

## THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN EVANGELISM

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Purpose is the key to understanding the role of Christian education in evangelism. Purpose is what Robert Dale was talking about in his book *To Dream Again*.<sup>1</sup> In this book, Dale suggests that when churches stop growing and start declining, they generally take one of three approaches. They change personnel, change policies, or create programs. These approaches, however, do not work. What works, according to Dale, is for churches to clarify their purpose. This is what Rick Warren was talking about in his book *The Purpose Driven Church*.<sup>2</sup>

Most books and articles on the work of the church have identified four functions: evangelism, edification, worship, and benevolence. Some writers have added fellowship as a fifth function. All of these are important, but relationships among these functions cannot be fully understood without identifying the one most general purpose. In Mark 12:28-31, one of the teachers of the Law asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jewish rabbis had counted 613 different statutes in the law. They had attempted to differentiate between the "great" and the "lesser" commandments. Jesus did not condemn this effort. Instead, he agreed with the rabbis who identified Deuteronomy 6:4 as the greatest command. Jesus said that the most important command was "Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." This is what the Jews called the *Shema*, which means "hear," the first word of this command. But then Jesus joined that passage with Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus thus showed that love for our neighbors is a natural and logical outgrowth of love for God. In Mark 12:31, Jesus concluded, "There is no commandment greater than these." In a parallel account, Jesus said "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Mat. 22:40).

The purpose of the church, according to 1 Peter 4:11, is "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> As individual Christians, we glorify God by becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). We grow day by day to become more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). We put off the old self and put on the new self "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Christ is formed in us (Gal. 4:19). We can then say, as Paul did, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). As individual Christians and as congregations of the Lord's church, we glorify God by our corporate worship. It is true that the worship words of the New Testament almost always refer to the whole of the sacrificial life—as in Romans 12:1—and not just to the assembly. But the corporate worship assembly of the church is a part of that sacrificial life and it is proper to refer to that assembly as "worship." However, the worship in the Old Testament at the tabernacle or the temple was replaced by the sacrificial life of individual Christians. The church was built more on the model of the synagogue than on the model of the temple. Synagogue activities focused as much on teaching as praise. Worship and helping the needy were important elements in the mission of the New Testament church—just as loving God and loving neighbors were central commands under the Law of Moses. But evangelism and edification were also central elements in the mission of the church.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."<sup>4</sup> Some have concluded from Matthew's account of the Great Commission that evangelism is what comes first and is how we make disciples. Christian education, then, is what comes later as we teach those disciples to obey everything that Jesus commanded. C. H. Dodd argued in favor of a distinction between preaching and teaching.<sup>5</sup> According to Dodd, preaching (*kerusso*) involved the *kerygma* (the basic facts of the gospel), while teaching (*didasko*) involved the *didache* (the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Dale, *To Dream Again* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> New American Standard translation.

<sup>4</sup> All Bible quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York: Harper, 1936).

body of teaching meant for believers). Recent scholarship, however, has challenged Dodd's distinction.<sup>6</sup> The words for "preaching" and "evangelism" are sometimes used interchangeably with the word for "teaching."<sup>7</sup> The distinction between evangelism and Christian education appears to be somewhat arbitrary.<sup>8</sup> Instead of looking for distinctions, we need to focus on the relationship between the two.

More than 53 years ago, when I first started preaching, one of my early sermons was based on an idea that I borrowed from some long forgotten source. The sermon was on "The Four Great Imperatives of the Great Commission." The four points were: "Go," "Make Disciples," "Baptize," and "Teach." I had not yet learned that all sermons are supposed to have three points with a poem—and with the three points all starting with the same letter. Furthermore, I had not yet learned that in the original Greek text of Matthew 28:18-20, there is only one commanding verb and it is the verb form of the noun "disciple." The others are participles, not verbs. What Jesus literally said in Matthew's account of the Great Commission was "As you are going into all the world, disciple all people groups." *Panta ta ethne* does not refer to nations as political subdivisions, but rather to ethnic groups. "Baptizing" and "teaching" are participles that follow the verb "disciple."

There is much teaching that must be done before baptism. Faith must precede baptism and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Repentance must precede baptism and people cannot repent until they have learned the basics about what is involved in accepting Jesus Christ as Lord. You do not have to understand everything that is involved, but you must at least know that you are making a total commitment of your life to God. "Counting the cost" is a biblical idea (Lk. 14:28). All of this requires teaching before baptism. Once people are baptized, they are Christians. They are disciples of Christ. According to Greek scholars, the "discipling" of Matthew 28:19 refers to the teaching that comes before baptism. But the kind of disciple-making instruction that comes before baptism must be followed by disciple-building instruction. All that you get from baptism without prior instruction is a wet sinner. And all that you are likely to get from baptism without subsequent instruction is a drop-out.

A mission statement for the church could identify the most general purpose as being "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:11). Then that mission statement could recognize that evangelism and edification are two essential ways in which we glorify God. Worship, helping the needy, and having fellowship with one another are also important, but disciple-making and disciple-building instruction must be central.

### **Beyond Mission Statements**

If you have ever tried to write a mission statement, you know that it is not easy. You probably also know that in most cases it does not help. Dale was right when he said that congregations must clarify their purpose. But that is just one small step. The reason that most congregational mission statements are soon forgotten is that the churches are not willing to do all the other things that must be done before a mission statement is of any real value.

In order to illustrate what it takes to make a mission statement effective, consider this personal example. Along with my work as a teacher in the College of Bible and Religion at Harding University, I have two administrative jobs. One is that I direct the Office of Outcomes Assessment where we collect and analyze data used to inform strategic planning and to help in accreditation reviews. In my other administrative job, I direct the Harding Center for Church Growth Studies where we collect and analyze data on Churches of Christ throughout the United States and assist congregations that are involved in assessment and planning. I believe that what universities do in assessment and planning can serve as a good model for what churches ought to do.

Harding University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Various colleges and degree programs at Harding are accredited by several different professional organizations. All of these accrediting agencies require a school to have a mission statement that clearly explains the school's purpose. These agencies

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<sup>6</sup> Donald L. Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), pp. 10-13.

<sup>7</sup> Compare Matthew 4:23, "teaching in their synagogues," with Mark 1:39, "preached in their synagogues." See also: Acts 5:42; 28:31; Col. 1:28.

<sup>8</sup> Two major works that take issue with the preaching-teaching distinction made by Dodd are: Robert Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960); and Robert C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Westminster, 1967).

do not tell us what our purpose should be, but they do expect us to have a clearly articulated mission statement. At Harding University, our mission statement takes up less than one page in the Catalogue. The motto is the most general part of a mission statement. The motto of Harding University is "Developing Christian Servants." The mission statement tells how we expect to fulfill the purpose expressed in the motto. Next to the motto, the most general part of Harding's mission statement is our purpose "to provide a quality education that will lead to an understanding and philosophy of life consistent with Christian ideals." The way we expect to fulfill that purpose is, in general, by "the integration of faith, learning and living." Getting just a little more specific, Harding's mission statement focus on five key elements:

- The development of Christian scholarship;
- The promotion of Christian ethics;
- The development of lasting relationships;
- The promotion of wellness; and,
- The promotion of citizenship within a global perspective.

A university mission statement is longer than a congregational mission statement should be. In both, however, the movement is always from the general to the specific. But while the key elements of a mission statement are more specific than the motto, mission statements are, by nature, quite general. They are so general, in fact, that it is usually very difficult to assess the degree to which the mission is being achieved. Most universities, therefore, go beyond the mission statement and develop an Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose (ESIPs as they are known in the jargon of assessment). These purpose statements are more specific and can be assessed more directly. At Harding, we developed more than 30 such statements. From that list, the University Assessment Committee selected seven to focus on at this time and these were approved by vote of the faculty.

The University Assessment Committee developed a plan for university-wide assessment. Deans of Harding's six colleges and the Chairpersons of each department got as much faculty and student input as they could in order to develop assessment plans for each department. Administrative and support units (such as the Library, Business Office, Student Health Services, etc.) did the same thing. They started with the university mission statement and the items in the Expanded Statement of Institutional Purpose. They selected one part of each that best summarized what they were trying to achieve in their academic department or administrative support unit. This connected departmental or unit planning to the mission of the university. This connection is needed to make sure that the university stays focused.

The next step was for each academic department to make a list of their Intended Educational Outcomes. These student outcomes were cognitive, behavioral, and affective. They focused on what students were expected to know, what students should be able to do, and what the attitudes and values of students should be. The administrative support units did the same thing, except that they developed Intended Administrative Outcomes that focused more on process and less directly on student learning. All of these intended outcomes, however, had to be measurable. Academic departments and administrative support units did some brainstorming and listed all the objectives that they could think of. Then they selected just a few of these to focus on in the current assessment.

Having selected intended outcomes, the next step was to select the Means of Assessment and establish the Criteria for Success. The university-wide assessment at Harding illustrates the kind of things done in the academic departments and administrative support units. The Office of Outcomes Assessment uses several tools.

- We use *The Academic Profile*, a test that assesses skills in college-level reading, writing, critical thinking, and mathematics--with an indication of knowledge in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. We give this test to samples of incoming freshmen and graduating seniors.
- We developed our own Bible Knowledge Test with objective items similar to those used in Bible Bowl competition. We give that test to incoming freshmen and graduating seniors.
- We developed our own Religious Views Questionnaire in which graduating seniors evaluate the spiritual impact of the Harding experience on such things as the strength of their faith, their prayer life, their commitment to Bible study, their involvement in evangelism, etc.
- We use a Senior Exit Questionnaire in which graduating seniors assess the degree to which Harding has achieved its mission and accomplished its purposes. This questionnaire also includes assessment of various administrative support units.
- We survey a sample of alumni three years after graduation and have them respond to an Alumni Questionnaire.
- Students fill out Teacher Evaluation Forms for all of our teachers in all of our classes at least once every three years.

The academic departments and the administrative support units do not use as many means of assessment as we use for university-wide assessment. But these illustrate the kinds of things that are used for assessment. Each academic department and administrative support unit sets its own targets for what it will regard as "success."

Having done all of this planning, the next step is to do the assessment and study the results. But just getting the results does not do any good unless those results are used to make improvements. Each academic department and administrative support unit is expected to report what they have learned from this assessment that has led to changes that improve what they are doing. In the jargon of assessment, that is called "closing the loop." But getting improvements at the department or unit level is not enough. Each year we have a meeting of department and unit leaders to discuss what they have learned from their assessment and what improvements they have made. In this discussion, they look for common themes. The goal in these discussions is to come up with suggestions that can be passed along to the people doing strategic planning.

At Harding University, strategic planning is done by the administration and the Board of Trustees. Assessment should not drive planning. Purpose should *drive* planning. But assessment should *inform* planning. Furthermore, assessment is just one of the things that should inform planning. "Environmental Scanning" is a term used in the jargon of planning to describe a focus on what is going on outside the institution. Closing the loop means giving planners the data they need from environmental scanning and from assessment in order to review the mission.

When Robert Dale talked about this process in congregations, he called his book *To Dream Again*. A mission statement is not something set in concrete. It may need to be modified. But usually it just needs to be reaffirmed.

Churches do not usually need to go quite as far as universities do in this process. But the main reason that churches write mission statements and soon forget them is that they do not do enough of the things that universities or other organizations do in assessment, environmental scanning, and planning. Kurt Lewin, the father of Group Dynamics, said "The more people you get involved in the formulation of a program or a policy, the more people you will have committed to the execution of that program or policy." Church leaders need to involve as many people as possible in the planning process. Members, both men and women, both young and old, should be involved in clarifying the purpose, writing the mission statement, planning and conducting the assessment, and closing the loop.

### **Purpose Driven Churches**

At Harding University, we are recruiting and training mission teams to plant new congregations in major cities throughout the United States. These teams primarily include Vocational Ministry majors. These students plan to be self-supported church workers. If you were trying to recruit other Christians to help you plant a new congregation, you might start by writing a mission statement describing the kind of congregation you want to plant. As others joined the team, they would help you refine that mission statement. In order to help team members understand this process, I would recommend that they all read two books already mentioned: *The Purpose Driven Church*, by Rick Warren, and *To Dream Again*, by Robert Dale. In order to help team members understand the options, I would recommend that they read Lyle Schaller's book, *Choices for Churches*.<sup>9</sup> This cross-denominational study discusses options for churches in general. Then they should read *Clear Choices for Churches* by John Ellas, a book that focuses on Churches of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

People who write a mission statement need to understand that a mission statement is not a creed—at least not in the negative sense of that term. There are, however, some similarities. The word "creed" comes from a Latin word meaning "This I believe." If I were planting a new congregation, I would want to make it clear what beliefs would be taught by that church. I have no interest in planting a congregation that will be affiliated with any denomination. I do not want to start a new denomination. I would, however, want to make it clear that the new congregation I want to plant will share the history, beliefs, and practices of an informal fellowship of independent non-denominational congregations identified in almanacs and yearbooks as "Churches of Christ."<sup>11</sup> Making that clear says a lot about the beliefs and practices of the new church. A

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<sup>9</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, *Choices for Churches* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup>John W. Ellas, *Clear Choices for Churches: Trends Among Growing and Declining Churches of Christ* (Houston: Center for Church Growth, 1994).

<sup>11</sup>Mac Lynn (compiler), *Churches of Christ in the United States* (Nashville: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian Publications, 2000). This directory lists 13,032 congregations with 1,264,115 members and 1,645,613 adherents (members plus children). See also: Mac Lynn (editor), *Churches of Christ Around the World* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1990). Although this book is somewhat out of date, it is the most recent listing of congregations outside the United States (13,908 congregations with 747,568 members in 177 nations).

mission statement for a new congregation identified with this fellowship would not focus on how it would differ from congregations identified with various denominations. That mission statement, however, might need to explain how this new congregation would differ from other congregations of the Churches of Christ in the area.

What you decide to call a new congregation can say a lot about the kind of congregation you want to build. "Metro Church of Christ," for example, would suggest a focus on a very large area. "Subdivision X Church of Christ," on the other hand, would suggest more of a neighborhood emphasis. "Community Church of Christ" or just "Community Church" might indicate much less emphasis on a connection with heirs of what some have called the "Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement." My wife and I are members of the College Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas. One local community leader suggested that when Bubba drives his muddy pickup truck down the street in front of our building, the "College" part of our name tells him that this is not a church for him. However, we are a congregation established to serve the Harding community. We are a collegiate church. Our church calendar and even our budget year reflect the school schedule. Other Churches of Christ in Searcy welcome Harding students, faculty, and staff—but focus more on the resident members. Recent demographic studies indicate that Churches of Christ need to plant a new congregation in Searcy that could be more effective in reaching a segment of the population not now being reached in our existing congregations: people with a country or rural lifestyle, no more than high school education, and with relatively low socio-economic status. "Countryside Church of Christ" might be a good name for such a congregation.

Some congregations have decided to drop the "Church of Christ" part of their congregational name in order to be more effective in reaching non-members in the community. That is essentially what Rick Warren did with his "Saddleback Valley Community Church." That church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, but they decided not to emphasize that denominational connection. Their driving purpose was to reach people with no religious affiliation. Their non-traditional name got them in trouble with other Baptists. At one of the meetings of the American Society for Church Growth, I heard Elmer Towns say "I would be ashamed to be afraid and afraid to be ashamed of the great name 'Baptist.'" But Rick Warren was not trying to reach people who were already Baptists. However, the non-traditional name also generated criticism from non-members. When they came to understand what the Saddleback Valley Community Church taught and practiced, they said "This sure looks like a Baptist church to me." They accused Warren of false advertising. Churches of Christ have taught for many years that there are many descriptions of the church found in the New Testament. The "little 'c' church of Christ" is what you read about in the New Testament. The "Big 'C' Church of Christ" is what you read about in the telephone directory—or in almanacs and yearbooks. I have personally received a lot of criticism from the heretic detectors in the brotherhood for defending the right of a congregation to have some name other than "Church of Christ" on the sign in front of their building. But if I were planting a new congregation, I would use the "Church of Christ" name.

A mission statement should define the target population. I would want to plant a church that would welcome people of all ages, all racial/ethnic groups, and all levels of socio-economic status. I would want a mission statement to say something about applying the fundamental essentials of New Testament Christianity within the context of modern, mainstream American culture in a balanced style of worship. That would let Blacks know that they would be welcome—but that this would not be a Black church. Hispanics would be welcome—but this would not be a Spanish-speaking congregation. Those of us who are chronologically gifted would be welcome—but the songs would not all be the old traditional hymns. Young people would be welcome—but the songs would not all be contemporary devo songs (what LaGard Smith calls the "Seven Eleven Songs" because they have just seven words that are each repeated eleven times).

There are many choices that church planters must make about the kind of church they want to establish. Writing a mission statement will help you build consensus around your purpose. I would hope, however, that all churches, new or old, would define disciple-making and disciple-building instruction as being at the very center of their mission. But remember that having a mission statement is just the beginning. The next step is to develop a congregation-wide assessment plan that is linked to the mission statement. This involves selecting intended objectives, means of assessment, and criteria for success. Each ministry within the congregation needs to do the same thing. In the area of Christian education, for example, objectives need to be stated in terms of cognitive, behavioral, and affective goals—what students of all ages are expected to know, what they are expected to do, and what attitudes or values they are expected to have. After the assessment plan has been developed, the next step is to collect the data and use it to make improvements. But that still is not the end of the process. Each ministry needs to use its data to make suggestions to those doing strategic planning. That planning may reaffirm the existing mission statement or modify it. When churches do all of these things, mission statements are useful. Without these things, the work of writing a mission statement is just busy work that has no positive impact on the church.

In order for churches to achieve their various objectives, there are several books that church leaders should study. This list is not complete, but it is at least a good beginning.<sup>12</sup>

### Evangelism and Christian Education

Evangelism and edification, disciple-making and disciple-building, can be defined as "the process of influencing others in such a way that the Christ who dwells in us and in the gospel message will be formed in them." The goal is not just to get people to attend church services or to get them baptized. Ultimately, the goal is to get them to heaven.

In the literature of the Church Growth Movement, several writers have talked about three kinds of evangelism: presence, proclamation, and persuasion. Success in the evangelism of presence is defined by the number of workers sent into the mission fields. Success in the evangelism of proclamation is defined by the size of the audience—the number of people who hear the gospel. Success in the evangelism of persuasion is defined by the number of people who are persuaded to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Donald McGavran, the father of the modern Church Growth Movement, suggested that presence, proclamation, and persuasion are not enough. All of these focus on process rather than outcomes. In the academic area, there was a time when assessment could focus on process. All that schools had to do to be accredited was demonstrate that they had teachers, classrooms, books, and money. As long as they were doing the things that should have produced student learning, that was enough. Not so today. We now have to focus on student learning outcomes. McGavran was ahead of his time when he rejected a process orientation that focused on presence, proclamation, and persuasion. McGavran said that churches should focus on how many people had been baptized, how many churches had been planted, and other such outcomes. This is what he described as "Church Growth Evangelism."

There are many things about spiritual growth that cannot be measured, but there are some outcomes that churches should strive to achieve that can be measured.

- The number of members a church had 10 years ago compared with the number of members today—with the amount and percentage of growth or decline.
- The sources of gain in membership—
  - Biological Growth (the baptism of members' children)
  - Move-in Transfer Growth
  - Local Transfer Growth
  - Evangelistic Growth (the baptism of adult converts)
- The sources of loss in membership—
  - Deaths
  - Move-out Transfer Loss
  - Local Transfer Loss
  - Drop-Outs
- Attendance at various services—as a total and as a percentage of the membership, with patterns of increase or decrease over the past 10 years.
- Contribution—as a total and as contribution per member per week, with patterns of increase or decrease over the past 10 years.

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<sup>12</sup> Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Pasadena, California: Church Growth Press, 1982). Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990). George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1990); *User Friendly Churches* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1991); *What Americans Believe* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1991). Charles L. Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1984). John W. Ellas, *Church Growth Through Groups* (Houston: Center for Church Growth, 1990); *Measuring Church Growth* (Houston: Center for Church Growth, 1997). C. Kirk Hadaway, *Church Growth Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991). George G. Hunter, III, *How To Reach Secular People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980)—**Note: The 1980 edition, fully revised by McGavran, is a far better source than the more recent edition revised by C. Peter Wagner.** Herb Miller, *How To Build a Magnetic Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988). Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993). C. Peter Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1990). Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Why Churches Grow, Third Edition* (Nashville: Christian Communications, 1986); *Church Leadership and Organization* (Nashville: Christian Communications, 1986); and, C. Wayne Zunkel, *Dare To Grow* (Elgin, Illinois: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1993).

- Baptism-to-Member ratios.
- Involvement level of the members.
- Members' responses to questionnaires asking for evaluations of various ministries.
- Results of Bible Knowledge Tests given to members.

And there are many other things that can and should be measured.

All of this assessment, however, will not result in improvements without closing the loop. Ministry leaders need to make suggestions based on their assessment and those suggestions need to be considered seriously by the leaders doing strategic planning.

### **Churches of Christ in the United States in 2000: An Assessment**

Congregational assessment is done at the local level, but there are some things that can be assessed concerning Churches of Christ throughout the nation. Results of such nation-wide assessment provide convincing evidence that there are major areas in which improvement is needed.

In the 1960s, I started doing survey research on patterns of growth and decline among Churches of Christ in the United States. In my book *Why Churches Grow* and in various brotherhood papers, I warned that the rate of growth was decreasing. In the first two decades after the end of World War II, Churches of Christ had the reputation of being one of the fastest-growing religious groups in the nation. Part of this perception was based on inflated reports of estimates. But even after correcting for such inflation, the underlying reality was that Churches of Christ really were growing rapidly in that period between 1945 and 1965. We were still growing in the late 1970s when I started publishing the results of my survey research—but the rate of growth was smaller and smaller each year. The warning that I gave to the brotherhood was that if the 1965-1975 trend continued, we would reach zero level growth by 1980. I was labeled as "the brotherhood prophet of gloom and doom." But what happened was that we reached zero level growth in 1980. I had warned that if the 1965-1975 trend continued beyond 1980, we would begin to decline and the decline would become dramatic by 2000. I did not say that this is what *would* happen. I just said that it would *if* the 1965-1975 trend continued. Fortunately, that trend did not continue. Growth stopped in 1980, but we have not declined significantly since then. Instead, we have been on a flat plateau with no significant growth or decline.

On September 20, 2002, the Glenmary Research Center in Nashville, Tennessee, held a press conference announcing the release of a new reference book, *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*.<sup>13</sup> This book was based on research conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. This study was related to several previous studies.<sup>14</sup> Newspapers throughout the nation published summaries of the results of this latest study. Most of the headlines focused on how conservative denominations were growing much faster than liberal denominations. A story in the *New York Times* was typical. According to that story, the fastest-growing religious group in the nation in the 1990s was the Church of Jesus Christ of Later-Day Saints, which grew by 19.3 percent to a total of 4.2 million since the last survey in 1990. The *Times* article went on to say that the groups with the next highest growth were "the conservative Christian Churches and Churches of Christ," with 18.6 percent; the Assemblies of God, with 18.5 percent; and the Roman Catholic Church, with 16.2 percent.<sup>15</sup> The *Washington Post* had a similar article, as did many other newspapers throughout the nation.

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<sup>13</sup>Dale E. Jones, Sherri Doty, Glifford Grammich, James E. Horsch, Richard Houseal, Mac Lynn, John P. Marcum, Kenneth M. Sanchagrin, and Richard H. Taylor (editors), *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000* (Nashville: Glenmary Research Center, 2002).

<sup>14</sup>Lauris B. Whitman and Glen W. Trimble, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States: An Enumeration and Analysis by Counties, States and Regions* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1956-1958), 80 bulletins; Douglas W. Johnson, Paul R. Picard and Bernard Quinn, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1971* (Washington, D.C.: Glenmary Research Center, 1974); Bernard Quinn, Herman Anderson, Martin Bradley, Paul Goetting and Peggy Shriver, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1980* (Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1982); and, Martin B. Bradley, Norman M. Green, Jr., Dale E. Jones, Mac Lynn, and Lou McNeil, *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990* (Atlanta: Glenmary Research Center, 1992).

<sup>15</sup>Laurie Goodstein, "Conservative Churches Grow Faster in 1990s, Report Says" (*New York Times*, September 19, 2002).

As soon as these newspaper stories appeared, I started getting telephone calls, e-mail messages, and letters from church leaders telling me that my earlier reports had been wrong and we really were growing rapidly once again. But I had to tell these people that I already knew about those reports. For several years, Mac Lynn and I have been the unofficial representatives of the Churches of Christ in the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies. Mac Lynn was one of the editors of the 1990 and 2000 studies and is a former president of this organization. What I had to tell these people was that "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" is the name used in almanacs and yearbooks for the group that some in our fellowship call "the instrumental brethren." Some of their congregations wear the "Christian Church" name, while others wear the "Church of Christ" name and that is why they are identified in almanacs and yearbooks as "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ." Almanacs and yearbooks list three religious groups that trace historical roots back to the Restoration Movement led by Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, and other such pioneers.

- "The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" with 3,339 congregations, 817,902 members, and 1,017,784 adherents (members plus children).
- "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ" with 5,471 congregations, 1,156,699 members, and 1,439,253 adherents.
- "Churches of Christ" with 13,027 congregations, 1,264,808 members, and 1,645,584 adherents. This listing includes all Restoration Movement heirs who do not use instrumental music in congregational worship assemblies. More than 75 percent of these congregations with over 87 percent of the members are similar enough to one another that no significant barriers to fellowship exist among them. But this listing includes congregations that are identified as Non-Institutional, Non-Class, One Cup, Mutual Edification, etc. and not just the "mainstream" congregations.

Churches of Christ (the non-instrumental fellowship) was *not* one of the fastest-growing religious groups in America in the 1990s. In fact, a comparison of statistics for 1990 and 2000 shows a very slight decline.

#### Churches of Christ in the United States, 1990-2000

##### Congregations

<b>2000</b>	<b>13,027</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>13,097</b>
<b>Change</b>	<b>-70</b>
<b>Percent of Change</b>	<b>-0.5</b>

##### Members

<b>2000</b>	<b>1,264,808</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>1,280,838</b>
<b>Change</b>	<b>-16,030</b>
<b>Percent of Change</b>	<b>-1.3</b>

##### Adherents

<b>2000</b>	<b>1,645,584</b>
<b>1990</b>	<b>1,681,013</b>
<b>Change</b>	<b>-35,429</b>
<b>Percent of Change</b>	<b>-2.1</b>

The change percentages were small enough that "plateaued" would be a better description than "declining." Furthermore, there is a problem with the comparison of 1990 and 2000 statistics. The figures for 1990 included the Boston/Crossroads Discipling Movement.<sup>16</sup> In 1990, leaders of that movement wanted to be counted with other Churches of Christ. By 1994, however, they had decided that they no longer wanted to be counted with other Churches of Christ. In *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000*, that movement is identified as the "International Churches of Christ" and they are reported as having 99 congregations with 56,952 members and 79,161 adherents.<sup>17</sup> One way to get around this problem about the International Churches of Christ is to compare the 2000 figures with the figures for 1980 when very few of the congregations now affiliated with the International Churches of Christ even existed. Starting with the 1980 figures had another advantage since a 20-year period is a better indication of trends than a 10-year period.

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<sup>16</sup>For background on this movement see: Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., (editor), *The Discipling Dilemma* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Page 2, Table 1, Religious Congregations by Groups in the United States: 2000.

## Churches of Christ in the United States, 1980-2000

### Congregations

2000	13,027
1980	12,719
Change	308
Percent of Change	2.4

### Members

2000	1,264,808
1980	1,239,612
Change	25,196
Percent of Change	2.0

### Adherents

2000	1,645,584
1980	1,600,177
Change	45,407
Percent of Change	2.8

The good news is that we have not really declined since 1980. The bad news is that we have not experienced any significant growth since 1980.

Since Churches of Christ exist as an informal fellowship of independent congregations with no denominational headquarters or structure, nation-wide assessment must be the responsibility of leaders in each congregation. Several statistical tables are included at the end of this paper in order to help church leaders in this assessment.

- **Twelve religious groups in the nation reported more adherents than were reported for Churches of Christ.**<sup>18</sup> Church statisticians use three size categories in comparisons of religious groups: 1) groups with more than one million adherents—there were 17 of these large groups and they accounted for 91 percent of the adherents reported in 2000; 2) groups with 100,000 to 999,999 adherents--there were 31 groups in this category and they accounted for seven percent of the adherents reported in 2000; and, 3) groups with fewer than 100,000 adherents—there were over 200 of these small groups, but together they accounted for only two percent of the adherents reported. *See Table 1.*
- **Thirteen religious groups in America reported more members than were reported for Churches of Christ.** These included 11 denominations along with Jewish and Muslim estimates. *See Table 2.*
- **Only three denominations reported more congregations than were reported for Churches of Christ.** These were the three largest denominations in America: the Southern Baptist Convention; the United Methodist Church; and the Catholic Church. *See Table 3.*
- **Sixteen religious groups in the United States had more increase in the total number of adherents between 1980 and 2000 than did the Churches of Christ.** Six religious groups increased in the total number of adherents, but their increase was less than what was experienced by Churches of Christ. Thirteen denominations had a loss in the total number of adherents. The rest of the religious groups with 100,000 or more adherents in 2000 did not report in the 1980 study and so no comparisons were possible. *See Table 4.*
- **Sixteen religious groups in the nation had more increase in the total number of members between 1980 and 2000 than did the Churches of Christ.** *See Table 5.*
- **Twelve religious groups in America had more increase in the total number of congregations between 1980 and 2000 than did the Churches of Christ.** *See Table 6.*
- **Among the religious groups with more than one million adherents, only five had greater growth rates (percentages) in the number of adherents than did the Churches of Christ.** Comparisons of percentages are valid only within size categories. Fifteen of the denominations with 100,000 to 999,999 adherents had greater growth rates (percentages) in the number of adherents than did the Churches of Christ, but it is easier for these smaller groups to show higher growth rates (percentages) than it is for the larger groups. *See Table 7.*
- **Among the religious groups with more than one million adherents, seven had greater growth rates (percentages) in the number of members than did the Churches of Christ.** *See Table 8.*
- **Among the religious groups with more than one million adherents, five had greater growth rates (percentages) in the number of congregations than did the Churches of Christ.** *See Table 9.*

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<sup>18</sup>"Adherent" is a term church statisticians use when comparing religious groups that count membership in different ways. It includes all of the "full, confirmed, communicant members," their children, and any others who attend regularly but are not counted as "members."

- **In 2000, only four denominations in the United States had congregations in more counties than did the Churches of Christ.** This is an important measure of how well various groups have fulfilled their missionary purpose within their own nation. *See Table 10.*
- **The number of adherents per county is an indicator of dispersion, i.e., how evenly the group is spread throughout the nation—given its size. Among the groups with one million or more adherents, Churches of Christ head the list as the most evenly distributed.** Churches of Christ are followed closely on this list by two other heirs of the Restoration Movement: "The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" and the "Christian Churches and Churches of Christ." There may have been something about the Restoration Plea that motivated people to move throughout the nation in order to spread this message. *See Table 11.*

The good news is that the bad news is not as bad as many have supposed. Churches of Christ are not declining rapidly. But the bad news is that the good news is not as good as it ought to be. Nation-wide totals do not show any significant growth in the period between 1980 and 2000. There are, however, some significant trends that can be seen in a state-by-state comparison. *See Table 12.*

### Conclusion

The assessment data reported above can be useful, but it can also be used in the wrong way. In academic assessment and in work with congregations, I have found that some people want to start with assessment data already available and work back from that to define their objectives. That would be like medical researchers inventing a new drug and then looking for a disease for that drug to cure. The place to begin is with *purpose*, not assessment. An example may make this point clearer. Surveys that I have conducted and others that I have studied indicate that a majority of the members of Churches of Christ in the United States who were born after the end of World War II do not believe that it would be wrong to use instrumental music in the worship assemblies of our congregations. Some would conclude from that assessment that we ought to start using instrumental music in our assemblies or at least stop teaching that it would be wrong to do so. The problem with that approach is that opinion polls are not a valid way of doing theology. This is an issue that should be resolved by careful Bible study, not by opinion polls. We should first go to the Bible to discover the mission of the church, clarify our purpose, and establish our objectives. When we have done that, we can use assessment to find out how well we have fulfilled our mission, achieved our purpose, and accomplished our objectives.

If we agree that our most general purpose is "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" and that disciple-making and disciple-building instruction is at the very center of our purpose—then the kind of assessment reported above would lead to the conclusion that we have not been doing a very good job in the past two decades.

The concluding presentation in this Christian Education Conference for 2003 is on "How To Use Bible Classes for Evangelism." That presentation will focus on things we can do to improve. But the first step in improving is to see the need and that has been the focus of this presentation. There is, however, one important point about Christian Education that must be made in the context of clarifying our purpose. It is possible for a congregation to have a shared vision without having a formal, written mission statement. But in the congregations that I have studied—and that is now well over 100—I have yet to find a shared vision in a congregation that has not gone through the discipline of writing a mission statement. In the presentation on "How To Use Bible Classes for Evangelism," I will discuss specific improvements that are needed. But the first step in improvement is to develop a list of our Intended Educational Outcomes—the cognitive, behavioral, and affective objectives that we want to achieve. That should be done at a general level for the whole congregation. More specific statements are needed in each department and perhaps at each age or grade level. Good teachers know that each lesson plan should have a statement of objectives. Publishers who provide workbooks for Bible classes know the importance of these objectives and usually state them in the workbook or in the Teacher's Guide. But week-to-week objectives often miss the big picture. Church leaders need to plan what they expect students to know, think, and do by the time they move from one department to the next. The place where this kind of planning is most neglected is in adult Bible classes. Often it seems that our only objective is to conduct classes or to rehearse the doctrine week after week without ever challenging students to think a new thought or learn anything that they did not already know. Because of this lack of purpose, our Bible classes—especially at the adult level—often seem like the bland leading the bland.

We can do better. We *must* do better.



## HOW TO USE BIBLE CLASSES FOR EVANGELISM

Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr.

The first step in learning how to use Bible classes for evangelism is to be sure that the instruction in these classes is Christ-centered, Bible-based, and life-related. We should do the same thing in regard to the preaching in our worship assemblies and in our efforts at personal evangelism.

### **Begin with the Basics**

Making a Bible class evangelistic does not mean spending all the time debating doctrinal issues, focusing on the plan of salvation, and persuading people to be baptized. When Christians come together to be fed, we need to feed those Christians. Of course we never outgrow our need for the milk of the word, but we also need meat.<sup>1</sup> Bible classes that meet the needs of the members can be evangelistic, but that will not happen by accident. Bible classes have to be evangelistic on purpose. We need to understand that our Bible classes can be the fundamental organizational units for disciple-making and disciple-building.

### **Bring Visitors**

Bible classes will never be evangelistic unless and until we invite non-members to come with us. You may have read books by people in the Church Growth Movement who report the results of surveys among first-time visitors asking what influenced them to attend. Over 95 percent say that they first attended because of a personal invitation by a family member or a close personal friend. They do not come the first time because of the reputation of the preacher or because they had heard about some great Bible class teacher. Unfortunately, that figure is sometimes quoted as the reason new members give for becoming members of the congregation they now attend. When new members are asked what influenced them to become members, they typically mention the quality of the worship assembly in general and especially the quality of the preaching. They also mention the quality of the teaching in the Bible class they attend. But the reason they come the first time is that someone invited them.

A Mormon researcher called me several years ago with some questions about statistics in an article I had written. After I gave him the information he had requested, I had a question for him. I told him that in 1950, when I first started preaching, we had twice as many members as the Mormons and today they have twice as many members as we do. I told him that I had often seen those 18 year old Mormon "elders" going door-to-door. But I told him that in Churches of Christ, we have not usually found door-to-door contact to be very productive. I wanted to know where all the growth was coming from among the Mormons. He said that a part of their growth was biological. They are having far more babies than we are. In regard to evangelistic growth, he said that they were making one convert for every 3,000 doors they knock on. They continue that effort because it is good public relations for the Mormons and good training for those young men. But he said that they are making one convert for every two people they have into their homes for a meal.

Do not just invite non-members to attend your Bible class. Bring them with you to class and to the worship assembly and then have them into your home for a meal—or at least take them out to eat somewhere. But do not let the personal contact end with Sunday dinner.

### **Visit Your Visitors**

Herb Miller has a chapter on "Visit Your Visitors" in his book *How to Build a Magnetic Church*.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, Miller discusses the results of a study by the Alban Institute. This study involved first-time visitors to the worship

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 5:11—6:4

<sup>2</sup> Herb Miller, *How to Build a Magnetic Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 72-85.

assembly, but it should also apply to Bible classes. Based on that study, Miller offered the following advice for church leaders.

*When laypersons make a fifteen-minute visit to the homes of first-time worship visitors within thirty-six hours, 85 percent of them return the following week. Make this home visit within seventy-two hours, and 60 percent of them return. Make it seven days later, and 15 percent will return. The pastor making this call, rather than a layperson, cuts each result in half.<sup>3</sup>*

A church-supported minister making this visit is often seen as a salesman for the congregation, while a member making this visit is seen more as a "satisfied customer."

### **Provide Genuine Bible Instruction**

Whether first-time visitors to a Bible class come back or not depends largely on what goes on in the Bible class and the worship assembly. They need and expect to hear class lessons and sermons that get them into God's word and that help them learn something they did not already know. They need to see that the church members are also learning. What visitors see in many of our Bible class lessons and sermons is very little Bible content that teaches anyone anything.

At Harding University, as a part of our outcomes assessment, we give a Bible Knowledge Test to incoming freshmen and an alternate form of that test to graduating seniors. Around 85 percent of our students were already members of the Churches of Christ before they came to Harding. They come from some fine Christian families and great congregations. But they come with very little Bible knowledge. The Bible Knowledge Test that we use at Harding University is similar to the General Bible Knowledge Test used by many schools affiliated with evangelical, conservative, and fundamentalist denominations. The scores of incoming freshmen at Harding are significantly lower than the scores of incoming freshmen at these denominational schools. If this sounds familiar, it may be because you read an article by Joe Hacker in the *Christian Bible Teacher* 20 or 30 years ago. Hacker used the very same test that these denominational schools use. He found that scores of incoming freshmen at Harding were significantly lower than scores of incoming freshmen at these denominational schools—but scores of graduating seniors at Harding were significantly higher than scores of graduating seniors at these denominational schools. However, students at these denominational schools are generally required to take Bible classes for only one or two years, while Harding students take Bible classes every semester. I have used Harding's Bible Knowledge Test in studies of local congregations throughout the nation. The average score of church members is just a little higher than the average score of entering freshmen at Harding, but only at the sophomore level. These tests in local congregations and at Harding show the same areas of weakness of church members and Harding students.

- They do not understand the time line of Bible events so that they know *when* things happened.
- They do not understand Bible geography so that they know *where* things happened.
- They are not able to match people to events so that they know *who* did *what*.
- They do not know the content of Bible books.
- They are especially weak in Old Testament knowledge.

Some people would argue that these objective Bible Knowledge Tests focus too much on trivial items. Indeed, the questions look like those in a Bible Trivia game. It is true that these objective items are not as important as values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. But these objective things are essential. They are like memory pegs that help people organize and remember everything else they learn in their Bible study.

When I was growing up attending Bible classes from nursery through high school (1934-1952), there was a lot of emphasis on these objective, factual items. There probably was not enough emphasis on practical applications. As the Baby Boomer generation was growing up, the emphasis shifted to application stories. That emphasis, however, left a generation of students with no cognitive framework for organizing and remembering the things they were learning. There must be a balance between these two extremes. That is basic.

### **Involve All Levels of the Congregation**

Another basic involves understanding how the church functions at different levels. In his book *Your Church Can Grow*, Peter Wagner talks about the church as celebration, congregation, and cell.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Miller, pp. 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1984), pp. 111-126.

## The "Celebration" Level

The celebration level is what we would call the worship assembly. There is virtually no limit to how large the assembly can be. The assembly is an ideal context for praise and dynamic preaching. Some teaching can be done in the context of the worship assembly, but the real power of the pulpit is the power to motivate people to do what they already know they ought to do. Evangelistic preaching in regular church services or in special meetings can be effective, but the greatest results of this kind of preaching come when there are enough people present who have been taught, but not yet motivated to obey the gospel.

## The "Congregation" Level

What Wagner calls the church as "congregation" is like an adult Bible class with 30 to 60 participants. At that size, everyone can get to know everyone else on a first name basis. In a cross-denominational, cross-cultural study, church members were asked "How many people do you know on a first name basis in this church?" Around two-thirds of the members knew between 30 and 60 other members on a first name basis. That was true regardless of how many members the church claimed. Studies in secular organizations have found similar results. In most organizations, people know between 30 and 60 other people on a first name basis. This size is an excellent context for cognitive learning, support for smaller groups, support for evangelism, and assimilation of new converts. Evangelistic growth in Baptist churches in America has come primarily through Bible classes. In a personal conversation, Elmer Towns told me that Baptist churches have found that the ideal strategy is to start an adult Bible class with 30 members, a teacher and a co-teacher, or a class chairman and a co-chairman if they rotate teachers. This class needs to start with a clear understanding that when they grow to around 60 members, they will split into two classes. The teacher or class chairman will take half and the co-teacher or co-chairman will take the other half. According to Towns, evangelistic growth among Baptist churches seldom comes from increasing class size beyond the upper limit of 60. Instead, he says, evangelistic growth comes primarily from increasing the number of classes.

## The "Cell" Level

"Cell" is the term Wagner uses to describe a group of no more than 15 people who meet together regularly for prayer, Bible study, and evangelism. This is the ideal size for relationship-building. This is where people go beyond knowing others on a first name basis and really become close personal friends. When members voluntarily make themselves accountable to one another, this is the ideal size. Social scientists who study group dynamics have found that five to seven is the ideal size for maximum participation. With fewer than five, there is a perception that they are not enough people to keep a good conversation going. As group size increases beyond seven, participation declines a little. If group size goes much beyond 15, participation stops, the dynamics change, and the interactive group becomes a passive audience. Social scientists have asked people in many different cultures how many close personal relationships they have with family and friends. Most people say between five and 15. That seems to be the limit to how many close personal relationships people can sustain at any one time.

The "cell group" structure was one of the factors contributing to the growth of the world's largest church, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, where Dr. Yonggi Cho is the pastor. That one congregation claims almost one million members. They have large multiple simultaneous services at their campus, but the real life of that church functions through their cell groups.

At a meeting of the American Society for Church Growth, Karen Hurston presented a report on her book *Growing the World's Largest Church*.<sup>5</sup> Her parents, John and Maxine Hurston, were missionaries for the Assemblies of God in Seoul, Korea. They worked with Cho in building the world's largest church. Karen Hurston grew up in that church, is now an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God, and worked on the staff of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul. In her report, she talked a little about the cell group structure, but she talked much more about visiting. That church has a very large staff of full-time, seminary trained, ordained pastors. Those pastors spend from one third to one half of their time visiting the members. When these pastors visit the members, they take the cell group leader along with them. Their pastoral visits are very focused. They start with questions about the members' prayer life, Bible study, ministry involvement, and personal life. Based on the answers to these questions, the pastor leads a brief Bible study focused on the

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<sup>5</sup> Karen Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church* (Springfield, Missouri: Chrism, 1994).

specific needs of the members. Then they do some really serious praying. The cell group leaders learn from these pastors how to do a pastoral visit and when they visit the members on their own, without a pastor present, they follow the same pattern. The members see their pastors and their lay leaders doing this kind of disciple-building visits and when they visit with one another, without anyone else present, they still follow the same pattern. Thousands of church leaders from America have gone to Seoul for the Church Growth Seminars conducted by Cho and his staff. What some of them notice is the cell group structure. What others notice is the charismatic nature of the church: the tongue speaking, the healing services, etc. But according to Hurston, American church leaders have usually missed the key element: the disciple-building relationships in the pastoral visits, the visits by lay leaders, and the visits members have with one another. Hurston said that when leaders of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul have come to America, they have come away with the impression that "there is no *koinonia* in the American church."

My own research in Churches of Christ indicates that the judgment of these visitors from Korea would apply in Churches of Christ. When I conduct diagnostic studies in local congregations, we use a questionnaire that the members fill out. One of the questions is "How many close personal friends do you have in this congregation?" In most congregations we find that at least 10 percent of the members say that they have no close personal friends at all in the congregation they attend. In one large congregation that I studied, 36 percent of the members said that they had no close personal friends in that church. In addition, another five to 10 percent of the members usually say that they have just one or two close personal friends in the church. These people are at risk of becoming drop-outs according to research that I reported in my book *Why Churches Grow*.<sup>6</sup> That study compared 50 new converts who were still faithful members with 50 new converts who had already dropped out of the church. The two groups were matched statistically according to the length of time that they had attended church services and that gave each group an equal opportunity to make friends in the church. All of the people who reported having fewer than three friends in the church were in the drop-out category, while all who claimed more than six friends in the church were in the faithful convert category.

In those questionnaires used in diagnostic church growth studies, the next question is for those who say that they have any close personal friends in the congregation. It is "How many of these friends did you visit in the past 12 months?" The questionnaire defines "visiting" as "you went into their home, you had them into your home, you went out and did something together, or you at least talked to each other on the telephone regularly." Around 30 percent of the members say that they have close personal friends in the congregation they attend—but that they have not visited any of those friends in the past 12 months. They see them at the church building, but that is all.

The next question is for those who have close personal friends in the congregation and who visited those friends in the past 12 months. That question asks what they do on these visits. "Do you pray together, study the Bible, have shared devotional time, or talk to each other about spiritual things?" Around 50 percent of the members say that they have close personal friends in the congregation and that they visited them in the past 12 months, but they have only a secular relationship. They do not use any of their friendship/visiting time for any disciple-building activity.

Only 10 percent of the members have close personal friends in the congregation, visit those friends, and do anything of a religious nature during these visits. On the average, they report doing this less than once a month. That is what those Korean pastors were talking about when they said "The American church has no *koinonia*." In Churches of Christ and in most other religious groups in America today, church is a place where people come together as strangers and leave as strangers without their lives ever touching. The kind of cell groups that Cho uses in his church in Seoul help to solve that problem.

Since Elmer Towns and I are both former presidents of the American Society for Church Growth, we visit whenever we can at meetings of this group. In one of our conversations, Towns told me that a lot of pastors from the Liberty Baptist Churches (the kind of Baptist churches that look to Jerry Falwell for leadership) have attended the Church Growth Seminars conducted by Cho and his staff in Seoul, Korea. Most of them noticed the cell group structure. They came back and tried to plug that cell group structure into Liberty Baptist Churches. Towns said that they split virtually every one of those churches. Towns said that some Liberty Baptist pastors asked him what they should do. He replied, "Baptists are comfortable leading others to Christ in the same way that they were led to Christ—and that is through the Sunday School." He suggested that they organize their small groups within the context of adult Bible classes and it worked. Not one of the congregations that followed that approach divided.

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<sup>6</sup>Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Why Churches Grow, Third Edition* (Nashville: Christian Communications, Inc., 1986), pp. 53-55.

A growing number of Churches of Christ have recognized the need for small groups, but many of the small group ministries have been ineffective in developing relationships. Most of these small groups meet once a month or less and that just is not enough time together to build close relationships. A better approach is to organize small groups within the context of adult Bible classes. Members already get together once a week in these Bible classes. If they can then get together once a week for small group Bible study, they can do some really serious relationship building.

### **Use a Felt Need Approach To Make New Contacts**

There are a lot of non-members who will not accept your invitation to attend a Bible class or a worship service—even if a Sunday dinner is included. But some of these would come to a small group Bible study. Some have come far enough in their spiritual journey that they are ready for a text-based Bible study. Luke-Acts is a good place to start. Others can be reached better through a felt need approach. Start with a well-advertised seminar on Marriage Enrichment, Parenting, Adjusting to Divorce, Problems of Aging, Dealing with Depression, or some other topic where people already recognize a need in their lives. Make it clear that this is a church-sponsored event where they will hear Christ-centered, Bible-based teaching—but teaching focused on the felt need topic. You will get at least 10 times as many non-members to attend such a felt need seminar as would attend a traditional Gospel Meeting. But do not stop with the seminar. Invite the visitors to take part in follow-up study groups. Have some small groups ready for follow-up sessions. These should meet once a week for just three or four weeks. The members should be trained to focus on two things. First, get the visitors more deeply into God's word. Keep the discussion focused on what you have learned in your own Bible study that has helped you enrich your marriage or become better parents—or whatever the felt need topic might be. Show the visitors that the Bible is relevant and that Christ has answers for their lives. The second thing that the members should be trained to do is to get the visitors into relationships. Visit them in their homes. Invite them into your home. Bring them to Bible classes and worship services. It helps if the Bible class lessons and sermons following the felt need seminar are related to the topic of that seminar. In that way, visitors see the church as celebration, congregation, and cell—all focused on a need that they already recognize in their lives. When the follow-up Bible study on the felt need topic is finished, try to get the visitors into a text-based Bible study that goes on for a longer period of time. Try to get them into your Bible classes and worship assemblies. As you work with these non-members, look for signs of receptivity, i.e., asking questions about salvation or at least discussing salvation when you bring it up. When you see that they are receptive, start an evangelistic study, i.e., a study focusing on the plan of salvation.

At this point, you will have gone beyond the celebration, congregation, and cell levels. You will have reached the level that some have called "one-on-one evangelism." Actually what works best is "two-on-one evangelism." Deal with one individual or one family at a time, but you do not have to do it by yourself. Two Christians working together make a great team for this kind of work. One team member should be someone who knows enough about the Bible and enough about evangelism to be an effective teacher. The other should be a Christian who is a relative or friend of the prospective convert. It is best for this other person to be as similar as possible to the prospective convert in every way—except that they will know a little more about the Bible than the prospective convert.<sup>7</sup>

### **Expand Relationships for New Converts**

One great advantage of doing personal evangelism with people who regularly participate in a small group Bible study is that after these people obey the gospel, they already have a support group, a circle of friends, the people in their small group Bible study. And when that small group is organized within the context of a more traditional Sunday morning or Wednesday evening Bible class, the new converts also have 30 to 60 people they know, or soon will know, on a first name basis. Such new converts are far less likely to drop out.

The drop-out rate among adult converts in Churches of Christ throughout the United States has remained at about 50 percent ever since the late 1960s when I first started doing this kind of research. Most of them drop out within a few

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<sup>7</sup> Social scientists who have studied "source credibility" have identified two main factors: perceptions of *competence* and perceptions of *trustworthiness*. When a teacher obviously knows a lot more about the Bible than the prospective convert, that difference contributes to a perception of *competence* and that perception is important for changing beliefs. When the other member of the evangelistic team is very similar to the prospective convert, that similarity contributes to a perception of *trustworthiness* and that perception is important for changing values and attitudes. That kind of two-person evangelistic team has the greatest potential for success.

months after their conversion—which may suggest that there was something wrong with their conversion in the first place. The drop-out rate among young people who grow up attending Churches of Christ is around 45 percent, according to Lewis, Dodd and Tippens.<sup>8</sup> Their study focused on high school and college-age young people. My own research has focused on a larger age range and I have found that 55 percent never drop out, 33 percent drop out and never come back, but 12 percent drop out when they grow up and leave home—and then come back to the church after they get married and have children.<sup>9</sup>

For a Bible class to be evangelistic, the total program of congregational activity should support evangelism. That includes a challenging adult Bible class curriculum. In my opinion, Churches of Christ in the United States need more ministers who have had significant training in Religious Education and who devote a significant amount of their time to work in this area. We need Ministers of Religious Education to help teachers and church leaders clarify the objectives they are trying to achieve, i.e., what they expect students to know, do, and think or feel at each age or grade level. We need Ministers of Religious Education to recruit and train teachers. However, very few Churches of Christ have Ministers of Religious Education.

According to Lyle Schaller, Protestant churches in the United States and Canada generally follow the same pattern in regard to the development of the ministry staff. Churches start with a church planter, a ministry generalist who does a little bit of everything while the church is growing enough to support a second full-time minister. The second minister on the staff is usually a Minister of Religious Education. It is not until later that churches add ministers in such areas as Youth, Involvement, Counseling, Family Life, Children's Ministry, etc. Schaller said that the only exception that he knew of was in Churches of Christ where the second minister added to the staff is usually a youth minister. It may be that these other religious groups know something about church staffing that we have not yet learned.<sup>10</sup>

For the past three years, I have been involved in a ministry study among Churches of Christ in the United States. I reported results of this study in several articles in *Church and Family*, a magazine published by the Institute for Church and Family at Harding University and in classes at the Harding University Bible Lectureship for 2002. This ministry study started with a questionnaire for all 25 of the degree-granting colleges and universities and the 34 non-degree granting schools of preaching serving this church constituency. In the fall of 2000, around 4,000 students were attending these schools and preparing for some kind of ministry. Around 1,000 of these were preparing for service as self-supported, vocational ministers. That left a total of around 3,000 who were preparing for church-supported ministry positions.

The second part of this ministry study involved questionnaires for all of these ministry students asking about their ministry plans. Youth Ministry was the most popular option with 27.0 percent selecting that as their first choice and 49.7 listing that as either their first choice or as an acceptable option. But there are not that many youth ministry positions available.

Among "mainstream" Churches of Christ, the greatest need is for preachers in the smaller churches where they are the only full-time church-supported ministers. There are 3,000 such positions. The second-greatest need is for preachers in larger congregations where there may be one or more other ministers on the staff. Over 77 percent of the available positions are for preachers. But over half of the students (55.5 percent) did not list preaching as a first choice or even as an acceptable alternative.

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<sup>8</sup>David K. Lewis, Carley H. Dodd and Darryl L. Tippens, *The Gospel According to Generation X* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Another study of retention rates among young people who grow up attending Churches of Christ may be worth considering in this context. When I was working at Abilene Christian University (1984-1990), I did a study comparing congregations that had high retention rates among their young people with congregations that had low retention rates. That study, which was reported in ACU's *Youth Ministry Bulletin*, found three significant characteristics of the high retention rate churches that distinguished them from the low retention rate churches: 1) the presence of some kind of organized youth ministry; 2) parents who were active and involved members; and, 3) a challenging Bible school curriculum in the adult classes. The differences in curriculum were not significant up through high school, but in the low retention rate churches the adult Bible class curriculum was very weak and it was far more challenging in the high retention rate churches.

<sup>10</sup>Lyle Schaller, "Church Staff Development," presented in a meeting of Leadership Network, Colorado Springs, 1988.

In the literature of the Church Growth Movement, a "small church" is defined as "a congregation with fewer than 200 in attendance, with no more than one full-time church-supported minister, and with the dynamics of a family." A "large church" is defined as "a congregation with 300 or more in attendance, with two or more full-time church-supported ministers, and with the dynamics of a large organization." "Transitional churches" are those with 200 to 299 in attendance. In the directory compiled by Mac Lynn, there are only 777 congregations listed that are in the "large church" category with 300 or more members; 741 "transitional churches" with 200-299 members; and 11,514 "small churches" with fewer than 200 members. This total of 13,032 congregations includes 9,806 "mainstream" Churches of Christ (75 percent of the congregations with 87 percent of the members). These congregations are similar enough to one another that no significant barriers to fellowship exist among them. But this total also includes Non-Institutional, Non-Class, One Cup, and Mutual Edification congregations.<sup>11</sup>

Among "mainstream" Churches of Christ, there are 4,477 positions for preachers (3,000 in small churches, 700 in transitional churches, and 777 in large churches). In addition, there are 800 youth ministry positions and 250 positions for all other full-time ministers (education, involvement, evangelism, counseling, etc.). The ministry goals of students do not match the ministry needs of the churches. Most of these students will serve in ministry positions where preaching, religious education, youth ministry, involvement, evangelism, counseling, and everything else are included in their job description. In order to provide the kind of ministers churches need, the schools preparing these ministers should recognize that all ministers are ministers of the word. Bible text courses, therefore, should be at the core of their curriculum. Preaching, religious education, youth ministry, involvement, evangelism, counseling, and many other ministry courses should also be a part of the curriculum. Some of these things may seem to be somewhat removed from the topic of "Using Bible Classes for Evangelism," but I believe that all of these things are related. Evangelistic Bible classes do not exist in isolation. They must be a part of a church whose mission is clearly focused on disciple-making and disciple-building instruction.

Evangelistic Bible classes do not have to require that every class member be a personal evangelism worker or teacher who gets the credit for making disciples. In his book on *Team Evangelism*, Larry Gilbert, a Baptist writer, says that 10 percent of Baptists have the necessary gifts to be effective "soul-winners," but every Baptist can be an effective "witness."<sup>12</sup> Gilbert advocates what he calls "stair-step evangelism." One person makes the initial contact, develops the relationship, and tells the prospective convert as much as he can. Another person—perhaps several others—take the prospective convert up the next steps. I believe that what Gilbert says about the Baptist Church applies to Churches of Christ. Probably 10 percent of our members have the gifts needed for success as "soul-winners," but only one percent are doing it (the same figure that Gilbert finds among the Baptists). I am sure that all of our members could invite friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors to attend Bible classes and worship assemblies—and even take the visitors home for Sunday dinner. Any of our members could make a 15-minute follow-up visit with someone who has attended our Bible classes or worship assemblies. All Christians could take part in small group Bible studies and invite others to attend. All of us could attend felt need seminars where we meet non-members and invite them to attend follow-up study groups. All of us would build relationships and look for signs of receptivity. All of us who knew enough to obey the gospel in the first place already know enough to tell others why we did what we did. That may not bring non-members to the point of conversion, but it may take them one step along the way. After that, we could get them to study with someone else and be present as for support. It is not essential that we all be involved in evangelism in the same way, but we must all be involved in evangelism in some way. That is what it takes to have a Bible class that is really evangelistic.

### **Keep the Focus on Christ**

Thus far, this discussion has been focused on the medium, not the message--the delivery system, not the cargo. The message is far more important. For a Bible class to be evangelistic, the lessons must be Christ-centered, Bible-based, and life-related. That must also be true of the public preaching, the instruction in small Bible study groups, and the instruction in our personal evangelism. That ought to be obvious to all students of the Bible, but it is not. Far too many engage in misguided, incomplete, and ineffective preaching, teaching, and personal evangelism.

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<sup>11</sup> Mac Lynn (compiler), *Churches of Christ in the United States, 2000* (Nashville, Tennessee: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Larry Gilbert, *Team Evangelism: How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ when you don't have the Gift of Evangelism* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Church Growth Institute, 1991).

## **The Limits of a Propositional Approach**

In some congregations, the approach to disciple-making and disciple-building instruction is primarily propositional. The implied message these congregations send to prospective converts is "We must debate all essential propositions. If you win the debate, we will join your church. If we win the debate, you must join our church." Propositions, of course, are important. In order to avoid being misunderstood and written up in the *Heretic Detector*, let me make it clear that I believe that Absolute Truth is possible, knowable, and propositional.<sup>13</sup> But when our instruction focuses primarily on propositions, we produce modern Pharisees rather than real disciples of Jesus Christ. The propositional approach is what I called the "Information Transition Model of Evangelism" in my book *Why Churches Grow*.<sup>14</sup>

In my research for my doctoral dissertation, I found three ways in which preachers and church members understood evangelism.<sup>15</sup> One of these was a teaching model. The assumption of this approach is that a teacher does not teach unless and until the student learns. If the prospective convert decides not to obey the gospel, it is the fault of the teacher who must have left something out or said something in the wrong way. This view assumes that people are like robots or computers. If we feed in the correct data, we get the desired results. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be "teachers teaching a lesson." The perception of the interaction was that it was all one-way communication. The teacher talked and the prospective convert listened. Most of the churches where this view prevailed had a very low net growth rate in regard to adult conversions. They had few such converts and most of those converts soon dropped out of the church.

## **The Limits of a Motivational Approach**

In many congregations, the approach to disciple-making, disciple-building instruction is primarily motivational. In my book *Why Churches Grow*, I called this the "Manipulative Monologue Model of Evangelism." It is a salesmanship model. It includes a cognitive dimension of teaching, as in the Information Transmission model, but it adds a strong motivational element. The assumption is that people are controlled by motivation as much as by information. Most of the books on personal evangelism were "borrowed" from books on high-pressure salesmanship. They even use the sales jargon: "Finding Prospects," "Getting Your Foot in the Door," "Establishing a Need," "Dealing with Objections," and "Closing the Sale." Both the Information Transmission model and the Manipulative Monologue model assume that conversion is something that Christians do to non-members. The Christian evangelist is active, but the prospect is passive. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be like "salesmen selling a product." The perception of the interaction was that it was primarily one-way communication. The only time the evangelist asked the prospect a question was when the evangelist was trying to trap the prospect on the horns of a dilemma. Churches where this view of evangelism prevailed baptized a lot of people, but they had a very high drop-out rate and thus their net growth rate was only moderate.

When the emphasis is primarily on motivation, we produce a lot of drop-outs. The result is like planting seed in shallow soil, where one "hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Mat. 13:20-21). When I was an elder of the Garnett Road congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, we had a lot of workers in our bus ministry who used the "Romans Method" in their evangelism. They memorized four verses from Romans and used these to persuade bus riders to be baptized. But a study that I did found a 96 percent drop-out rate among the people persuaded by the Romans Method.

The Information Transmission Model and the Manipulative Monologue Model both assume that the Christian evangelist controls the outcome. The prospect is like a puppet. If we pull the right motivational strings, the puppet will do what we want the puppet to do. The way we talk about evangelism often betrays this view. We use the active voice when we talk about the role of the Christian evangelist as we should. But we use the passive voice when we talk about the role of the convert. We do not ask "When did you convert?" Instead, we ask "Who converted you?" The King James Version of

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<sup>13</sup> Propositional truth is the kind of truth that can be stated in ordinary language in the form of a debate proposition that can be affirmed or denied.

<sup>14</sup> Pp. 75-84.

<sup>15</sup> Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Persuasion in Religious Conversion* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1975).

the Bible—reflecting Calvinistic theology—often uses the passive voice to talk about conversion, but the original Greek and Hebrew text do not. The Bible never uses the passive voice in talking about the role of the convert. Conversion is something that people do, not something that we do to them.

### **The Need for a Relational Approach**

The goal of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction is that Christ might be formed in the hearts and lives of those we seek to influence. We want the Christ who lives in us and in the gospel message to be formed in others. This happens in response to a Person, not a proposition or some kind of motivation.

In *Why Churches Grow*, I called this **Non-Manipulative Dialogue**. It is a friendship model. It includes a cognitive dimension and motivation, but no manipulation. Control is assumed to rest with the prospective convert. It is a conversation in which each seeks to understand how the other sees things and why. The persuasive power is assumed to be in the message we share about Jesus Christ, not in any kind of manipulation. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be "friends", not "teacher" or "salesmen." The interaction was seen as a dialogue—a conversation. Churches where this view prevailed had the highest net growth rate among adult converts. These churches did not baptize quite as many as those that accepted the high-pressure salesmanship model, but they had a very low drop-out rate.

There are some passages in the Bible that are impossible to understand from the perspective of a propositional or motivational view of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction. Consider first the conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees who refused to believe on him. In these passages, emphasis has been added to focus attention on the point that some people *cannot* believe.

- "I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, *because you have no room for my word*" (John 8:37).
- "Why is my language not clear to you? Because *you are unable to hear what I say*" (John 8:43).
- "He who belongs to God hears what God says. *The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God*" (John 8:47).

This language makes it appear that people are divided into two categories—even before they hear the gospel. The same idea is expressed in several other passages.

- When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Pisidian Antioch, Luke tells us that "*all who were appointed for eternal life believed*" (Acts 13:48).
- When Paul was beginning his mission work in Corinth, God appeared to him in a vision. In that vision, God said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because *I have many people in this city*" (Acts 18:9-10). When God said this, few people in Corinth had even heard the gospel message. Fewer had believed. Fewer still had been baptized. But God still claimed them as His own people. God knew that there were honest seekers in Corinth who would believe and obey as soon as they heard the gospel proclaimed.
- In Romans 8:28-30, Paul wrote about how "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Calvin understood this to be proof of *particular election*. He believed that God predestined some individuals to be saved and others to be lost—regardless of what they did. In Churches of Christ, we have rejected this doctrine of particular election, but we should not reject the doctrine of general election. There really are two categories of people. When honest seekers hear the gospel, they will believe, obey, and be saved. When others hear the gospel, they will not believe because they *cannot* believe. They will not repent because they *cannot* repent. They are like the people discussed in Hebrews 6:4-6. It is *impossible* to bring them to repentance. This being the case, the essential task of evangelism is to find the honest seekers who will be receptive.
- In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the apostle Paul wrote, "For the message of the cross is foolishness *to those who are perishing*, but *to us who are being saved* it is the power of God." That is why Paul, as he preached in Corinth, kept the focus on Jesus Christ. "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumblingblock to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but *to those whom God has called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-23). That is why Paul preached the way he did in Corinth. "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not

with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:1-4). When honest seekers hear the story of Jesus Christ, they respond by becoming disciples of Christ. When others hear this same story, they refuse to believe and obey. In either case, the Christian evangelist has done what God commanded.

There were, of course, propositional and a motivational elements in Paul's preaching, but his emphasis was on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul wrote, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." But Paul's persuasion was not like that of the rhetoricians in Corinth. Paul said, "We do not peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor. 2:17). He also said, "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Paul's approach to evangelism is set forth in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." In Paul's view, there were two classes of people: one being saved and the other perishing. Honest seekers were attracted by the beauty of the Christ who lived in Paul and in the message he preached. Others found Paul and his message about Jesus to be "the smell of death."

In 2 Corinthians 3:3, Paul makes reference to the tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. Then he talked about how Moses' face glowed after he had been with God on Mt. Sinai. His face glowed so much that the Israelites could not look steadily at his face and he had to wear a veil (2 Cor. 3:7). But then in 2 Corinthians 3:14, Paul uses that veil to represent the unbelief of the Jews: "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read." Then, Paul returns to this symbol of the veil in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

The veil of unbelief is not removed by propositional debates showing all the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. The Bible does not start with all of those arguments. It starts with the affirmation that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Then it goes on to tell the story of all that God did to save human beings from sin. The heart of that story is "Jesus Christ and him crucified." In 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Paul explains how the veil of unbelief is removed. "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

### Application

It has not been my purpose in this discussion to suggest that we neglect propositional or motivational instruction in our disciple-making, disciple-building efforts. Instead, my purpose has been to urge that we put the primary emphasis on a relational approach. People do not become like Christ in response to mere propositions or motivation. We become like Christ in response to Jesus as a Person—the only Person who fully reveals to us the nature and heart of God.

We should always keep the focus on Jesus Christ, whether we are teaching a Bible class lesson, preaching a sermon, or engaging in personal evangelism. Whatever we are teaching, from Genesis through Revelation, should be related to the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The purpose of our instruction should be to show people what God is like so that we can, in some small way, become more and more like God. This requires balance in our preaching, teaching, and evangelism—but Christ must be at the center.

A personal example may help to illustrate the importance of balance. I was a debater in high school. Later I taught and coached debate. When I started preaching, most of my sermons sounded like the first affirmative address in a debate (which is not as bad as some preachers I know who always sound like they are giving the last negative rebuttal). I probably used this approach because—given my results on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>16</sup>--I prefer to deal with the external world through what Carl Jung called the "Thinking" style of communication. When I was in my mid-20s, I learned to take "Intuition," my dominant function that is normally introverted, and use it for preaching. I was well into my 30s before I

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<sup>16</sup>Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and MBTI are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, California.

learned how to use the "Feeler" style of communication in order to motivate audiences. And I was around 40 before I began learning how to use the "Sensing" style of communication to preach practical "How To" sermons. There are 16 different patterns of communication style preferences identified by the MBTI. I now use the MBTI in preaching classes in order to teach preachers how to preach to the whole church and not just to the people who share their psychological type preferences. That means using all four of the Jungian communication styles: Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling. Whenever I have a chance to talk to teachers, I make the same plea: teach students in their style rather than in your own. Since you usually have all types of people in your class, use a balanced approach. Use Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling in your teaching.<sup>17</sup>

The need for balance is one of the main reasons that I now stress narrative preaching in the preaching classes that I teach at Harding University. Narrative preaching communicates in all four of the Jungian communication styles at the same time, although in different ways. But narrative preaching also focuses, or *should* focus on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Even if the sermon is a narration about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the focus can and should be on the nature of God, i.e., 1) God is good in what He provides, 2) God keeps His word—even in warnings such as "You will surely die," 3) God saves us through the "seed of women" who bruised the head of Satan, etc.

Keep the focus on Jesus Christ in your Bible class lessons, sermons, and personal evangelism. That is the most important part of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction that influences others in such a way that the Christ who lives in us and in the gospel message will be formed in them. This ultimate purpose of evangelism and edification cannot be achieved by manipulation. It might be wise, therefore, for us to reconsider the fish hook as a symbol for evangelism. When Jesus called his first disciples to be "fishers of men" (Mat. 4:19), the kind of fishing that they understood was done with nets. Those nets brought fish in alive. Many of us who fish today use hooks with sharp points that may injure or even kill the fish. We use bait to cover the sharp point and trick the fish. We may use artificial bait to deceive the fish. The fish hook is a good symbol for the manipulative evangelism used by cults, but the net is a better symbol for the kind of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction that we should use.

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<sup>17</sup> See: Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., "Preaching to the Whole Church: Using the Four Communication Styles Identified in Carl Jung's Theory of Psychological Types," Christian Scholars Conference, July 18-20, 2002, at Oklahoma Christian University. Archive maintained at Abilene Christian University.

## HOW TO USE BIBLE CLASSES FOR EVANGELISM

Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr.

The first step in learning how to use Bible classes for evangelism is to be sure that the instruction in these classes is Christ-centered, Bible-based, and life-related. We should do the same thing in regard to the preaching in our worship assemblies and in our efforts at personal evangelism.

### Begin with the Basics

Making a Bible class evangelistic does not mean spending all the time debating doctrinal issues, focusing on the plan of salvation, and persuading people to be baptized. When Christians come together to be fed, we need to feed those Christians. Of course we never outgrow our need for the milk of the word, but we also need meat.<sup>1</sup> Bible classes that meet the needs of the members can be evangelistic, but that will not happen by accident. Bible classes have to be evangelistic on purpose. We need to understand that our Bible classes can be the fundamental organizational units for disciple-making and disciple-building.

### Bring Visitors

Bible classes will never be evangelistic unless and until we invite non-members to come with us. You may have read books by people in the Church Growth Movement who report the results of surveys among first-time visitors asking what influenced them to attend. Over 95 percent say that they first attended because of a personal invitation by a family member or a close personal friend. They do not come the first time because of the reputation of the preacher or because they had heard about some great Bible class teacher. Unfortunately, that figure is sometimes quoted as the reason new members give for becoming members of the congregation they now attend. When new members are asked what influenced them to become members, they typically mention the quality of the worship assembly in general and especially the quality of the preaching. They also mention the quality of the teaching in the Bible class they attend. But the reason they come the first time is that someone invited them.

A Mormon researcher called me several years ago with some questions about statistics in an article I had written. After I gave him the information he had requested, I had a question for him. I told him that in 1950, when I first started preaching, we had twice as many members as the Mormons and today they have twice as many members as we do. I told him that I had often seen those 18 year old Mormon "elders" going door-to-door. But I told him that in Churches of Christ, we have not usually found door-to-door contact to be very productive. I wanted to know where all the growth was coming from among the Mormons. He said that a part of their growth was biological. They are having far more babies than we are. In regard to evangelistic growth, he said that they were making one convert for every 3,000 doors they knock on. They continue that effort because it is good public relations for the Mormons and good training for those young men. But he said that they are making one convert for every two people they have into their homes for a meal.

Do not just invite non-members to attend your Bible class. Bring them with you to class and to the worship assembly and then have them into your home for a meal—or at least take them out to eat somewhere. But do not let the personal contact end with Sunday dinner.

### Visit Your Visitors

Herb Miller has a chapter on "Visit Your Visitors" in his book *How to Build a Magnetic Church*.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, Miller discusses the results of a study by the Alban Institute. This study involved first-time visitors to the worship

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 5:11—6:4

<sup>2</sup> Herb Miller, *How to Build a Magnetic Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 72-85.

assembly, but it should also apply to Bible classes. Based on that study, Miller offered the following advice for church leaders.

*When laypersons make a fifteen-minute visit to the homes of first-time worship visitors within thirty-six hours, 85 percent of them return the following week. Make this home visit within seventy-two hours, and 60 percent of them return. Make it seven days later, and 15 percent will return. The pastor making this call, rather than a layperson, cuts each result in half.<sup>3</sup>*

A church-supported minister making this visit is often seen as a salesman for the congregation, while a member making this visit is seen more as a "satisfied customer."

### **Provide Genuine Bible Instruction**

Whether first-time visitors to a Bible class come back or not depends largely on what goes on in the Bible class and the worship assembly. They need and expect to hear class lessons and sermons that get them into God's word and that help them learn something they did not already know. They need to see that the church members are also learning. What visitors see in many of our Bible class lessons and sermons is very little Bible content that teaches anyone anything.

At Harding University, as a part of our outcomes assessment, we give a Bible Knowledge Test to incoming freshmen and an alternate form of that test to graduating seniors. Around 85 percent of our students were already members of the Churches of Christ before they came to Harding. They come from some fine Christian families and great congregations. But they come with very little Bible knowledge. The Bible Knowledge Test that we use at Harding University is similar to the General Bible Knowledge Test used by many schools affiliated with evangelical, conservative, and fundamentalist denominations. The scores of incoming freshmen at Harding are significantly lower than the scores of incoming freshmen at these denominational schools. If this sounds familiar, it may be because you read an article by Joe Hacker in the *Christian Bible Teacher* 20 or 30 years ago. Hacker used the very same test that these denominational schools use. He found that scores of incoming freshmen at Harding were significantly lower than scores of incoming freshmen at these denominational schools—but scores of graduating seniors at Harding were significantly higher than scores of graduating seniors at these denominational schools. However, students at these denominational schools are generally required to take Bible classes for only one or two years, while Harding students take Bible classes every semester. I have used Harding's Bible Knowledge Test in studies of local congregations throughout the nation. The average score of church members is just a little higher than the average score of entering freshmen at Harding, but only at the sophomore level. These tests in local congregations and at Harding show the same areas of weakness of church members and Harding students.

- They do not understand the time line of Bible events so that they know *when* things happened.
- They do not understand Bible geography so that they know *where* things happened.
- They are not able to match people to events so that they know *who* did *what*.
- They do not know the content of Bible books.
- They are especially weak in Old Testament knowledge.

Some people would argue that these objective Bible Knowledge Tests focus too much on trivial items. Indeed, the questions look like those in a Bible Trivia game. It is true that these objective items are not as important as values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. But these objective things are essential. They are like memory pegs that help people organize and remember everything else they learn in their Bible study.

When I was growing up attending Bible classes from nursery through high school (1934-1952), there was a lot of emphasis on these objective, factual items. There probably was not enough emphasis on practical applications. As the Baby Boomer generation was growing up, the emphasis shifted to application stories. That emphasis, however, left a generation of students with no cognitive framework for organizing and remembering the things they were learning. There must be a balance between these two extremes. That is basic.

### **Involve All Levels of the Congregation**

Another basic involves understanding how the church functions at different levels. In his book *Your Church Can Grow*, Peter Wagner talks about the church as celebration, congregation, and cell.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Miller, pp. 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1984), pp. 111-126.

## The "Celebration" Level

The celebration level is what we would call the worship assembly. There is virtually no limit to how large the assembly can be. The assembly is an ideal context for praise and dynamic preaching. Some teaching can be done in the context of the worship assembly, but the real power of the pulpit is the power to motivate people to do what they already know they ought to do. Evangelistic preaching in regular church services or in special meetings can be effective, but the greatest results of this kind of preaching come when there are enough people present who have been taught, but not yet motivated to obey the gospel.

## The "Congregation" Level

What Wagner calls the church as "congregation" is like an adult Bible class with 30 to 60 participants. At that size, everyone can get to know everyone else on a first name basis. In a cross-denominational, cross-cultural study, church members were asked "How many people do you know on a first name basis in this church?" Around two-thirds of the members knew between 30 and 60 other members on a first name basis. That was true regardless of how many members the church claimed. Studies in secular organizations have found similar results. In most organizations, people know between 30 and 60 other people on a first name basis. This size is an excellent context for cognitive learning, support for smaller groups, support for evangelism, and assimilation of new converts. Evangelistic growth in Baptist churches in America has come primarily through Bible classes. In a personal conversation, Elmer Towns told me that Baptist churches have found that the ideal strategy is to start an adult Bible class with 30 members, a teacher and a co-teacher, or a class chairman and a co-chairman if they rotate teachers. This class needs to start with a clear understanding that when they grow to around 60 members, they will split into two classes. The teacher or class chairman will take half and the co-teacher or co-chairman will take the other half. According to Towns, evangelistic growth among Baptist churches seldom comes from increasing class size beyond the upper limit of 60. Instead, he says, evangelistic growth comes primarily from increasing the number of classes.

## The "Cell" Level

"Cell" is the term Wagner uses to describe a group of no more than 15 people who meet together regularly for prayer, Bible study, and evangelism. This is the ideal size for relationship-building. This is where people go beyond knowing others on a first name basis and really become close personal friends. When members voluntarily make themselves accountable to one another, this is the ideal size. Social scientists who study group dynamics have found that five to seven is the ideal size for maximum participation. With fewer than five, there is a perception that they are not enough people to keep a good conversation going. As group size increases beyond seven, participation declines a little. If group size goes much beyond 15, participation stops, the dynamics change, and the interactive group becomes a passive audience. Social scientists have asked people in many different cultures how many close personal relationships they have with family and friends. Most people say between five and 15. That seems to be the limit to how many close personal relationships people can sustain at any one time.

The "cell group" structure was one of the factors contributing to the growth of the world's largest church, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, where Dr. Yonggi Cho is the pastor. That one congregation claims almost one million members. They have large multiple simultaneous services at their campus, but the real life of that church functions through their cell groups.

At a meeting of the American Society for Church Growth, Karen Hurston presented a report on her book *Growing the World's Largest Church*.<sup>5</sup> Her parents, John and Maxine Hurston, were missionaries for the Assemblies of God in Seoul, Korea. They worked with Cho in building the world's largest church. Karen Hurston grew up in that church, is now an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God, and worked on the staff of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul. In her report, she talked a little about the cell group structure, but she talked much more about visiting. That church has a very large staff of full-time, seminary trained, ordained pastors. Those pastors spend from one third to one half of their time visiting the members. When these pastors visit the members, they take the cell group leader along with them. Their pastoral visits are very focused. They start with questions about the members' prayer life, Bible study, ministry involvement, and personal life. Based on the answers to these questions, the pastor leads a brief Bible study focused on the

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<sup>5</sup> Karen Hurston, *Growing the World's Largest Church* (Springfield, Missouri: Chrism, 1994).

specific needs of the members. Then they do some really serious praying. The cell group leaders learn from these pastors how to do a pastoral visit and when they visit the members on their own, without a pastor present, they follow the same pattern. The members see their pastors and their lay leaders doing this kind of disciple-building visits and when they visit with one another, without anyone else present, they still follow the same pattern. Thousands of church leaders from America have gone to Seoul for the Church Growth Seminars conducted by Cho and his staff. What some of them notice is the cell group structure. What others notice is the charismatic nature of the church: the tongue speaking, the healing services, etc. But according to Hurston, American church leaders have usually missed the key element: the disciple-building relationships in the pastoral visits, the visits by lay leaders, and the visits members have with one another. Hurston said that when leaders of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul have come to America, they have come away with the impression that "there is no *koinonia* in the American church."

My own research in Churches of Christ indicates that the judgment of these visitors from Korea would apply in Churches of Christ. When I conduct diagnostic studies in local congregations, we use a questionnaire that the members fill out. One of the questions is "How many close personal friends do you have in this congregation?" In most congregations we find that at least 10 percent of the members say that they have no close personal friends at all in the congregation they attend. In one large congregation that I studied, 36 percent of the members said that they had no close personal friends in that church. In addition, another five to 10 percent of the members usually say that they have just one or two close personal friends in the church. These people are at risk of becoming drop-outs according to research that I reported in my book *Why Churches Grow*.<sup>6</sup> That study compared 50 new converts who were still faithful members with 50 new converts who had already dropped out of the church. The two groups were matched statistically according to the length of time that they had attended church services and that gave each group an equal opportunity to make friends in the church. All of the people who reported having fewer than three friends in the church were in the drop-out category, while all who claimed more than six friends in the church were in the faithful convert category.

In those questionnaires used in diagnostic church growth studies, the next question is for those who say that they have any close personal friends in the congregation. It is "How many of these friends did you visit in the past 12 months?" The questionnaire defines "visiting" as "you went into their home, you had them into your home, you went out and did something together, or you at least talked to each other on the telephone regularly." Around 30 percent of the members say that they have close personal friends in the congregation they attend—but that they have not visited any of those friends in the past 12 months. They see them at the church building, but that is all.

The next question is for those who have close personal friends in the congregation and who visited those friends in the past 12 months. That question asks what they do on these visits. "Do you pray together, study the Bible, have shared devotional time, or talk to each other about spiritual things?" Around 50 percent of the members say that they have close personal friends in the congregation and that they visited them in the past 12 months, but they have only a secular relationship. They do not use any of their friendship/visiting time for any disciple-building activity.

Only 10 percent of the members have close personal friends in the congregation, visit those friends, and do anything of a religious nature during these visits. On the average, they report doing this less than once a month. That is what those Korean pastors were talking about when they said "The American church has no *koinonia*." In Churches of Christ and in most other religious groups in America today, church is a place where people come together as strangers and leave as strangers without their lives ever touching. The kind of cell groups that Cho uses in his church in Seoul help to solve that problem.

Since Elmer Towns and I are both former presidents of the American Society for Church Growth, we visit whenever we can at meetings of this group. In one of our conversations, Towns told me that a lot of pastors from the Liberty Baptist Churches (the kind of Baptist churches that look to Jerry Falwell for leadership) have attended the Church Growth Seminars conducted by Cho and his staff in Seoul, Korea. Most of them noticed the cell group structure. They came back and tried to plug that cell group structure into Liberty Baptist Churches. Towns said that they split virtually every one of those churches. Towns said that some Liberty Baptist pastors asked him what they should do. He replied, "Baptists are comfortable leading others to Christ in the same way that they were led to Christ—and that is through the Sunday School." He suggested that they organize their small groups within the context of adult Bible classes and it worked. Not one of the congregations that followed that approach divided.

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<sup>6</sup>Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Why Churches Grow, Third Edition* (Nashville: Christian Communications, Inc., 1986), pp. 53-55.

A growing number of Churches of Christ have recognized the need for small groups, but many of the small group ministries have been ineffective in developing relationships. Most of these small groups meet once a month or less and that just is not enough time together to build close relationships. A better approach is to organize small groups within the context of adult Bible classes. Members already get together once a week in these Bible classes. If they can then get together once a week for small group Bible study, they can do some really serious relationship building.

### **Use a Felt Need Approach To Make New Contacts**

There are a lot of non-members who will not accept your invitation to attend a Bible class or a worship service—even if a Sunday dinner is included. But some of these would come to a small group Bible study. Some have come far enough in their spiritual journey that they are ready for a text-based Bible study. Luke-Acts is a good place to start. Others can be reached better through a felt need approach. Start with a well-advertised seminar on Marriage Enrichment, Parenting, Adjusting to Divorce, Problems of Aging, Dealing with Depression, or some other topic where people already recognize a need in their lives. Make it clear that this is a church-sponsored event where they will hear Christ-centered, Bible-based teaching—but teaching focused on the felt need topic. You will get at least 10 times as many non-members to attend such a felt need seminar as would attend a traditional Gospel Meeting. But do not stop with the seminar. Invite the visitors to take part in follow-up study groups. Have some small groups ready for follow-up sessions. These should meet once a week for just three or four weeks. The members should be trained to focus on two things. First, get the visitors more deeply into God's word. Keep the discussion focused on what you have learned in your own Bible study that has helped you enrich your marriage or become better parents—or whatever the felt need topic might be. Show the visitors that the Bible is relevant and that Christ has answers for their lives. The second thing that the members should be trained to do is to get the visitors into relationships. Visit them in their homes. Invite them into your home. Bring them to Bible classes and worship services. It helps if the Bible class lessons and sermons following the felt need seminar are related to the topic of that seminar. In that way, visitors see the church as celebration, congregation, and cell—all focused on a need that they already recognize in their lives. When the follow-up Bible study on the felt need topic is finished, try to get the visitors into a text-based Bible study that goes on for a longer period of time. Try to get them into your Bible classes and worship assemblies. As you work with these non-members, look for signs of receptivity, i.e., asking questions about salvation or at least discussing salvation when you bring it up. When you see that they are receptive, start an evangelistic study, i.e., a study focusing on the plan of salvation.

At this point, you will have gone beyond the celebration, congregation, and cell levels. You will have reached the level that some have called "one-on-one evangelism." Actually what works best is "two-on-one evangelism." Deal with one individual or one family at a time, but you do not have to do it by yourself. Two Christians working together make a great team for this kind of work. One team member should be someone who knows enough about the Bible and enough about evangelism to be an effective teacher. The other should be a Christian who is a relative or friend of the prospective convert. It is best for this other person to be as similar as possible to the prospective convert in every way—except that they will know a little more about the Bible than the prospective convert.<sup>7</sup>

### **Expand Relationships for New Converts**

One great advantage of doing personal evangelism with people who regularly participate in a small group Bible study is that after these people obey the gospel, they already have a support group, a circle of friends, the people in their small group Bible study. And when that small group is organized within the context of a more traditional Sunday morning or Wednesday evening Bible class, the new converts also have 30 to 60 people they know, or soon will know, on a first name basis. Such new converts are far less likely to drop out.

The drop-out rate among adult converts in Churches of Christ throughout the United States has remained at about 50 percent ever since the late 1960s when I first started doing this kind of research. Most of them drop out within a few

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<sup>7</sup> Social scientists who have studied "source credibility" have identified two main factors: perceptions of *competence* and perceptions of *trustworthiness*. When a teacher obviously knows a lot more about the Bible than the prospective convert, that difference contributes to a perception of *competence* and that perception is important for changing beliefs. When the other member of the evangelistic team is very similar to the prospective convert, that similarity contributes to a perception of *trustworthiness* and that perception is important for changing values and attitudes. That kind of two-person evangelistic team has the greatest potential for success.

months after their conversion—which may suggest that there was something wrong with their conversion in the first place. The drop-out rate among young people who grow up attending Churches of Christ is around 45 percent, according to Lewis, Dodd and Tippens.<sup>8</sup> Their study focused on high school and college-age young people. My own research has focused on a larger age range and I have found that 55 percent never drop out, 33 percent drop out and never come back, but 12 percent drop out when they grow up and leave home—and then come back to the church after they get married and have children.<sup>9</sup>

For a Bible class to be evangelistic, the total program of congregational activity should support evangelism. That includes a challenging adult Bible class curriculum. In my opinion, Churches of Christ in the United States need more ministers who have had significant training in Religious Education and who devote a significant amount of their time to work in this area. We need Ministers of Religious Education to help teachers and church leaders clarify the objectives they are trying to achieve, i.e., what they expect students to know, do, and think or feel at each age or grade level. We need Ministers of Religious Education to recruit and train teachers. However, very few Churches of Christ have Ministers of Religious Education.

According to Lyle Schaller, Protestant churches in the United States and Canada generally follow the same pattern in regard to the development of the ministry staff. Churches start with a church planter, a ministry generalist who does a little bit of everything while the church is growing enough to support a second full-time minister. The second minister on the staff is usually a Minister of Religious Education. It is not until later that churches add ministers in such areas as Youth, Involvement, Counseling, Family Life, Children's Ministry, etc. Schaller said that the only exception that he knew of was in Churches of Christ where the second minister added to the staff is usually a youth minister. It may be that these other religious groups know something about church staffing that we have not yet learned.<sup>10</sup>

For the past three years, I have been involved in a ministry study among Churches of Christ in the United States. I reported results of this study in several articles in *Church and Family*, a magazine published by the Institute for Church and Family at Harding University and in classes at the Harding University Bible Lectureship for 2002. This ministry study started with a questionnaire for all 25 of the degree-granting colleges and universities and the 34 non-degree granting schools of preaching serving this church constituency. In the fall of 2000, around 4,000 students were attending these schools and preparing for some kind of ministry. Around 1,000 of these were preparing for service as self-supported, vocational ministers. That left a total of around 3,000 who were preparing for church-supported ministry positions.

The second part of this ministry study involved questionnaires for all of these ministry students asking about their ministry plans. Youth Ministry was the most popular option with 27.0 percent selecting that as their first choice and 45.7 listing that as either their first choice or as an acceptable option. But there are not that many youth ministry positions available.

Among "mainstream" Churches of Christ, the greatest need is for preachers in the smaller churches where they are the only full-time church-supported ministers. There are 3,000 such positions. The second-greatest need is for preachers in larger congregations where there may be one or more other ministers on the staff. Over 77 percent of the available positions are for preachers. But over half of the students (55.5 percent) did not list preaching as a first choice or even as an acceptable alternative.

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<sup>8</sup>David K. Lewis, Carley H. Dodd and Darryl L. Tippens, *The Gospel According to Generation X* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Another study of retention rates among young people who grow up attending Churches of Christ may be worth considering in this context. When I was working at Abilene Christian University (1984-1990), I did a study comparing congregations that had high retention rates among their young people with congregations that had low retention rates. That study, which was reported in ACU's *Youth Ministry Bulletin*, found three significant characteristics of the high retention rate churches that distinguished them from the low retention rate churches: 1) the presence of some kind of organized youth ministry; 2) parents who were active and involved members; and, 3) a challenging Bible school curriculum in the adult classes. The differences in curriculum were not significant up through high school, but in the low retention rate churches the adult Bible class curriculum was very weak and it was far more challenging in the high retention rate churches.

<sup>10</sup>Lyle Schaller, "Church Staff Development," presented in a meeting of Leadership Network, Colorado Springs, 1988.

In the literature of the Church Growth Movement, a "small church" is defined as "a congregation with fewer than 200 in attendance, with no more than one full-time church-supported minister, and with the dynamics of a family." A "large church" is defined as "a congregation with 300 or more in attendance, with two or more full-time church-supported ministers, and with the dynamics of a large organization." "Transitional churches" are those with 200 to 299 in attendance. In the directory compiled by Mac Lynn, there are only 777 congregations listed that are in the "large church" category with 300 or more members; 741 "transitional churches" with 200-299 members; and 11,514 "small churches" with fewer than 200 members. This total of 13,032 congregations includes 9,806 "mainstream" Churches of Christ (75 percent of the congregations with 87 percent of the members). These congregations are similar enough to one another that no significant barriers to fellowship exist among them. But this total also includes Non-Institutional, Non-Class, One Cup, and Mutual Edification congregations.<sup>11</sup>

Among "mainstream" Churches of Christ, there are 4,477 positions for preachers (3,000 in small churches, 700 in transitional churches, and 777 in large churches). In addition, there are 800 youth ministry positions and 250 positions for all other full-time ministers (education, involvement, evangelism, counseling, etc.). The ministry goals of students do not match the ministry needs of the churches. Most of these students will serve in ministry positions where preaching, religious education, youth ministry, involvement, evangelism, counseling, and everything else are included in their job description. In order to provide the kind of ministers churches need, the schools preparing these ministers should recognize that all ministers are ministers of the word. Bible text courses, therefore, should be at the core of their curriculum. Preaching, religious education, youth ministry, involvement, evangelism, counseling, and many other ministry courses should also be a part of the curriculum. Some of these things may seem to be somewhat removed from the topic of "Using Bible Classes for Evangelism," but I believe that all of these things are related. Evangelistic Bible classes do not exist in isolation. They must be a part of a church whose mission is clearly focused on disciple-making and disciple-building instruction.

Evangelistic Bible classes do not have to require that every class member be a personal evangelism worker or teacher who gets the credit for making disciples. In his book on *Team Evangelism*, Larry Gilbert, a Baptist writer, says that 10 percent of Baptists have the necessary gifts to be effective "soul-winners," but every Baptist can be an effective "witness."<sup>12</sup> Gilbert advocates what he calls "stair-step evangelism." One person makes the initial contact, develops the relationship, and tells the prospective convert as much as he can. Another person—perhaps several others—take the prospective convert up the next steps. I believe that what Gilbert says about the Baptist Church applies to Churches of Christ. Probably 10 percent of our members have the gifts needed for success as "soul-winners," but only one percent are doing it (the same figure that Gilbert finds among the Baptists). I am sure that all of our members could invite friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors to attend Bible classes and worship assemblies—and even take the visitors home for Sunday dinner. Any of our members could make a 15-minute follow-up visit with someone who has attended our Bible classes or worship assemblies. All Christians could take part in small group Bible studies and invite others to attend. All of us could attend felt need seminars where we meet non-members and invite them to attend follow-up study groups. All of us would build relationships and look for signs of receptivity. All of us who knew enough to obey the gospel in the first place already know enough to tell others why we did what we did. That may not bring non-members to the point of conversion, but it may take them one step along the way. After that, we could get them to study with someone else and be present as for support. It is not essential that we all be involved in evangelism in the same way, but we must all be involved in evangelism in some way. That is what it takes to have a Bible class that is really evangelistic.

### **Keep the Focus on Christ**

Thus far, this discussion has been focused on the medium, not the message--the delivery system, not the cargo. The message is far more important. For a Bible class to be evangelistic, the lessons must be Christ-centered, Bible-based, and life-related. That must also be true of the public preaching, the instruction in small Bible study groups, and the instruction in our personal evangelism. That ought to be obvious to all students of the Bible, but it is not. Far too many engage in misguided, incomplete, and ineffective preaching, teaching, and personal evangelism.

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<sup>11</sup> Mac Lynn (compiler), *Churches of Christ in the United States, 2000* (Nashville, Tennessee: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Larry Gilbert, *Team Evangelism: How to Influence Your Loved Ones for Christ when you don't have the Gift of Evangelism* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Church Growth Institute, 1991).

## The Limits of a Propositional Approach

In some congregations, the approach to disciple-making and disciple-building instruction is primarily propositional. The implied message these congregations send to prospective converts is "We must debate all essential propositions. If you win the debate, we will join your church. If we win the debate, you must join our church." Propositions, of course, are important. In order to avoid being misunderstood and written up in the *Heretic Detector*, let me make it clear that I believe that Absolute Truth is possible, knowable, and propositional.<sup>13</sup> But when our instruction focuses primarily on propositions, we produce modern Pharisees rather than real disciples of Jesus Christ. The propositional approach is what I called the "Information Transition Model of Evangelism" in my book *Why Churches Grow*.<sup>14</sup>

In my research for my doctoral dissertation, I found three ways in which preachers and church members understood evangelism.<sup>15</sup> One of these was a teaching model. The assumption of this approach is that a teacher does not teach unless and until the student learns. If the prospective convert decides not to obey the gospel, it is the fault of the teacher who must have left something out or said something in the wrong way. This view assumes that people are like robots or computers. If we feed in the correct data, we get the desired results. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be "teachers teaching a lesson." The perception of the interaction was that it was all one-way communication. The teacher talked and the prospective convert listened. Most of the churches where this view prevailed had a very low net growth rate in regard to adult conversions. They had few such converts and most of those converts soon dropped out of the church.

## The Limits of a Motivational Approach

In many congregations, the approach to disciple-making, disciple-building instruction is primarily motivational. In my book *Why Churches Grow*, I called this the "Manipulative Monologue Model of Evangelism." It is a salesmanship model. It includes a cognitive dimension of teaching, as in the Information Transmission model, but it adds a strong motivational element. The assumption is that people are controlled by motivation as much as by information. Most of the books on personal evangelism were "borrowed" from books on high-pressure salesmanship. They even use the sales jargon: "Finding Prospects," "Getting Your Foot in the Door," "Establishing a Need," "Dealing with Objections," and "Closing the Sale." Both the Information Transmission model and the Manipulative Monologue model assume that conversion is something that Christians do to non-members. The Christian evangelist is active, but the prospect is passive. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be like "salesmen selling a product." The perception of the interaction was that it was primarily one-way communication. The only time the evangelist asked the prospect a question was when the evangelist was trying to trap the prospect on the horns of a dilemma. Churches where this view of evangelism prevailed baptized a lot of people, but they had a very high drop-out rate and thus their net growth rate was only moderate.

When the emphasis is primarily on motivation, we produce a lot of drop-outs. The result is like planting seed in shallow soil, where one "hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Mat. 13:20-21). When I was an elder of the Garnett Road congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, we had a lot of workers in our bus ministry who used the "Romans Method" in their evangelism. They memorized four verses from Romans and used these to persuade bus riders to be baptized. But a study that I did found a 96 percent drop-out rate among the people persuaded by the Romans Method.

The Information Transmission Model and the Manipulative Monologue Model both assume that the Christian evangelist controls the outcome. The prospect is like a puppet. If we pull the right motivational strings, the puppet will do what we want the puppet to do. The way we talk about evangelism often betrays this view. We use the active voice when we talk about the role of the Christian evangelist as we should. But we use the passive voice when we talk about the role of the convert. We do not ask "When did you convert?" Instead, we ask "Who converted you?" The King James Version of

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<sup>13</sup> Propositional truth is the kind of truth that can be stated in ordinary language in the form of a debate proposition that can be affirmed or denied.

<sup>14</sup> Pp. 75-84.

<sup>15</sup> Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Persuasion in Religious Conversion* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1975).

the Bible—reflecting Calvinistic theology—often uses the passive voice to talk about conversion, but the original Greek and Hebrew text do not. The Bible never uses the passive voice in talking about the role of the convert. Conversion is something that people do, not something that we do to them.

### The Need for a Relational Approach

The goal of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction is that Christ might be formed in the hearts and lives of those we seek to influence. We want the Christ who lives in us and in the gospel message to be formed in others. This happens in response to a Person, not a proposition or some kind of motivation.

In *Why Churches Grow*, I called this **Non-Manipulative Dialogue**. It is a friendship model. It includes a cognitive dimension and motivation, but no manipulation. Control is assumed to rest with the prospective convert. It is a conversation in which each seeks to understand how the other sees things and why. The persuasive power is assumed to be in the message we share about Jesus Christ, not in any kind of manipulation. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be "friends", not "teacher" or "salesmen." The interaction was seen as a dialogue—a conversation. Churches where this view prevailed had the highest net growth rate among adult converts. These churches did not baptize quite as many as those that accepted the high-pressure salesmanship model, but they had a very low drop-out rate.

There are some passages in the Bible that are impossible to understand from the perspective of a propositional or motivational view of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction. Consider first the conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees who refused to believe on him. In these passages, emphasis has been added to focus attention on the point that some people *cannot* believe.

- "I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, *because you have no room for my word*" (John 8:37).
- "Why is my language not clear to you? *Because you are unable to hear what I say*" (John 8:43).
- "He who belongs to God hears what God says. *The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God*" (John 8:47).

This language makes it appear that people are divided into two categories—even before they hear the gospel. The same idea is expressed in several other passages.

- When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Pisidian Antioch, Luke tells us that "*all who were appointed for eternal life believed*" (Acts 13:48).
- When Paul was beginning his mission work in Corinth, God appeared to him in a vision. In that vision, God said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, *because I have many people in this city*" (Acts 18:9-10). When God said this, few people in Corinth had even heard the gospel message. Fewer had believed. Fewer still had been baptized. But God still claimed them as His own people. God knew that there were honest seekers in Corinth who would believe and obey as soon as they heard the gospel proclaimed.
- In Romans 8:28-30, Paul wrote about how "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Calvin understood this to be proof of *particular election*. He believed that God predestined some individuals to be saved and others to be lost—regardless of what they did. In Churches of Christ, we have rejected this doctrine of particular election, but we should not reject the doctrine of general election. There really are two categories of people. When honest seekers hear the gospel, they will believe, obey, and be saved. When others hear the gospel, they will not believe because they *cannot* believe. They will not repent because they *cannot* repent. They are like the people discussed in Hebrews 6:4-6. It is *impossible* to bring them to repentance. This being the case, the essential task of evangelism is to find the honest seekers who will be receptive.
- In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the apostle Paul wrote, "For the message of the cross is foolishness *to those who are perishing*, but *to us who are being saved* it is the power of God." That is why Paul, as he preached in Corinth, kept the focus on Jesus Christ. "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumblingblock to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but *to those whom God has called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-23). That is why Paul preached the way he did in Corinth. "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not

with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:1-4). When honest seekers hear the story of Jesus Christ, they respond by becoming disciples of Christ. When others hear this same story, they refuse to believe and obey. In either case, the Christian evangelist has done what God commanded.

There were, of course, propositional and a motivational elements in Paul's preaching, but his emphasis was on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul wrote, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." But Paul's persuasion was not like that of the rhetoricians in Corinth. Paul said, "We do not peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor. 2:17). He also said, "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Paul's approach to evangelism is set forth in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." In Paul's view, there were two classes of people: one being saved and the other perishing. Honest seekers were attracted by the beauty of the Christ who lived in Paul and in the message he preached. Others found Paul and his message about Jesus to be "the smell of death."

In 2 Corinthians 3:3, Paul makes reference to the tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. Then he talked about how Moses' face glowed after he had been with God on Mt. Sinai. His face glowed so much that the Israelites could not look steadily at his face and he had to wear a veil (2 Cor. 3:7). But then in 2 Corinthians 3:14, Paul uses that veil to represent the unbelief of the Jews: "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read." Then, Paul returns to this symbol of the veil in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

The veil of unbelief is not removed by propositional debates showing all the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. The Bible does not start with all of those arguments. It starts with the affirmation that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Then it goes on to tell the story of all that God did to save human beings from sin. The heart of that story is "Jesus Christ and him crucified." In 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Paul explains how the veil of unbelief is removed. "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

### Application

It has not been my purpose in this discussion to suggest that we neglect propositional or motivational instruction in our disciple-making, disciple-building efforts. Instead, my purpose has been to urge that we put the primary emphasis on a relational approach. People do not become like Christ in response to mere propositions or motivation. We become like Christ in response to Jesus as a Person—the only Person who fully reveals to us the nature and heart of God.

We should always keep the focus on Jesus Christ, whether we are teaching a Bible class lesson, preaching a sermon, or engaging in personal evangelism. Whatever we are teaching, from Genesis through Revelation, should be related to the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The purpose of our instruction should be to show people what God is like so that we can, in some small way, become more and more like God. This requires balance in our preaching, teaching, and evangelism—but Christ must be at the center.

A personal example may help to illustrate the importance of balance. I was a debater in high school. Later I taught and coached debate. When I started preaching, most of my sermons sounded like the first affirmative address in a debate (which is not as bad as some preachers I know who always sound like they are giving the last negative rebuttal). I probably used this approach because—given my results on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator<sup>16</sup>--I prefer to deal with the external world through what Carl Jung called the "Thinking" style of communication. When I was in my mid-20s, I learned to take "Intuition," my dominant function that is normally introverted, and use it for preaching. I was well into my 30s before I

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<sup>16</sup>Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and MBTI are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, California.

learned how to use the "Feeler" style of communication in order to motivate audiences. And I was around 40 before I began learning how to use the "Sensing" style of communication to preach practical "How To" sermons. There are 16 different patterns of communication style preferences identified by the MBTI. I now use the MBTI in preaching classes in order to teach preachers how to preach to the whole church and not just to the people who share their psychological type preferences. That means using all four of the Jungian communication styles: Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling. Whenever I have a chance to talk to teachers, I make the same plea: teach students in their style rather than in your own. Since you usually have all types of people in your class, use a balanced approach. Use Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling in your teaching.<sup>17</sup>

The need for balance is one of the main reasons that I now stress narrative preaching in the preaching classes that I teach at Harding University. Narrative preaching communicates in all four of the Jungian communication styles at the same time, although in different ways. But narrative preaching also focuses, or *should* focus on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Even if the sermon is a narration about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the focus can and should be on the nature of God, i.e., 1) God is good in what He provides, 2) God keeps His word—even in warnings such as "You will surely die," 3) God saves us through the "seed of women" who bruised the head of Satan, etc.

Keep the focus on Jesus Christ in your Bible class lessons, sermons, and personal evangelism. That is the most important part of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction that influences others in such a way that the Christ who lives in us and in the gospel message will be formed in them. This ultimate purpose of evangelism and edification cannot be achieved by manipulation. It might be wise, therefore, for us to reconsider the fish hook as a symbol for evangelism. When Jesus called his first disciples to be "fishers of men" (Mat. 4:19), the kind of fishing that they understood was done with nets. Those nets brought fish in alive. Many of us who fish today use hooks with sharp points that may injure or even kill the fish. We use bait to cover the sharp point and trick the fish. We may use artificial bait to deceive the fish. The fish hook is a good symbol for the manipulative evangelism used by cults, but the net is a better symbol for the kind of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction that we should use.

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<sup>17</sup> See: Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., "Preaching to the Whole Church: Using the Four Communication Styles Identified in Carl Jung's Theory of Psychological Types," Christian Scholars Conference, July 18-20, 2002, at Oklahoma Christian University. Archive maintained at Abilene Christian University.

## HOW TO USE BIBLE CLASSES FOR EVANGELISM

In the 9:15 session on "The Role of Christian Education in Evangelism," we began with the need to clarify our purpose. It is possible for a congregation to have a shared vision without having a formal, written mission statement. But in the congregations that I have studied—and that is now well over 100—I have yet to find a shared vision in a congregation that has not gone through the discipline of writing a mission statement.

But mission statements are just the beginning. You also need some kind of Expanded Statement of Purpose that is more specific and you need to prioritize in order to select the purposes that you want to focus on at the present time. Then you need to develop an assessment plan for the whole congregation—and each ministry area needs to develop its own assessment plan—that is approved by the elders. These plans should identify Intended Outcomes. In ministry areas such as Bible classes, preaching, and evangelism, you would need to define objectives in terms of what knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors you would expect people to display. Other ministries would need administrative objectives. Each assessment plan should identify the means of assessment and the criteria for success. Once you have the assessment plans in place, you collect and analyze the data, make improvements, and make suggestions to the central leadership to inform their strategic planning as they clarify the purpose. This is a cycle that needs to go on year after year and that will get you closer and closer to success.

In this concluding session as we talk about using Bible classes for evangelism, I want to begin with the Intended Outcomes. Good teachers know that each lesson plan should have a statement of objectives. Publishers who provide workbooks for Bible classes know the importance of these objectives and usually state them in the workbook or the Teacher's Guide. But week-to-week objectives often miss the big picture. Church leaders need to define the intended objectives—what knowledge, attitudes, and behavior they expect people to display. The place where this kind of planning is most neglected is in the adult Bible classes. Often it seems that our only objective is to conduct classes or to rehearse the doctrine week after week without ever challenging students to think a new thought or to learn anything they did not already know. Because of this lack of purpose, our Bible classes—especially at the adult level—often seem like the bland leading the bland.

The first step in learning how to use Bible classes for evangelism is to be sure that the instruction in these classes is Christ-centered, Bible-based, and life-related. We should do the same thing in regard to the preaching in our worship assemblies and in our efforts at personal evangelism.

## Begin with the Basics

Making a Bible class evangelistic does not mean spending all the time debating doctrinal issues, focusing on the plan of salvation, and persuading people to be baptized. When Christians come together to be fed, we need to feed those Christians. Of course we never outgrow our need for the milk of the word, but we also need meat. Bible classes that meet the needs of the members can be evangelistic, but that will not happen by accident. Bible classes have to be evangelistic on purpose. We need to understand that our Bible classes can be the fundamental organizational units for disciple-making and disciple-building instruction.

## Bring Visitors

Bible classes will never be evangelistic unless and until we invite non-members to come with us. You may have read books by people in the Church Growth Movement who report the results of surveys among first-time visitors asking what influenced them to attend. Over 95 percent say that they first attended because of a personal invitation by a family member or a close personal friend. They do not come the first time because of the reputation of the preacher or because they had heard about some great Bible class teacher. Unfortunately, that figure is sometimes quoted as the reason new members give for becoming members of the congregation they now attend. When new members are asked what influenced them to become members, they typically mention the quality of the worship assembly in general and especially the quality of the preaching. They also mention the quality of the teaching in the Bible class they attend. But the reason they come the first time is that someone invited them.

A Mormon researcher called me several years ago with some questions about statistics in an article I had written. After I gave him the information he had requested, I had a question for him. I told him that in 1950, when I first started preaching, we had twice as many members in the United States as the Mormons had--and today they have twice as many members as we do. I told him that I had often seen those 18 year old Mormon "elders" going door-to-door. But I told him that in Churches of Christ, we have not usually found door-to-door contact to be very productive. I wanted to know where all the growth was coming from among the Mormons. He said that a part of their growth was biological. They are having far more babies than we are. In regard to evangelistic growth, he said that they were making one convert for every 3,000 doors they knock on. They continue that effort because it is good public relations for the Mormons and good training for those young men. But he said that they are making one convert for every two people they have into their homes for a meal.

Do not just invite non-members to attend your Bible class. Bring them with you to class and to the worship assembly and then have them into your home for a meal—or at least take them out to eat somewhere. But do not let the personal contact end with Sunday dinner.

### **Visit Your Visitors**

Herb Miller has a chapter on "Visit Your Visitors" in his book *How to Build a Magnetic Church*. In this chapter, Miller discusses the results of a study by the Alban Institute. This study involved first-time visitors to the worship assembly, but it should also apply to Bible classes. Based on that study, Miller offered the following advice for church leaders.

*When laypersons make a fifteen-minute visit to the homes of first-time worship visitors within thirty-six hours, 85 percent of them return the following week. Make this home visit within seventy-two hours, and 60 percent of them return. Make it seven days later, and 15 percent will return. The pastor making this call, rather than a layperson, cuts each result in half.*

A church-supported minister making this visit is often seen as a salesman for the congregation, while a member making this visit is seen more as a "satisfied customer."

### **Provide Genuine Bible Instruction**

Whether first-time visitors to a Bible class come back or not depends largely on what goes on in the Bible class and the worship assembly. They need and expect to hear class lessons and sermons that get them into God's word and that help them learn something they did not already know. They need to see that the church members are also learning. What visitors see in many of our Bible class lessons and sermons is very little Bible content that teaches anyone anything.

At Harding University, as a part of our outcomes assessment, we give a Bible Knowledge Test to incoming freshmen and an alternate form of that test to graduating seniors. Around 85 percent of our students were already members of the Churches of Christ before they came to Harding. They come from some fine Christian families and great congregations. But they come with very little Bible knowledge. I have used Harding's Bible Knowledge Test in studies of local congregations throughout the nation. These tests in local congregations and at Harding show the same areas of weakness of church members and Harding students.

- They do not understand the time line of Bible events so that they know *when* things happened.
- They do not understand Bible geography so that they know *where* things happened.
- They are not able to match people to events so that they know *who* did *what*.
- They do not know the content of Bible books.
- They are especially weak in Old Testament knowledge.

Some people would argue that these objective Bible Knowledge Tests focus too much on trivial items. Indeed, the questions look like those in a Bible Trivia game. It is true that these objective items are not as important as values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. But these objective things are essential. They are like memory pegs that help people organize and remember everything else they learn in their Bible study.

When I was growing up attending Bible classes from nursery through high school (1934-1952), there was a lot of emphasis on these objective, factual items. There probably was not enough emphasis on practical applications. As the Baby Boomer generation was growing up, the emphasis shifted to application stories. That emphasis, however, left a generation of students with no cognitive framework for organizing and remembering the things they were learning. There must be a balance between these two extremes. That is basic.

### **Involve All Levels of the Congregation**

Another basic involves understanding how the church functions at different levels. In his book *Your Church Can Grow*, Peter Wagner talks about the church as celebration, congregation, and cell.

#### **The "Celebration" Level**

The celebration level is what we would call the worship assembly. There is virtually no limit to how large the assembly can be. The assembly is an ideal context for praise and dynamic preaching. Some teaching can be done in the context of the worship assembly, but the real power of the pulpit is the power to motivate people to do what they already know they ought to do. Evangelistic preaching in regular church services or in special meetings can be effective, but the greatest results of this kind of preaching come when there are enough people present who have been taught, but not yet motivated to obey the gospel.

## **The "Congregation" Level**

What Wagner calls the church as "congregation" is like an adult Bible class with 30 to 60 participants. At that size, everyone can get to know everyone else on a first name basis. In a cross-denominational, cross-cultural study, church members were asked "How many people do you know on a first name basis in this church?" Around two-thirds of the members knew between 30 and 60 other members on a first name basis. That was true regardless of how many members the church claimed. Studies in secular organizations have found similar results. In most organizations, people know between 30 and 60 other people on a first name basis. This size is an excellent context for cognitive learning, support for smaller groups, support for evangelism, and assimilation of new converts. Evangelistic growth in Baptist churches in America has come primarily through Bible classes. In a personal conversation, Elmer Towns told me that Baptist churches have found that the ideal strategy is to start an adult Bible class with 30 members, a teacher and a co-teacher, or a class chairman and a co-chairman if they rotate teachers. This class needs to start with a clear understanding that when they grow to around 60 members, they will split into two classes. The teacher or class chairman will take half and the co-teacher or co-chairman will take the other half. According to Towns, evangelistic growth among Baptist churches seldom comes from increasing class size beyond the upper limit of 60. Instead, he says, evangelistic growth comes primarily from increasing the number of classes.

## **The "Cell" Level**

"Cell" is the term Wagner uses to describe a group of no more than 15 people who meet together regularly for prayer, Bible study, and evangelism. This is the ideal size for relationship-building. This is where people go beyond knowing others on a first name basis and really become close personal friends. When members voluntarily make themselves accountable to one another, this is the ideal size. Social scientists who study group dynamics have found that five to seven is the ideal size for maximum participation. With fewer than five, there is a perception that they are not enough people to keep a good conversation going. As group size increases beyond seven, participation declines a little. If group size goes much beyond 15, participation stops, the dynamics change, and the interactive group becomes a passive audience. Social scientists have asked people in many different cultures how many close personal relationships they have with family and friends. Most people say between five and 15. That seems to be the limit to how many close personal relationships people can sustain at any one time.

The "cell group" structure was one of the factors contributing to the growth of the world's largest church, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, where Dr. Yonggi Cho is the pastor. That one congregation claims almost one million members.

They have large multiple simultaneous services at their campus, but the real life of that church functions through their cell groups.

At a meeting of the American Society for Church Growth, Karen Hurston presented a report on her book *Growing the World's Largest Church*. Her parents, John and Maxine Hurston, were missionaries for the Assemblies of God in Seoul, Korea. They worked with Cho in building the world's largest church. Karen Hurston grew up in that church, is now an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God, and worked on the staff of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul. In her report, she talked a little about the cell group structure, but she talked much more about visiting. That church has a very large staff of full-time, seminary trained, ordained pastors. Those pastors spend from one third to one half of their time visiting the members. When these pastors visit the members, they take the cell group leader along with them. Their pastoral visits are very focused. They start with questions about the members' prayer life, Bible study, ministry involvement, and personal life. Based on the answers to these questions, the pastor leads a brief Bible study focused on the specific needs of the members. Then they do some really serious praying. The cell group leaders learn from these pastors how to do a pastoral visit and when they visit the members on their own, without a pastor present, they follow the same pattern. The members see their pastors and their lay leaders doing this kind of disciple-building visits and when they visit with one another, without anyone else present, they still follow the same pattern. Thousands of church leaders from America have gone to Seoul for the Church Growth Seminars conducted by Cho and his staff. What some of them notice is the cell group structure. What others notice is the charismatic nature of the church: the tongue speaking, the healing services, etc. But according to Hurston, American church leaders have usually missed the key element: the disciple-building relationships in the pastoral visits, the visits by lay leaders, and the visits members have with one another. Hurston said that when leaders of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul have come to America, they have come away with the impression that "there is no *koinonia* in the American church."

My own research in Churches of Christ indicates that the judgment of these visitors from Korea would apply in Churches of Christ. When I conduct diagnostic studies in local congregations, we use a questionnaire that the members fill out. One of the questions is "How many close personal friends do you have in this congregation?" In most congregations we find that at least 10 percent of the members say that they have no close personal friends at all in the congregation they attend. In one large congregation that I studied, 36 percent of the members said that they had no close personal friends in that church. In addition, another five to 10 percent of the members usually say that they have just one or two close personal friends in the church. These people are at risk of becoming drop-outs according to research that I reported in my book *Why Churches Grow*. That study compared 50 new converts who were still faithful members with 50 new converts who had already dropped out of the church. The

two groups were matched statistically according to the length of time that they had attended church services and that gave each group an equal opportunity to make friends in the church. All of the people who reported having fewer than three friends in the church were in the drop-out category, while all who claimed more than six friends in the church were in the faithful convert category.

In those questionnaires used in diagnostic church growth studies, the next question is for those who say that they have any close personal friends in the congregation. It is "How many of these friends did you visit in the past 12 months?" The questionnaire defines "visiting" as "you went into their home, you had them into your home, you went out and did something together, or you at least talked to each other on the telephone regularly." Around 30 percent of the members say that they have close personal friends in the congregation they attend—but that they have not visited any of those friends in the past 12 months. They see them at the church building, but that is all.

The next question is for those who have close personal friends in the congregation and who visited those friends in the past 12 months. That question asks what they do on these visits. "Do you pray together, study the Bible, have shared devotional time, or talk to each other about spiritual things?" Around 50 percent of the members say that they have close personal friends in the congregation and that they visited them in the past 12 months, but they have only a secular relationship. They do not use any of their friendship/visiting time for any disciple-building activity.

Only 10 percent of the members have close personal friends in the congregation, visit those friends, and do anything of a religious nature during these visits. On the average, they report doing this less than once a month. That is what those Korean pastors were talking about when they said "The American church has no *koinonia*." In Churches of Christ and in most other religious groups in America today, church is a place where people come together as strangers and leave as strangers without their lives ever touching. The kind of cell groups that Cho uses in his church in Seoul help to solve that problem.

Since Elmer Towns and I are both former presidents of the American Society for Church Growth, we visit whenever we can at meetings of this group. In one of our conversations, Towns told me that a lot of pastors from the Liberty Baptist Churches (the kind of Baptist churches that look to Jerry Falwell for leadership) have attended the Church Growth Seminars conducted by Cho and his staff in Seoul, Korea. Most of them noticed the cell group structure. They came back and tried to plug that cell group structure into Liberty Baptist Churches. Towns said that they split virtually every one of those churches. Towns said that some Liberty Baptist pastors asked him what they should do. He replied, "Baptists are comfortable leading others to Christ in the same way that they were led to Christ—and that is through the Sunday School." He

suggested that they organize their small groups within the context of adult Bible classes and it worked. Not one of the congregations that followed that approach divided.

A growing number of Churches of Christ have recognized the need for small groups, but many of the small group ministries have been ineffective in developing relationships. Most of these small groups meet once a month or less and that just is not enough time together to build close relationships. A better approach is to organize small groups within the context of adult Bible classes. Members already get together once a week in these Bible classes. If they can then get together once a week for small group Bible study, they can do some really serious relationship building.

### **Use a Felt Need Approach To Make New Contacts**

There are a lot of non-members who will not accept your invitation to attend a Bible class or a worship service—even if a Sunday dinner is included. But some of these would come to a small group Bible study. Some have come far enough in their spiritual journey that they are ready for a text-based Bible study. Luke-Acts is a good place to start. Others can be reached better through a felt need approach. Start with a well-advertised seminar on Marriage Enrichment, Parenting, Adjusting to Divorce, Problems of Aging, Dealing with Depression, or some other topic where people already recognize a need in their lives. Make it clear that this is a church-sponsored event where they will hear Christ-centered, Bible-based teaching—but teaching focused on the felt need topic. You will get at least 10 times as many non-members to attend such a felt need seminar as would attend a traditional Gospel Meeting. But do not stop with the seminar. Invite the visitors to take part in follow-up study groups. Have some small groups ready for follow-up sessions. These should meet once a week for just three or four weeks. The members should be trained to focus on two things. First, get the visitors more deeply into God's word. Keep the discussion focused on what you have learned in your own Bible study that has helped you enrich your marriage or become better parents—or whatever the felt need topic might be. Show the visitors that the Bible is relevant and that Christ has answers for their lives. The second thing that the members should be trained to do is to get the visitors into relationships. Visit them in their homes. Invite them into your home. Bring them to Bible classes and worship services. It helps if the Bible class lessons and sermons following the felt need seminar are related to the topic of that seminar. In that way, visitors see the church as celebration, congregation, and cell—all focused on a need that they already recognize in their lives. When the follow-up Bible study on the felt need topic is finished, try to get the visitors into a text-based Bible study that goes on for a longer period of time. Try to get them into your Bible classes and worship assemblies. As you work with these non-members, look for signs of receptivity, i.e., asking questions about salvation or at least discussing salvation when

you bring it up. When you see that they are receptive, start an evangelistic study, i.e., a study focusing on the plan of salvation.

At this point, you will have gone beyond the celebration, congregation, and cell levels. You will have reached the level that some have called "one-on-one evangelism." Actually what works best is "two-on-one evangelism." Deal with one individual or one family at a time, but you do not have to do it by yourself. Two Christians working together make a great team for this kind of work. One team member should be someone who knows enough about the Bible and enough about evangelism to be an effective teacher. The other should be a Christian who is a relative or friend of the prospective convert. It is best for this other person to be as similar as possible to the prospective convert in every way—except that they will know a little more about the Bible than the prospective convert.<sup>1</sup>

### **Expand Relationships for New Converts**

One great advantage of doing personal evangelism with people who regularly participate in a small group Bible study is that after these people obey the gospel, they already have a support group, a circle of friends, the people in their small group Bible study. And when that small group is organized within the context of a more traditional Sunday morning or Wednesday evening Bible class, the new converts also have 30 to 60 people they know, or soon will know, on a first name basis. Such new converts are far less likely to drop out.

For a Bible class to be evangelistic, the total program of congregational activity should support evangelism. That includes a challenging adult Bible class curriculum. In my opinion, Churches of Christ in the United States need more ministers who have had significant training in Religious Education and who devote a significant amount of their time to work in this area. We need Ministers of Religious Education to help teachers and church leaders clarify the objectives they are trying to achieve, i.e., what they expect students to know, do, and think or feel at each age or grade level. We need Ministers of Religious Education to recruit and train teachers. However, very few Churches of Christ have Ministers of Religious Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Social scientists who have studied "source credibility" have identified two main factors: perceptions of *competence* and perceptions of *trustworthiness*. When a teacher obviously knows a lot more about the Bible than the prospective convert, that difference contributes to a perception of *competence* and that perception is important for changing beliefs. When the other member of the evangelistic team is very similar to the prospective convert, that similarity contributes to a perception of *trustworthiness* and that perception is important for changing values and attitudes. That kind of two-person evangelistic team has the greatest potential for success.

According to Lyle Schaller, Protestant churches in the United States and Canada generally follow the same pattern in regard to the development of the ministry staff. Churches start with a church planter, a ministry generalist who does a little bit of everything while the church is growing enough to support a second full-time minister. The second minister on the staff is usually a Minister of Religious Education. It is not until later that churches add ministers in such areas as Youth, Involvement, Counseling, Family Life, Children's Ministry, etc. Schaller said that the only exception that he knew of was in Churches of Christ where the second minister added to the staff is usually a youth minister. It may be that these other religious groups know something about church staffing that we have not yet learned.

For the past three years, I have been involved in a ministry study among Churches of Christ in the United States. I reported results of this study in several articles in *Church and Family*, a magazine published by the Institute for Church and Family at Harding University and in classes at the Harding University Bible Lectureship for 2002. This ministry study started with a questionnaire for all 25 of the degree-granting colleges and universities and the 34 non-degree granting schools of preaching serving this church constituency. In the fall of 2000, around 4,000 students were attending these schools and preparing for some kind of ministry. Around 1,000 of these were preparing for service as self-supported, vocational ministers. That left a total of around 3,000 who were preparing for church-supported ministry positions.

The second part of this ministry study involved questionnaires for all of these ministry students asking about their ministry plans. Youth Ministry was the most popular option with 27.0 percent selecting that as their first choice and 49.7 listing that as either their first choice or as an acceptable option. But there are not that many youth ministry positions available.

Among "mainstream" Churches of Christ, the greatest need is for preachers in the smaller churches where they are the only full-time church-supported ministers. There are 3,000 such positions. The second-greatest need is for preachers in larger congregations where there may be one or more other ministers on the staff. Over 77 percent of the available positions are for preachers. But over half of the students (55.5 percent) did not list preaching as a first choice or even as an acceptable alternative.

Among "mainstream" Churches of Christ, there are 4,477 positions for preachers (3,000 in small churches, 700 in transitional churches, and 777 in large churches). In addition, there are 800 youth ministry positions and 250 positions for all other full-time ministers (education, involvement, evangelism, counseling, etc.). The ministry goals of students do not match the ministry needs of the churches. Most of these students will serve in ministry positions where preaching, religious education, youth ministry, involvement, evangelism, counseling, and everything else are included in their job

description. In order to provide the kind of ministers churches need, the schools preparing these ministers should recognize that all ministers are ministers of the word. Bible text courses, therefore, should be at the core of their curriculum. Preaching, religious education, youth ministry, involvement, evangelism, counseling, and many other ministry courses should also be a part of the curriculum. Some of these things may seem to be somewhat removed from the topic of "Using Bible Classes for Evangelism," but I believe that all of these things are related. Evangelistic Bible classes do not exist in isolation. They must be a part of a church whose mission is clearly focused on disciple-making and disciple-building instruction.

Evangelistic Bible classes do not have to require that every class member be a personal evangelism worker or teacher who gets the credit for making disciples. In his book on *Team Evangelism*, Larry Gilbert, a Baptist writer, says that 10 percent of Baptists have the necessary gifts to be effective "soul-winners," but every Baptist can be an effective "witness." Gilbert advocates what he calls "stair-step evangelism." One person makes the initial contact, develops the relationship, and tells the prospective convert as much as he can. Another person—perhaps several others—take the prospective convert up the next steps. I believe that what Gilbert says about the Baptist Church applies to Churches of Christ. Probably 10 percent of our members have the gifts needed for success as "soul-winners," but only one percent are doing it (the same figure that Gilbert finds among the Baptists). I am sure that all of our members could invite friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors to attend Bible classes and worship assemblies—and even take the visitors home for Sunday dinner. Any of our members could make a 15-minute follow-up visit with someone who has attended our Bible classes or worship assemblies. All Christians could take part in small group Bible studies and invite others to attend. All of us could attend felt need seminars where we meet non-members and invite them to attend follow-up study groups. All of us would build relationships and look for signs of receptivity. All of us who knew enough to obey the gospel in the first place already know enough to tell others why we did what we did. That may not bring non-members to the point of conversion, but it may take them one step along the way. After that, we could get them to study with someone else and be present as for support. It is not essential that we all be involved in evangelism in the same way, but we must all be involved in evangelism in some way. That is what it takes to have a Bible class that is really evangelistic.

### **Keep the Focus on Christ**

Thus far, this discussion has been focused on the medium, not the message--the delivery system, not the cargo. The message is far more important. For a Bible class to be evangelistic, the lessons must be Christ-centered, Bible-based, and life-related. That must also be true of the public preaching, the instruction in small Bible study

groups, and the instruction in our personal evangelism. That ought to be obvious to all students of the Bible, but it is not. Far too many engage in misguided, incomplete, and ineffective preaching, teaching, and personal evangelism.

### **The Limits of a Propositional Approach**

In some congregations, the approach to disciple-making and disciple-building instruction is primarily propositional. The implied message these congregations send to prospective converts is "We must debate all essential propositions. If you win the debate, we will join your church. If we win the debate, you must join our church." Propositions, of course, are important. In order to avoid being misunderstood and written up in the *Heretic Detector*, let me make it clear that I believe that Absolute Truth is possible, knowable, and propositional.<sup>2</sup> But when our instruction focuses primarily on propositions, we produce modern Pharisees rather than real disciples of Jesus Christ.

Some assume that a teacher does not teach unless and until the student learns. If the prospective convert decides not to obey the gospel, it is the fault of the teacher who must have left something out or said something in the wrong way. This view assumes that people are like robots or computers. If we feed in the correct data, we get the desired results. Most of the churches where this is the accepted view have a very low net growth rate in regard to adult conversions. They have few converts and most of those converts soon dropped out of the church.

### **The Limits of a Motivational Approach**

In many congregations, the approach to disciple-making, disciple-building instruction is primarily motivational. It is a salesmanship model. It includes a cognitive dimension of teaching, but it adds a strong motivational element. The assumption is that people are controlled by motivation as much as by information. Most of the books on personal evangelism were "borrowed" from books on high-pressure salesmanship. They even use the sales jargon: "Finding Prospects," "Getting Your Foot in the Door," "Establishing a Need," "Dealing with Objections," and "Closing the Sale." The teaching and selling models of evangelism both assume that conversion is something that Christians do to non-members. The Christian evangelist is active, but the prospect is passive. When preachers and personal evangelism workers held this view, they were perceived to be like "salesmen selling a product." The perception of

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<sup>2</sup> Propositional truth is the kind of truth that can be stated in ordinary language in the form of a debate proposition that can be affirmed or denied.

the interaction was that it was primarily one-way communication. The only time the evangelist asked the prospect a question was when the evangelist was trying to trap the prospect on the horns of a dilemma. Churches where this view of evangelism prevailed baptized a lot of people, but they had a very high drop-out rate and thus their net growth rate was only moderate.

When the emphasis is primarily on motivation, we produce a lot of drop-outs. The result is like planting seed in shallow soil, where one "hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away" (Mat. 13:20-21).

The teaching and selling models of evangelism assume that the Christian evangelist controls the outcome. The prospect is like a puppet. If we pull the right motivational strings, the puppet will do what we want the puppet to do. The way we talk about evangelism often betrays this view. We use the active voice when we talk about the role of the Christian evangelist as we should. But we use the passive voice when we talk about the role of the convert. We do not ask "When did you convert?" Instead, we ask "Who converted you?" The King James Version of the Bible—reflecting Calvinistic theology--often uses the passive voice to talk about conversion, but the original Greek and Hebrew text do not. The Bible never uses the passive voice in talking about the role of the convert. Conversion is something that people do, not something that we do to them.

### **The Need for a Relational Approach**

The goal of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction is that Christ might be formed in the hearts and lives of those we seek to influence. We want the Christ who lives in us and in the gospel message to be formed in others. This happens in response to a Person, not a proposition or some kind of motivation.

This view of evangelism includes a cognitive dimension and motivation, but no manipulation. Control is assumed to rest with the prospective convert. It is a conversation in which each seeks to understand how the other sees things and why. The persuasive power is assumed to be in the message we share about Jesus Christ, not in any kind of manipulation.

There are some passages in the Bible that are impossible to understand from the perspective of a propositional or motivational view of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction. Consider first the conversation Jesus had with the Pharisees who refused to believe on him. In these passages, Jesus indicated that some people *cannot* believe.

- "I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, *because you have no room for my word*" (John 8:37).
- "Why is my language not clear to you? Because *you are unable to hear what I say*" (John 8:43).
- "He who belongs to God hears what God says. *The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God*" (John 8:47).

This language makes it appear that people are divided into two categories—even before they hear the gospel. The same idea is expressed in several other passages.

- When Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in Pisidian Antioch, Luke tells us that "*all who were appointed for eternal life believed*" (Acts 13:48).
- When Paul was beginning his mission work in Corinth, God appeared to him in a vision. In that vision, God said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because *I have many people in this city*" (Acts 18:9-10). When God said this, few people in Corinth had even heard the gospel message. Fewer had believed. Fewer still had been baptized. But God still claimed them as His own people. God knew that there were honest seekers in Corinth who would believe and obey as soon as they heard the gospel proclaimed.
- In Romans 8:28-30, Paul wrote about how "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Calvin understood this to be proof of *particular election*. He believed that God predestined some individuals to be saved and others to be lost—regardless of what they did. In Churches of Christ, we have rejected this doctrine of particular election, but we should not reject the doctrine of general election. There really are two categories of people. When honest seekers hear the gospel, they will believe, obey, and be saved. When others hear the gospel, they will not believe because they *cannot* believe. They will not repent because they *cannot* repent. They are like the people discussed in Hebrews 6:4-6. It is *impossible* to bring them to repentance. This being the case, the essential task of evangelism is to find the honest seekers who will be receptive.
- In 1 Corinthians 1:18, the apostle Paul wrote, "For the message of the cross is foolishness *to those who are perishing*, but *to us who are being saved* it is the power of God." That is why Paul, as he preached in Corinth, kept the focus on Jesus Christ. "Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumblingblock to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but *to those whom God has called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-23). That is why Paul preached the way he did in Corinth. "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with

eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor. 2:1-4). When honest seekers hear the story of Jesus Christ, they respond by becoming disciples of Christ. When others hear this same story, they refuse to believe and obey. In either case, the Christian evangelist has done what God commanded.

There were, of course, propositional and a motivational elements in Paul's preaching, but his emphasis was on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, Paul wrote, "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men." But Paul's persuasion was not like that of the rhetoricians in Corinth. Paul said, "We do not peddle the word of God for profit" (2 Cor. 2:17). He also said, "We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God" (2 Cor. 4:2).

Paul's approach to evangelism is set forth in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life." In Paul's view, there were two classes of people: one being saved and the other perishing. Honest seekers were attracted by the beauty of the Christ who lived in Paul and in the message he preached. Others found Paul and his message about Jesus to be "the smell of death."

In 2 Corinthians 3:3, Paul makes reference to the tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. Then he talked about how Moses' face glowed after he had been with God on Mt. Sinai. His face glowed so much that the Israelites could not look steadily at his face and he had to wear a veil (2 Cor. 3:7). But then in 2 Corinthians 3:14, Paul uses that veil to represent the unbelief of the Jews: "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read." Then, Paul returns to this symbol of the veil in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

The veil of unbelief is not removed by propositional debates showing all the philosophical proofs for the existence of God. The Bible does not start with all of those arguments. It starts with the affirmation that "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Then it goes on to tell the story of all that God did to save

human beings from sin. The heart of that story is "Jesus Christ and him crucified." In 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Paul explains how the veil of unbelief is removed. "But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

### **Application**

It has not been my purpose in this discussion to suggest that we neglect propositional or motivational instruction in our disciple-making, disciple-building efforts. Instead, my purpose has been to urge that we put the primary emphasis on a relational approach. People do not become like Christ in response to mere propositions or motivation. We become like Christ in response to Jesus as a Person—the only Person who fully reveals to us the nature and heart of God.

We should always keep the focus on Jesus Christ, whether we are teaching a Bible class lesson, preaching a sermon, or engaging in personal evangelism. Whatever we are teaching, from Genesis through Revelation, should be related to the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The purpose of our instruction should be to show people what God is like so that we can, in some small way, become more and more like God. This requires balance in our preaching, teaching, and evangelism—but Christ must be at the center.

A personal example may help to illustrate the importance of balance. I was a debater in high school. Later I taught and coached debate. When I started preaching, most of my sermons sounded like the first affirmative address in a debate (which is not as bad as some preachers I know who always sound like they are giving the last negative rebuttal). I probably used this approach because—given my results on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator—I prefer to deal with the external world through what Carl Jung called the "Thinking" style of communication. When I was in my mid-20s, I learned to take "Intuition," my dominant function that is normally introverted, and use it for preaching. I was well into my 30s before I learned how to use the "Feeler" style of communication in order to motivate audiences. And I was around 40 before I began learning how to use the "Sensing" style of communication to preach practical "How To" sermons. There are 16 different patterns of communication style preferences identified by the MBTI. I now use the MBTI in preaching classes in order to teach preachers how to preach to the whole church and not just to the people who share their psychological type preferences. That means using all four of the Jungian communication styles: Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling. Whenever I have a chance to talk to teachers, I make the same plea: teach students in their style rather than in your own. Since you

usually have all types of people in your class, use a balanced approach. Use Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling in your teaching.

The need for balance is one of the main reasons that I now stress narrative preaching in the preaching classes that I teach at Harding University. Narrative preaching communicates in all four of the Jungian communication styles at the same time, although in different ways. But narrative preaching also focuses, or *should* focus on the nature of God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Even if the sermon is a narration about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the focus can and should be on the nature of God, i.e., 1) God is good in what He provides, 2) God keeps His word—even in warnings such as "You will surely die," 3) God saves us through the "seed of women" who bruised the head of Satan, etc.

Keep the focus on Jesus Christ in your Bible class lessons, sermons, and personal evangelism. That is the most important part of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction that influences others in such a way that the Christ who lives in us and in the gospel message will be formed in them. This ultimate purpose of evangelism and edification cannot be achieved by manipulation.

In conclusion, let me suggest that it might be wise for us to reconsider the fish hook as a symbol for evangelism. When Jesus called his first disciples to be "fishers of men" (Mat. 4:19), the kind of fishing that they understood was done with nets. Those nets brought fish in alive. Many of us who fish today use hooks with sharp points that may injure or even kill the fish. We use bait to cover the sharp point and trick the fish. We may use artificial bait to deceive the fish. The fish hook is a good symbol for the manipulative evangelism used by cults, but the net is a better symbol for the kind of disciple-making, disciple-building instruction that we should use.

