

LITURGY AND EVANGELISM¹

This theme brought my mind back to 1945. It was early July and the war hardly two months over, but chaplains of the Corps gathered us war service candidates to 8 Corps Church House at Preetz in Schleswig Holstein. There were men of various denominations, and the chaplains were Anglican and Church of Scotland. In war we accepted this ecumenical togetherness so easily. What I recall especially was a discussion on evangelism on the verandah of the country house. Each was asked for a definition, which was rather a bold demand on beginners. There were as many answers as persons asked. Knowing my own cast of mind I suppose my answer was something like, "letting God's love be made known through the Church". If that were so I do not know if I should change it very much now except to add, "God's love in Jesus Christ". Yet, after years of familiarity with words like *kerygma* and *didache*, and of conducting public worship myself, I do not know if I am any better qualified to speak on evangelism.

I suppose that some at least approached the question that day with reservations and suspicions about evangelism as suggesting cliches like "being saved" and also instant decisions. I felt something of the same hesitations when I was asked to review a book called *An Assessment of Mass Meetings as a Method of Evangelism — Case Study of Eurofest '75 and the Billy Graham Crusade in Brussels*.² The author is William Thomas, a black, full-time American evangelist with the European Baptist Federation. Contrary to expectation I found the book interesting, and by no means one-sided, uncritical, or unappreciative for example of changes in the Roman Catholic Church. Although language like "being born again" and ideas like "the personal return of Christ" occur, there is awareness of people's different responses, from the superficial to the sincere, and also of a process rather than instant changes. Therefore people need to be confronted with Christ in preaching continually and to be in the Church.

The writer connects the mass meeting to the Pietist-Methodist tradition and describes the earlier work of men like Moody. In our time radio and television seem obvious ways of reaching the masses. Yet mass meetings have gone on, and Billy Graham still comes to mind when we think of them. We can remember his campaigns in this country in the fifties. Compared with others

round the world the Belgian campaign was relatively a failure. Yet if this method may not be used so much now, evangelism itself must go on.

The writer begins with his own definition, "the proclamation, by the power of the Holy Spirit, of the historical and biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people (by *kerygma*, dialogue, and teaching) to come to Him personally by faith, and so be reconciled to God."³ This is not purely a matter of the individual and God as it might seem. He is concerned with the social and political consequences. Evangelism is part of the Church's mission to the world. He quotes also the late Pope Paul's definition of evangelism, given as recently as December 1975, to show the new attitude of the Roman Church. "Evangelism is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise, that is to say in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God." "The task of evangelising all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church."⁴ On the Roman side therefore the Church is seen more clearly as the agent or source of evangelism.

Evangelism then means a constant moving between Church and people as the New Testament reminds us. The familiar distinction between *kerygma* and *didache* is good enough to a point. The preaching or proclamation of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, crucified, dead, risen, His presence by the Spirit, His bringing the consummation; all these elements of the *kerygma* must be presented to those who do not know. The Church is taught what God's revelation and action in Christ mean, and the consequences for our lives in obedience and action. Of course the distinction cannot be rigidly applied, for even in Acts Peter and others both "teach the people and proclaim in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (4: 2). The Church must have Christ presented to it continually, and rehearse his mighty acts, in creeds and the Christian Year. Yet the distinction is true enough. Christ must be proclaimed, the good news preached, to those who do not know Him. Those brought in must hear its consequences in teaching.

The Gospels never let us forget the outsiders, the lost, people, the world. In Mark's Gospel Jesus first appears heralding the good news of the Kingdom. He has to press on to preach to other cities. The crowds come to hear. In the Sermon on the Mount Matthew indeed shows Jesus as separating from the crowd to teach the disciples. Yet Luke gives the impression that what Jesus tells the disciples is overheard by the crowd. T. W. Manson showed almost fifty years ago, that in all the Synoptic

sources quite a proportion of the teaching was directed to the general public, from 10% in Q to 38% in L, with about 25% in both Mark and M.⁵ Even if the audiences appear in redaction verses yet the Gospel writers intended to show that Jesus was always reaching out. This is no private affair for a few.

In the use of the words for preaching it is interesting but no surprise that *euaggelisésthai* is used mainly by Luke, both in the Gospel and Acts, and very often covers a general audience of Jews and Gentiles. Luke makes little use of *kerússein*; this word is used by Mark and Matthew. Paul of course employs both. The words imply reaching out to those who do not know about Jesus Christ and the great event of the Kingdom of God that entered the world in Him.

It is not necessary to omit John. The words for proclaiming the good news do not occur. But the Incarnation is for the world; "God so loved the world". On the surface Jesus seems more concerned with individuals than the crowds. Individuals are drawn to him. Nicodemus comes by night and hears about the mystery of being born from above or anew, of the kerygmatic ideas of the descent and ascent of the Son of man, and of the Son of man being lifted up that through Him men might have eternal life. Then at once we read of Jesus baptising people, although there is an immediate correction. The disciples baptised; Jesus himself did not. Again, as in the Synoptics, the crowds appear to be fed by Jesus, before the great exposition that He is the bread from heaven come down to give life to the world, and of the need to eat the flesh of the Son of man. When the Greeks come it is suggestive of the outer world waiting for something to take place, for the Son of man to be lifted up to draw all men to Him. In this Gospel Jesus does proclaim; the unusual word *ekraxen* is used (7: 28). "He proclaimed as he taught in the temple." "He cried out, 'If any one thirst, let him come to Me and drink'." (7: 37). Later He "spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world'." (8: 12). The crowd of the Jews are there when the great and final sign is given, the raising of Lazarus by Him who is the resurrection and the life. That Jesus came for the world is constantly put before us. Men must come to him. "The evangelist has in view a non-Christian public to whom he wishes to appeal."⁶

Therefore, whatever Gospel we use there is pressure to move out to people in the name of Christ. People always are ignorant, dissatisfied with themselves, caught in the sin of the world, thirsty and hungry for something better. They are lost as sheep without a shepherd. This is so in our time, in our highly

materialistic and individualistic society, not least in a highly individualistic and sophisticated society like Belgium.

One of the most revealing parts of this book is the author's report of his asking 200 people in the streets of Brussels about Jesus Christ and their church connections. 75 claimed to belong to some church; the rest, 125, had no connection. The main question asked was "Who is Jesus Christ?" Most people had no clear idea who he was, or they believed he no longer existed. Again and again the answers were, "He is now dead", "a historical figure", "a great man", "just a man", "an ordinary man now dead". Some of those who went occasionally to church said the same sort of thing, as well as "a revolutionary", "a myth". One or two said, "The Son of God". Even among those who said they attended church regularly two said he was a man now dead. Others said, "Son of God", "God", or "Saviour". Even more significantly 156 said that they did not believe in a personal God who was interested in them.

This survey may not be significant socially, but it confirms what many of us are uneasy about. There is vast ignorance of Jesus Christ and of the reality of the caring God that the Incarnation proclaims. It tells too of the failure of the churches to bring home what the Church is commissioned to tell. There are the sheep without a shepherd, those who have not heard the Gospel.

To Brussels there came, then, in 1975 Eurofest and the Campaign. Eurofest was a gathering of 7,951 young people from 41 countries. They came for Bible training and training in evangelism. Along with it went the Campaign in the evenings from July 24 to August 2. The nine meetings were held in the Heysel Stadium which holds 55,000. An average of 11,311 attended each session, so one can imagine the empty spaces. About 7,000 of these were Eurofest participants. People also came from Holland and France for a day. Less than 38,000 Belgians attended.

Two men gave Bible Expositions to the Eurofest young people. Luis Palau, coming from South America, made them relevant to political responsibility in the world. Bishop Festo Kivingere dealt with the Christian's inner life, and what is called "the body life of the Christian community". Speaking on "Understanding the fellowship", based on Ephesians 4: 1-16, he referred to our divisions by nature being overcome by a miracle of grace. Christian unity is expressed in a life of service and in worship.

Billy Graham spoke at the evening open meetings. His sermons were direct and simple, seeking to bring people to faith, as well as helping the committed. For example faith was made

plain by using the story of Naaman. Other subjects included "Who Jesus is" and "The Second Coming". He sometimes mentioned persecution and coming world revolution. He is criticised by the author for not explaining what these meant. He is also criticised for not making his preaching relate to the situation of the Belgian people. Here, in a very highly concentrated Roman Catholic community, Graham put his emphasis on "coming to Christ" and not on changing churches. It made it easier for people to respond.

The net attendance, without Eurofest members, was some 39,000. 2,557 cards were returned, analysed as Acceptance 1,298, Assurance 298, Dedication 499, and others who gave no indication, 471. Of the 1,881 Belgians 1,080 were Roman Catholics and these were not followed up by the participating Protestant churches.

At Eurofest 1970 at Dortmund the attendance was 839,000 and 15,813 cards were returned. Compared with many other Graham campaigns the response in Belgium was poor. For example in Korea in 1973 the attendance was 4,711,000, cards received over 100,000. Comparisons are only surface.

Various reasons are given for the so-called minimal success. One is the individualism of the Belgians. That must be a small contributory factor because it is general in our western society. But Belgium is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic with 95% of the people nominally belonging to it. Many of course do not go to Mass and the Roman Catholic Church is worried by anti-Christian forces, and the desertion of the young to Marxism.⁷ Yet Protestantism accounts for only 0.5% of the population, and is hampered by serious division. The division we would call "liberal" and "evangelical" and is here called "left of centre" and "right of centre". The evangelicals have a strict view of the Bible's inspiration and emphasise immediate individual salvation. The liberals think more of a process. The evangelicals were willing to be involved in Eurofest; the liberals were not. On the other hand the liberals on the whole were ready to work with the Roman Catholic Church while the others were not.

The great weakness was that no invitation was given to the Roman Catholic Church to participate, and this despite growing co-operation with that Church. Yet fifty per cent of those who came forward were Roman Catholics.

The Campaign points to the great difficulty and weakness of the Church in our time, our separation, and the maintaining of differences within communions and with other communions. In Belgium the Roman Catholic Church was aware of the need to proclaim Christ. Cardinal Suenens was asked by the author if

the Catholics would have given their moral support if they had been asked. He answered, "Such participation would have been good but not very simple. For before we are agreed on preaching Christ, we must agree who He is. The difficulty comes not with the preaching or with the praying together, but with the teaching."⁸ There might be some evasion there, but the real issue of our time is pinpointed, the question of Christology. There was need for some dialogue and discussion before the Campaign. The author makes plain elsewhere in the book that he is aware of the area where Roman Catholics and Protestants can move closer together, and where they must differ. More discussion and openness are needed.

More discussion and openness are needed because it is in the continuing liturgy, which basically we share, that progress can be made, and we can reach the world more effectively. Moreover the fourth evangelist represents Christ praying that His Church be one so that the world may believe.

There is the ongoing worship of the Christian Year, in which so many of the Christian communions share and show forth the mighty acts of God in Christ. What we believe we proclaim: the wonder of the Word made flesh at Christmas, the lifting up on the Son of man on Good Friday; the extraordinary triumph over the world and death at Easter; His Lordship over the universe at Ascension; the coming of the Comforter at Pentecost. Together we look to the culmination of all things in Christ, the key to God's purpose for the universe. We continually proclaim Christ in the pattern of the Christian Year.

We continually proclaim Christ in the preaching, which, in the public worship of God, is not only in the Church and for the Church, but also from the Church to the world, to all who may come. In the past few years I have attended Mass in three great churches on the continent, in Strasbourg, Lucerne and Munich, and heard vigorous preaching, and was made aware of the plain demonstration of the norm of worship which we share, the eucharistic norm. The Kerygma is presented by the word and also in the sacrament.

In the Fourth Gospel the interview with Nicodemus is followed by Jesus among people, Jesus baptising. That is at once corrected. "Jesus himself did not baptise, but only his disciples" (4: 2). In that correction the practice of the Church of the evangelist is breaking through. It is in the name of Christ that His ministers baptise. Baptism shows Christ at the centre of all things, the centre of His Church's worship, drawing the individual to himself. The mighty things he has done for the world are applied to the individual. Ever after in his life his

baptism is a recall to Christ. If one has been baptised as a child and wandered away, captivated by the world and self concern, then Christ calls him back. Christ is not breaking for the first time into such an adult life. He recalls one to enter into the bond which already he had established.

Again in the Eucharist the mighty acts of God in Christ are set forth. The whole structure of the Eucharist, the word read and preached, the bringing in of the elements, the setting apart, the Great Prayer with its marvellous fullness, the fraction, the *Agnus Dei*, all these, as well as the actual receiving, involve us in the mighty things of Christ. This is the fullness of the *Kerygma*. "The whole eucharistic action is the sacrament."⁹

In the Fourth Gospel the crowd are fed before the great teaching on the bread of life; the feeding is the sign pointing to it. Jesus fed the ignorant and hungry seekers first. Then they sought him out but for the wrong reasons. "You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." Like Nicodemus they did not see past the immediate, the material things of sense. Jesus goes on to explain what He has done in terms of what He is. He is the bread come down from heaven to give life to the world, and "the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh". That is the turning point. Many walk no more with Him; the disciples remain. Yet the ignorant and hungry crowd who had been fed still matter and are still there on the periphery. It reminds the Church that Christ has come to feed all such as they. He is "the bread of life" for the world. Men and women may come and see in the celebration of the Eucharist the great unfolding of what Christ has done for the world and for them.

At Pope Paul's funeral on 13th August 1978 the great table stood on the steps before the basilica. It was open to the sky and to the world represented by the crowds. The great and moving moment was not the concelebration by so many cardinals, but when 150 priests moved out with the bread of life, taking it to the waiting people. It seemed to demonstrate that Christ is for the world. He comes through the Church. It was a demonstration of the *kerygma*.¹⁰

The trouble of course is that while the worship of the Church goes on year after year, Sunday by Sunday, so many do not come. They have to be reached.

The conclusion of this book on Mass Evangelism is that while the mass meeting still has a place in the church's overall mission, campaigns like those of Billy Graham in the fifties and sixties will become rarer in Europe. More might be done with two or three evangelists working in areas from the local church.

It is the local church, with its fellowship and worship, that is vital.

There is always too what is called in the book "Friendship Evangelism". Those preparing for Eurofest were to bring a friend. From the local church this contact of members with friends must also be a gentle and continual and understanding means of approach.

There must be going out to bring in, to recall some to their baptism into Christ, to bring others to share in the Church's proclamation of Christ all the time in the richness of its liturgy. Other means of evangelising come and go and have their place, but the liturgy continues, season after season, Sunday after Sunday.

NOTES

1. Paper given at the Conference of the Society at Dundee Parish Church (St Mary's) on 25th September 1978.
2. Published 1977 by Editions Rodopi N.V., Amsterdam.
3. *Ibid.* p. 5.
4. *Ibid.* p. 150.
5. *The Teaching of Jesus* (1931; 1948) p. 28.
6. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (1953; 1968) p. 8.
7. *Op. cit.* p. 153.
8. *Op. Cit.* p. 251.
9. A. K. Robertson in his Presidential Address, 1978 *Liturgical Review* Vol. VIII (November 1978).
10. This was of course repeated on three subsequent occasions in 1978: the inauguration on 3rd September and the funeral on 4th October of Pope John Paul I, and the inauguration on 22nd October of Pope John Paul II. The first occasion naturally made the strongest impact.

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