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BOOK SECTION

Books on Mission 1970–1979

A. SKEVINGTON WOOD

THE decade of evangelism, in which the churches of this country have been urged to participate in the 1980s, was preceded by a decade reflecting an intensified interest in the theology of mission. This juxtaposition represents both a stimulus and a safeguard. Theological concern is no doubt one of the factors which prompted the call to action. On the other hand, no venture in evangelism is likely to prove more than superficially effective unless it not only arises from, but is controlled by, a biblical understanding of what mission involves.

It is now generally recognized that, strictly speaking, mission has to do with the overall witness of the Church in society — serving, teaching, healing, liberating, as well as seeking to make disciples. The latter task, within the total concept of mission, is more properly described as evangelism, although often also referred to as mission. In the present review we propose to concentrate mainly on this narrower aspect, picking out some of the more important contributions to the extensive literature on the subject.

The year 1970 itself saw the publication of Douglas Webster's admirably balanced survey, with the Pauline title *Not Ashamed: Studies in Mission and Ministry* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970). Canon Webster had already produced a useful introduction in *What is Evangelism?* (London: Highway Press, 1959) which can still be consulted with profit. It was in 1970 also that Michael Green's *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970) first appeared in hard covers. It was reproduced as a paperback in 1978. Since Adolf Harnack's *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* was translated in 1904 nothing of substance had been available in English. Green regards the New Testament period as normative for subsequent evangelism so far as basic principles are concerned and finds that these are underlined in the first three centuries of Church history. He shows that, although proclamation and exhortation were prominent, evangelism also included apologetics and dialogue with closely reasoned teaching and patient argument. Mission, moreover, was regarded as the responsibility not only of the professional but even more of the ordinary believer. The 'little man' was the prime agent. Green's coverage is essential reading for those seriously concerned with evangelism today. More recently his Denman Lectures on 'The New Testament Foundations for Evangelism', delivered at the United Methodist Church Congress in the States in 1978, have been reproduced as *Evangelism Now and Then* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979).

Throughout the 1970s a spate of incidental books on evangelism has flooded the market. Most of them deal with attitudes and methods. John Stott has followed up *Our Guilty Silence* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967) with *The Christian Mission in the Modern World* (London: Falcon Books, 1975) pinpointing keywords like mission, evangelism, dialogue,

salvation and conversion. He warns that overtures to non-Christians should not cultivate a total 'openness' in which convictions about the truth of the gospel and personal commitment to Christ are suspended, for these in themselves constitute a significant contribution to genuine dialogue.

John Poulton's *A Today Sort of Evangelism* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1972) is as down to earth and relevant as its title suggests, while Gavin Reid provides practical guidelines for the local church in *Good News to Share* (Eastbourne: Falcon Books, 1979). It is more realistically applicable to the British scene than D. James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion* (London: Coverdale House, 1972). Peter Beyerhaus, Professor of Mission Studies and Ecumenical Theology at the University of Tübingen, voiced his misgivings about the inadequate theological substance of much contemporary evangelism in *Shaken Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972).

The World Methodist Council sponsored the circulation of another Denman Lecture, Albert C. Outler's *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971). He disarmingly confesses that he would hardly have been his own first choice for such an assignment — 'an aging academic, with no special talent for rousements, with a lifelong dedication to the substance of Christian orthodoxy but within the "liberal" tradition, with no special affinity for much of what has passed for "evangelism" in our church.' His refreshing presentation, however, is all the more convincing because of these apparent disqualifications, as he hopes and prays for a third Great Awakening — 'a reinvigoration of the evangelical spirit, a revival of God's sovereign grace, a renaissance of the vitalities of the Christian tradition.'

The decade from 1970 has been dominated by an ongoing debate about the scope of mission and, in particular, its social orientation. This can be traced through the pages of the *International Review of Mission* and the plentiful literature put out from Geneva by the World Council of Churches' Commission on Mission and Evangelism, as well as in the reports of the Bangkok Conference in 1973 and the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne in 1974.

A feature of the 70s has been the way in which conservative evangelicals have increasingly recognized the need to include social action in their concept of mission. This growing conviction found explicit expression in the Lausanne Covenant, but it had already been foreshadowed at the European Congress on Evangelism held at Amsterdam in 1971. Gilbert W. Kirby, the Chairman, edited the authorized reference manual *Evangelism Alert: A Strategy for the Seventies* (London: World Wide Publications, 1972). Professor Paavo Korteganos of Finland delivered a major address on 'The Social Implications of Evangelism' in which he insisted that evangelism and social reform must be regarded as complementary movements of renewal. If, on the one hand, Christ is turned into a political Messiah, the gospel is misrepresented. But this is equally the case if, on the other hand, it is assumed that the Christian faith is unrelated to social issues. In his closing address, the Chairman drew attention to this emphasis and reminded the Congress that it represented a rediscovery of authentic evangelicalism such as is characterized by the eighteenth-century revival.

This realization on the part of evangelicals that the wholeness of the gospel demands that the Church's mission should be interpreted in terms of man's total needs in society was reflected at greater length and even more

emphatically in the Lausanne sessions. *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975) is an encyclopaedic record of the addresses and deliberations, running to no less than 1,471 pages. Although valuable as a source book to be consulted from time to time, it does tend to bear out the complaint of Harvey Cox that Christians are talkative to the point of verbosity.

Some of the papers, however, are of more than passing importance, indicating as they do a distinct change of attitude in the area of humanization and social involvement. René Padilla, from Latin America, resisted the notion that the Church is merely an otherworldly religious club organizing occasional forays into society so as to gain followers through the use of persuasive techniques. It is rather an active sign of the kingdom, both living and proclaiming the gospel here and now, although also awaiting the consummation of God's plan at the end of the age. It has been freed *from* the world but it still remains *in* the world to fulfil its true mission. Samuel Escobar in handling 'Evangelism and Man's Search for Freedom, Justice and Fulfilment' supported such an outlook. Athol Gill followed up the same theme in a symposium on the Lausanne Covenant edited by Padilla under the title *The New Face of Evangelicalism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976).

By no means all evangelicals are prepared to follow the Lausanne line on this issue. Arthur P. Johnston's *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1978) is distinctly critical. He believes that the Covenant unnecessarily shifted the emphasis of Christian responsibility from the individual to the Church and that, as a result, personal accountability was diminished by being merged with that of the group. In its desire to reach the exploding masses, Lausanne, according to Johnston, grew more technological, methodological and sophisticated in its approach and thus forfeited the essential simplicity of the gospel which in fact represents the effective spearhead of its appeal to the common man. He is convinced that Lausanne, following the lead given at the first World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin in 1966, succeeded in stemming the tide of what he regards as a disastrous ecumenical theology of mission, but in his view it was itself in danger of making too many concessions to fashionable trends. This is a prickly, controversial and at times one-sided account of the struggle maintained throughout the present century between two competing and (as Johnston would see it) incompatible versions of evangelism. It disturbs and on occasion annoys, but its well-documented arguments cannot all be summarily swept under the carpet.

From a Roman Catholic standpoint, Edward Schillebeeckx in *The Mission of the Church* (London: Sheed and Ward, ET 1973) claims that, so far as its witness to the secular community is concerned, the Church has a distinctly religious and not primarily a political and socio-economic function to fulfil. Yet he concedes that the gospel involves social responsibilities and repercussions. As the Church champions human rights, however, it will at the same time warn man that genuine freedom does not bring with it any exemption from the sanctions of divine law. In this fourth volume of his *Theological Soundings*, Professor Schillebeeckx considers the task of the Church in the light of a changed secular environment and in terms of Vatican II. He recognizes that the Church's mission is in the first instance directed

inwardly, since self-reformation is always required. The mystery of the Church is seen against the background of the Father's saving activity through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. The Church's mission is thus an extension of God's mission.

Schillebeeckx pays particular attention to the variety of functions within the Church in so far as they are designed to further its mission. Prominence is given to the role of the laity which is considered to be crucial. The traditional tendency was to see lay members of the Church simply as at the receiving end of pastoral care from the clergy. The new conciliar definition of the laity recognizes that they 'participate in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own way and consequently for their part carry out the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and the world'. Through the witness of their lives their faith, hope and love, they will make Christ known to others. Schillebeeckx's book tends to be technical in its presentation and, as a result, is not altogether easy to read. The repeated references to Vatican II documents, either in draft or in their finally accepted form, hold up the progress of the argument at times, but these collected articles and papers are nevertheless of high theological significance, as one would expect from the author.

If, however, one were asked to recommend a popular and practical discussion of the subject under review, there would be little hesitation in nominating David Watson's *I Believe in Evangelism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976). It should be read in conjunction with the late Canon M. A. C. Warren's *I Believe in the Great Commission* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976) in the same series. Watson writes from experience in a dockland parish in Gillingham, as well as in Cambridge and now in York. He has no doubt about the urgency of mission. 'Compared with evangelism, everything else happening in the Church is like rearranging the furniture when the house is on fire.' He proceeds both to justify and also to qualify the comprehensive claim contained in that quotation. As he examines the root cause of the world's malaise today, he starts with the diagnosis offered by Jesus himself. The fundamental problem is that of the human heart (Matthew 15:10-20). Ultimately, all the evils of society can be traced to the inherent self-centredness of man's fallen nature. Yet Watson is not so naïve as to suppose that it is possible to resolve every teasing social problem simply by changing individuals. The new men who are needed for a new society will themselves set about transforming the structures of the community so as to secure justice and freedom for all.

Watson is at pains to demonstrate, as was the Lausanne Congress, that the polarization between the social gospel and the so-called 'pure' gospel is false and unbiblical. Jesus not only gave the great commission to make disciples, but also the great commandment to love our neighbours. The neighbour is 'a body-soul-in-community', as John Stott puts it, and we cannot claim to love him if we are concerned only for one aspect of that complex — whether it be body or soul or community.

Evangelism is at once an activity of the Church and the means by which it is itself built up and expanded. The most critical factor in its witness is the quality of its corporate life. A drastic reassessment of priorities is called for if the Church is to function as the body of Christ. Entrenched attitudes will have to be demolished. Traditions, however sacred they may seem, must not

be allowed to impede progress. 'God is not the God of yesterday. He is the God of today. Heaven forbid that we should continue playing religious games in one corner when the cloud and fire of God's presence have moved to another.' Watson's is a prophetic and challenging book.

A survey of this kind is bound to be subjective in its selection, although an attempt has been made to cover as wide a field as possible. Perhaps I may be forgiven, however, for winding up with three paperbacks which strongly appealed to me as I read them.

I was impressed and stimulated by Walter J. Hollenweger's *Evangelism Today* (Belfast: Christian Journals, 1976). The German edition appeared in 1973. The subtitle conveys the flavour of the contents: *Good News or Bone of Contention?* Dr Hollenweger, who is currently Professor of Mission at the University of Birmingham, was himself an evangelist in Europe for many years. His book is a response to the Lausanne Congress and specifically to Padilla's plea that no isolated version of culture-Christianity — and certainly not one with an inadequate theological foundation and conditioned by hard pragmatism — should be accepted as definitive. No doubt Padilla had in mind not only more traditional evangelistic techniques derived from nineteenth-century revivalism, but also some of the methods associated with the contemporary Church growth school. This is the bone of contention to which Hollenweger refers.

If the gospel is indeed good news (as distinct from what Hollenweger calls 'good olds'), then it is an event and not merely a statement. It requires constant reappraisal. Our understanding of the gospel can never attain finality. We are always in the process of discovering what it is. Such an approach calls for a mature type of evangelist whose reliance is on God himself and not on any preconceived idea of his nature and purpose. There is a penetrating chapter on 'Heaven and Hell or Universalism?' which is calculated to disturb some cherished assumptions at both ends of the theological spectrum. The lengthy bibliography lists many articles on mission in addition to relevant books.

In *God's Tomorrow* (London: SCM, 1977) David Brown, Bishop of Guildford, has in mind Christians who find it difficult to associate the gospel with the secular world in which they spend the greater part of their lives. He seeks to share three convictions with them: 'that mission is God's total activity in the world and that the Church is privileged to share in it because he calls its members to do so: that mission is concerned with the everyday life of the whole human community, its problems and opportunities: that mission looks forward to what God will bring to pass on his tomorrow.'

In a positive and hopeful approach the Bishop recognizes the relevance of grace and the centrality of Christ's death and resurrection in the Church's witness. After discussing the assets and deficiencies of other world religions, he upholds the uniqueness of Christianity. In an enheartening chapter he points to the Church's resources of power in the Holy Spirit. He endorses a statement in an Anglican report on 'Evangelism and the Mission of the Church' to the effect that 'the purpose of the Church as the community of faith is to make the gospel visible'. He believes that the crucial requirement today is a recognizable correspondence between the great affirmations of faith made by the churches and their corporate life and service. There is indeed a crisis of credibility.

In language borrowed from the 1974 Council of Youth at Taizé, he calls on Christians to share in 'a liberating festival for mankind' going beyond the customary techniques of evangelism. After all, Jesus likened the kingdom of God to a marriage feast and a party. One cannot help feeling that if the decade of evangelism were to sound such a call as this, it would soon attract attention and make some headway.

The last book to be considered also strikes a festive note as it draws on the biblical imagery which depicts God as the wedding maker and the promoter of celebration. *Five Lanterns at Sundown* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) is written by Alfred C. Krass, Consultant on Evangelism for the United Church Board for World Ministries and a former Africa missionary. He complains that evangelism has too often been misinterpreted as a reinstatement of the past in a form of antiquarianism which has little relevance for the present and expects no more from the future than a dissolution of society in order to pave the way for the establishment of an exclusively spiritual kingdom beyond history. He himself contends that the Church's mission is instead to invite people to share in the present reality of God's working, as well as recognizing his past acts, and look forward to a fulfilment of his purposes before the end of the age as well as beyond it.

Krass reveals that his own outlook was radically transformed through reading an article by Krister Stendahl on 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'. Traditional evangelism has been based largely on unjustified presumptions about Pauline teaching which have tended to overlook his concern with God's history-making activity as well as with the problem of personal guilt. In its mission, the Church is God's vanguard community which calls men to an altogether new kind of existence. Krass is aware that humanization is under discussion and approves of A. A. Van Ruler's dictum that a person is not human in order to become Christian but is Christian in order to become human.

As the title of his book indicates, Krass deals with the call to mission in terms of our Lord's allegory of the wise and foolish maidens in Matthew 25:1-13. The biblical evangelist urges a secularized civilisation to prepare for the night — hence the subtitle *Evangelism in a Chastened Mood*. But he also makes it clear that it is in the night that the marriage takes place as the prelude to a glad new day. The last word is with hope, not with gloom and despair. That is a reassuring reminder as we move through the eighties.

Reviews

ANDERSON, B. W., *The Eighth-century Prophets* (S.P.C.K. 1979 £3.25) pp. xvi, 111.

ALL preachers are aware that the eighth-century prophets have something to say which is relevant to our modern society if only they knew just how the prophetic message ought to be handled. Bernhard Anderson, whose *Living World of the Old Testament* has set many peoples' feet on the path of Old