Christians can do should have first priority for most of us.



The ACR in conjunction with Moore College is pleased to be publishing two further volumes of Donald Robinson's Selected Works to complete the series. As a former vice-principal of Moore College and Archbishop of Sydney, Robinson's thinking and writing is known for being penetrating and stimulating. These new volumes include his work on biblical studies, liturgical studies and historical studies. They will be launched in early 2019 and they, along with the two earlier volumes and appreciation volume, will be available for sale through Matthias Media.



EVANGELISM AND SYDNEY DIOCESE: OUR DNA

Ed Loane



AT THE 2017 SESSION of synod a report was given in relation to diocesan mission and church growth. While there were some positives, the general tenor of the discussion was fairly bleak. Church leaders might be tempted to despair at the apparent fruitlessness of their efforts

and perhaps withdrawal into a 'holy huddle'. Spending all our effort on current members may seem like a more rewarding enterprise. To take this course, however, would not only be a dereliction of the gospel mandate entrusted to all Christians, it would be a radical departure from one of the most enduring and significant aspects of our diocesan identity: evangelism.

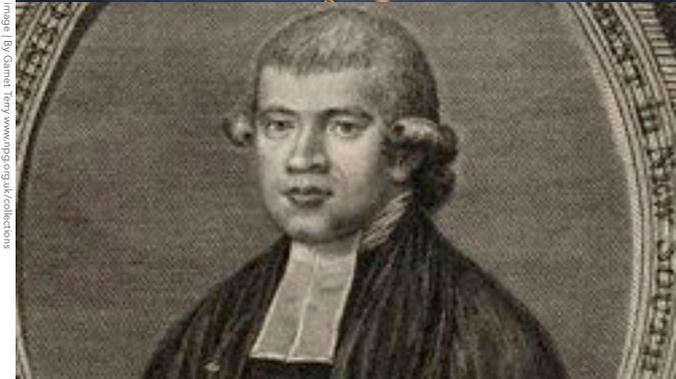
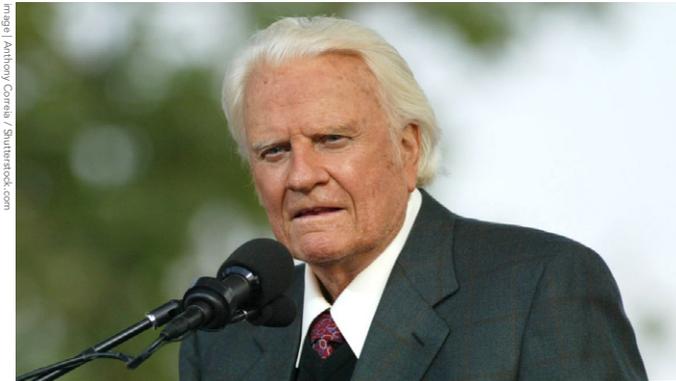
Richard Johnson, the chaplain who arrived with the First Fleet, had been offered a daunting task. As a thirty year old graduate of Cambridge he had very promising prospects and could have easily pursued the relatively high social standing and income of a late eighteenth century English clergyman. On the contrary, however, he chose to face deprivation, discomfort and difficulty. He left everything and everyone he knew behind. He and his wife Mary, who was the only 'lady' in the colony, opted to begin a family and raise their children among the dregs of British society. The commission of King George III was to 'carefully and diligently to discharge the duty of chaplain by doing and performing all and all manner of things thereto belonging'... it was something of an open-ended job description. But Johnson's friends certainly encouraged him about where his efforts should be directed. John Newton wrote these lines of encouragement to the departing Johnson.

*Go, bear the Saviour's name to lands unknown,
Tell to the Southern world His wondrous grace;
An energy divine thy words shall own,
And draw their untaught hearts to seek His face.
Many in quest of gold, or empty fame,
would compass earth, or venture near the Poles;
But how much nobler thy reward and aim,
To spread His grace, and win immortal souls.*

Newton wrote to Wilberforce of Richard Johnson's appointment: 'It may seem like a small event at present: so a foundation-stone, when laid, is small compared with the building to be erected upon it; but it is the beginning and the earnest of the whole.' Thus Richard Johnson's arrival marked the 'foundation-stone' of Anglican evangelistic enterprise in Sydney.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Sydney Anglicans became keen supporters of numerous evangelistic rallies centred around visiting missionaries. One preacher who left a profound and enduring legacy was Rev George Grubb who arrived in Sydney in 1891. Numerous men and women were converted and congregations were motivated to conduct their own evangelistic initiatives. An example of this evangelistic vigour is represented in the experience of D.J. Knox (father of D.B. Knox, later Principal of Moore College). Knox was converted at a Bowral parish mission. He entered Moore College in 1897 and soon after ordination was asked by the Archbishop to be curate-in-charge of Mill Hill (Bondi Junction). When he received the commission there was no building and no congregation so Knox pitched a tent and held a mission. Numerous people were converted, including R.B. Robinson (father of D.W.B. Robinson, later Archbishop of Sydney), and by 1906 Mill Hill had become a full parish.

EVANGELISM AND SYDNEY DIOCESE: OUR DNA (CONTINUED)



Decades later, in the year before D.J. Knox died, Sydney Anglicans were instrumental in the city's most successful evangelistic event: the 1959 Billy Graham Crusade. Archbishop Mowll issued the invitation for the American evangelist to come, and although Mowll died a few months before the mission, it certainly was a fitting climax to the priorities he had established through his episcopate. Bishop Kerle wrote in the *Report of the Billy Graham Crusades*, 'Never again could I doubt that the Gospel is the Power of God, nor that men's lives can be changed through "the foolishness of preaching"'. Countless people were converted, including many who would exercise leadership in the diocese over the coming decades.

The turbulent years of the 1960s and the more dislocated place of the church in wider society led Sydney Anglicans to more innovative evangelistic efforts. A key

leader in the latter half of the twentieth century was John Chapman, especially through his work at the Sydney Diocese Department of Evangelism. He understood his job description as simply to 'evangelise Sydney'. Rather than leave evangelism as merely the duty of the clergy, Chapman encouraged all Christians to be taking the gospel to the lost. He developed many resources to aid people in the task. He encouraged a growth in evangelistic 'dialogue meetings' and one-to-one evangelism, which grew in popularity through the diocese. This was not at the expense of public evangelistic campaigns (Chapman himself was a renowned missionary), but personal evangelism was a welcome addition in the diocesan outreach labours.

Throughout this period, Moore College has played a vital part in keeping the evangelistic emphasis as an essential aspect of ministry training. Every year the entire college breaks its routine to work together in the joys and challenges of evangelism. This practice and emphasis is rarely found in other Anglican theological colleges around the world. Yet, for decades it has been considered an essential aspect of Sydney Anglican ministry training. The experience usually involves cross cultural evangelism, one-to-one evangelism as well as public evangelistic preaching. The Moore College mission program instils in students what it looks like to be Christians who 'do the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim 4:5).

Evangelism in Sydney Diocese has never been easy. It was not easy for Richard Johnson. It was not easy for D.J. Knox. It was not easy for John Chapman. Yet, evangelism is an essential aspect of Sydney Anglican identity. Our society has changed radically over the last 230 years, but our mission remains the same. Our methods have developed, and we must continue to work at developing them further. Whatever shape evangelism looks like in 2018 and beyond, one thing is certain: we must not give up on this essential task. Although the statistics may show little overall growth, we must not be discouraged, because ultimately conversion is the Lord's work not ours. Our responsibility is faithfulness in the task entrusted to us... We are compelled to preach. Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor 9:16) 

The turbulent years of the 1960s and the more dislocated place of the church in wider society led Sydney Anglicans to more innovative evangelistic efforts.

FAITHFULNESS AND FRUITFULNESS IN MINISTRY

Scott Newling & Dan McKinlay



WHAT DOES A *faithful* ministry look like? What does *fruitfulness* in ministry look like? Are these things distinct or exclusive or identical to each other? Does one take precedence over the other? How, in other words, do we correlate faithfulness and fruitfulness in ministry?



The metaphor of fruit and harvest is worth pondering afresh, because a farmer knows acutely the difference between faithfulness and fruitfulness when it comes to his vocation. The difference is one of *responsibility*. A farmer's responsibility is to sow seed,

to water and tend the shoots, to harvest in season; he must be diligent, prepared, hardworking and persevering. He knows that if he isn't his harvest will be unfruitful. Nevertheless, he also knows that *even if he does all these things his harvest may still be unfruitful*, because there are things beyond his responsibility, but rather belong to another: drought, storm, plague and blight.

A farmer, then, lives a 'telic' life: a life aimed towards and energy poured out towards a desired outcome, fully aware that while he can guarantee failure (unfaithfulness), he cannot guarantee a successful outcome (fruitfulness). His responsibility is faithfulness in hope of fruitfulness, not fruitfulness itself.

So, too, with the watchman whose role it is to watch against invasion: a watchman can oversee the demise of a town through unfaithful duty, but he cannot guarantee the life of its citizens (in this case, the people fleeing to safety). And it is this metaphor of the watchman that God applies to the ministry of Ezekiel, required as he was to speak faithfully and responsibly the whole counsel of God even as he heard it (Ezekiel 3:16-21; 33:1-9). While faithfulness would correlate with *personal* fruitfulness (he would save his soul alive), it could only promote—not guarantee—fruitfulness in others.

In a (Christian) world saturated with vision-statements, mission-statements, strategies, KPIs and metrics, it would be a timely reminder for us to flee back to the Scriptures and ensure we are clear what God requires of us—and what he does not require of us—as ministers of the word.

For ourselves, our church recently heard Mark 6 read and preached. In that chapter Mark gives us a picture of three different ministries. First, there is Jesus, who preached the gospel and called for repentance and faith (Mark 1:14-15) in his hometown and yet offended those who knew him since he was a boy (6:3). Then we read about the disciples who were sent out to preach repentance (6:12) and yet not to linger when their message was rejected. Finally, Mark concludes his narrative with the ministry of the John the Baptist, who preached repentance to Herod (6:18).

In each, a call to repent is given. In each, a *faithful* ministry of the word is exercised. And yet, in each, there is little fruit. Jesus is greeted with unbelief by those who knew him best (6:6). The disciples return exhausted and have to withdraw to recover (6:30-31)—remembering that whatever their 'fruitfulness', immediately following on from this, with the feeding of the 5,000, many turn back from following Jesus (John 6:66). And John the Baptist—well, he is beheaded and his head served on a platter (6:27-28).

God's last old covenant prophet, Jesus' apostles, and Jesus himself: none of these snippets of the mission of the gospel produced fruitfulness, even though all were faithful messengers.

The apostle Paul's words encapsulate the reality of faithful ministry and its correlation with fruitful ministry:

'What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.' (1 **Corinthians 3:5-7**)

'For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?' (2 **Corinthians 2:15-16**)

And we're not sufficient! We can't save people. And preaching the gospel will always be difficult because it always involves preaching *repentance*. Whatever the

A farmer knows acutely the difference between faithfulness and fruitfulness... The difference is one of responsibility.

FAITHFULNESS AND FRUITFULNESS IN MINISTRY (CONTINUED)

efficacy of strategy, vision, and metrics, we must never obscure our fundamental insufficiency for the task. To do otherwise is to detract from God's glory and falsely impute it elsewhere—like our systems. If anything we do implicitly (or explicitly) communicates anything other than God's sovereign determination in election and call (in fruitfulness), we must repent.

But what a good thing it is that God is sufficient for the task. And it is *his* responsibility to save. He opens doors, he provides avenues for the gospel to be proclaimed even when we are bound, he is saving a people for himself. He gives the growth.

And yet, consciously or subconsciously, many are found sadly attempting to guarantee fruitfulness in their ministries. And invariably, if fully worked-out, this leads to forsaking faithfulness, or even redefining what fruitfulness is (if the definition of fruitfulness is altered so as to have *any* fruit, then who cares if it's diseased, worm-ridden and rotting?).

Consider the decline into liberalism in many of western Christianity's large denominations. Much of the compromise on ethical issues and human sexuality, of core doctrines like penal substitutionary atonement, the resurrection, the uniqueness of Christ, and the authority of Scripture, came about because there was a perceived threat to the fruitfulness of ministries (people in pews). As a result, the method of ministry changed, and the criterion of ministry was no longer fidelity, but relevance. The western church is littered with the litany of faithful ministers who, out of good intentions desiring the lost to be saved, forgot their one responsibility in the process: fidelity. The fuel that fed the fires of compromise were the good intentions of those who wanted fruitful, growing ministries.

Closer to home, as conservative evangelicals, are there signs of danger for ourselves? Why is it that we have so many metrics (as useful as they may be in their appropriate place) to measure fruitfulness? What are our corresponding 'metrics'—or 'standards' (or confessions!)—of faithfulness? Do they have precedence in our church discourse, our denominational and public life?

Perhaps there are some other questions worth reflecting upon. Allow us to draw attention to three areas, which will inevitably draw a response, given they involve real people making real decisions! Our aim is not accusation, however, but acuity; nor irritation, but illumination. The areas are: a shift to the city; a shift in conference emphases; and a shift in ministry appointment criteria.

The shift to the city has many flavours, from the emphasis on urban ministry pitted against the 'suburban captivity of the church' through to models of ministry that explicitly mould Scripture to present a theological emphasis on ministry in the city as a priority for the church. The consequence of both, however, is that 'not city' is downplayed. There is nothing wrong with city ministry! But what does 'fruitfulness' in ministry look like in rural contexts? We've been in large urban churches where there are as many visitors each week as there are members. We're currently in a church that, while 15 minutes' drive from the CBD, nevertheless is functionally a country church: a population of less than 5,000 and no traffic lights in the parish! Our parish boundary, aside from about 400 metres, is *entirely water*. We're at the end of the line. In its 150 year history, what ought faithfulness and fruitfulness have looked like? What truths do the dynamics of country ministry remind city ministries of?

Playing into this, secondly, is the shift in conference culture over the last twenty years. We used to run conferences to teach the Bible (as simple as that),

and to teach the Bible to laity. Our conference calendar is overwhelming now, with a focus that has shifted towards conferences for *ministers* and conferences about *how* to do ministry. We must self-evaluate. Does the skew also represent a shift towards prioritising 'fruitfulness' by downplaying 'faithfulness'? Do we merely assume a fidelity to Scripture and so speak instead about ways and means to go up 'levels' of numeric growth?

Again, there may be a helpfulness to what is presented at these types of conferences—there is a responsibility to be faithful in the most faithful way possible!—but we must reflect on what the shift in conference culture reflects about the shift in our mindset about what is at the heart of ministry. Why is it that the speakers at these conferences are almost invariably the senior minister, and the senior minister of a larger church, not the small struggling ones? Have we, in our conference culture, implicitly equated faithfulness with fruitfulness? We're not looking for personal invitations to speak! But when have we ever heard

The western church is littered with the litany of faithful ministers who, out of good intentions desiring the lost to be saved, forgot their one responsibility in the process: fidelity.

FAITHFULNESS AND FRUITFULNESS IN MINISTRY (CONTINUED)

of a conference that promotes as its 'keynote speaker' (and what happened to 'preacher?') the minister of a small, barely surviving congregation? What does this say about how we correlate faithfulness and fruitfulness?

It would make for an interesting study to reflect on what effect our public conversation, with its emphasis on numeric growth and metrics, has on the disposition and demeanour of ministers in non-urban areas? It would make for an important and vital study to explore whether there is a correlation to be found by the pressure we put on ourselves to do God's work of fruitfulness and the burnout we see in so many ministers.

Finally, we must consider our church appointment practices. The shift in advertised positions over the last decade—in Sydney—has skewed from theological education and ordination as essential, to now often being merely desirable. Instead, there has been a commensurate growth in importance of 'managerial skills' in ministry job descriptions. Where are we heading in this? Is it possible that, in a desire to promote fruitfulness, are we at the cusp of minimising the priority of faithfulness?

When conservative evangelical ministers put out job descriptions for assistants that tie stipend and tenure to numeric growth in the church, are we anything other than Arminian? When did we get the audacity to make assistants be responsible for what is solely God's with fruitfulness—but not even have the integrity to submit to the same horror ourselves?

We cannot afford to pursue fruitfulness in these hues. It will invariably come at the expense of faithfulness. To do so forgets that the miraculous work

of salvation belongs to God—alone. Instead, we pursue and promote fruitfulness by pursuing our responsibility: faithfulness as ministers of the word, in season *and out*. 

When conservative evangelical ministers put out job descriptions for assistants that tie stipend and tenure to numeric growth in the church, are we anything other than Arminian?

REAL FAITH

Tom Habib



I want people to really believe

THE SIMPLE GOAL OF evangelism is for people to *believe in Jesus* and be saved. This is our mission.

Whether it is through our personal relationships, large-scale events, evangelistic courses or the regular preaching of the word on Sunday—we

want to see people come to faith in Christ and remain in Him. But if we want people to come to faith, we must first be clear on what real faith is. We may have gathered a crowd or filled a church, but have we made real disciples with real faith? Real evangelism must seek real faith.

The Apostle John wrote his gospel, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). And yet John does not assume that we know what these terms mean. Throughout the gospel John pours meaning into these key phrases. He confounds our expectations as he teaches what it means for Jesus to be "the Messiah, the

Son of God". He challenges our focus on the material and temporary as he explains what sort of "life" Jesus offers. And he schools us in true discipleship as he shows what it looks like to "believe". The gospel of John is a training manual in real faith, and would serve us well as we think about how to evangelise Sydney and beyond.

Real faith is based on the word of God

John's first lesson is that real faith comes from the *word of God*. In John 4 Jesus converts an entire Samaritan town. But how did they come to believe? We are told that it was, "because of his words many more became believers" (John 4:41). To underline the point the Samaritans then say to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). Jesus spent two days with this village, and yet it was not his physical presence that led to real faith. It was what they *heard*. It was his *words*. Real faith comes through the word. John then

REAL FAITH (CONTINUED)

offers a contrast between the real faith of the Samaritan village and the false faith of the neighbouring Jewish village. Jesus is welcomed by the same ‘believers’ who saw his miracles in Jerusalem, and yet Jesus rebukes them, “Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe” (John 4:48). John is teaching us that whilst the Jews’ “faith” rests in powerful displays of signs and wonders, real faith rests in the *words* of Jesus.

John then gives us a lesson in real faith as he narrates the healing of the official’s son. Jesus refuses to go with the official, instead only giving the man his word, “Go, your son will live”. And so, we are told, “The man took Jesus at his word and departed” (John 4:50). This story offers a model of real faith—the man took Jesus at his word, and his son received life. John is teaching us in the back half of chapter 4 that real faith does not come through the impressive signs and wonders. Real faith comes from hearing the word of God. This is the same lesson the Apostle Paul teaches the wayward Corinthians, who are constantly impressed with what was showy and powerful. For whilst, “Jews demand signs” the apostle Paul resigns himself to the weak and foolish preaching of the word (1 Cor 1:18-30). This is where real power is—and this is where real faith comes from.

How then should this shape our evangelism? Whilst we may not run signs and wonders ministries in our context, we will always be tempted to reach people through impressive demonstrations of power. To draw a crowd and gain a following through outward displays of strength rather than inward changes of the heart. And perhaps more than anywhere, it is within our youth ministries that we are most vulnerable to this temptation. Over the last decade or so there has been a ‘charismatic flavour’ to most youth conferences. Smoke machines, light shows, mosh pits and dance parties have become the norm as we look for new ways to attract and engage our youth. Of course, the word is not abandoned. Generally, good Bible teachers continue to grace the stage and offer good teaching from the Bible. But the conventional wisdom seems to be that you can have both—charismatic when it comes to singing and vibe, and evangelical when it comes to teaching. Start with a dance party and end with the Bible. What this fails to recognise, however, is that hype is not neutral. Hype does not only fail to bring about *real faith*, it also produces *fake faith*. If we set out to impress our youth with outward displays of power, we will foster within our youth a faith that is not based on the word. And what is true for our youth conferences is true for any evangelistic endeavour. In a world where appearance is valued and power is

currency, we must still hold out the weak-looking word as the means of saving souls.

Real faith is in the real Messiah

John’s second lesson is that real faith is in the real Messiah. In John 6, over five thousand people come to see Jesus. But what sort of a Messiah were they looking for? We are told that they came to Jesus hoping to see a powerful wonder-worker who might perform more signs (John 6:2). They pursue Jesus, hoping for a powerful military ruler as they seek to make him King by force (John 6:15). And they return to Jesus, looking for a material provider who can give them another loaf of bread to eat (John 6:26). They may be looking for a Messiah—but it is a Messiah of their own making. What is striking about this chapter is that whilst it begins with over five thousand people seeking Jesus, it ends with all of the crowd and most of Jesus’ disciples abandoning him. As they are confronted with the real Jesus they grumble like the Israelites in the desert. They cannot believe the claim that this man has ‘come down from heaven’ (John 6:42). And they certainly can’t stomach the idea that they must eat his flesh (John 6:52). This message of a crucified Messiah ultimately becomes the scandal or ‘stumbling block’ for his disciples (John 6:61). They came to Jesus looking for a wonder-worker, a political activist or a material provider—but all they found was a man offering his body and his blood. And they were offended. John is teaching that real faith must be in the real Messiah. That the message of Christ crucified is a stumbling block for Jews (1 Cor 1:23) and that the real Messiah is the stone rejected by humans on which they fall (1 Peter 2:4, 6-8). False teachers will still preach Jesus—but he will be a Jesus other than the Jesus preached by the apostles (2 Cor 11:4).

Hype does not only fail to bring about *real faith*, it also produces *fake faith*.

This is what makes the prosperity gospel or the social justice gospel so appealing. They promote a Jesus of our own making who offers us what we want. But faith in a fake Jesus is fake. But what about our own context? Is the Jesus we are offering the real Jesus? Leading evangelists such as Tim Keller, and more recently our own Sam Chan, have helped us think through the need for *contextualisation* when we present the gospel. They teach us to find our culture’s storyline and let the gospel fulfil it. We want our hearers to, “wish the gospel was true.” There is much to learn here, particularly as we face a rapidly changing world.

REAL FAITH (CONTINUED)

But we must also tread carefully. As we seek to engage our culture, are we ready to lose the whole crowd by preaching the real Jesus? Will we still teach that our biggest problem is the coming judgement and not a lack of fulfilment? Or that our greatest need is a sacrifice for sin and not simply a life coach for direction? Or that our real hope is in the new creation, and not in making this world better? At its best, *contextualisation* is about finding timely ways to communicate the timeless truths of the gospel. At its worst, it is a cloak for preaching a false Jesus fashioned by our culture's desires.

Real faith holds to Jesus' teaching

In John 8 Jesus offers another test for real faith: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:32). This warning was given to the Jews who had "believed in Jesus" and yet by the end of the chapter this group of new converts reject Jesus' teaching. They are offended that Jesus

would call them slaves to sin (John 8:33) and outraged that he would call them children of the devil (John 8:44). By the time Jesus claims the very name of God, they have stones in their hands and are ready to kill him (John 8:59). Quite the follow up course for new believers! The point is clear—if you claim to 'believe in

For many today, the teachings of Christ appear as a barrier to reaching the lost. How will anyone come to Christ if we teach that homosexual practices are sinful or that gender is binary?

Jesus' you must believe in what Jesus says. And this does not mean simply intellectual assent—but obedience. For, "if you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). Yet this group of so-called believers only accepted Jesus' teaching when it suited them. They believed that Jesus was the light of the world, but hated the light when it started to shine. It is the same spirit of unbelief that the Apostle Paul warns us of—those who

have the form of godliness, but deny its power (2 Tim 3:5). And it is no surprise that the teachings on which this group of Jewish 'believers' stumble are the same teachings so called believers reject today—the sinfulness of man and the Lordship of Christ.

For many today, the teachings of Christ appear as a barrier to reaching the lost. How will anyone come to Christ if we teach that homosexual practices are sinful or that gender is binary? The response from some within the church is that we must change. Evolve. Bring our beliefs into the twenty first century. And all of this is in the name of evangelism—so that we can reach the lost. This is not new. So-called believers denied the bodily resurrection in an age of reason, the judgement of God in an age of relativism and sexual ethics in an age of permissive individualism. Each time it is insisted that we must change what we believe if we are to reach the people of our day. But Jesus teaches that anyone who does not hold to his teaching is not a real disciple. This has never been more relevant in the lead up to the third Global Anglican Future conference. Sadly today, parts of our worldwide Anglican communion seem to echo the Groucho Marx line, "These are my principles, and if you don't like them...well, I've got others." And this acquiescence comes at a time when those who do make a stand for biblical Christianity face growing hostility. But as churches around the world yield, we must make our stand and declare with our Lord that real faith holds to Jesus' teaching. If we want people to really believe in Jesus, we must proclaim what our Lord taught.

Real evangelism

Real evangelism will seek real faith. It will preach the weak-looking (weak-sounding?) word instead of seeking to impress with pomp and power. It will proclaim the crucified Messiah who died for our sins, and not simply the Messiah the world wants. It will remain steadfast to the teachings of Christ, and not conform to the values of our world. I want people to really believe in Jesus. And so, as Jesus sends us out to make disciples of all nations—let's be sure that this is what we're doing. ☺

FROM THE VAULT

EVANGELISM—WHAT IS IT?

By the Rev. Dr. J. I. Packer, Tutor at Tyndale Hall, Bristol.
Published in *The Australian Church Record*, Nov 10, 1960.

“Evangeli-” has recently risen to the status of what Stephen Potter would call an “O.K. word”: to utter it is to be ecclesiastically “one up” straight away. Things were different 20 years ago. The term stands for something which the modern church knows it should be doing; indeed, we have reached the point where mere self-respect prompts us all to describe evangelism as our chief interest.

Yet it is apparent that we lack a common mind as to what evangelism is, and there is urgent need that this question be thoroughly ventilated.

We are in the habit of thinking of evangelism as a matter of making people do things. Some equate it with holding services the climax of which is a standard outline of extracting and recording “decisions.” Others would describe the mere prevailing on people to come to church as evangelism. There are better definitions of evangelism along these lines, the best, perhaps, being that of the Archbishops’ committee of 1918: “To evangelise is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.”

No evangelism without the gospel

This formula states admirably the aim and scope of the evangelistic enterprise. As a definition of evangelism, however, it, and all other definitions of this type, are open to one fundamental objection.

Is it right to define evangelism in terms of an effect achieved in the lives of others? Is the essence of evangelism the actual production of converts?

Surely not. The evangelist’s aim is to convert; but the question whether or not a person is evangelising, cannot be settled simply by asking whether he has seen conversions. There have been missionaries to Muslims who have seen no converts; should we conclude from this that they have not been evangelising? There have been unevangelical preachers under whom individuals have been soundly converted; should we infer that they have been evangelising after all? The answer is no in both cases. The results of preaching depend not on the intentions of man but on the will of an almighty God. This does not mean

that we should be indifferent as to whether we see fruit for our witness to Christ. If fruit is not appearing, we should seek God’s face about it. But this truth does mean that we may not define evangelism in terms of achieved results.

In fact, the New Testament directs our thoughts another way. The verb *euaggelizo* means “declare the gospel,” and the gospel of the New Testament is a clearly defined body of information. It looks, therefore, as if we ought to define evangelism in terms not of meetings held or appeals made or pews filled or converts gained but of a message delivered. Thus, whether or not our recruiting activities can rightly be called evangelism will depend not on the outward success they have but on what message we give to those whom we seek to win. There is no evangelism without the gospel. If what we say is less than the New Testament gospel, what we are doing is something less than evangelising.

It is surprising how rarely this point is grasped. As a rule, the only question raised in discussions about evangelism concerns the relative value of different methods—big central meetings in neutral halls or guest services in the parish church; courses of sermons or study groups; testimonies or expositions; and so on. But to discuss method before reaching agreement on the message is to put the cart before the horse. The assumption that all who care about evangelism are of one mind about the gospel is large and doubtful. Unanimity about methods and techniques may (and, it seems, often does) conceal radical differences as to the message to be conveyed. The modern debate about evangelism is unlikely to make progress until these differences are frankly faced and thrashed out. In any case, we shall abuse our own judgements if we try to evaluate rival methods without reference to the contents of our message, for we are in no position to see what methods are best for our purpose until we have asked ourselves what exactly it is that we want to get across.

What, then is the evangelistic message? What is the

There is no evangelism without the gospel. If what we say is less than the New Testament gospel, what we are doing is something less than evangelising.

EVANGELISM—WHAT IS IT? (CONTINUED)

gospel which we have to communicate?

Five points must be made.

Foundations of true religion

First, the gospel is a message about **God**; telling us that He is our Maker, in Whom we exist and move and in Whose hands, for good or ill, we always are, and that we, His creatures, were made to worship and serve Him and to live for His glory. These truths are the foundations of theistic religion, and the gospel is built on them. The Jews of the New Testament days, with the Old Testament faith behind them, knew these things, and when the apostles preached to Jews they could take this knowledge for granted. But when Paul preached to Gentiles, who knew nothing of the Old Testament, it was here that he had to start. So, when the Athenians asked him to explain what his talk of Jesus and the resurrection was all about, he began by telling them about God the Creator, and what He had made man for.

Not until we have begun to see what God sees wrong with us, and what God thinks of us, can we begin to grasp what it means to say that Jesus Christ saves from sin.

“God ... made the world ... he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ... and he made all nations ... that they seek the Lord” (Acts 17:24-27). This was not, as is sometimes supposed, a piece of philosophical apologetic of a kind which Paul afterwards renounced, but the first and basic lesson in theistic faith.

Our thinking about evangelism today runs largely on rails laid down a century ago, when most Westerners, like the New Testament Jews, had some idea of religion. But modern men do not know these things; they are like the pagan Athenians, superstitious indeed but not religious. So, like Paul, we must start evangelising them by telling them of the Creator whom they have forgotten to remember.

Converted but not religious

The last-century evangelist could confine himself to the themes of sin and salvation without ill effect, but if we today do this, the best that can happen is that we produce Christians who, though converted, are irreligious, cocky and self-centred, interested in spiritual experience but not in God; ‘keen’ but not reverent; on fire to witness but seeing no point in worship. Indeed, the thing is happening: it is one of the unpleasant phenomena of our time which summons us to consider our ways in evangelism.

Secondly, the gospel is a message about **sin**; telling us that we are helpless slaves of our own rebelliousness,

showing us ourselves under the wrath of God, and assuring us that nothing we do for ourselves can put us right. Not until we have begun to see what God sees wrong with us, and what God thinks of us, can we begin to grasp what it means to say that Jesus Christ saves from sin. Those who do not know their need to get right with God never come to know Christ.

There is a pitfall here. Everybody’s life includes things which cause dissatisfaction and shame. The evangelist’s temptation is to evoke thoughts of these things and make people feel very uncomfortable about them (which a skillful speaker can easily do), and then to depict Christ simply as One Who saves us from these elements of ourselves, without raising the question of our relationship with God at all. But this is not preaching Christ—and such preaching, though it will cause crises and neuroses in plenty, will not bring about conversions. It is true that the real Christ, the Christ of the Bible Who offers Himself to us as a Saviour from sin and sets us right with God, gives peace, joy and moral strength also. But the Christ who is depicted and desired merely as the giver of these things is a merely imaginary Christ, and an imaginary Christ does not bestow a real salvation.

Thirdly, the gospel is a message about **the person and work of Christ**; an interpreted story of the earthly life, death, resurrection and reign of God’s Son. Both the facts and the meaning must be given. Whether or not we use terms like “incarnation” and “atonement,” we must teach the truths which they express—who Jesus was, and what He did. It is often said that it is the presentation of Christ’s person, rather than of doctrines about Him, that draws sinners to His feet. It is true that it is the living Christ who saves, and that a theory of the atonement, however orthodox, is no substitute; but Jesus of Nazareth cannot be known as the living Christ if we are unaware that He was eternal God and that His passion, His judicial murder, was really His redeeming action of bearing away the sins of the world. We cannot see Jesus as a personal Saviour until we have learned Christ and understood the meaning of His life and death in the redeeming purpose of God. Nor can we know how to approach Him till we have learned that the man of Galilee now reigns as God’s king, and must be hailed as such.

Big meetings not the only means

Fourthly, the gospel is a message about **the new birth**; telling us that our plight in sin is so great that nothing less than a supernatural renewing of our nature can save us. There must be a wholly new beginning, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Fifthly, the gospel is a summons to faith and repentance. Faith is not a mere feeling of confidence, nor repentance

EVANGELISM—WHAT IS IT? (CONTINUED)

a mere feeling of remorse; both are acts, and acts of the whole man. Faith is credence, and more; faith is born of self-despair, and is essentially a casting and resting of oneself on the promises of Christ to sinners and on the Christ of those promises. And repentance is a change of heart and mind, a new life of denying self and serving the Saviour as king in self's place. As Luther put in in the first of the Ninety-Five Theses: "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' he called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." This is the demand of the gospel, and the evangelist may not gloss over it. We must teach our hearers to count the cost of receiving Christ. Evangelism is not a confidence trick, and we have no business to invite men to Christ under false pretences.

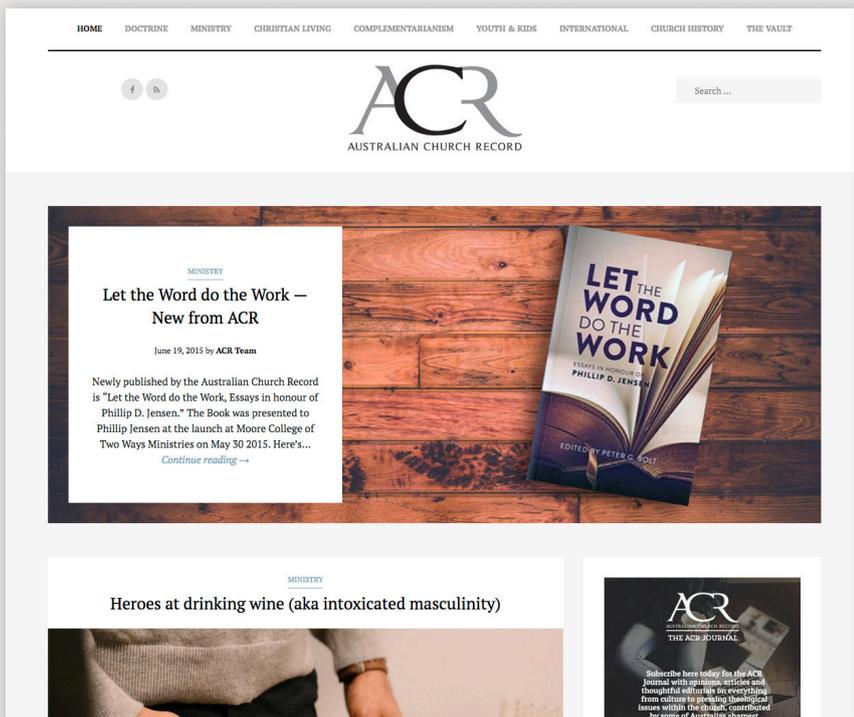
Methods are a complex question

This, in outline, is the evangelistic message, and evangelism is communicating it. It is the Holy Spirit's work to make men repent and believe; our task as evangelists is to make sure that they understand what the gospel is, how it affects them personally, and why and how they should respond to it. We could only in principle justify the special methods that we use—big meetings, little meetings, after meetings, organised counselling and the rest—as a means to this end.

How far current methods can be so justified is too complex a question to raise here. We would only say now that, whatever means are used, **all the points listed**

must be made; and until we are sure that a person has grasped them all, we have no business to press him to commit himself to Christ, for it is not yet clear that he is in a position to do so responsibly and with understanding. And if we short-circuit the process of patient instruction and application and try to precipitate "decisions" by psychological pressure (a thing too easily done), we shall merely produce psychological upsets. People will come to our vestries and enquiry rooms in an agitated state; they will go through the motions of "decision" at our bidding; but when the shock has worn off, it will appear that the decision meant nothing save that now they are "gospel-hardened." And if a few prove to have been truly converted, that will be despite our methods, not because of them.

The popularity of such methods in recent years seem largely due to the erroneous idea that the task of evangelism is by hook or by crook to reap a crop of converts; and idea which has led to the equally erroneous assumption that evangelism is better done through special high-pressure mass meetings than through the steady teaching and witness of the local church. But it is clear that these ideas are mistaken. And the sooner we learn to give ourselves, clergy and laity alike, to our own proper task of witness, instruction and application, and to eschew these unfortunate attempts to do the Holy Ghost's work for Him, the healthier it will be for the cause of evangelism today. ☪



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