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Evangelism in the Early Church

William C. Weinrich

Martin Hengel begins the summation of his article on the origins of the Christian mission by remarking, “the history and the theology of early Christianity are mission-history and mission-theology.”¹ This implies that one cannot understand the history of the Church (whether early, medieval, or modern) or the very nature of the Church without taking into consideration — as a central, even essential concern — the mission activity of the Church. To reflect upon “mission” or upon “evangelism” is to reflect upon the Church itself, for the act of mission or of evangelism is not accidental or coincidental to the Church — like the activity of golf, tennis or horsebackriding is to this or that individual — but the act of mission belongs to the very “core” of what it means to be the Church.

The question of the Church and its mission is forcing itself upon the Christian community, and it can not be ignored. The rising importance of nations and peoples traditionally non-Christian — such as China, India, Japan, and much of Africa — is bringing home the fact that Christians are a minority of the world’s population. And more ominously, the traditional bulwarks of western Christian culture — Europe, the United States — are without question reverting to what Christopher Dawson has termed “a new kind of paganism.”² The underpinning of ideals and mores, engendered by the Christian gospel, upon which modern Western cultures were constructed is showing massive fissures. The bowels of Western civilization are being exposed and they are no longer Christian. The manifestations are everywhere about us: the demand for state-supported abortion, declining church membership, increasing Church-State confrontations (i.e. the question of women’s ordination in the Church of Sweden, the abortion question in Norway). The Church no longer enjoys the luxury of spontaneous general acceptance. It will increasingly have to proclaim its way, explain its way, and even suffer its way into the hearts of a hostile world. We are, let there be no doubt, returning to a pre-Constantinian era in which the Church is an outcast society whose sole support is the Gospel, whose sole comfort is hope in the resurrection.³ If such is the situation, a study of the mission endeavor of the early Church may be beneficial and instructive.

1. The "Why" of Evangelism

The Church evangelized because it had to. This assertion is to be understood in the strictest possible sense. The early Church did not begin the work of evangelism simply because Christ commanded it (cf. Matt. 28:19); mission was not simple obedience to a high authority. Nor did the Church evangelize out of a sense of gratitude for God's love, out of a sense of responsibility in light of the last judgment, or out of a sense of concern for fallen man's destiny — although these may be considered "emotive causations" for the Church's mission activity, as we shall note below. Rather, the Church evangelized because it could not do otherwise, and it could not do otherwise because in the Holy Spirit the Church had been taken up into the very activity of God in Christ whereby the final purposes of God are fulfilled.

The early Church did not understand mission as a merely human action done in response to the good things God had done. Mission was perceived christologically — as God acting for the salvation of fallen mankind, but God acting only in union with mankind. The early Church understood mission to be the very expression of the Lordship of Christ in the Holy Spirit. But it is important to note where that Lordship of Christ is manifested and where that Lordship is instituted. Christ is Lord in His coming in lowly servanthood to sinful man, a servanthood culminating in and summed up in His atoning death and ushering forth in the life of resurrection. However, this ministry of lowly servanthood even unto death wherein Christ's Lordship is manifested and established is worldwide in its dimensions. When Jesus entered Jerusalem in lowly pomp, the prophecy of Zechariah was being fulfilled (Matt. 21:5): "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your King comes to you; triumphant and victorious is He, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9). It is, however, the following verse which sets this event in context: "... and He shall command peace to the nations; His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:10). In the light of this truth we may say two things: (1) Jesus' ministry is not contained temporally or geographically but rather contains in itself universal mission, and (2) the mission of the Church is nothing other than Jesus' mission in its universal proportions.

This point is nicely illustrated by the New Testament's application of Isaiah 49:6: "... I will give You as a light to the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (cf.

Is. 42:6). In the New Testament Jesus is expressly called the Light for the Gentiles (Luke 2:32) or the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). In Jesus' ministry of death and resurrection the purposes of God for all nations were being brought to fruition. However, in Acts 13:46 the words of Isaiah 49:6 are explicitly quoted by Paul to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch and are applied to Paul and his compatriots, who now turn their missionary endeavors to the Gentiles. Here Paul and his fellows are the light of the nations. This is not to be so construed that Paul is a light alongside the light of Jesus. Rather, Paul is *in loco Christi* ("in the place of Christ")⁴ carrying out the very ministry which is Jesus' own ministry. Thus Paul's mission to the nations is nothing other than the ministry of Jesus to the world. That is, it is essentially God's coming to the world in Christ, for that is the *only* mode of God's salvific work toward the world. God the Father sends Christ to the world. That is how God works; He works salvifically in no other way. To say that the Church is sent into the world is to say that *today* God is coming in Christ to the world (cf. II Cor. 6:2). This explains Paul's insistence that he had no other message than that of Christ crucified. His ministry *as* the ministry of the Crucified One, who is now the living Lord, must be characterized by the message of the cross.⁵ There is no other divine ministry than that of Christ's cross, for that is how God works to establish His Kingdom.

This understanding of the Church's universal mission as nothing other than Christ's universal mission was possessed also by the Church Fathers. A reference to Origen will suffice. The pagan polemicist, Celsus, wondered why it was that if God wished to illuminate the world, He sent the Spirit of life only into one corner of the world, namely, Palestine. Origen (c. 230 A.D.) replies that it was proper for God to send His Son to those people whom He had prepared for Christ's coming but that this coming occurred at a time when the Word was about to be sent into the whole world. Origen then continues (*contra Celsum* 6.79):

And therefore there was no need that there should everywhere exist many bodies, and many spirits like Jesus, in order that the whole world of men might be enlightened by the Word of God. For the one Word was enough, having arisen as the "Sun of righteousness" to send forth from Judea His coming rays into the soul of all who were willing to receive Him. But if anyone desires to see many bodies filled with a divine Spirit, similar to the one Christ, ministering to the salvation of men everywhere, let him take note of those who teach the Gospel of Jesus in all lands in soundness of

doctrine and uprightness of life, and who are themselves termed "christ's" by the Holy Scriptures in the passage, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do not My prophets any harm."⁶

This christological perspective fundamentally explains the "why" of the Church's mission. Mission is not the Church's work done in response to a prior action by God (this would make mission essentially a human work), but mission is God's work for which and to which the Church has been called.⁷ However, in that God calls *men* to the work of mission, one may appropriately speak of human motives to mission, what we termed above "emotive causations." Two such motives may briefly be mentioned:⁸ (1) No doubt many Christians, freed from the oppressive tyranny of guilt and released from the baseness of pagan idolatry, were motivated by a sense of gratitude to God. Clement of Alexandria (c. 210 A.D.) gives vivid expression to his gratitude for release from sin and death (*Protrep.* 12):

The Lord . . . clothing Himself with flesh — O divine mystery!
— vanquished the serpent and enslaved the tyrant death;
and, most marvelous of all, man that had been deceived by
pleasure, and bound fast by corruption, had his hands
loosed, and was set free. O mystic wonder! The Lord was laid
low, and man rose up . . . And though God needs nothing, let
us render to Him the grateful recompense of a thankful heart
and piety.

That this sense of gratitude could motivate to the task of evangelism is shown by the following passage from Pseudo-Justin's *De Monarchia*: "It is the part of a lover of man, or rather of a lover of God, to remind men who have neglected it of that which they ought to know" (*de monarchia* 1). (2) Firmly believing that Christ was the sole instrument of God for the salvation of the world (cf. Acts 4:12), the early Christians were also motivated by their concern for those who, not having heard of the Savior, were in danger of losing their souls. Justin Martyr (c. 150 A.D.) explicitly states that he writes his so-called *Second Apology* in order that the readers might be converted (*2 Apol.* 15). Tertullian (c. 210 A.D.), writing to Scapula, the proconsul of Carthage, remarks (*ad Scap.* 1):

It is peculiar to Christians alone to love those that hate them. Therefore, mourning over your ignorance, and having compassion on your human error, and looking on that future of which every day shows threatening signs, necessity is laid upon us to come forward in this way that we may set before you the truths you will not listen to openly.

Similarly Clement of Alexandria (*Protrep.* 9): “Do you not fear, and hasten to learn from Him — that is, hasten to salvation — dreading wrath, loving grace, eagerly striving after the hope set before us, that you may shun the judgment threatened?”

2. The “Who” of Evangelism

The rapid expansion of the Christian faith is itself testimony to the fact that evangelism was the task of every Christian. As we shall see below, every facet of Christian life served the missionary purpose. Witnessing to the Gospel was not the work just of professional, full-time missionaries. Because all Christians were baptized into Christ, all Christians were taken up into the missionary endeavor.

(a) *Apostles*. According to Acts 1:8 the disciples of Jesus were to witness from Jerusalem to the end of the earth. In fact, little is known of their missionary endeavors or even where they evangelized. Eusebius (c. 330 A.D.) records a tradition that the disciples cast lots to determine where they were to go: “Thomas obtained by lot Parthia, Andrew Scythia, John Asia . . . Peter seems to have preached to the Jews of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, and Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia, and finally he came to Rome” (*H.E.* 3.1.1). The *Acts of Thomas* maintain that Judas Thomas went to India. It is difficult to assess such traditions, but they do bear witness to the primary function of an apostle, to establish churches through a traveling missionary activity. The best example of this activity, of course, is Paul whose travels and work are well-known to us through the New Testament.

(b) *Wandering missionaries*. Especially in the first and second centuries there were missionaries who believed themselves called by God to the task of evangelism but who do not seem to have been connected with any one congregation. These roving preachers did not stay long in any one place and usually were supported by gifts from host congregations.⁹ Perhaps it was this type of ministry that Philip executed (Acts 8:4). Be that as it may, the *Didache* (c. 95 A.D.) gives explicit instructions about how certain “apostles,” who traveled from place to place, were to be received. Such “apostles,” who “speak the word of the Lord,” are to be received as though they were the Lord (*Did.* 4:1; 11:4). They are to be maintained with the first-fruits of wine, grain, and animals (*Did.* 13:3), but they are not to be allowed to stay more than one day, two at the most. If they stay three days, they show themselves to be false prophets (*Did.* 11:5). Such “apostles” appear to have been full-time wandering missionaries, but unattached to any congregation. Only the message of their preaching and their

conduct verified them as authentic or unauthentic (*Did.* 11:2, 8-12).

In the third century Origen could still speak of such itinerant preachers: "Christians do not neglect, as far as in them lies, to take measures to disseminate their doctrine throughout the whole world. Some of them, accordingly, have made it their business to wander not only from city to city but even from town to town and village to village in order to make converts to God" (*contra Celsum* 3.9).

A congregation by itself could enter upon the missionary enterprise by sending out "apostles" of its own. The congregation of Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3), and it was to Antioch that Paul and Barnabas returned to give account of their success to the assembled congregation (Acts 14:26-27). Antioch certainly was not unique in this respect. There were, therefore, wandering missionaries who were in the "employ" of local congregations.

(c) *Local ministers.* Not only itinerant ministers evangelized. The local clergy also helped to spread the faith. In his letter to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, Ignatius (c. 115 A.D.) exhorts: "Press on in your race and exhort all men that they might be saved" (*Ign. Poly.* 1:2). Forty years later (c. 157 A.D.) when Polycarp was being brought to his martyrdom the pagan populace testified to Polycarp's missionary zeal: "This is he, the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, he who teaches many not to sacrifice or worship the gods" (*Mart. Poly.* 12:2). It is known that Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.), bishop of Lyons (southern France), was active in evangelizing the Celts who lived in his district. At the beginning of his great work, *Against the Heresies*, Irenaeus apologizes that he has been so accustomed to using the "barbarous dialect" of the Celts that he has forgotten how to write correct Greek (*adv. Haer.* 1. pref.).

(d) *Philosopher-theologians.* A not uncommon phenomenon of the ancient world was that of the wandering philosopher who would present his views in open-air lectures, and should enough interest be elicited, he might establish a "school" at his place of sojourn. The early Church also had its peripatetic philosopher-theologians. From the *Martyrdom of Justin* (2) we learn that during his sojourn in Rome Justin Martyr "imparted the words of Truth" to any who would come to his dwelling. The Syrian, Tatian, was a student of Justin's and after Justin's death formed his own "school" (*Iren. adv. Haer.* 1.28).¹⁰ Perhaps the best example of a wandering missionary-theologian is Pantaenus. Pantaenus (c. 180 A.D.), converted from Stoicism, is said to have

travelled as far as India preaching the Gospel (Eus. *H.E.* 5.10).¹¹ Later he was to return to Alexandria and establish the famous Catechetical School there.

(e) "*Common*" Christians. Adolf von Harnack was, no doubt, correct when he wrote: "The most numerous and successful missionaries of the Christian religion were not the professional teachers but Christians themselves, in virtue of their loyalty and courage."¹² The paucity of historical materials concerning daily, informal evangelism is, therefore, all the more regrettable. That such evangelism, however, went on is clear from the testimony of the second century pagan Celsus (c. 180 A.D.; Orig. *contra Celsum* 3.55):

We see, indeed, in private houses workers in wool and leather, and fullers, and persons of the most uninstructed and rustic character, not venturing to utter a word in the presence of their elders and wiser masters; but when they get hold of the children privately, and certain women as ignorant as themselves, they pour forth wonderful statements, to the effect that they ought not to give heed to their father and to their teachers, but should obey them.

The cynical opposition of Celsus cannot hide the fact that simple Christians were actively evangelizing their fellows wherever they might be — in the synagogues, in the streets, in the marketplaces, in the homes, during business contacts, in the courts, in the army. As an illustrative example an incident recounted by Tertullian may be mentioned. A Christian soldier refused to wear the victory garland, feeling it improper for a Christian to wear a crown which bore many pagan associations. Summoned before the tribune the soldier declared himself a Christian and was punished by dishonorable discharge from the army and, at the writing of Tertullian, awaited in prison his martyrdom (*de corona* 1).

Von Harnack devotes a special section to the activity of women in the missionary endeavor of the early Church,¹³ and without question women played an important role in the Church's expansion. Acts tells us that Christians assembled in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); apparently Christians in Laodicea met in the house of a certain Nympha (Col. 4:15); Dorcas was known for her charity (Acts 9:36-39); Priscilla was an important aid to Paul (Acts 18:2; Rom. 16:3: "fellow-worker"); Philip had four daughters who prophesied; Paul mentions one Phoebe, a deaconess at Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). The second century apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* has as its

heroine a woman, Thecla, who supposedly was converted by Paul at Iconium. She is said to have baptized herself and to have undertaken the work of evangelism, and she is even called an *apostole*.

What was true of orthodox communions was true also of heretical communities. Two of the leading figures of Montanism were women, the prophetesses Prisca and Maximilla. Speaking of women in Gnostic communities Tertullian writes: "How wanton are even the women of these heretics! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures and maybe even to baptize" (*de prae. haer.* 41).

3. The "Whom" of Evangelism

Since Christ's mission of love, his Lordship, is universal in dimension, men and women of all tongues, lands, races, social classes and ages were addressed with the Gospel. Through its references to various Christian faithful the New Testament reveals the inclusiveness of its fellowship: Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10:1); the jailer in Philippi (Acts 16:33); Onesimus, a slave (Philemon); Dionysius the Areopagite, an intellectual (Acts 17:34); Luke, a physician (Col. 4:14); Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers (Acts 18:3); Erastus, a city treasurer (Rom. 16:23); Zenas, a lawyer (Titus 3:13); Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:43); Lydia, a dealer in purple goods (Acts 16:14); Sergius Paulus, a proconsul (Acts 13:2); Crispus, a leader of a synagogue (Acts 18:8); those connected with high society, such as "the saints . . . of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22; cf. 1:13), the Ethiopian eunuch, a court minister to the queen of the Ethiopians (Acts 8:27), Manaen, a court member of Herod the Tetrarch (Acts 13:1), and the "prominent" men and women in Thessalonika and Beroea (Acts 17:4,12).¹⁴

It is no wonder that Pliny the Younger (c. 100 A.D.) wrote the Emperor Trajan that Christians comprised "many from every class" (*multi omnis ordinis*). The second and third centuries present a picture of the same social and cultural inclusiveness as does the New Testament. In the Octavius of Minucius Felix the pagan Caecilius speaks of the Christians as "unskilled in learning, strangers to literature" (*Octav.* 5), as "reprobate, unlawful, . . . unskilled and women from the lowest dregs . . . wretched . . . half-naked" (*Octav.* 8). In the third century Origen can admit that the "simple and ignorant" still outnumber the more intelligent (*contra Celsum* 1.27). The pagan polemicist Celsus often scathingly refers to the low social status of most Christians: "only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception,

and slaves, and women, and children" (*contra Celsum* 3.49). Evelpistus, a slave of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, was martyred along with Justin Martyr (*Mart. Just.* 4.3). Two of the best-known female martyrs were slaves, Blandina (*Eus. H.E.* 5.1.17-19) and Felicitas (*Pass. Perp.* 15).

But not all Christians were of low estate.¹⁵ We know that one of the Lyons Martyrs, Alexander, was a physician from Phrygia (*Eus. H.E.* 5.1.49). Tertullian testifies that Christians inhabited the military (*Apol.* 37).¹⁶ Eusebius tells the story of the Militene Legion which was saved from thirst by the prayers of its Christian members (*Eus. H.E.* 5.5). Hermas (c. 140 A.D.) often speaks of the rich in Christian communities, often, unfortunately, to attack their lack of charity (*Herm. Vis.* 3.6.5-6; *Sim.* 8.9.1; 9.30.4-5). There were apparently enough rich persons among the Christians of Alexandria for it became a pastoral problem. Some of the well-to-do listeners of Clement of Alexandria worried that wealth itself was a hindrance to heaven. Clement wrote a homily on Mark 10:17-31, "Who Is the Rich Man That Shall Be Saved?" to respond to this concern. Some heretical Christians were likewise wealthy. Perhaps the best example is Marcion (c. 140 A.D.) who is said to have given the sum of 200,000 sesterces to the Church at Rome.

It did not take long before the Christian faith permeated even the highest levels of society and government, non-Roman and Roman alike. Eusebius reports of a correspondence between Jesus and the King of Edessa, Abgar (*Eus. H.E.* 1.13.1-22). The legendary correspondence anticipates events at the end of the second century when Abgar IX, King of Edessa from 179-186, became the first Christian king of that kingdom. From Hippolytus (c. 200 A.D.) we learn that the favorite concubine of Emperor Commodus (180-192), Marcia, was a Christian and was even able to use her influence to intercede successfully on behalf of fellow-believers who had been condemned to the mines of Sardinia (*Philos.* 9.12.11). The wife of Emperor Diocletian (284-304), Prisca, as well as his daughter, Valeria, were won over to Christianity.

In light of this pervasive expansion of Christianity it was not simply rhetorical exaggeration when Tertullian wrote at the end of the second century: "we are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you — cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, palace, senate, forum — we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods" (*Apol.* 37).

4. The "How" of Evangelism

Evangelism was the central activity of the Church and was the

final purpose for all the labors of the Church. Virtually everything about the Church was a missionary instrument. We list below only a select few of the means Christians used to further the Gospel.

(a) The evangelist Mark sums up Jesus' ministry as a "preaching the Gospel" (1:14). So also from Jesus' command to go into all the world it is clear that the continuing presence of Jesus with his disciples is given expression by their *preaching* to the nations (Matt. 28:19). Paul is pre-eminent in the New Testament in this regard, for he considered all mission work as fundamentally a preaching of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23). It was no different in post-New Testament periods, as Eusebius testifies. Speaking of evangelistic activity in the second century, he writes (Eus. *H.E.* 3.37):

These earnest disciples of great men built on the foundations of the churches everywhere laid by the apostles, spreading the message still further and sowing the saving seed of the Kingdom of Heaven far and wide through the entire world. Very many of the disciples of the time, their hearts smitten by the word of God with ardent passion for true philosophy, first fulfilled the Savior's command by distributing their possessions among the needy; then, leaving their homes behind, they carried out the work of evangelists, ambitious to preach to those who had never yet heard the message of the faith and to give them the inspired gospels in writing.

(b) The world of Rome was in many ways a banal and sensuous world wherein disrespect for life was shown by immoral, hedonistic behavior. In such a context the impact which the *purity of life and high ethical standards* of the Christians had upon the pagan world is not to be underestimated. Tatian testified that the purity of life which Christians led was one reason for his becoming a Christian (*Orat.* 29). Justin Martyr speaks of the converting thrust of Christian behavior (1 *Apol* 16):

He [Christ] has not wished us to imitate the wicked, but rather by our patience and meekness to draw all men from shame and evil desires. This we can show in the case of many who were once on your [pagan] side but have turned from the ways of violence and tyranny, overcome by observing the consistent lives of their neighbors, or noting the strange patience of their injured acquaintances, or experiencing the way they did business with them.

Examples could be multiplied, but the words of the pagan physician Galen (c. 150 A.D.) say it all (*de sententiis politiae Platonicae*):

Most men cannot follow a chain of demonstrative reasoning, and therefore need to be taught in parables. So in our time we see those who are called Christians gathering their faith from parables; and yet sometimes they do just the same thing as the genuine philosophers; for we can all see with our own eyes that they despise death, and further that they are led by modesty to shrink from carnal lusts; for there are among them men and women who have maintained unbroken chastity throughout their lives. There are even those who, by their self-discipline and self-control, and by their ardent desire for virtue, have advanced so far that they are not in any way inferior to the genuine philosophers.

(c) Christians proclaimed the message that in Christ sin and death were overcome. But, if real, this victory was not just to be asserted; it had to be demonstrated. Authenticity is a *sine qua non* for every evangelist, and nowhere did the early Christians demonstrate the authenticity of their convictions more convincingly than during persecution and *martyrdom*. In his *Second Apology* Justin Martyr speaks of his seeing Christians "fearless of death and of all other things which are counted fearful" and remarks that such steadfastness demonstrates the goodness of the Christian: "For what sensual or intemperate man . . . could welcome death that he might be deprived of his enjoyments" (2 *Apol.* 12). The Acts of the Martyrs are replete with instances of Christians, both simple and of high social rank, making bold confession in the face of hostile judges. One might think of the slave girl Blandina, who in the midst of tortures continued the simple confession, "I am a Christian; we do nothing to be ashamed of" (Eus. *H.E.* 5.1.19). Or we might mention the slave girl Felicitas, who when asked by her prison guard how she would be able to endure the pain of martyrdom, replied: "What I suffer now I suffer by myself. But then another will be inside me who will suffer for me, just as I shall be suffering for him" (*Pass. Perp.* 15). Or one may think of Apollonius, who is said by Eusebius to have been "one of the most distinguished of the Christians of his time in learning and philosophy." When told that he must die, he answered: "I have been glad to live, but I have not been afraid of death because of my love of life. There is nothing more precious than life — that is, eternal life — which is the immortality of the soul that has lived a good life on earth" (*Mart. Apoll.* 30; see also Eus. *H.E.* 5.21). Such steadfastness had its effect upon the pagan viewer and could lead him to inquire about the Christian faith. Tertullian ends his address to Scapula, Proconsul of Carthage,

with the assertion that Christian martyrdom had in it the power of Christian expansion (*ad Scapulam* 5.4):

For all who witness the noble patience of its martyrs, struck with misgivings, are inflamed with desire to examine into the matter in question; and as soon as they come to know the truth, they straightway enroll themselves its [Christianity's] disciples.

(d) H. M. Gwatkin in his *Early Church History*¹⁷ remarks that in the Gentile world of the Roman Empire every relation of life was corrupted by slavery. The aristocratic male was, socially, the only true free man. It was impossible for the slave to move up significantly; women were kept in lifelong tutelage to fathers, husbands, and even sons; children were totally dependent upon their fathers, who had literally the power of life and death. It is difficult to overestimate the pull Christianity had for the oppressed and underprivileged. The words of Paul are well-known: "In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28). It was not that the Christian faith destroyed distinctions and legitimate order but that it perceived all persons in their highest dignity. Several New Testament epistles (such as Ephesians, Colossians, and I Peter) speak of the *mutual love and service* that husband and wife are to render to one another, that master and servant are to render to one another, that children are to render to their parents and parents to their children. Such an ethic of love toward the other had great impact on the heathen world. In the *Acts of the Lyons Martyrs* the slave Blandina suffers tortures along with her mistress; in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* the slave Felicitas suffers in prison along with her mistress, the high-born Perpetua. This was scandalous for much of the pagan world, but to many it also testified to the unifying power of the Gospel.

(e) "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). *Active charity* is the very "stuff" of the Christian life, and with great probability works of charity provided the early Church its best opportunities for mission. Adolf von Harnack¹⁸ discusses no less than ten types of charitable activities performed by the early Church: alms-giving in general, support of teachers and officials, support of widows and orphans, support of the sick, infirm and disabled, care of prisoners and those banished to the mines, the care of the poor needing burial, care of slaves, care of those suffering from calamities, care of the unemployed, and hospitality of the brethren on journeys. Tertullian speaks eloquently of such charity (*Apol.* 39):

Though we have our treasure chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation, but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able, for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken and spent on feasts and drinkingbouts and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. "See," they say, "how they love one another."

Perhaps a better testimony, because by a pagan, was uttered by the apostate Emperor Julian (c. 360). He recognized that the largest obstacle to his plan to renew the old pagan religions was the practiced love of the Christians:

Atheism [i.e., Christianity] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galilaeans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.

(f) God intends to convert the mind as well as the heart and the body, and therefore *apologetic, argumentation, and dialogue* were important instruments in the early Church's missionary endeavors. The New Testament itself gives examples. Philip shows the Ethiopian eunuch the truth of the Gospel from the Old Testament (Acts 8:27-38); it was standard procedure for Paul to enter synagogues in order to prove from Scripture that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 17:1-4); Paul argues with the Greeks in Athens in open-air debate (Acts 17:16-34). The writings of Justin Martyr exemplify the full range of argumentation: his *Dialogue* with the Jew Trypho is an excellent example of the detailed debate on the basis of the Old Testament that could occur between Christians and Jews; his two *Apologies* are addressed to the pagan world in the person of the emperors. In his *Second Apology* Justin relates the public disputation he had with a Cynic philosopher by the name of Crescens. The *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, although

probably a literary construction, is a good example of the way a discussion between an intelligent Christian and an intelligent pagan might be conducted. An interesting example of public dialogue is given by Eusebius. He tells of Origen whose teaching had become so well-known that Mammaea, the mother of the Emperor Alexander Severus, secured an interview with Origen in order to hear him present the Christian faith. While she was at Antioch, writes Eusebius, "she sent a bodyguard of soldiers to fetch him. He stayed with her for some time, revealing to her many things to the glory of the Lord and of the virtue of the divine message" (Eus. *H.E.* 6.21).

FOOTNOTES

1. Martin Hengel, "Die Ursprünge der christlichen Mission," *New Testament Studies* 18 (1971-72), p. 38: "Geschichte und Theologie des Urchristentums sind 'Missionsgeschichte' und 'Missionstheologie'."
2. Christopher Dawson, *The Historic Reality of Christian Culture: A Way to the Renewal of Human Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960) p. 22.
3. Dawson, *Historic Reality*, p. 23: "... the changes of the past forty years have confronted us with a situation which is not essentially different from that the primitive Church faced under the Roman Empire."
4. See II Cor. 5:20: *huper Christou oun presbeuomen*. Cf. Gunther Bornkamm's fine discussion (TDNT 6 (1968), p. 682).
5. This explains also why Paul, when his apostolate was being questioned by certain "superapostles" in Corinth, referred so explicitly to his apostolic suffering as a "mark" of his apostleship. Not only his message but even the very form of his apostleship was "cruciform" in nature (see IICor. 4:7-12; 5:18-6:10).
6. Origen is referring to LXX Ps. 104:15.
7. Cf. Ulrich Wilkens, "Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 56 (1959), p. 274: "Dass Paulus sein Widerfahrnis [Damascus road experience] in dieser Weise betont als ein Sehen des Auferstandenen beschreibt, hat zunächst seinen Grund darin, dass er das Ereignis vorzüglich nicht so sehr als seine eigene, individuelle Bekehrung zum christlichen Glauben, sondern vielmehr als *Berufung zum Apostel* versteht." What Wilkens says concerning Paul can be said for every Christian and for the Church itself. No one is merely converted to a belief but God calls for a *purpose*.
8. For this see Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 236-55.
9. See Green, *Evangelism*, pp. 167-70; Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902), pp. 242-57.
10. Eusebius (*H.E.* 5.13) tells of a certain Rhodo who was a student of Tatian and fought against the Marcionite Church.
11. Eusebius reports that in India Pantaenus found the Gospel of Matthew in the Hebrew language. It was said that the apostle Bartholomew had preached there and left the Gospel account. It is uncertain what is meant by "India"; virtually anything east of Ethiopia could be so designated.
12. A. von Harnack, *Mission*, pp.266-67: "die zahlreichsten und erfolgreichsten Missionare der christlichen Religion waren nicht die berufsmässigen

Lehrer, sondern die Christen selbst, sofern sie treu und stark waren.”

13. A. von Harnack, *Mission*, pp. 395-407.
14. This brief listing for the most part was taken from C. George Fry, “Evangelism in the Early Church,” *The Watchman-Examiner* 57 (1969), pp. 104-6.
15. A. von Harnack, *Mission*, pp. 376-88.
16. A. von Harnack, *Mission*, pp. 388-95.
17. Henry Melvill Gwatkin, *Early Church History to A.D. 313*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 1:221.
18. A. von Harnack, *Mission*, pp. 105-48.