

Introduction

I am convinced that we – and, by ‘we’, I mean evangelical believers (churches) – we, today, are on the cusp of a sea change in what we call ‘evangelism’; that is, in the way we try to reach unbelievers with the gospel, in what we provide for them, what we offer them, and what we expect from them.¹ I am convinced that we are undergoing a revolution in our thinking and practice in this vital area. I am also convinced that, within a few years, the result will prove catastrophic, and will be evident to all.

Looking at it in another way, what I am referring to is not really a revolution; rather, it is yet another tweaking of the principles of Christendom,² a logical extension of a practice which has been with us for a long time, something we have all grown used to,³ but something, nevertheless, which has no scriptural warrant. I am talking about churches looking upon the gospel as a ‘product’ which has to be ‘sold’, going to the world to find out how they sell their products, learning from the world, so that they can make the gospel attractive to the ‘unchurched’.⁴

¹ For more on ‘evangelism’, see Appendix 1.

² By ‘Christendom’, I mean the so-called ‘Christian world’, ‘cultural Christianity’, ‘Churchianity’, ‘religion in the name of Christ’. See Appendix 2.

³ In the West, at least, the culture of Christendom is embedded in our genes, part of our DNA. Bringing this right up to date, do not ignore the fact that, for many, evangelism by church invitation and a man-centered church experience is all they have known. The fact is, we have inherited Christendom (unknown in New Testament days), and we have to live with it. The question is, do we do the best we can to cope with it, doing all we can to avoid its clutches, or do we adopt and exploit it?

⁴ I will continue to talk in terms of ‘sinners’, the ‘unconverted’, the ‘ungodly’ and ‘unbelievers’. Talk of the ‘unchurched’ is, in itself, not without significance, grievous significance, at that. It is yet another product stamped ‘Made in Christendom’. ‘Sinners’ is too

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So, while the issue which is my present concern is not altogether new in principle, let me call it an innovation, and give it a tag: 'Relationship Evangelism'.⁵

While I have spoken about this before,⁶ Ray Evans of Kempston, Bedford, England, with his recently published *Ready, Steady, Grow*, has clarified things for me in a remarkable way. Evans, arguing vigorously for this new method of evangelism, has crystallised my view and made my stance even more firm.⁷

And so to my book. I will start with the primary issue. What do we want with all our evangelism? Well, we are looking for the glory of God. Yes, that is a given, surely. But getting down to brass tacks, we long to see the glory of God in the conversion of sinners. The question is, what do we mean by 'conversion'? If we are not crystal clear about that, all will be lost, lost before we start.

painful for Christendom's advocates – the hunt for euphemisms is on! In his book, Evans uses 'sinner' only four times, three of which were in quotations of Scripture. The New Testament uses the word over forty times.

⁵ Checking whether or not I had coined a title, I soon discovered I had not. For instance, I came across 'Ministry Evangelism ideas every church can do!'; '10 Servanthood Evangelism ideas to impact your community'; '94 Community Servant Evangelism ideas for your church'; 'Relationship Evangelism: definition and value of...'; '4 Reasons [why] Relational Evangelism works'; 'Community Evangelism Ideas'. And so on.

⁶ See my *Battle* pp263-267; *Baptist* pp327-332; *Glorious* pp186-195. See also my sermons such as 'Confronting The Cultures'; 'No Mixture! Separation!'; 'Need Not Want: A Warning', and so on.

⁷ When I had got the bulk of my manuscript well underway, I was given a copy of David F.Wells' *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2008. For the valuable material in Wells' work that I simply had to use, see Appendix 3.