

“LIFESTYLE, FRIENDSHIP, AND SERVICE—
THE ADDITION OF *PREPARATIO EVANGELICA* TO THE *ORDO SALUTIS*”

by

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Mark Mittelberg, in his book *Building a Contagious Church*, writes of the paradigm shift that he underwent in his evangelism. He moved from “Lone Ranger Evangelism” to “Church-Based Evangelism.” The methodological issue confronting Mittelberg was how to handle “seekers who wanted to go to the next level in their search.”¹ The answer to this problem was found in bringing them “to experience a relevant church service.” The theological presuppositions undergirding his new methodology was discussed in his next chapter. Mittelberg began with the “Bridge to Life” Gospel presentation, adding four graphics on the front end—hence four *preparatio evangelica*. Before the Gospel could be understood, the recipient first needed to understand the Christian worldview. He explained:

If we want to help people move toward Christ, we are going to have to proactively address their issues and show that the Christian faith is built on the foundation of truth [apologetics] and can be trusted wholeheartedly.²

However, before reaching this need, considered a higher realization need by Maslow, the Christian must surmount the relational hurdle. Mittelberg was convinced that people in American culture were “craving the kind of deep, relational connection that can be found fully only in the church of Jesus Christ.”³ Once the *preparatio* of worldview and relationship were dealt with, the next *preparatio* could be addressed, that of cultural relevance. Mittelberg defines this as follows: “The culture chasm consists of the barriers that keep a secular person from hearing and understanding our message.”⁴ Finally, when

¹Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 23.

²Ibid., 43.

³Ibid., 46.

⁴Ibid., 49.

worldview, relational, and cultural barriers were surmounted, the final *preparatio* was time. Mittelberg explained, “I’ve learned the hard way that pressing people to take steps for which they are not ready will backfire. In some cases it can even short-circuit the whole process.”⁵ The result was a “process-oriented evangelism.” Mittelberg began with a lone ranger mentality seeking instantaneous conversion (Why is this often the starting place?). Then his view matured to a “church-based [seeker-oriented]” evangelism when he became aware of the gradual process of evangelism.

While the insights of Mittelberg are provide helpful ideas regarding church-oriented evangelism, it must be noted that they emphasize a naturalistic approach. In actuality, it would seem that Mittelberg, along with many other evangelicals today, have accepted a natural or gradual view of evangelism which we will call sacramental evangelism. *Those who adhere to sacramental evangelism teach either explicitly or implicitly that truly effective evangelism must be accompanied by a human sign or preparatio.* Usually the necessary signs or *preparatios* are biblical. However, this paper is concerned with the idea that a human, incarnational, or natural “sign” must either precede, augment, or replace the verbal proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In this light, good deeds are often deemed a “sign” in the life of the Christian. And it is true that the Bible tells the Christian to live zealous for good deeds.

Zealous for Good Deeds

When the Apostle Paul addressed Titus, he returned to a recurring theme: the need for the practice of good deeds. The Scripture is clear that the Christian ought to live

⁵Ibid., 59.

zealously for Christ, doing good works (cf. Titus 2:14). In fact, the term for good deeds is found repeated a number of times in the book of Titus:

- “By deeds they deny (τοις δε εργοις αρνουνται) . . . worthless for any good deed (εργον αγαθον),” 1:16
- “Be an example of good deeds (καλων εργων),” 2:7
- “Redeem us from every lawless deed (πασης ανομιας) . . . zealous for good deeds (ζηλωτην καλων εργων),” 2:14
- “Be ready for every good deed (προς παν ργον αγαθον ετοιμους ειπαι),” 3:1
- “Not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness (ουκ εξ εργων των εν δικαιοσυνη),” 3:5
- “Will be careful to engage in good deeds (φροντιζωσιν καλων εργων προιστασθαι),” 3:8
- “Learn to engage in good deeds (καλων εργων προιστασθαι),” 3:14.

A biblical theology of Titus teaches Paul’s conception of good deeds. First, salvation is not on the basis of “deeds done in righteousness” (3:5).⁶ This teaching parallels Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:8-9 and elsewhere. Second, after salvation, it is clear that the Christian ought to live righteously. Again, the theology of Ephesians 2:10 corresponds perfectly. In fact, the good deeds of the Christian are not his own deeds, but rather those of God foreordained by Him, or as noted in John 3:21, wrought in God. Third, these good deeds are clearly defined by Paul’s usage in Titus. Paul wrote of the antithesis of their spiritual and moral quality: “deeds that deny” versus “good deeds” (1:16). Kelly writes of this passage, “Just as faith without works is dead, so the quality of a man’s life is the decisive test of his knowledge of God (I Jn. 2:4).”⁷ The second

⁶“He affirms that by their works they did not at all deserve that they should become partakers of salvation, or that they should be reconciled to God through faith; but he says that they obtained this blessing solely through the mercy of God. We therefore conclude from his words, that we bring nothing to God, but that he goes before us by his pure grace, without any regard to works” (John Calvin, “Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon” in Calvin’s Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], 21:331).

⁷J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles: Timothy I & II, and Titus*, gen. ed. Henry Chadwick, “Harper’s New Testament Commentaries” (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 237.

opposition of Paul is found in 2:14 is clearly moral: “lawless deeds” versus “good deeds.” In this case a parallel is found in Galatians 5:19-23, the deeds of the flesh (τα εργα της σαρχος) versus the fruit of the Spirit (ο δε καρπος του πνευματος). Fourth, good deeds keep the Christian from being unfruitful, “Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful (ινα μη ωσιν ακαρποι)” (Titus 3:14). Notice that the pressing need in the context is to assist other Christians in their mission (3:13, Zenas and Apollos). This approach follows Galatians 6:10, “Let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Notice as well how Paul uses a double negative, “so that they will not be unfruitful.” The good deeds of themselves do not bring fruit, rather a lack of them leads to fruitlessness. The issue of the believer’s good deeds is thus one concerning their moral quality, their provenance from God, and a lack of them causing a hindrance to the proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore, it is clear from Titus that although the Christian is not saved by works, he ought to live zealous for every good deed. Indeed, Martin Luther, who taught Scriptures alone, faith alone, and grace alone, wrote, “We agree on the major premise: ‘Good works are to be performed.’”⁸ Yet while Christians are to be “zealous for good works,” the Markan Great Commission is *not* “Go into all the world and do good works to all men”!⁹

⁸Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther’s Works* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968), 29:48.

⁹Pope Paul VI redefined “preach the Gospel” by the inserting good works as a parallel concept, hence coming up with a “wordless witness”: “Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live” (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [8 December 1975], section 21). Or again, note the allusion to the evangelization of closed cloisters who have *no* contact with the outside world: “Religious, for their part, find in their consecrated life a privileged

The non-salvific nature of good works in conversion of a Christian is well-attested in historic Protestantism. However, a new form of good work seems to have emerged, the good work of the proclaimer savingly benefiting the person to whom he is preparing to proclaim the message. How do the good works of the evangelist impact the preparation of the heart of the person who receives the message? If, in fact, the good works of the proclaimer enter into the salvific process for the listener, then they become a part of the *ordo salutis* for that person. And if it can be shown that the good works *amplify* the power of the message of salvation, then they ought to be practiced in every evangelism situation. Then, in this latter case, evangelism without a *preparatio* would actually be counter-productive to a most effective Order of Salvation! It shall be shown that some concur with this last statement. However, before addressing the contemporary milieu, a historical excursus will provide the basis for definition of terms.

Luther on the Sacraments—Defining Sign and Promise

The terminology “evangelism accompanied by a sign” is derived from Martin Luther’s “The Pagan Servitude of the Church” (a.k.a. “Babylonian Captivity of the Church”). In this 1520 work, Luther described the sacraments as a sign accompanied by a promise. In questioning the validity of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther found that only two, perhaps three sacramental signs were accompanied by a promise. They were Baptism, the Eucharist, and possibly Penance.¹⁰ For example, Luther discussed the sign (sacrament) and the promise (testament) as regards the mass:

means of effective evangelization. . . . In this perspective one perceives the role played in evangelization by religious men and women consecrated to prayer, silence, penance and sacrifice” (ibid., section 69).

¹⁰Martin Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 357.

Similarly in the mass, the greatest promise of all, He adds a sign as a memorial of this great promise, His own body and His own blood in the bread and the wine, when He says: “This do in remembrance of Me.” So, at baptism, He adds the sign of immersion in the water to the words of promise. From these instances we learn that, in every promise, God presents two things to us, a word and a sign, in order that we may understand the word to be a testament, and the sign a sacrament. In the mass, the word of Christ is the testament, the bread and wine are the sacrament. Since greater power resides in a word than in a sign, so more power resides in a testament than in a sacrament; for a man may have, and use, a word of testament without a sign or sacrament. “Believe”, says Augustine, “and thou hast eaten.” But what is believed is nothing more than the word of the promiser. Thus, I am able daily, indeed hourly, to have mass; for as often as I wish, I can set the words of Christ before me, and nourish and strengthen my faith by them. This is the true eating and drinking.¹¹

Luther maintained that there was no implicit power in the sign outside of the word of promise—this was how he was able to eliminate four of the seven sacraments. It was the word of promise that nourished faith. Similarly today, there is no implicit power in the “signs” of the Christian life outside of the word of promise. In fact, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ [i.e. *not* the life of the believer] that is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Rom 1:16) and faith comes by hearing [i.e. *not* seeing] and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom 10:17). So close is the association of conversion with the word of God that Peter wrote:

You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God “All flesh is like grass, and its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word which was preached to you (1 Pet 1:23-25).

So great is the power and potency of the Word of God that Paul was able to tell Timothy:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my Gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned (2 Tim 2:8-9).

¹¹Ibid., 279.

Even in the context of a negative witness to the world, imprisonment as a criminal, Paul wrote that the Word of God was not imprisoned.

Sign and Promise in Evangelism

However, in evangelism today there is a danger of making the signs of the Christian life (part of the “all flesh is like grass”—and the other three parallel lines) equal to the promise (“living and abiding word of God”), and of placing the power of evangelism *not* in the word *but* in signs that accompany genuine faith. In fact, the signs of Christianity are being confused and are sometimes replacing the message of Christianity, the Gospel. It is also important not to confuse the signs with the vehicle of the Gospel proclamation. The vehicle is the obedient Christian evangelizing (Luke 4:43; Acts 8:4, 25, 45) or preaching the Gospel (Mark 16:15). The instrumentality of salvation is the Gospel and/or the Word of God (Luke 11:28; John 5:24; Rom 10:17; 1 Pet 1:23-25) wrought through the power of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6; Titus 3:5). Then, the Spirit working through the Word of God elicits faith in the heart of the elect. However, there is sometimes confusion between the message, the vehicle, and the instrument of salvation. Luther was biblical and evangelical to place the instrumentality in the unchanging Word of God:

As we have said, God never has dealt, and never does deal, with mankind at any time otherwise than by the word of promise. Neither can we, on our part, ever have to do with God otherwise than through faith in His word and promise.¹²

Clearly for Luther, the word of promise was the instrument of salvation. Hence, the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformation. However, some contemporary evangelicals have returned

¹²Ibid., 277.

to the human agency of the sacramental system through the prerequisite use of “signs” which must precede evangelism or the preaching of the Gospel.

Deed and Word

Mankind stumbles over words.

In John 6, as long as Jesus performed signs, the people affirmed that he was the Prophet (John 6:14). But when He spoke the “words of eternal life,” then they grumbled (John 6:41, 43, 61). Even today in evangelism, as long as the focus remains on the *preparatio evangelica* (lifestyle, relationship, service) there is no problem. But as soon as one focuses on the verbal communication of the Gospel, then comes the accusation of “advocating ‘*blosse Kundmachung*’ (mere proclamation).”¹³ Gustav Warneck, “the father of missiology as a theological discipline,”¹⁴ maintained that the basis for mere proclamation was “one-sided and exegetically untenable.”¹⁵ Almost one hundred years later, the eminent missiologist David Bosch dismissed the same position quoting Moltmann: “I perceive mission to be wider than evangelism. ‘Evangelization is mission, but mission is not merely evangelization’ (Moltmann 1977:10; Geffré 1982:478f).”¹⁶

What of mere proclamation? Is it a product of the Enlightenment resulting from

¹³“This last is the task of missions; the limitation of this task to mere evangelization confounds means and goal. Mere preaching does not suffice; it is to be the means of laying the foundation of a Church. . . . If, however, the task in question be to build among the many-tongued heathen, who are so poorly prepared for the understanding of the Gospel message, the Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, then the mere announcement of the Gospel is not sufficient for this” (Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions from the Reformation to the Present Time*, 8th ed. [New York: Revell, 1904], 407). The text contains a quotation from David Barrett, *Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1987), 29.

¹⁴David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 244.

¹⁵Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions*, 407.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 411-12.

Nineteenth Century premillennial dispensationalism as noted by George Marsden?¹⁷

What of Marsden's affirmation of Richard Hofstadter's appellation of meerprouclamation-evangelicals as Manichean?¹⁸ This moves the argument to another historical setting, that of the Aquinas-Albigensian interchange of the Middle Ages. It is clear that historical argument alone does not provide conclusive evidence, as there are too many *a priori* presuppositions clouding the issue.

Perhaps a survey of some Scripture verses used to promote *other* than mere proclamation is in order. These sample verses seem to indicate that something more than mere proclamation is necessary. First, some verses may show that evangelism is not "in word only". For example:

- "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake" (1 Thes 1:5)
- "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb 2:3-4).

Second, other verses seem to indicate that good deeds are some type of a sign:

- "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16)
- "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of them, you did it to Me'" (Matt 25:40)
- "Keep your behavior excellent among Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of His visitation" (1 Pet 2:12).

¹⁷George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37-39, 43-44.

¹⁸Marsden in seeking to explain why premillennial fundamentalists hold "extreme political views" wrote: "Richard Hofstadter aptly described this mentality as 'essentially Manichean. . . . The fundamentalists, however, were disposed to divide *all* reality into neat antitheses: the saved and the lost, the holy and the unsanctified, the true and the false'" (Ibid., 210-11).

Third, several verses may point to the possibility of love as a sign:

- “By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another” (John 13:35)
- “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

Lastly, some verses seem to indicate that Christian unity is a sign to the world:

- “That they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21)
- “That they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me” (John 17:23).

While an exegesis of each of these passages is impossible for lack of space, suffice it to say that the context of any of these *does not* invalidate “mere proclamation” as the theologically and pragmatic teaching of Scripture as concerns the missionary mandate of the church.

The above biblical signs considered to be in addition to “mere proclamation” have been translated into the current parlance of friendship or relational evangelism,¹⁹ lifestyle evangelism,²⁰ and service evangelism.²¹ In fact, the evangelical world was deluged with books on sign-based sacramental evangelism in a period from 1976 to

¹⁹See Arthur McPhee, *Friendship Evangelism: the Caring Way to Share Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Jim Petersen, *Evangelism as a Lifestyle* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1980); and Rebecca Manly Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979). Five years after writing *Evangelism as a Lifestyle*, Petersen wrote *Evangelism for Our Generation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1985). The two books were combined to form *Living Proof* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1989). *Living Proof* was made into a video series and its methodology was adopted by churches and organizations, such as the Christian Businessmen’s Association.

²⁰Joseph Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Portland: Multnomah, 1981).

²¹Steve Sjogren, *Conspiracy of Kindness: a Refreshing New Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus with Others* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1993).

1981.²² A tragic result of this approach to signs in evangelism is that in some cases the signs have completely usurped the promise or the proclamation of the Gospel. In the latter situation the signs are left devoid of life and power—like salt that is tasteless (cf. Matt 5:13)? Now clearly the above signs are all biblical. The question is do they usurp or supplant the need for the preaching and hearing of the Gospel. The impact of moving down the Square of Opposition by accepting the necessity or prerequisite of any one of these signs for effective evangelism drives evangelism away from its theological moorings and undermines the Scriptural examples of evangelism.

Figure 1 builds a Square of Opposition based on the Universal Affirmative, “The Word of God preached alone is absolutely necessary in the proclamation of the Gospel.” Notice that the first shift down the square of opposition is a move from necessary to important. Once it is deemed “only” important and not preeminent, then the shift to secondary or not important (the actual Sub-contrary) is nothing more than a small shift in logic. If the place of the Word in witness or in salvation is deemed secondary, then the move to unnecessary can follow as a move from one Sub-contrary to another. Figure 2 reverses the concept (without removing proclamation as the Universal Negative of Figure 1) by making the Universal Affirmative, “Relationship, lifestyle, or service must precede the proclamation of the Gospel.” Similar pros and cons may be made by counter-positioning expectant evangelism with incarnational evangelism, placing verbal

²²For example (listed chronologically): Gerald Borchert, *Dynamics of Evangelism* (Waco: Word, 1976); C. B. Hogue, *Love Leaves No Choice: Life-style Evangelism* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976); Leighton Ford, *Good News Is for Sharing: A Guide to Making Friends for Christ* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook, 1977); James H. Jauncey, *One-on-One Evangelism* (Chicago: Moody, 1978); Richard S. Armstrong, *Service Evangelism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979); Paul E. Little, ed., *His Guide to Evangelism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979); Wayne McDill, *Making Friends for Christ--A Practical Approach to Relational Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979); Richard G. Korthals, *Agape Evangelism: Roots that Reach Out* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1980); Joyce Neville, *How to Share Your Faith without Being Offensive* (New York: Seabury, 1981); and Matthew Prince, *Winning through Caring: Handbook on Friendship Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

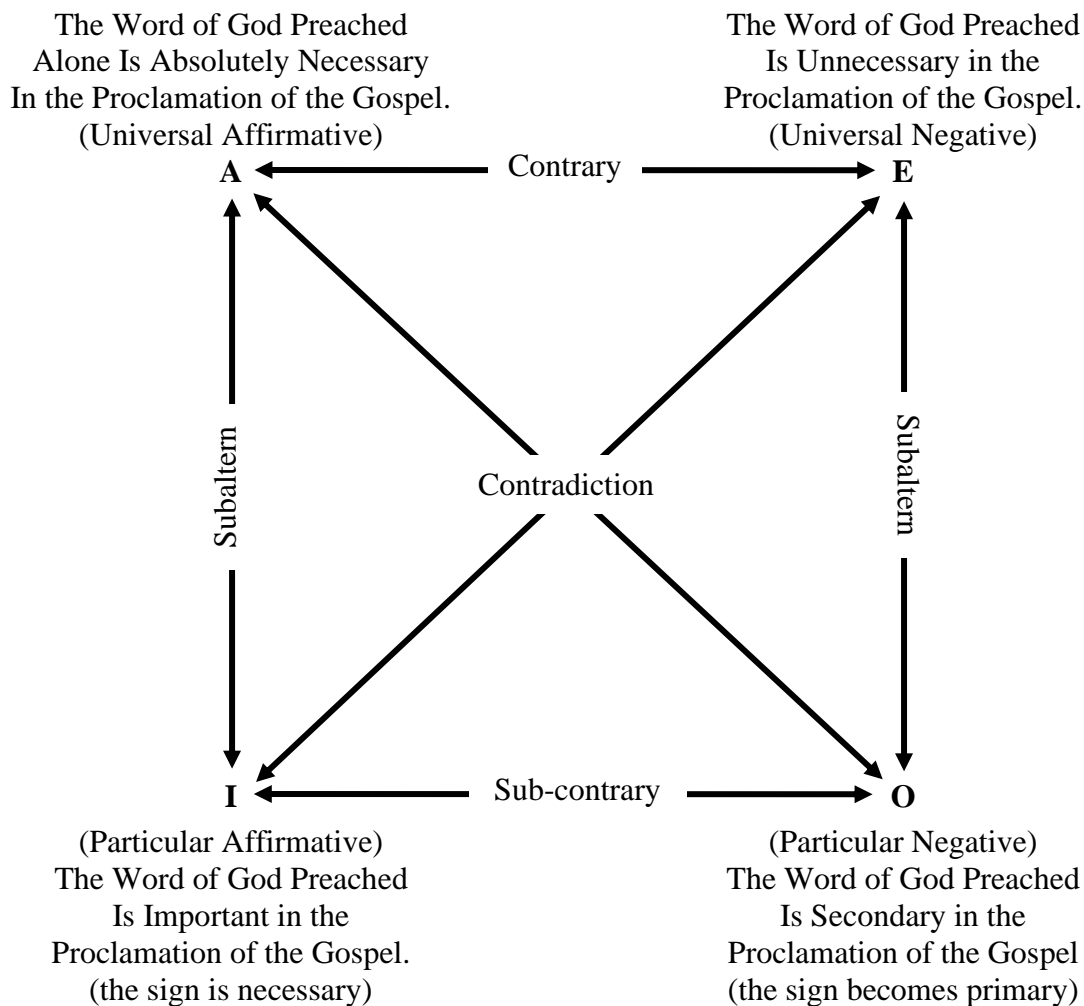


Fig. 1. Logic's Square of Opposition²³ and the Instrumentality of the Word of God in salvation—evangelism and conversion.

evangelism versus non-verbal evangelism, the Word as the vehicle versus the life of the testifier as the vehicle, or proclamation as the sufficient condition for the awakening of saving faith. All of these state the same issue or question in different terms. They describe or consider the relationship of the human element in evangelism (the sign) with the divine element in evangelism (the promise). Following Luther's definition of a

²³Figure adapted from Brand Blanshard, "Logic," *Collier's Encyclopedia*, 1961 ed.

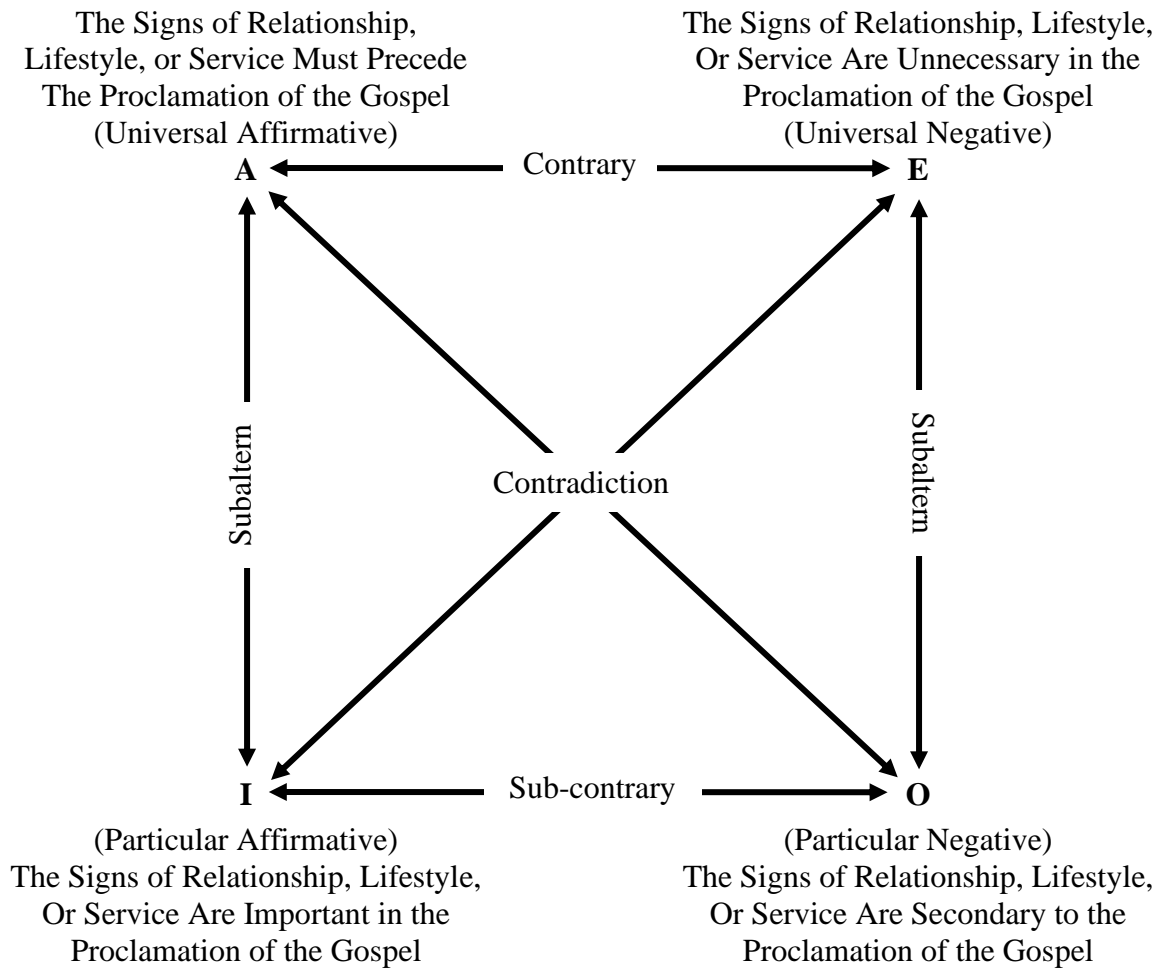


Fig. 2. Logic's Square of Opposition and the instrumentality of relationship, lifestyle, or service in salvation—evangelism and conversion.

sacrament as a sign with a promise, those types of evangelism that recommend or require a human vehicle are termed sacramental evangelism. Even as Luther had to choose the promise as all important and solely efficacious over the sign (*sola Scriptura*), so evangelicals today must accept that the word preached is solely efficacious over any human *preparatio*.

The Demand for a Human *Preparatio*

Sacramental evangelism not only recommends but then demands a sign to precede the promise. For example, the Report of the Archbishops' Third Committee of Inquiry (1918) denigrated the non-use of *preparatio evangelica*:

Social and industrial problems and questions of Church reform are being dealt with by other Committees, but it falls within the scope of this Committee to point out with the greatest possible emphasis that such questions are vitally related to the evangelistic work of the Church. . . .

He who applies Christian faith and living to the common relationships of life is the best evangelist. The translation of our creed into action by social service rendered from a Christian motive is a true *preparatio evangelica*, and the presentation of the Gospel which ignores the social obligations of Christianity will not receive serious attention from increasing numbers of people to-day.²⁴

Let us note the role of social service and evangelism in the text of the committee. First, the committee began by placing creed before action, then they reversed the order by calling “social service” a *preparatio evangelica*—a preparation for the Gospel. The committee continued by stating that those who do not use an appropriate *preparatio* “will not receive serious attention from increasing numbers of people to-day.” The Archbishops' Third Committee walked half-way around the Square of Opposition!

Present day parallels may be found off the pens of Joseph Aldrich and Christian Schwarz. Aldrich wrote:

The vast majority do *not* become Christians by confrontational, stranger-to-stranger evangelism. Furthermore, many are being kept from making an effective decision because of bad experiences with a zealous but insensitive witness.²⁵

Schwarz seemed to agree with Aldrich:

There are some people who feel evangelism works best when you push people to commit their life to Christ. They do not even shy away from manipulative methods

²⁴*The Evangelistic Work of the Church Being the Report of the Archbishops' Third Committee of Inquiry* (London: SPCK, 1918), 16-17.

²⁵Joseph Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 79. Emphasis his.

to reach this goal. No wonder many of us feel a strange sensation in our stomach when we hear the word “evangelism.”

But it can be shown that “pushy” manipulative methods represent the exact opposite of the practice we learn from growing churches.²⁶

Much like the Archbishops’ Third Committee of Inquiry, Aldrich and Schwarz repeated the negativity to evangelism that does not include the *preparatio* of relationship or a need-based *preparatio*. Both also made statements affirming their commitment to a *preparatio evangelica*:

Although the proclamational approach to evangelism will have validity until Jesus comes, it is not a means by which the majority of Christians will reach their own private world.²⁷

This “need-oriented” approach is different from “manipulative methods” where pressure on non-Christians must compensate for the lack of need-orientation.²⁸

The basic underlying thought behind the sacramental evangelism of Lifestyle Evangelism is that *the word of the Gospel is not enough without a sign*. For Lifestyle Evangelism the sign is a lifestyle bridged by relationship. For Servant Evangelism, the sign is social service of some type. For Friendship Evangelism, the sign is friendship. Seemingly for each of these cases, without the *preparatio* or sign, the evangelism lacks power, sincerity, and effectiveness. It must be stated clearly that the sign without the word of promise is in vain and to no avail. In fact, to require a sign is to make it a

²⁶Christian A. Schwarz, *ABC’s of Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart, n.d.), 16.

²⁷Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 78. Aldrich defined “proclamational evangelism” by using the example of the early church: “The early church was planted because of the strong proclamational ministries of the apostles. They preached on street corners, in synagogues, and in marketplaces” (ibid.). Aldrich followed Gustav Warneck’s dispensational dismissal of mere proclamation: “This basis [the evangelization of the world in this generation to hasten the return of Christ], however, is one-sided and exegetically untenable; it ignores the difference between the circumstances of the apostolic time and the present, and rests upon arid calculations, as well as impatience” (Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions*, 407).

²⁸Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 35.

sacrament—a means by which the grace of God is bridged to the intended audience. Whereas, in fact, the above signs (lifestyle, friendship, and service) were never instituted as sacraments (means of grace) nor do they assist or render more power to the promise or Gospel. The Gospel alone has all the power it needs for salvation (cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:17-18).²⁹ Evangelicalism has held that the word of promise accompanied by the agency of the work of the Holy Spirit on the individual alone can bring a response of faith in the heart of man.³⁰

Concerning Divine *Preparatio Evangelica*

Now there are several places in historical theology in which one may find some type of divine *preparatio* or prevenient-type of work of God. However, in historic evangelical theology these precursors to the conversion were never deemed salvific outside of belief in the word of promise, that is the Gospel. For example, the work of God in nature seen by all men (cf. Ps 19:1-3; Rom 1:18-25) serves only to condemn natural man, not to bring salvation, as this end comes only through the agency of the Gospel.³¹ Also there is man's conscience that condemns and commends (Rom 2:14-15), which also serves to condemn man reminding him of his depravity. These divine works are not salvific in themselves. Rather, while they may cooperate with special revelation when it

²⁹Taylor, J. Hudson. "The Source of Power," in *Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900: Report of the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions, Held in Carnegie Hall and Neighboring Churches*, April 21 to May 1, James Johnston, ed. (New York: American Tract Society, 1900), 91.

³⁰B. B. Warfield, *The Work of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1918), 20; Arno C. Gaebelin, *Listen!—God Speaks* (New York: Our Hope, 1936), 92-93; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1973), 104-105.

³¹B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 75-76.

is shared, they are only effective to the elect. In themselves the preparatory works afford no saving knowledge of God to those who are not saved.

Three other theological concepts are sometimes considered divine *preparatio*-types of grace: prevenient grace, *gratia praeprans*, and *desiderium aeternitatis*. First, in the Wesleyan approach to the order of salvation, prevenient grace is given universally to all. It is this grace that allows man to cooperate with God in salvation:

We acknowledge God's prevenient grace, the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God's will, and our "first slight transient conviction" of having sinned against God.

God's grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith."³²

Prevenient grace in the Wesleyan system is a universal *preparatio* which prepares all men "to please God." It is not salvific, but rather a preparation for a relationship with God.

Nevertheless, its origin is from God, not from human relationship, lifestyle, or service.

Second, *Gratia praeprans* is a term used by Franz Delitzsch to describe the theological nature of "the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law" (Isaiah 42:4). He interpreted this text as follows:

There is a *gratia praeprans* at work in the Gentile world, as these prophecies presuppose, in perfect harmony with the Gospel of John, with which they have so much affinity; and it is an actual fact, that the cry for redemption runs through the whole human race, *i.e.* an earnest longing, the ultimate object of which, however unconsciously, is the servant of Jehovah and his instruction from Zion (ch. ii. 3),—in other words, the gospel.³³

³²"Church Library: Section I: Our Doctrinal Heritage: Prevenient Grace," from http://www.umc.org/churchlibrary/discipline/doctrinalstandards/doctrinal_heritage.htm; accessed 8 September 2002; Internet. Taken from *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2000* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000).

³³Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, by C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 177.

Calvin, on the other hand, sought to interpret this verse within an understanding of particularism: “By the word *wait*, he means that the elect will eagerly embrace the gospel offered to them.”³⁴ Nevertheless, regardless if a theologian is a generalist or a particularist, it is clear that the agency of this *gratia praeprans* is God, and not the relationship, lifestyle, or service of the messenger.

Lastly, we note the *preparatio* made famous by Augustine in his *Confessions*.³⁵ It is the *desiderium aeternitatis* as found in Ecclesiastes 3:11:³⁶ “He has also set eternity in their hearts.”³⁷ Blaise Pascal seemed to build from this concept from a skeptical point-of-view in his refutation of the Cartesian *a priori* of reason.³⁸ However, from this *desiderium aeternitatis*, some have postulated that salvific grace is communicated by the Holy Spirit or available to man outside of the preaching of the Gospel, such as through natural theology³⁹ or through various world religions.⁴⁰ Again a

³⁴John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 3:292.

³⁵“And man desires to praise thee, for he is a part of thy creation; he bears his mortality about with him and carries the evidence of his sin and the proof that thou dost resist the proud. Still he desires to praise thee, this man who is only a small part of thy creation. Thou hast prompted him, that he should delight to praise thee, for thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee” (Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. and trans. Albert C. Oulter; from http://www.ccel.org/a/augustine/confessions/confessions_enchiridion.txt; accessed 11 September 2002; Internet).

³⁶Perhaps Christ as the “Desire of all nations,” as found in some translations of Haggai 2:7 (e.g. KJV), builds on this concept.

³⁷Keil And Delitzsch wrote, “This saying regarding the *desiderium aeternitatis* being planted in the heart of man, is one of the profoundest utterances of Koheleth. In fact, the impulse of man shows that his innermost wants cannot be satisfied by that which is temporal. He is a being limited by time, but as to his innermost nature he is related to eternity. That which is transient yields him no support, it carries him on like a rushing stream, and constrains him to save himself by laying hold of eternity” (Keil and Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, 261).

³⁸“Infinitely far from grasping the extremes, the end of things and their origins are completely hid from him [man] in impenetrable mystery; he is equally incapable of seeing the void whence he comes and the infinite in which he is engulfed” (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, ed. L. Lafuma [Paris: Delmas, 1952], 390, *Pensée* 72). “

particularist interpretation does not agree with any salvific quality being communicated.⁴¹

Nevertheless, just as with prevenient grace and *gratia preparans*, this *preparatio* does not originate from the messenger's lifestyle, relationship, or service, but from God.

Each of the above mentioned prevenient-types of works of God, whether we agree with their universal nature or not, are said to be divinely originated and supernatural. They are (1) not humanly derived or operated; (2) cooperate with saving grace only in the elect; and (3) serve to condemn the reprobate. It can be said, therefore,

³⁹“The stronger the intellectual light the deeper the understanding we derive from images, whether these are received in a natural way from the senses or formed in the imagination by divine power. Revelation provides us with a divine light which enables us to attain a more profound understanding of these images” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Section I, Question 12, Article 13, Conclusion 2 [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963], 3:45). “Natural theology declares a Creator of man, of the heavens and the earth. He declares himself to be *Almighty*, which we know from the laws of our belief must exist. We seek for that cause of what we see, and cannot stop till we find one adequate and necessarily eternal” (P. A. Chadbourne, “Natural Theology,” in *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, And Ecclesiastical Literature*, ed. By John McClintock and James Strong (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981). “Among them intelligent creatures are ranked under Divine Providence the more nobly because they take part in Providence by their own providing for themselves and others. Thus they join in and make their own Eternal Reason through which they have their natural aptitudes for their due activity and purpose.[c] Now this sharing in the Eternal Law by intelligent creatures is what we call ‘Natural Law.’” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Section 2, Question 91, Article 2, 28:23). Footnote [c] in the previous text reads: “Rational creatures move themselves with reference to the end in view, and therefore can live with God and be associates in his Providence, 1a. 18, 3 & 4; 22, 2 ad 4 & 5. This sharing of God's law is the theme of *CG III*, 111-46. This association is taken into a new dimension by the friendship of charity; 1a2æ. 109, 3. 2æ2æ. 23, 1.”

⁴⁰Note the concentric circles of the church discussed in Paul VI's, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 6 August 1964, paragraph 96 and following. These concentric circles are expanded Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, 13-16. For example, paragraph 13 stated, “All men are called to belong to the new People of God” (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 21 November 1964; Taken From <http://listserv.american.edu/catholic/church/vaticanii/lumen-gentium.html>; accessed 24 march 2001; Internet). Paragraph 16 expanded on this generalism to adopt universalism, “Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways. . . . Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those may achieve eternal salvation” (Ibid., paragraph 16). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in several paragraphs under the heading “Who belongs to the Church?” included a subheading titled, “The Church's bond with non-Christian Religions.” Rather than restating the universalism of Vatican II, this section reminded its readers that “The Church is the place where humanity must rediscover its unity and salvation” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 845 [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994], 224).

⁴¹John Calvin wrote, “He means not that it was so engraven on their will, that they sought and diligently pursued it, but that they were so mastered by the power of truth, that they could not disapprove it” (Calvin, *Romans*, 97).

that neither prevenient grace, nor *gratia prae-parans*, nor *desiderium aeternitatis* communicate any special saving grace to their recipients.

If we do not believe that divine *preparatio* to communicate saving grace to their recipients, how can we accept that human *preparatio* communicate saving grace? For, in fact, those who operate with a sacramental presupposition in their view of evangelism necessarily cause the sign (*preparatio*) to (1) precede the promise, (2) cooperate with the promise, and (3) intensify the impact of the promise. Interestingly, however, this sacramental presupposition is in direct conflict with the Gospel's explanation of the role of signs in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus and the Place of Signs

Jesus told those who desired a sign that they would receive none, save the sign of Jonah (Luke 11:29)—a sign which had not yet seen its fulfillment in Christ and which required faith in the message of Jonah to accept. Paul stated that Jews wanted a sign, but he preached Christ crucified, “to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23). Again, Jesus had particularly harsh words for the towns that had seen the majority of his miracles: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Luke 10:13-15; Matt 11:20-24). Regardless of the “service evangelism” of the many miracles of Jesus Christ in these towns, grace was not increased in them, nor did they repent!⁴² Likewise Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, had seen the lifestyle of the sinless Son of God for over twenty-five years. Yet they did not repent, but tried to kill Him (Luke 4:28-29). In fact, Jesus did not work miracles in Nazareth (Luke 4:23) because of their unbelief (Mark 6:5-6), adding: “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his own hometown” (Luke 4:24).

⁴²Many did repent at the preaching of John the Baptist, who “performed no sign” (John 10:41)!

Thus, the lifestyle and service of Jesus did not increase the effectiveness of His ministry, nor did it open hardened hearts. *In actuality, it may even be considered that it reduced the short-term effectiveness of His ministry as the miracles were often received on naturalistic terms rather than supernatural terms.* Is this misunderstanding not what Jesus addressed in John 10? He said, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” (John 10:32).⁴³ The issue was not the good works, it was the “from the Father.” There are many other examples of man looking at the natural side, whereas Jesus was addressing the supernatural.⁴⁴ Perhaps this is why spiritual leaders are called to discern between the holy and the profane (cf. Lev 10:10; Ezek 44:23; and Mal 2:6-9).

Contrary to the example of Jesus, the *preparatio evangelica* of sacramental evangelism is usually considered to communicate a special saving grace as if the sign savingly prepared the recipient for the message of the Gospel—could we say, as if it increased the chances of a person’s salvation, or added to and increased the number of the elect. Theologically, the result of friendship, lifestyle, and service preparing the way for the Gospel is their addition to the Order of Salvation as a necessary step in the conversion process. Thus, these *preparatio* are a new level of human mediation added to the *ordo salutis*.⁴⁵ It is also a new incarnational addition to *sola Scriptura* in salvation. The Word alone, it is deemed, is not potent enough as the instrument of salvation without the

⁴³The stumbling block was not “many good works,” the stumbling block was “from the Father,” the supernatural words or spiritual teaching which Jesus said.

⁴⁴For example, see Nicodemus, John 3:4; the Samaritan woman, John 4:15; the Jews, John 6:34; and the concept of the destruction of the Temple, John 2:18-19 and Matt 27:61.

⁴⁵“Formulations of the *ordo [salutis]* attempt to express the way by which God through Christ imparts salvation to sinners from inception to consummation or from eternity past to eternity future” (Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 36.

necessary mediation of a human sign. By the way, use of the word incarnational for evangelism wrongly implies that the incarnation of Christ was a fifty percent man-fifty percent God proposition, in direct conflict with the historic creeds.⁴⁶ For example, incarnational evangelism implies that the human *preparatio* accounts for fifty percent of the effectiveness, and the Gospel preached accounts for fifty percent. They are like two birds of a wing or the two blades on a scissor and cannot be separated.⁴⁷ C. B. Hogue, in his booklet entitled *Lifestyle Evangelism* published in 1973 made this link in the first sentence of his introduction: “Lifestyle evangelism is incarnational evangelism.”⁴⁸ In this case incarnational evangelism was synonymous with sacramental evangelism.

Sacramental Evangelism’s Source

From whence did this sacramental evangelism emanate? While having historical precursors in the naturalism of Peter Abelard and mediatorial system of Thomas Aquinas, sacramental evangelism became prominent among Protestants in the International Missionary Councils,⁴⁹ precursors to the World Council of Churches. It was

⁴⁶A portion of the Nicene Creed, enlarged in A.D. 381: “We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all worlds; [God of God]. Light of Light. Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made; Who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made a man . . .” (Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998; from 1931 edition], 1:27-28; 2:58-59).

⁴⁷John R. W. Stott, *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 182.

⁴⁸C. B. Hogue, *Lifestyle Evangelism* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1973), 1.

⁴⁹“At least since the IMC [International Missionary Council] meeting at Jerusalem (1928), the ecumenical movement has laid considerable emphasis on active involvement in society by Christians as an important part of the mission of the church. Evangelism and social action have been viewed as integral elements in a comprehensive Christian witness to God’s love and concern for the whole person and the whole of society” (Rodger Bassham, *Mission Theology: 1948-1975 Years of Worldwide Creative Tension Ecumenical, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic* [Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1979], 342).

absorbed into evangelicalism variously through the writings of Leighton Ford (1966),⁵⁰ John R. W. Stott (1975),⁵¹ and others. The same sacramental evangelism was affirmed through the 1966 Wheaton Declaration,⁵² Lausanne '74,⁵³ the Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture (1978),⁵⁴ and the Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility (1982).⁵⁵ And finally through the deluge of practical books on the subject published between 1976 and 1981 (as noted above). The pragmatism of much of the Church Growth materials and many of the Servant Evangelism materials provide a second generation to this movement—a shift from lifestyle to social service as a *preparatio*.

⁵⁰Notice the order in Leighton Ford's paradigm: "How did Jesus' disciples evangelize? They followed in His steps. Their witness was by *loving fellowship* (Acts 2:44). Their witness was by *compassionate service* (Acts 3:6). Their witness was by *faithful proclamation* (Acts 5:42). . . . Not until they could show the fellowship of truth and demonstrate the deeds of truth, were they ready to speak the words of truth" (Leighton Ford, *The Christian Persuader* [New York: Harper and Row, 1966], 68).

⁵¹"In its extreme form this older view of mission as consisting exclusively of evangelism also concentrated on verbal proclamation. . . . At the opposite extreme of this unbiblical concept of mission as consisting of evangelism alone there is the standard ecumenical viewpoint. . . . the identification of the mission of God with social renewal" (Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975], 15, 17, 18). Stott then explained that his view of mission had changed since Berlin 1966, "Today, however, I would express myself differently. . . . I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are guilty of distorting the words of Jesus" (*ibid.*, 23).

⁵²Norman E. Thomas, ed., *Classic Texts in Missions and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 138-139.

⁵³John R. W. Stott, "The Lausanne Covenant," in *Making Christ Known: Historic Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 24-28.

⁵⁴"Just as a 'dynamic equivalence' translation, however, seeks to convey to contemporary readers meanings equivalent to those conveyed to the original readers, by using appropriate cultural forms, so would a 'dynamic equivalence' church" (John R. W. Stott, "The Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture," in *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, ed. John R. W. Stott [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 99).

⁵⁵John R. W. Stott, "Grand Rapids Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment," in *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989*, ed. John R. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 181-182.

As indicated above, sacramental evangelism may in fact indicate a lack of discernment between the profane and the holy (cf. Lev 10:10 et al). Its presence is felt by some common statements on the subject. One such statement is as follows: “We need to earn the right to share the Gospel.” This saying undermines the unique power of the Gospel (Rom 1:16), the sole authority of the Bible (Heb 4:12-13), and the sufficiency of the word of the cross preached (1 Cor 1:18). Another statement is “We are His hands and feet.” This mantra undermines the uniqueness of God’s perfect revelation of Himself in His μονογενης, Jesus, and raises church members and the church or Church to the place of Christ, thus implying an ecclesial idolatry. Similarly, the statement, “They need to see Jesus first,” includes the same misapplied Christology and ecclesiology. “A hungry mouth has no ears” assumes that serving them food will open their ears. John 6 clearly contradicts this teaching as Jesus fed five thousand persons who were following Him to see the signs Jesus was performing (John 6:2, 26). They believed he was “the Prophet” (John 6:14). Then when He explained His role in the atonement (John 6:29-65) “many of His disciples withdrew” (John 6:66). The hearts of the people were not opened by the physical food provided by Jesus. In fact, the opposite occurred, they followed Jesus only to fill their stomachs with food (John 6:26-27). Yet Peter clearly understood the issue, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (John 6:68). A last common statement is sometimes attributed to Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Lower Order in 1209-1210, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.”⁵⁶ First

⁵⁶Toward the end of his life, Francis was permitted by the Pope to celebrate the Eucharist in the Franciscan residences. He wrote of celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours: “*Give praise to Him because He is good* (Ps. 136:1 [V 135:1]); *exalt Him by your deeds* (Tob. 13:6), for He has sent you into the whole world for this reason: that in word and deed you may bear witness to His voice and bring everyone to know that there is no *one who is all-powerful* except Him (Tob. 13:4)” (Regis J. Armstrong, *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings for a Gospel Life* [New York: Crossroad, 1994], 215). One quote from an earlier chapter in Tobit reads as follows: “It is better to give alms than to store up gold; for almsgiving saves one from death and

of all, this statement removes the necessity of a verbal communication of the Gospel, a serious downgrade of all the passages that indicate the need to hear for belief. Second, the Great Commission is downgraded from “preach the Gospel” to “live a virtuous lifestyle,” which any humanistic religion can accept. And thirdly, the role of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in a theology of conversion are seriously omitted to the detriment of the supernatural in conversion and the substitutionary atonement. Therefore each of the above common statements proves theologically disconcerting.

Impact on Theology

The theological and practical differences between sacramental evangelism and expectant evangelism are noted in Table 1. The Term expectant evangelism is derived from J. Hudson Taylor’s sermon, “The Source of Power,” from the Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900:

One other power is the gospel itself. The gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. Now, there are different ways of preaching the gospel. There is the plan of preaching the gospel and looking forward to the *gradual enlightenment* of the people, to their being saved as it were by *a process of gradual instruction and preaching*. And there is another method of preaching the gospel; believing it to be the power of God unto salvation; *preaching it in the expectation* that He who first brought light out of darkness can and will at once and *instantaneously* take the darkest heathen heart and create light within. That is the method that is successful. It has been my privilege to know many Christians—I am speaking within bounds when I say a hundred—who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour the first time they ever heard of Him. The gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation.⁵⁷

expiates every sin” (Tobit 12:8-9, *Saint Joseph Personal Size Edition of the New American Bible* [New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1992]).

⁵⁷Taylor, J. Hudson. “The Source of Power,” 91. Emphasis mine.

Taylor, in his day, was speaking for a supernatural evangelism that emphasized instantaneous conversion, rather than a gradual conversion⁵⁸ which emphasized a process of human enlightenment. In fact, the addition of the human element in evangelism, and hence its addition to the *ordo salutis*, has immense theological and practical implications. In addition, the results of Sacramental Evangelism are also disconcerting.

From a sterile bottom line approach to evangelism—what will it do for my church?—the acceptance of sacramental evangelism as the primary method of evangelism virtually guarantees a decrease in conversion growth in a church. For example, in an excellent study on churches that were growing through conversion growth, Thom Rainer commented on the ineffectiveness of “Service Evangelism”:

As a rule the pastors of the 576 churches were disappointed if not frustrated with anemic evangelistic efforts in most of the social and community ministries. . . . The comments we received about ministry ineffectiveness in evangelism was but one example of their vigorous and continuous evaluative process. . . . Rarely did our research team hear a comment about discontinuing a ministry because of its evangelistic ineffectiveness.⁵⁹

Imagine the anemic conversion growth of churches who limit their outreach to “service evangelism.” Rather than service evangelism being the answer, Rainer discovered that churches growing from conversion growth were growing primarily by traditional methods of evangelism.⁶⁰ Therefore in light of this paper it would seem that *sacramental evangelism smothers the power of the Gospel preached, and champions unproductive*

⁵⁸Note the inclusion of “time” as a precursor to sharing the Gospel by Mark Mittelberg (*Building a Contagious Church*, 59) and Steve Sjogren (*Conspiracy of Kindness* [Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1993], 22-24).

⁵⁹Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Really Works* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 145-146.

⁶⁰“We have heard from the leaders of nearly six hundred evangelistic churches. Over one-half (50.2 percent) of these leaders ranked weekly outreach as one of their most effective evangelistic tools. Only four other methodologies [out of a total of 24] fared better” (Ibid., 19).

TABLE 1
THEOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF
EXPECTANT AND SACRAMENTAL EVANGELISM

Expectant Evangelism	Theological Implications of Sacramental Evangelism ⁶¹
1. Instantaneous conversion, Acts 16:14; Rom 10:13	Progressive conversion/gradual enlightenment
2. Substitutionary or vicarious atonement, 2 Cor 5:21	Reconciliation model of the atone- ment
3. Faith comes by hearing, Rom 10:17	Faith comes by seeing and hearing
4. The word of God is the instrument of salvation, Rom 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:23	Sharing the gospel must be preempted by lifestyle, relationship, or service
5. Preaching Christ, 2 Cor 4:5	Preaching ourselves and Christ
6. Christ alone saves, Acts 4:12; Rom 5:8- 10, et al.	Christ's work needs human merits to be effective
7. Christ earned the right for the message to be shared, Rom 5:8; 1 Tim 1:15	Christians must earn the right to share the gospel with others
8. The lifestyle and miracles of Christ did not lead to faith in all those who observed them, John 12:37	The lifestyle of the Christian will lead the lost to become open to the message of the gospel
9. Harvest is ripe, Luke 10:2, John 4:35	Harvest is not ripe; it needs cultivation
10. Must evangelize by faith, John 4:35	Must use natural relational rules
11. Christians' lives should be consistent with the gospel; Christians should live holy lives, 1 Pet 1:14-16	Christians must practice "radical identification" and "eat meat" (à la 1 Cor 10:23 ff.) to relate to the lost.
12. Christians will be hated by the world due to their association with Christ, John 15:18-21	Christians are hated only because they are not culturally sensitive and open to the needs of the unsaved

⁶¹It is important to understand that, as within any movement, there are degrees of adherence to sacramental evangelism. Various Scriptures are also cited by those adhering to lifestyle, friendship, or service evangelism to affirm their position.

13. The gospel is a reproach, Heb 11:26, e.g. 1 Cor 1:23; it will be avoided by evildoers, lest their deeds be exposed, John 3:20-21	The gospel need not be a reproach (i.e. a moral philosophy); natural man can and will accept Christianity's rational superiority with proper apologetics
14. Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see Christ, John 3:20-21, 2 Cor 2:17, 4:3-4	Man's sin has not fully blinded his mind; he can discern certain spiritual truths if properly communicated
15. Rejection of gospel is due to lack of comprehension and spiritual blindness, Matt 13:19, 2 Cor 4:3-4 – Christian is only responsible to share, Ezek 3:18-19, with patience, 2 Tim 4:2, and gentleness, 1 Pet 3:15	Rejection of gospel is due to a lack of relational cultivation; guilt is placed on the rejected Christian for his lack of proper cultivation, leading to a further fear and neglect of sharing the gospel to the unsaved
16. Persecution is promised, 2 Tim 3:12, and is a blessing, Matt 5:10-11, 1 Pet 4:12-14	Persecution is a sign that the method of evangelism is faulty, needing modification
17. Evangelism weapons are spiritual, 2 Cor 10:3-5	Must use both spiritual and carnal weapons (e.g., marketing techniques)
18. Evangelism is both urgent and the preeminent priority for the Christian: (1) Return of Christ, Matt 24:14 (2) Mankind is totally depraved, Rom 3:9-20 (3) Reality of hell as eternal conscious punishment, Matt 25:46 (4) Christians are accountable, Ezek 3:16-21, Acts 20:26	Evangelism is one of many important aspects of the Christian life: (1) Emphasis on here and now (2) Total depravity may be an overstatement (3) Some question the reality of a literal hell (4) Mentioning accountability is putting guilt trips on Christians
19. The Bible is authoritative in both doctrine and practice (e.g., the work of evangelism), 2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Cor 11:1	The Bible is authoritative primarily for doctrine, evangelism's practice must glean truth from culture
20. Expectant evangelism is absolutely necessary in the ministry of the local church: (1) Expectant or verbal evangelism is commanded, Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49 (2) Expectant evangelism is exemplified, Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; cf. 2 Tim 4:1-5	Expectant evangelism is counter-productive, negative to the world's view of the church, cf. I Cor. 4:10: (1) Reinterpret Great Commission as a gradual process, e.g., make disciples in Matt 28:19 (2) Adapt evangelism methodology to truths in anthropology, sociology, and psychology

evangelism. Wolfhart Pannenberg made a striking statement in this regard: “mainline and accommodating churches are in decline, while conservative churches continue to grow.”⁶² By the way, this idea was not a new brainstorm. Billy Graham quoted someone in 1967 who said the same thing:

It was most interesting for me to read an observation of David Danzig of *Commentary*, a Hebrew periodical. He has observed that those churches that believe in conversion grow more rapidly and have a more intense faith than those who do not believe in conversion.⁶³

It is therefore important to understand the negative long-term results of an accommodating or non-conversionistic methodology of evangelism.

Luther on the “Hearing of Faith”

Perhaps the verses that aided Martin Luther in removing the veil of sacramentalism from the Roman Catholic faith may also assist evangelicals in removing the veil of sacramental evangelism from their methodology. Two Scripture portions seemed important to Martin Luther. First, Luther cited Luke 11:28 on the role of the word of God and salvation, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”⁶⁴ Herein the sole agency of blessing came through the hearing of the word of God. It was through a response of obedience to the hearing of the word of God that one

⁶²“Accommodation to secularity is in fact perceived as a sign of weakness, as a loss of Christian confidence. It has frequently been noted that the mainline and accommodating churches are in decline, while conservative churches continue to grow. Evangelicals and fundamentalists are not embarrassed to challenge the prevailing patterns of thought and behavior associated with secularity. This growth, however, does not come without paying a price. That price includes a loss of openness to the human situation in all of its maddening variety, and a quenching of the unprejudiced search for truth. That said, the irony is that those churches that are dismissed as irrelevant by more “sophisticated” Christians often turn out to be most relevant to our secular societies” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Present and Future Church,” *First Things*, November 1991, 47).

⁶³Billy Graham, “Biblical Conversion,” in *Lectures, Kansas City School of Evangelism, September, 1967* (Kansas City, MO: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1967), 10.

⁶⁴Martin Luther, “The Pagan Servitude of the Church,” 357.

received blessing. Second was the book that Luther called his wife, Galatians: “My own Epistle to which I have plighted my troth. It is my Katie von Bora.”⁶⁵ Central in Luther’s interpretation of Galatians were chapter 3, verses 1-5. In these verses the Apostle Paul spoke of the “hearing of faith.” This “hearing of faith” or “outward word” became a hermeneutical principle by which Luther judged the authenticity of doctrine,⁶⁶ as it focused attention away from the physical signs and back to the only source of power, the Word of God proclaimed.

Was Luther merely responding to his *Sitz im Leben*, or were these emphases on the “hearing of faith” and the “outward word” biblically derived? Several sample passages will be cited. First of all, there is the need to hear in order to know God’s word:

- “The peoples who hear all these statutes will say ‘surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deut 4:6)
- “Listen, O my people, to my instruction; Incline your ears to the words of My mouth” (Psalm 78:1)
- “Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding” (Prov 2:2; cf. Prov 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7)
- “Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks” (Isaiah 1:2)
- “But He said to him, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’” (Luke 16:31).

Second, there is hearing to fear the Lord:

⁶⁵Philip S. Watson, “Introduction,” in *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, by Martin Luther (Westwood, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 5.

⁶⁶“And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may [thus] be protected against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare. For [indeed] the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with [in] his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word. . . . Without the outward Word, however, they were not holy, much less would the Holy Ghost have moved them to speak when they still were unholy [or profane]; for they were holy, says he, since the Holy Ghost spake through them” (Martin Luther, “Of Confession,” Smalcald Articles, Part 3, Section 8 [on-line], accessed 11 October 2001, available from <http://www.frii.com/~gospow/smalcald.html#smc-03h>; Internet).

- “Go near and hear all that the Lord our God says; then speak it to us all that the Lord our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it.” The Lord heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me [Moses], and the Lord said to me, “I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken to you. They have done well in what they have spoken. Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it would be well with them and with their sons forever” (Deut 5:27-29)
- “Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do your people Israel. . .” (1 Kings 8:41-43, cf. 59-60).

Thirdly, a verbal proclamation alone makes known the Gospel:

- Most of the 54 uses of εὐαγγελίζω in the New Testament (e.g. Acts 8:5, 25, 40), as well as the nine uses of κερύσσω in evangelistic contexts (e.g. Mark 16:15)
- “And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will harm you, for I have many people in this city’” (Acts 18:9-10)
- “For indeed we have had the good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Heb 4:2)
- “And this is the message we heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

Fourth, there is the need to hear to be able to obey:

- “As soon as they hear, they obey me; foreigners submit to me” (Psalm 18:44)
- “Thou hast ordained Thy precepts, That we should keep them diligently. . . . Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee” (Ps. 119:4, 11)
- “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24; cf. Luke 6:47)
- “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold, I must bring them also, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:16)
- “I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word” (John 17:6).

Fifth, there is hearing to give an opportunity to believe:

- “And many more believed because of his word” (John 4:41)
- “And they were saying to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world’” (John 4:42)
- “The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he started off” (John 4:50)
- “For the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received them, and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me” (John 17:8)
- “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word” (John 17:20)
- “And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 11:14)
- “And [they] spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 14:1)
- “But go on speaking and do not be silent . . . for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10)
- “And how are they to believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14)
- “Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17)
- “This is the only thing that I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing with faith?” (Gal 3:2)
- “For you have been born again . . . through the living and abiding word of God. . . . And this is the word which was preached to you” (1 Pet 1:23, 25)
- “But the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Heb 4:2).

Sixth, there is hearing for salvation:

- “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).
- “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13)
- “Keeping us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved” (1 Thes 2:16).

Do these verses not confirm the absolute necessity for the “outward word” and the “hearing of faith”? Was it not this same “outward word” and “hearing of faith” that was fueled by the hundreds of Bible societies formed after 1804? Was it not the source of

power for the Great Century of Protestant Missions the “hearing of faith”? Has not the Word of God produced the similar results wherever it is shared? The following quotes from the book of Acts emphasize the dynamic role of the Word of God in evangelism:⁶⁷

- “And they began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31)
- “And the Word of God kept on spreading” (Acts 6:7)
- “Therefore those who had been scattered went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:4)
- “Now the apostles heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God” (Acts 11:1)
- “But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied” (Acts 12:24)
- “They began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues” (Acts 13:5)
- “And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region” (Acts 13:49)
- “And they spoke the word of the Lord to him” (Acts 16:32)
- “The word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also” (Acts 17:13)
- “All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10)
- “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (Acts 19:20).

It would seem that evangelicalism needs to return to the *sola Scriptura* of Martin Luther and the urgent expectancy of Hudson Taylor, in order that the divine agency of the Word of God may spread rapidly and glorified throughout the world (cf. 2 Thes 3:1). The words of Hugh Thomson Kerr, quoted by Samuel Zwemer, seem pertinent to the present time:

“We are sent,” in the pregnant words of Hugh Thomson Kerr, “not to preach sociology but salvation; not economics but evangelism; not reform but redemption; not culture but conversion; not progress but pardon; not the new social order but the new birth; not revolution but regeneration; not renovation but revival; not resuscitation but resurrection; not a new organization but a new creation; not democracy but the Gospel; not civilization but Christ. We are ambassadors not diplomats.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷Luther as he discussed Galatians 3:1-5 had a section in his commentary dealing with the Book of Acts He wrote, “Wherefore we must diligently weigh and consider the force of this argument, which is so often repeated in the Acts of the Apostles” (Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 201.

⁶⁸Samuel M. Zwemer, *Evangelism Today: Message Not Method*, 4th ed. (New York: Revell, 1944), 17.