

The Role of the Evangelist in the New Millennium

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When considering the role of the evangelist one must consider how evangelism will likely take place in a more and more complex world. Because our beliefs about conversion so directly impact our evangelism practices a more complex, effective, orthodox, culturally sensitive theology of conversion must be developed. Toward that end I propose the following key principles regarding conversion and its impact on our missional practices today.

The evangelist should be seen as a communicator, educator, and equipper. My motto: “Winning the lost, preaching the gospel, and teaching others to do likewise.” This reflects what I see as the three-fold aspect of the evangelist’s ministry to the church and the world: 1) Personal witness and discipleship of those the Scriptures call the “lost”; 2) Communicating the good news of Christ’s full redemption to include repentance, healing, deliverance, provision and fullness of life in the Spirit to all who would listen; 3) and Equipping those with a call to be a witness to a lost and dying world to fulfill that call.

Some **key theological elements** that must be addressed by evangelists in the new millennium:

- **Conversion is much more of a process** rather than event and believers involved in witness to a lost and dying world must honor the spiritual process the unbeliever is going through.
- This necessitates a **sense of awe and wonder at the complexity of the conversion experience**. So no cookie-cutter approach to conversion or witness will be able to healthily embrace the complex nature of the conversion process for each individual situation we find ourselves in.
- **Every believer is called to be a witness, not just professional clergy**. While others may more formerly have the gift or calling of evangelist, to be a witness is to embrace a responsibility for the destiny of lost people within our circle of influence and to be open as to how God could use us to communicate eternal truths to them.
- In the new millennium **relationship is key to earning trust among our audience**. This means no more drive-by evangelism, which seeks to assuage the believer’s guilt concerning their responsibility to the lost without a willingness to extend a true invitation or initiation into the body of Christ. We are asking them literally to become part of our family, our brothers and sisters for eternity and if we are not willing to lay down our lives for them as Jesus did then are we really offering a legitimate witness to his love?
- **Incarnational witness is essential not mere proclamation**. Many seekers are likely going to want to see the unique nature of our community of faith, to see if we genuinely live out the message we communicate **before** they come to belief. It becomes an experiential apologetic that communicates don’t just listen to what we say but experience how we live to see if Christ is real. In this way the dynamic Pentecostal experience of

worship, prayer, miracles, and other manifestations of spiritual fruit and subsequent gifts, should resonate with the complex cultures in which we find ourselves in.

- **Christians must be willing to expose their weaknesses as well as their strengths.** We have not arrived but we are journeying with one who has. They too, may have eternal truths to share and we need to be open to what God is saying to the Church through the Muslims, the Hindus, and the Jews. Dogmatic rhetoric may win the battle but lose the salvation war, so to speak, and we need to be willing to trust God to reveal himself in our weaknesses because by them he is made strong. This is not to say we lose confidence in our message. For we are not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of salvation to all those who believe. But speaking the truth in love, we are not yet complete, but flawed in every way, so we don't come to them with the power of the wisdom of men but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.
- **There are key non-negotiables regarding the gospel that must be communicated.** The **authority of the Scripture** as our rule of faith and practice and the **exclusivity/inclusivity** of Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all humanity.
- **Our witness should always entail a sense of urgency because of the immediacy of Christ's return.** After all today is the day of salvation; today is the day of the Lord. We don't know when Jesus is coming back; it will be like a thief in the night he told us. Furthermore, our lives are but a vapor, a mist, and we don't know how long each of us has to take breath from this earth. This should instill in us a Spirit-led urgency in respect to the condition of every person's soul. Every person we meet and speak with could be in eternity within the hour and because this remains a mystery, we must remain open to the possibility that God would want to speak through us to them with a sense of loving urgency as to the condition of their soul. Someone once said that an evangelist restores the sense of eternity in the soul and that seems appropriate here.

With these principles in mind I believe we can then begin to address our specific evangelism practices. When considering the nature of effective witness in the new millennium I believe there are at least **5 key aspects that need to be considered that should be applied to every evangelistic method. Effective methods will be biblical in basis, dialogical (conversational) in method, spiritual in dimension, communal (relational) in context, and holistic in scope. I elaborate on all this in my book: [One Step Closer to Christ](#). A brief synopsis of each follows.**

1. For our method to be **Biblical in Basis** means that principles regarding conversion and outreach derived from the Scriptures should be one of the foundational criteria by which all methods are measured (i.e.; conversion is more of a long-term process than a singular event, anointed incarnational witness is expected of every believer, ordinary believers are primarily responsible for evangelism not paid professional clergy, discernment regarding what the key non-negotiables of the gospel are is necessary, etc.)
2. Effective outreach is **Dialogical in Method**. Evangelism is not mere proclamation of Scriptures or principles but involves genuine open communication between the parties

involved (*kerygma* = communication, not just proclamation or preaching). It begins with a conversation with God in prayer, entails a dialogue with the church about how best to communicate eternal truths within their specific context, and finally, facilitates a venue for truly listening to what the unregenerate world is saying concerning the gospel and its adherents.

3. The ideas that our methods must be **Spiritual in Dimension** may be the most important of these aspects. The focus is on holding methods very loosely – it’s the message that’s sacred (God’s love for his creation) not the method. It’s trusting that God is already at work in the lives of people and he is the evangelist, the Holy Spirit is the means as divine change agent (*parakletos*) and humans are the vessel through which he chooses to engage the lost. The Spirit as counselor will help us to contextualize the sacred truths of the gospel without accommodating them to specific cultures thereby robbing the message of its veracity and power to offer both contrast and sanctuary to local culture.
4. Evangelism methods should inherently be **Communal (relational) in Context**. Because the ontological essence of the Triune Godhead is communal any relationship with him must also be communal in nature. Because humans are created in God’s image they are by nature beings in community not isolated rugged individuals as the broader American zeitgeist implies. God has ordained local communities of faith to be the primary means of expressing his body here on earth. The Body of Christ, ideally, is the healthiest expression of God’s presence in the world today, however that may be comprised (house churches, liturgical traditions, classical Pentecostal/charismatic expressions, etc.). For this reason evangelism that is divorced from local church communities is not the most effective way of enveloping new disciples into a loving community of faith.
5. Because conversion moves beyond mere individuals to the redemption of the entire cosmos, our methods should be **Holistic in Scope**. This addresses the need for redemption and reconciliation of whole diabolical social, economic, and political structures that are human created and sustained. Just as evangelism efforts must go beyond the individual in their redemptive focus they must extend be the mere “spiritual” conversion to engage the psychological, sociological and physical aspects of human need. An “either/or” approach to the social/spiritual gospel positions is inappropriate rather a “both/and” embracing of the two aspects of human existence is what God intends in salvation.

So what does all this mean about today’s means of reaching the lost around us? Well perhaps our outreach efforts will take some form of:

- **Cyber-evangelism** – if the agora of today is the internet then perhaps each church should have an evangelism blog in which to begin a healthy discussion about the truth claims of Christ and the Christian community, [see Strategic Digital Witness](#)
- **Collaborative approaches to sharing faith in a community of small groups** will likely be a favorite among many who are new to the task of reaching out to lost people – Training and organizing home hospitality groups in which the gospel is shared around a meal and a testimony may well become the norm for many outreach efforts - evangelism

occurring most likely in the “afterglow” fellowship rather than in any intentional call for a decision.

- **Prophetic focus on prayer and other signs and wonders** – such as those methods employed in praying for divine healing, encouraging spiritual gifts, and vision and prophetic dream interpretation.
- **Engaging the lost in ministry to the poor, the oppressed and the needy** whereby they not only see our compassion but are invited to be a part of Christ’s hand extended to those in a desperate plight in our society.
- **Personal evangelism of all sorts** in many different venues in which Christians are challenged to restore a lifestyle of evangelism by busting out of their Christian ghettos, and enthusiastically engage those outside the community of faith.
- **Christian concerts to reach the lost through art and music** and to provide a way for the lost to check out the Christian community to test the truth claims of their exemplary fellowship.
- **What are the “bridges of God” into the sub-culture** of which you are a part of today?

I am encouraged by the tremendous diversity of vision among Christians today when I hear what God is calling them to in their vision for life. God is raising up a community of witnesses among us and we must do what we can to facilitate that call in their lives. I hear testimony often of God speaking to many to be missional in their focus beyond just inviting people to church. Perhaps for some the way of the future is as a lay minister of evangelism who serves bi-vocationally as a therapist, counselor, businessperson, or homemaker as well as on church staff to win the lost, preach the gospel, and teach others to do likewise.