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Selected Sample Definitions of Evanelism

Kenneth B. Kramer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_kramerk@csl.edu

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SELECTED SAMPLE DEFINITIONS
OF EVANGELISM

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Kenneth B. Kramer

June 1952

Approved by:

Robert R. Cameron
Advisor

Otto E. Sohn
Reader

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1

It is the aim of this paper to describe definitions of evangelism currently prevailing in American Protestant and Lutheran churches.

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Lutheran Council Commission on Evangelism and Chapter VI considers the work of the Commission. Some detailed and historical evangelistic theories are outside the scope of this paper. It is for this reason that Arminianism's outstanding work, The Principles of Evangelism, receives no mention in this paper, although an comprehensive study of evangelism can afford to ignore this detailed work by

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aim

It is the aim of this paper to describe definitions of evangelism currently prevailing in American Protestant and Lutheran Churches. The aim is principally to describe these definitions, not to evaluate or extensively to criticize them.

Scope

The definitions are representative of various branches of non-Roman churches in America. The Dutch Reformed Church represents the Calvinist emphasis, the Methodist the Arminian, and the Moody Bible Institute the Fundamentalist. The Lutheran Church receives two chapters; Chapter V considers publications exclusive of the work of the National Lutheran Council Commission on Evangelism and Chapter VI considers the work of the Commission. Roman Catholic and Episcopal evangelistic theories are outside the scope of this paper. It is for this reason that Bryan Green's outstanding book, The Practice of Evangelism, receives no mention in this paper, although no comprehensive study of evangelism can afford to ignore this detailed work by

Rector Green.¹

For purposes of the present study, "definition" includes the objectives for which the respective branches strive, the agents who conduct evangelism, the motivation that impels them, and the approach which they follow in addressing the unconverted.

Limitations

The present study limits itself to a survey of basic theories. It does not concern itself with specific techniques, although reference to techniques may in some cases be necessary in order to demonstrate basic theories.

It is important to remember that in no church body is there unanimity in evangelistic principles. It is equally significant that theories of evangelism are constantly changing. The statements of this paper, therefore, are not conclusive in the sense that they are universally applicable to specific instances. Rather, they are indicative of general trends officially endorsed by representative church bodies.

¹Bryan Green, The Practice of Evangelism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951).

CHAPTER II

A CALVINIST DEFINITION

Objectives

According to its official manual on the subject, the Dutch Reformed Church by the word "evangelism" denotes "the activity which brings the evangel, the Gospel, to those who do not know or who do not believe it, in the hope of bringing them to a saving faith in Christ our Savior."¹ Evangelism applies to the work of preaching the Gospel to pagans living in nominally Christian lands, missions applies to the work directed toward pagans living in pagan lands.

Creation of belief apart from subsequent church membership is held to be incomplete evangelization.² As a corollary, nominal church members are not to be evangelized; only upon formal excommunication do lukewarm members become fit objects for evangelization.³

Throughout the manual emphasis is placed on the fact that proper evangelism includes far more than moral uplift. The aim is to bring about a "cleansing of the heart by the

¹Reformed Evangelism, edited by Martin Monsma (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, c.1948), p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Ibid., p. 21.

powerful working of the Holy Spirit through regeneration."⁴

Agents

There is a heavy emphasis on the organizational channels for conducting evangelism. This emphasis is derived from the stated conception of the office of the Church as "the divinely instituted agency for the gathering of the elect wherever these may be."⁵ The everyday life of the believer is termed "unintentional evangelism" and work done by virtue of consistorial appointment is "deliberate evangelism." The former may also be called "witnessing" or "witness-bearing."⁶ Because of this Reformed distinction, it is said to be desirable to have two staffs in the Sunday School; one for ordinary teaching and one for evangelistic teaching.⁷ The heavy emphasis on the organized local church as the "mater fidelium"⁸ and its authoritative role in evangelism may be seen in the following excerpts:

However, let us ever remember that the work of evangelism in its more purposeful and organized form is definitely the prerogative, the privilege, and duty of

⁴Ibid., p. 332.

⁵Ibid., pp. 18-20.

⁶Ibid., p. 180.

⁷Ibid., p. 214.

⁸Ibid., p. 332.

the instituted or organized church.⁹

The leadership of the consistory in the matters of evangelism should never be by-passed, but ever honored.¹⁰

The fundamental principle is here, that evangelism as an organized effort to gain the unbelieving to Christ is the task, not of some society or individual, but of the Church, and should be sponsored and conducted by the Church.¹¹

Evangelism is the work, therefore, to be done only by members who receive their assignments through consistorial appointment. It is related to the ordinary life of the individual member, but is definitely a separate work for which special skills and formal appointment are required.

Motivation

Five points of Calvinistic doctrine are listed as normative for Reformed evangelism: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of saints.¹² From these five points the various incentives are derived.

The modus sanctificandi of sin, grace and gratitude is a primary factor in motivation. Open-air meetings are to

⁹Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., pp. 14-21.

be held only out of gratitude to God;¹³ failure to participate in evangelism programs indicates feeble gratitude for one's own salvation;¹⁴ and Sunday School lessons must always operate with the motivated sequence of sin, redemption and gratitude.¹⁵

It is held that "the greatest of all incentives in the work of evangelism" is the "glory of our God."¹⁶ Failing adequately to fear and love God, the worker should "plead with God for the sake of His glory and the honor of His name"¹⁷ to equip him with the urge to evangelize.

The above statements imply that man is capable of rousing himself to deep gratitude and burning passion for God's glory. The technique apparently consists of imagining one's self in an unsaved condition, bemoaning one's eminent fate, suddenly introducing the Gospel into the picture, and coming up with a profound feeling of gratitude for being saved.

The worker's thankfulness for personal salvation and passion for God's glory are implemented by a strong sense of obligation to obey all express divine commands. This

¹³Ibid., p. 308.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 142.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 199.

obedience will not become a "wooden performance of duty" if one has "an inner experience of Christ."¹⁸

Rigid obedience brings blessings to the evangelist and the desire to receive these blessings is also a motivating factor in evangelism. There is a reward in heaven for true evangelists, because each person will receive as much glory as he is capable of bearing, and nothing equips the Christian better for larger glory than does evangelism. Christians should also bear in mind that they will feel ashamed and embarrassed in heaven if they have come there without one soul to their credit. Such a feeling of unworthiness is held to blight the bliss of heaven to at least some extent.¹⁹ In this life, too, blessings come as a result of evangelistic efforts. God is always with His people "in unconditioned grace," but the harder they try to evangelize, the better they appreciate His presence. Evangelism is to be carried on for the sake of personal faith improvement.²⁰

Approach

The doctrine of the covenant is the basis of Reformed

¹⁸Ibid., p. 137 f.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 142-7.

²⁰David M. Dawson, More Power In Soul-Winning (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1947), p. 42.

evangelism. The unbeliever is regarded primarily as a "grossly guilty covenant breaker" cut off from God's gracious agreement and doomed to eternal destruction. Acceptance of forgiveness through Christ and acknowledgment of God's just ethical demands insures covenantal status and guarantees subsequent observance of divine rules.²¹ The evangelist attempts to persuade the prospect to make a decision to keep God's rules. Christian benevolence should be performed in order to make an opening for the evangel.²²

This complex of motives could easily induce an attitude of moral superiority and the incentive to good works might well be sensed by the prospect. If both eventualities occur, the unchurched prospect will resent the attitude of moral superiority evidenced by the Christian worker and identify the church's benevolence with astute salesmanship.

Reformed evangelism is anti-revivalistic.²³

²¹Reformed Evangelism, pp. 206, 250.

²²Ibid., p. 232.

²³Ibid., p. 224.

CHAPTER III

A FUNDAMENTALIST DEFINITION

Objectives

The Moody Institute definition of evangelism is difficult concisely to analyze or to describe. The group is Fundamentalist and interdenominational; it has no common confession or spokesman.¹ Only on the fundamental facts of man's sin, forgiveness through Christ's redemption, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the efficacy of prayer is there reasonably uniform opinion. The Moody group is closely related to the Calvinist and Arminian branches of Christianity, and has nothing mutually unique to these two. Its overwhelming emphasis on prayer is its outstanding characteristic.

C. Norman Bartlett, faculty member of the Moody Bible Institute, maintains that in order to become Christians men "must will to accept the new life God imparts."² Rees, in his book Stir Up the Gift asserts that "the transition from blight to blessing" is impossible "save as we unsparingly commit ourselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ." Rees

¹Alfred Martin, "This Was Founders' Week," Moody Monthly, LI (April, 1950), 532.

²C. Norman Bartlett, "The New Birth," Moody Monthly, LI (September, 1951), 16.

concludes that the only truly Christian type of preaching is that type which attempts to get from the hearer a "decision for Christ."³ Harold John Ockenga makes the following assertion:

The Christian must realize the spiritual privilege of having the Holy Spirit in one. This demands our complete surrender, obedience and trust, for the Holy Spirit is given to them that obey Him and we are to grieve not the Spirit of God. Therefore, our complete surrender is essential. Such a realization will bring us power, for after the Holy Ghost is come upon us we will have power.⁴

It may be said that Moody evangelism is the attempt to bring men to a conviction of their sin and to a surrender of themselves in complete obedience to the ethical demands of Scripture with the expectation of a consequent gift of the Holy Spirit as an inner voice guiding one's life and assuring one of the forgiveness of sins.⁵

Agents

Literature representing the Moody group is unanimous in emphasizing the obligation of every believer to evangel-

³Paul S. Rees, Stir Up the Gift (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1951), p. 132 f.

⁴Harold John Ockenga, Our Evangelical Faith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1946), p. 55.

⁵" Foolproof Formula for Guidance," Moody Monthly, LI (June, 1951), 706; R. A. Torrey, How to Pray (Chicago: The Moody Press, c.1900), p. 141; F. G. McClure, Intercessory Prayer (Chicago: The Moody Press, c.1902), pp. 47-50; Rees, op. cit., p. 148.

ize by witness of moral excellence and the spoken Gospel. This theory of evangelism was clearly advocated by Dwight L. Moody.⁶ However, current emphasis lies heavily on the use of professional evangelists in the tradition of Moody, Torrey, Whitefield, Sunday and Graham. Every number of the Moody Monthly under the section headed "Evangelism" lists evangelists currently on tour, extensively reporting future bookings and past successes. The technical use of the term in connection with professional evangelists is developing alongside the more general use.

Evangelistic campaigns should be conducted through established congregations.⁷ The resident pastor gives regular pastoral care and is at special times to bring in professional evangelists to secure decisions. The success of the itinerant evangelist depends largely on the quality of prayer and witnessing done by the members of the local church or churches prior to the evangelistic mission. After the travelling expert has secured decisions for Christ, the congregation assumes responsibility for edify-

⁶Dwight L. Moody, Sovereign Grace (Chicago: Moody Press, c.1891), passim.

⁷Ockenga, op. cit., p. 69.

ing the new converts.⁸

Motivation

The Moody group's motivation for evangelistic activity is identical with the Reformed motivation.⁹ There is, however, increased emphasis on the surrender motif and on the gift of the Holy Spirit in His special mission as "Comforter." F. G. McClure states that "the Holy Spirit as the gift-giver" is "intended only for those who are ready to glorify Christ before the world."¹⁰ The degree of a Christian's glory at Christ's second coming depends on how hard the Christian has worked for conversions in this life. A believer's calling is so to live that he will be the best person possible "to be ready for that day."¹¹ This desire to glorify God is supplemented by gratitude for one's own

⁸R. A. Torrey, "How to Promote A Revival," Moody Monthly, LI (September, 1950), 20; W. A. Criswell, "Fires of Evangelism," Moody Monthly, LI (September, 1950), 28; David D. Allen, "What I Expect of an Evangelist," Moody Monthly, LI (April, 1951), 524; "Evangelism or Revival or Both?," Moody Monthly, LI (July, 1951), 730; "Billy Graham Answers," Moody Monthly, LI (February, 1951), 374.

⁹Supra 5.

¹⁰McClure, op. cit., p. 58.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 99-109; Torrey, How To Pray, p. 77.

salvation.¹²

Approach

As one reads the Moody literature on evangelism, he is struck by the large number of statements on the subject of the Holy Spirit and by the relative scarcity of references to the person and work of Christ. Apparently Christ is regarded as primarily a device for securing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is from this emphasis on the gift of the Holy Spirit that the preoccupation with prayer arises, so that the Moody approach to evangelism might well be described in one word: prayer. The Holy Spirit can by "irresistible"¹³ intercessory prayer be induced to work out the conversion of any unbeliever or group of unbelievers.

The Moody literature abounds with references to middle-of-the-night conversions, apparently coming through thin air, but subsequently traceable to unremitting prayer offered by concerned Christians.¹⁴ At the Moody Institute's Founders' Week Conference in 1951, the leaders prayed "from early evening" into the early morning hours and some "even until daylight." This "deep spirit of

¹²Ockenga, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Torrey, *How To Pray*, p. 40; Nathan J. Stone, "Answering Your Questions," *Moody Monthly*, LI (May, 1951), p. 604.

¹³Torrey, *How To Pray*, p. 31.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 49.

prayer" was regarded as one of the most significant phases of the conference.¹⁵ The full extent of this concern with the power of prayer in evangelism cannot be described; only a personal reading of the pertinent literature will show the extreme preoccupation with this one phase of the Christian life.

The Sacrament of Baptism is an outward sign only.¹⁶ No mention is made of the Lord's Supper. Only the spoken or written Gospel, intercessory prayer and a moral life can achieve success in evangelism.

The Moody approach to evangelism embraces these five points:

1. Live a life free from moral taint which might repel prospects.¹⁷

2. Free yourself from sin (i. e., surrender completely) in order to possess the power of the Holy Spirit in your conversion efforts.¹⁸

3. Pick a community, a group, or an individual and

¹⁵Martin, loc. cit.

¹⁶McClure, op. cit., p. 64; Nathan J. Stone, "Salvation and Baptism," Moody Monthly, LI (September, 1950), 32; Bartlett, loc. cit.

¹⁷Torrey, How To Pray, p. 77.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 39 f.; McClure, op. cit., p. 58; Dorothy C. Haskin, A Practical Primer on Prayer (Chicago: Moody Press, c.1951), pp. 56, 77 f.; Ockenga, op. cit., p. 54; Rees, op. cit., p. 153.

pray constantly for their conversion; that is, for conviction of sin and surrender to Christ's ethical demands.¹⁹

4. When the opportunity presents itself, speak the Gospel.

5. Intensify this ministry of prayer when an evangelistic campaign is coming to your community. Unite with other Christians to increase the power of your prayer.²⁰

¹⁹McClure, op. cit., p. 33; Haskin, op. cit., p. 91; Torrey, How To Pray, pp. 111-26; "Princeton's Fifteen Days," Moody Monthly, LI (January, 1951), 320.

²⁰McClure, op. cit., p. 47; Torrey, "How to Promote A Revival," passim.

CHAPTER IV

AN ARMINIAN DEFINITION

Objectives

The Methodist Church Board of Evangelism uses the magazine Shepherds as its official channel for statements on evangelism. Articles appearing in this periodical state that decision and commitment are the aims of evangelistic efforts. Aaron W. Meckel holds that the preacher's task is to "inspire and provoke men to decision."¹ G. Ray Jordan, professor of preaching at Emory University, outlines the evangelistic process as conviction (of ethical wrongdoing), repentance and conversion (decision to follow a new way of living). The new life is an "expression of gratitude for deliverance from sin," and is the result of "an impelling spiritual experience" when a man "eagerly and gratefully responds to His divine appeal."² Bishop William C. Martin, writing to promote the National Week of Lay Evangelism, gives the following analyses of goals:

Literally thousands of people have been reached during the campaign with an appeal to take Christ's way of life who did not quite come to the crucial decision.

¹ Aaron W. Meckel, "The Spiritual Basis of Evangelistic Preaching," Shepherds, IV (July, 1950), 25 f.

² G. Ray Jordan, "Effective Evangelistic Preaching," Shepherds, VI (March, 1952), 17-19.

If they are neglected now they will drift back in the old ways of indifference and sin.³

Concise statements of this decision evangelism are given by Dawson C. Eryan, outstanding Methodist pastor and evangelist, who maintains that "the ultimate purpose is to secure a commitment to enter the Christian way or to renew loyalty to the church."⁴ A similar definition is the following: "Evangelism is the process of winning commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the inviting, the exhorting, the pressing, for a verdict."⁵

This heavy emphasis on the acceptance of ethical standards has as its ultimate goal the realization of the kingdom of God on earth; that is, of an ideal Christian society.⁶ The Church may realize this goal by regenerating individuals who will create a "social order" and "an environment worthy of the followers of the way."⁷

³William C. Martin, "Laymen Make Discovery," Shepherds, VI (February, 1952), 7.

⁴Dawson C. Eryan, A Handbook of Evangelism for Laymen (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1948), p. 26.

⁵Lowell Erested Hazzard, "How Christians Are Made," Shepherds, III (April, 1949), 9.

⁶Eryan, op. cit., p. 26 f.; Wayne A. Lam, "A Program of Evangelism," Shepherds, III (September, 1949), 9.

⁷Eryan, op. cit., p. 22.

Agents

Methodist evangelism is to be conducted through organized congregations. Evangelistic missions are endorsed and seem to be a major device for securing decisions.

Most authors encourage personal evangelism by every member but there is not a consistent development of this participation by all members. For example, Bryan definitely sets up a division of labor which distinguishes between Christians fit to evangelize and the rank and file qualified only for supporting work as chauffeurs, clerks and cooks. In other words, all the members are agents, but only the specially endowed Christians actually secure decisions under normal circumstances. The pastor is the expert in securing decisions.⁸

The close similarities to the Calvinist and Fundamentalist approaches to this problem are apparent.⁹

Motivation

Little attention is given to the problem of motivation. Apparently, motivation is assumed. Gratitude is a

⁸Dawson C. Bryan, A Workable Plan of Evangelism (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, c.1945), pp. 70-7; Robert B. Giffen, "The Answer to 'Why Evangelism?'," Shepherds, VI (February, 1952), 10.

⁹Supra 4, 11.

component factor, in addition to the duty and the desire to establish God's ideal society among men.¹⁰ The following statement is indicative of this social-order type motivation:

We are now living in a somber and discouraged world. To many of us the outstanding responsibility of the Christian Church is to help create the kind of world worth living in, to help bring forth justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace on earth. The goal of all Christians is the Kingdom of God.¹¹

Approach

The Methodist evangelistic approach involves a slight change from Calvinist and Fundamentalist theories of approach.¹² The assumption is made that most unbelievers are aware of God's ethical demands and therefore need only a little encouragement to "do the right thing." Simple directive questioning is usually sufficient to bring about the desired decision to attend church, follow Christian ethics and form devotional habits.¹³

There is in all the literature minimal concern with the historical redemptive activity of Christ. At times one

¹⁰Bryan, A Handbook of Evangelism for Laymen, pp. 9-12; and A Workable Plan of Evangelism, pp. 140-2.

¹¹Bryan, A Handbook of Evangelism for Laymen, p. 21 f.

¹²Supra 8, 13.

¹³Bryan, A Handbook of Evangelism for Laymen, pp. 27-55.

gains the impression that authors are deliberately avoiding the central issue of sin and grace. Almost every article, even when setting out to discuss radical theories of evangelism, soon concerns itself with techniques of promotion, organization and publicity.¹⁴

The doctrine of evangelistic prayer, like the Moody approach,¹⁵ involves "praying through," "full surrender," and the "witness of the Spirit."¹⁶

¹⁴O. A. Bowers, "The Early Church Had An Effective Program of Evangelism," Shepherds, IV (May, 1950), 2; R. B. Schwitzgebel, "Local Churches Can Reach Jews for Christ," Shepherds, VI (March, 1952), 31.

¹⁵Supra 13.

¹⁶Everett Staats, "How To Conduct A Successful Prayer Circle In the Home," Shepherds, VI (February, 1952), 27; "The Minister's Spiritual Preparation for Evangelism," Shepherds, VI (February, 1952), 11.

CHAPTER V

A LUTHERAN DEFINITION UNDER NON-LUTHERAN INFLUENCE

Objectives

The evangelistic definitions given in this chapter definitely indicate that evangelism is the preaching of the Gospel primarily to unbelievers.¹ While it is true that more attention is given to using the Gospel toward sincere church members than is given by the Reformed, Fundamentalist and Arminian samples,² much more space is devoted to the problems involved in outreach to nominal church members and to the unchurched. Knock is particularly vehement in denouncing cold formalism in established churches.³

Assimilation into church life and continued care of new members is emphasized.⁴

¹William S. Avery and Royal E. Leshar, You Shall Be My Witnesses (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 13-22; A. W. Knock, Personal Evangelism (Minneapolis: The Lutheran Bible Institute Book Store, 1941), pp. 3, 73; Amos John Traver, Harvesters (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, c.1950), p. 7 f.; August W. Erustat, Partnership With God (New York: Ernst Kaufman, Inc., c.1947), p. 64; Philip Lange, The Approach to the Unchurched (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), p. 7.

²Knock, op. cit., p. 3; Erustat, op. cit., p. 74; Avery and Leshar, op. cit., p. 15.

³Knock, op. cit., pp. 3-9.

⁴Avery and Leshar, op. cit., pp. 13-22; Erustat, op. cit., pp. 15, 61; Traver, op. cit., pp. 10-20.

Avery and Leshner have definite overtones of the decision theology usually typical of the Moody group.⁵ Knock speaks extensively of the need to "yield ourselves completely"⁶ to the will of God and of being "willingly obedient" to divine imperatives.⁷

Agents

All the sample literature provides for participation by the laity. This is due partly to the fact that lay visitation is the burden of each of the books, but the framework in every instance implies total congregational participation even if this is not explicitly stated.⁸

There is little apparent success in maintaining that all of a man's life can and should be evangelism, but at least the way is opened for all to be evangelists at some time of the week.

Motivation

It is in the attempt to state motivation for evangelism that Reformed and Fundamentalist tendencies are most appa-

⁵Supra 10; Avery and Leshner, op. cit., p. 18.

⁶Knock, op. cit., p. 54.

⁷Ibid., p. 37.

Avery and Leshner, op. cit., p. 16; Erustat, op. cit., p. 69.

rent. Love to Christ is one of the motivations, but this motivation is never clearly described as the result of God's gracious activity through the medium of the Gospel and is therefore subject to easy Reformed and Fundamentalist interpretation.⁹

It is said that one's evangelistic zeal is a direct measurement of his gratitude for his salvation.¹⁰ Brustat and Lange hold that the desire to create a better place in which to live is a fit motivation.¹¹ Knock and Traver combine to appeal to a sense of shame in the lagging evangelist.¹² Obedience to the will of God is a motivation and the statement of this motivation is unsupported by a view as to how this desire to obey grows in a Christian's heart.¹³

Brustat comes directly into the Reformed school when he lists Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15 and Acts 1:8 as key passages and proceeds to a legalistic exegesis of the entire group.¹⁴ Brustat also believes that the Christian's

⁹Traver, op. cit., pp. 14, 26; Knock, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰Traver, op. cit., p. 5; Lange, op. cit., p. 9.

¹¹Brustat, op. cit., p. 68; Lange, op. cit., p. 3.

¹²Knock, op. cit., p. 9; Traver, op. cit., p. 7.

¹³Knock, op. cit., p. 23; Traver, op. cit., p. 5 f.

¹⁴Brustat, op. cit., p. 61 f.

obedience to God's ethical commands is a condition attached to all God's promises.¹⁵ The rather obvious implication that men should fulfill the condition in order to persuade God to give His gracious gifts is highly reminiscent of Calvinistic theories on the subject.¹⁶

There is general agreement that Christians should carry on soul-winning efforts in order to better their own spiritual life.¹⁷

The motivation of desire for rewards is emphasized less than by Reformed and Fundamentalist authors. Lange, however, holds out the promise of greater glory in heaven as well as joy and satisfaction on earth.¹⁸

Approach

The only specific method of evangelism considered in the sample literature is the method of lay visitation. For this reason the advocated approach cannot be accurately determined. Within this limited criterion, however, one notes the consistent emphasis on conversion to Jesus Christ as Savior through vicarious redemption; moral uplift and church

¹⁵Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁶Supra 7.

¹⁷Brustat, op. cit., pp. 61-73; Avery and Leshner, op. cit., p. 18 f.; Knock, op. cit., p. 12; Lange, op. cit., p. 12.

¹⁸Lange, op. cit., p. 12 f.

membership are never equated with conversion. The local church is always integral in evangelistic activity.¹⁹

Knock's theory of prayer's place in evangelism is almost identical with the views held by the Moody group.²⁰ He has considerable support in this respect from Traver.²¹

¹⁹Traver, op. cit., p. 19.

²⁰Knock, op. cit., pp. 33-6, 49 f.

²¹Traver, op. cit., pp. 24-7.

CHAPTER VI

A LUTHERAN DEFINITION UNDER LUTHERAN INFLUENCE

Objectives

Evangelism literature emanating from the National Lutheran Council Commission on Evangelism represents an attempt to evolve a definition of evangelism based on confessional Lutheran principles. Traces of the evangelism advocated by earlier authors remain.¹ The following official definition indicates this trend toward deeper theological orientation:

Evangelism is winning men for Jesus Christ. It is bringing people to a consciousness of their sins, and to an acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; instructing them, and sending them forth to bear witness to their faith, especially among the indifferent, the unchurched, and the unsaved.²

The same trend is apparent when the Commission states that "it is a program with one aim - to bring people into a living relationship with Christ as Lord and Savior that they in turn may be witnesses of His love and grace."³

The subdued implication that sincere members of the

¹Supra Chapter V.

²Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, *Approved Unto God* (Chicago: Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, n.d.), foreword.

³Ibid., p. 9.

congregation are objects of evangelism is not carried out in subsequent directives of the Commission. Inactive members of the church and "those with some, little or no church background" are the primary objects of evangelistic work.⁴

Evangelism is to be an ongoing process and is considered the basic work of the Church.⁵ The decision theology typical of the Moody and Arminian samples is minimal.⁶

The literature emphasizes assimilation into the fellowship of the congregation and stimulation to active service. While it is true that every program of evangelism described in this paper recognizes the need for assimilation, this is the first literature to weave this theory into the very fabric of its program.⁷

Agents

Recognition of a Christian's witness in his daily occupation is implied by the fact that organized evangelism is assigned a secondary role in the evangelistic process.

⁴Ibid., p. 12.

⁵Ibid., passim.

⁶Supra 10, 17.

⁷Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, That They May Hear His Voice (Chicago: Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, n.d.), p. 4; Carl C. Rasmussen, Integrating (Chicago: Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, n.d.), passim.

Lay visitation, for example, is said to capitalize on the inevitable daily witness of all Christians but remains only a secondary device.⁸ Despite these assertions, however, the organized devices for evangelism dominate in the specific plans that are given and the Christian's everyday witness recedes. Plans for the commissioning of lay visitors illustrate this failure to follow original definitions when they provide for an elite corps of visitors to discharge the duties of the entire membership.⁹

The heavy emphasis on the local congregation as the center of evangelistic activity is unique among the samples given in this paper.¹⁰

Motivation

Literature published by the Lutheran Commission on Evangelism allows only one basic motive for evangelism:

We must be clear on our motive. It is not merely the sinful and lost condition of the world that motivates us. It is "because the love of God has been shed abroad on our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us." In other words, the motive comes from above.¹¹

⁸Approved Unto God, p. 8.

⁹Ibid., pp. 12-21; Royal E. Leshner, Organized Evangelism in the Congregation (Chicago: Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, n.d.), passim; That They May Hear His Voice, pp. 24-8.

¹⁰Infra 29.

¹¹That They May Hear His Voice, p. 12.

This motive which "comes from above" is coupled with the Christian's recognition of the fact that unbelievers have a claim on his soul-winning efforts because "they, too, are redeemed by the blood of Christ."¹² This statement of theocentric motivation has no parallel in other types of evangelistic theory.

Approach

It is in the area of approach that the Lutheran Commission on Evangelism most clearly shows the trend toward an evangelistic theory based on Lutheran confessional theology.¹³

Moral superiority is no authority for evangelistic attempts.¹⁴ The approach should be characterized by love and humility, since the graciously bestowed "love of God" is all that justifies evangelistic efforts.¹⁵

The emphasis on the means of grace is unique among the samples considered in this paper. The spoken Word and the Sacraments are necessary for congregational members before and while they attempt to effect the conversion of unbeliev-

¹²Approved Unto God, p. 10.

¹³Supra 26.

¹⁴Approved Unto God, p. 10.

¹⁵Supra 28.

ers.¹⁶ Significant in this connection is the publication of a pamphlet authored by G. Everett Arden, entitled "Lutheran Worship."¹⁷ No other group considers the usual setting for the use of the means of grace to be of such importance.

Also in the statements about prayer this attention to the verbal and signed Word is apparent. Prayer is essential but prayer does not ask an unmediated gift of the Spirit; rather, it asks God to bless the Word about Christ as the evangelist speaks it.¹⁸ This theory is clearly distinct from Fundamentalist theory on the same subject.¹⁹

Adult instruction (or membership) class is the accepted Lutheran way of preparing for membership and integration.²⁰ Lay visitation attempts to secure decisions to attend this course of instruction.²¹

One pamphlet promotes preaching missions featuring the use of travelling evangelists. A number of such evangelists are employed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church. How

¹⁶Approved Unto God, p. 8 f.

¹⁷C. Everett Arden, Lutheran Worship (Chicago: Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, n.d.), passim.

¹⁸Approved Unto God, pp. 16-20.

¹⁹Supra 14.

²⁰Approved Unto God, p. 31.

²¹Ibid., pp. 16-21; That They May Hear His Voice, pp. 24-8.

great this emphasis will become is a matter of conjecture.²² The American Lutheran Conference expressly provides for the continuation of this approach in its United Testimony on Faith and Life, adopted on February 13, 1952.²³

The literature available from the Lutheran Commission on Evangelism is not extensive enough to form an adequate criterion for evaluation. The entire program under the direction of this committee is in a formative stage. Only further activity and additional publications can provide adequate criteria for measurement. It is apparent, however, that the Lutheran Commission on Evangelism has not as yet succeeded in radically restudying the theory and practice of evangelism.

²²G. C. Reinertson, Preaching Evangelism Today (Chicago: Lutheran Commission on Evangelism, n.d.), passim.

²³"The United Testimony on Faith and Life," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII (May, 1952), 369.

'CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The theories of evangelism described in this study lack adequate development of three particulars. They fail adequately to develop the doctrine of the Word, the doctrine of the Church, and the doctrine of Faith.

Every sample indicates the preeminence of Jesus' historical redemptive activity. It is therefore obvious that a penetrating study of how the message of this activity effects conversion to Christian faith is essential to any theory of evangelism. Yet one looks in vain for such analysis in these schools of thought.

The second failing, neglect of the doctrine of the Christian Church, ties in closely with the first failing. There is no definition of the place of the fellowship of believers in Christ insofar as they make a common impact on unbelievers.

Failure adequately to study the doctrine of Christian Faith accounts for the lack of a clear definition of the condition to which converts must be brought. If Christ and His redemption are the focal point of evangelism, what relationship to Christ is ideal for the converts? It is insufficient to have only general aims about bringing the unbeliever to Christian faith if this life of faith is not

precisely determined.

In summary, one may say that there is a common failure clearly to state the process by which the evangelist's weapon is to effect conversion, a failure to state the role of the society of Christian believers in effecting conversion, and a failure clearly to state the ultimate objectives which are to be achieved in the new converts.

It is therefore apparent that the formulation of an effective program of Christian evangelism must begin with a serious evaluation of the doctrine of the Word of God, continue to the doctrine of the Church as the body of Christ and the means of His work among men, and finally a deep reorientation to the meaning of Christian faith. Radical restudy of and radical answers to these three questions undoubtedly will alter the respective statements on objectives, agents, motivation and approach.

There are hopeful signs on the horizon, notably the current attempt by the Lutheran Commission on Evangelism to achieve deeper theological orientation.¹ There are two books recently published within the Lutheran Church that are also hopeful signs. Oscar Carlson's book, The Church's Singular Task, is a radical restudy of the problem of

¹Supra 26.

evangelism with emphasis on the use of the Word.² Richard R. Caemmerer's book, The Church in the World, is a serious evaluation of the place of the Church as the fellowship of believers in effecting conversion. It also presents the ultimate objectives to be achieved in all converts and in all church members.³ These two works have as yet received no official recognition; and until such recognition is given them, they cannot be considered as anything more than minority opinions within the Lutheran churches.

One significant pamphlet which has official status is currently being issued by the Missouri Synod's Department of Stewardship, Missionary Education, and Promotion. Witness Where You Are successfully avoids most of the Reformed and Fundamentalist emphases and may well presage the coming of a new type of Lutheran evangelism.⁴

²Oscar W. Carlson, The Church's Singular Task (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1950), passim.

³Richard R. Caemmerer, The Church in the World (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1949), passim.

⁴Witness Where You Are (Issued by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Department of Stewardship, Missionary Education, and Promotion, n.d.).

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