

Evangelism through the Normal Life of the Church

“You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody” (2 Corinthians 3.2). The very existence of the church showed the apostolic authority of Paul. The church is God’s tract. So do we have to arrange specific outreach moments or evangelistic events for unbelievers, or is it more likely that they will discover the Gospel through seeing Christians as they live together and worship God? In other words, can they be attracted and identify with the Christian message before being born again? “Belonging before believing” is how certain sociologists have expressed it. This session will look at the ways this can happen but also possible risks inherent in this approach.

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I. Introduction

A. The results of a nation-wide survey in France

1. Personal contact is seen as the best form of evangelism
2. But pastors don’t seem entirely convinced it’s really happening

B. Evangelism today is

1. A process
2. Within the context of relationships
3. But attempting to have a certain visibility in the public arena.

C. What are the implications of this?

II. The need to learn flexibility within the church without denying the fundamentals

A. A local church is a group of Christians

1. who meet together (Acts 2.42) to devote themselves to

- i. the apostles' teaching (i.e. the teaching of the Word)
 - ii. fellowship
 - iii. the breaking of bread (i.e. fellowship meals, communion, worship)
 - iv. prayer
 2. who welcome all those who believe in Jesus (Romans 15.7)
 3. who meet together physically (1 Cor 1.2 / Eph 1.1 / Philemon 1.2)
 4. Who have recognized leadership (Acts 14.23 / 1 Tim 3 / Titus 1) who watch over the life of the church
 5. where each person can use their spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12)
 6. where baptisms take place and the Lord's supper is observed
 7. where love is the distinctive sign (John 13.35)
 8. who are involved in society and proclaim salvation (1 Tim 2.1-7)
- B. These are the minimum criteria for a local church. All the rest is flexible and optional. Soteriology trumps ecclesiology.

III. The need to learn to live life seamlessly – ‘today’

- A. Worshipping God today (Isaiah 38.19)
- B. Trusting God today (Proverbs 22.19 / Matthew 6.11)

- C. Fighting the good fight / obeying God today (Hebrews 3.13)
- D. Doing good to the person God brings into my life today (Matthew 22.39 / 1 Peter 3.18)
- E. Each one of these aspects contributes to the overall life of the believer each day, as they become more and more satisfied in Christ and convinced that there is no better way.

IV. The need to learn to live in tune with your particular culture

- A. The 21st Century European is secular (religion and public affairs are separated) and tolerant (as long as no-one tries to impose their ideas).
 - 1. But this mindset varies from culture to culture.
- B. Which aspects of culture are compatible with the Christian faith and which aren't? Contextualization is a double movement.
- C. Some practical issues of contextualization.
 - 1. How to help each Christian live his new identity in Christ
 - 2. How to encourage diversity within the local fellowship

3. How to incorporate genuine and meaningful conversations in our church life
4. How to welcome unbelievers and let them walk in our landscape
5. How to help Christians interact with people around them regarding culture and current issues in a relevant way
6. How to help Christians build relationships with unbelievers while recognizing the risks involved (John 17 15-18)
7. How to build connections with the authorities and with the local religious and secular leaders
8. How to maintain our freedom of speech in the public arena
9. How to decide what are the best times to meet as a church

Suggested Readings:

David BROWN *Une Église pour aujourd'hui* (Éditions Farel) IN FRENCH
David BROWN *Servir à nos Français* (Éditions Farel) IN FRENCH