

LEADING IN EVANGELISM

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TYOLOGY OF TERMS

Mission, Evangelism, Witness and Evangelist

BY EMMA SYKES

Confusion and Clarity

When thinking about how to lead a church in evangelism we immediately come across a problem. What do we mean by evangelism, and how does that relate to mission, witness and evangelist? Not unusually, these words are used interchangeably, which is unhelpful, and sometimes they are avoided altogether (especially evangelism). This may be for a number of reasons:

- They are seen as partisan, the preserve of one particular tradition within the Church.
- They are associated with a particular approach, often a caricature of all the worst practice possible.
- They are thought of as somehow 'unAnglican', something other denominations might do but we don't within the Church of England.

Avoiding these words is actually more likely to add to the confusion that already exists. A better way is to bring some clarity, where possible, by defining what is meant by such words. In doing this we are not claiming we have the 'right' definition, simply that this is our way of using the terms, and when working with others it enables us to have a common starting point. We have developed a basic typology of the following terms: mission, evangelism, witness and evangelist.

Mission

Mission is defined in a variety of ways, for example:

'God's mission works primarily through Jesus Christ sending the people of God to intentionally cross barriers from church to non-church, faith to nonfaith, to proclaim by word and deed the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ through the Church's participation in God's

mission of reconciling people to God, to themselves, to one another, and to the world and gathering them into the Church, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit, with a view to the transformation of the world, as a sign of the coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ.'

'Mission Described and Defined' in MissionShift, Charles Van Engen, ed. D. Hesselgrave and E. Stetzer (Baker: 2010)

'Mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus, wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to believe. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.'

Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, David Bosch (Orbis Books: 1991)



Mission is ‘everything that the Gospel of God’s love revealed in Christ sends to the world. It embraces the pursuit of justice and peace and the care of creation, as well as the sharing of faith.’

Catholic Evangelism, Stephen Cottrell (Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd: 1998)

Missio Dei has become a fundamental theological focus in missionary thinking. Encapsulated in the Moltmann quote ‘It is not that the Church has a mission, but the missionary God has a Church’, it’s focus is on our missionary endeavours flowing from the work of God in the world and is reflected in the Five Marks of Mission adopted by the Anglican Communion:

‘The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ.

1. To proclaim the good news of the kingdom.
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’

www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx

This definition of mission, which resonates with Newbign and Bosch’s understanding, is a helpful summary:

Mission is the vocation of the Church: our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.

Mission is primarily something God does. It is a big thing, and involves us in, amongst other things, engagement with issues of climate change, the oppression of the marginalised, issues of social action, as well as the proclamation of the gospel.

Relationship Between Mission and Evangelism

To understand the differing definitions of evangelism, it is necessary to understand the different perspectives on the relationship between mission and evangelism. Bosch gives two broad categories, each containing several different positions:

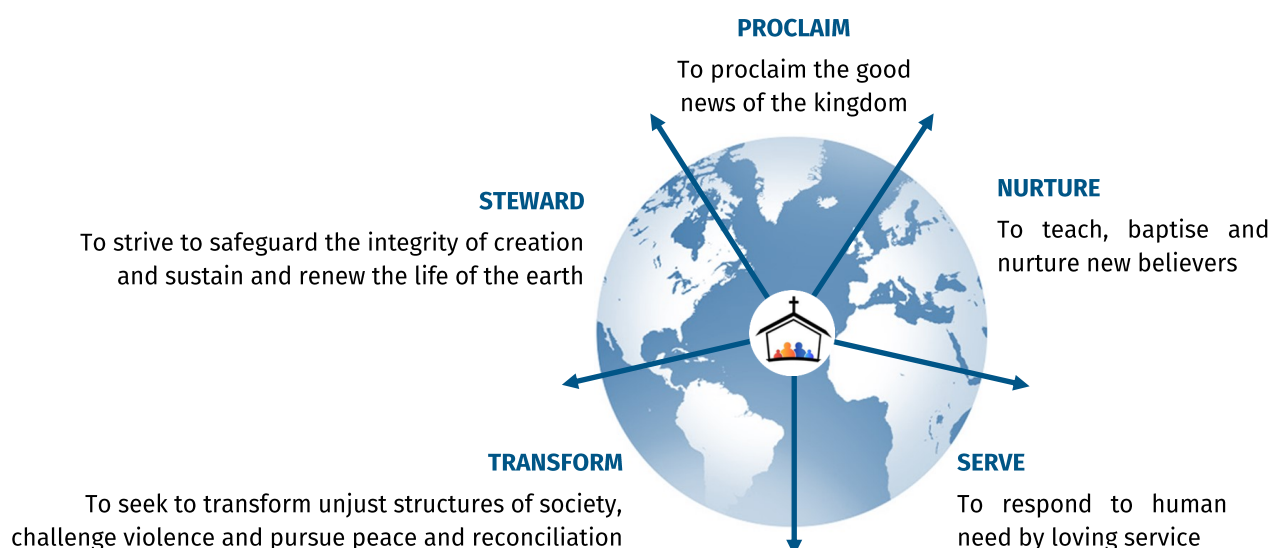
1. MISSION AND EVANGELISM AS SYNONYMOUS WITH ONE ANOTHER

Within this category he outlines six different positions that range from a narrow evangelical position where mission/evangelism are entirely about ‘winning souls for eternity’, to a broad ecumenical one which at its extreme position, describe mission/evangelism as not always including a call to repentance and faith in Christ. Salvation becomes entirely this worldly and interprets God’s kingdom as being a project to change the structures of society.

2. MISSION AND EVANGELISM AS TWO FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENT REALITIES

Within this category he outlines four positions:

- a. The ‘objects’ of mission are entirely different. Evangelism is to do with those who are no longer Christians or who were nominal Christians, and so evangelism is about calling back those who have been estranged from the Church. Mission however, is about calling those to faith who have always been strangers to the gospel, so refers to those who we might describe as ‘not yet’ Christians.
- b. There are those, mainly Roman Catholics, who have simply dropped the word ‘mission’ altogether and choose to use



the word 'evangelization'. Some have chosen this because of the word 'missions' historical link with colonisation.

- c. This third group would hold onto both concepts of 'mission' and 'evangelism' but would see evangelism as being the wider term for the entire way that the gospel becomes a reality in a person's life, including proclamation, translation, dialogue, service and presence. Mission in this category is purely a theological concept, which is used as the motivation for evangelism.
- d. In this final category 'mission' is the wider term and 'evangelism' becomes the narrower term. Bosch suggests three different ways in which this can be understood in relation to social action:
 - i. John Stott's position, in which he would define mission as evangelism plus social action, however evangelism would be primary.
 - ii. Mission is both evangelism and social involvement. Tim Keller describes this as a 'seamless cloth', unable to unravel one from the other.
 - iii. There are those who would agree with John Stott that mission is evangelism plus social action but would argue that social involvement should take precedence over evangelism.

David J Bosch 'Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-currents Today' in International Bulletin of Missionary Research (1987)

For our purposes category (d) above is the one that most resonates with our understanding of mission and evangelism. Yet is evangelism purely proclaiming the gospel or does it require deeds as well?

There are many who, like John Stott, would put proclaiming Christ as being the primary action of evangelism:

Newbigin describes evangelism as 'an action in which the name of Jesus is central.'

Krish Kandiah, 'Lesslie Newbigin's Contribution to a Theology of Evangelism.' Transformation, vol. 24, no. 1, 2007, pp. 51-60. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43052689. Accessed 16 Mar. 2020.

'The essence of evangelism is the message that Jesus Christ is Lord. Evangelism is our human effort of proclaiming this message – which necessarily involves using our human communication, language, idioms, metaphors, stories, experiences, personality, emotions, context, culture, locatedness – and trusting and praying that God, in his sovereign will, will supernaturally use our human and natural means to effect his divine purposes. In a general sense, evangelism refers to our human efforts of proclaiming this message to any audience of believers and nonbelievers. In a narrower sense, evangelism refers to our human efforts of proclaiming this message to non-believers. But in both senses, we proclaim the gospel with the hope that our audience responds by trusting, repenting, and following and obeying Jesus.'

Sam Chan, 'Evangelism in a Skeptical World' (Zondervan, 2018)

'To evangelise is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the gospel invitation, we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify themselves with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his Church and responsible service in the world. (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4; Acts 2:32-39; John 20:21; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:5; 5:11, 20; Luke 14:25-33; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:40, 47; Mark 10:43-45).'

The statement on evangelism from The Lausanne Covenant

However, Bosch would argue that evangelism is not a solely verbal task, but it is the deliberate proclamation of the gospel through both word **and** deed:

'Evangelism will of necessity consist of word and deed, proclamation and presence, explication and example... because our deeds, our Christian presence and our example are ambiguous. They need explanation.' (1984:80)

Of his reading of Galatians he says:

'The very heart of Paul's understanding of the gospel was in jeopardy. In this epistle more than any other, he wanted to demonstrate that the gospel was more than a new



teaching or a new law but a radically new way of living.' (1979:52)

There are others who would also want to keep a firm link between word and deed in defining evangelism:

'Both the conciliar and the evangelical global statements on evangelism focus on the broad themes of working for God's future, proclaiming salvation through Christ, seeking justice through socially responsible action, and serving the poor, sick and needy. Both groups stress the importance of ecumenical cooperation in these evangelistic efforts.'

Frances Adeney, *Graceful Evangelism*

Ultimately, in Krish Kandiah's exploration of Newbigin's contribution to a theology of evangelism he concludes that, for both Newbigin and Bosch, there can be no prioritisation of word and deed over another. However, it is essential, he goes on to say, that the integrity of the term evangelism is maintained as 'the verbal proclamation of the good news of the gospel, and that other vital aspects of the wider mission of the church are not incorporated or imposed on this definition.' Furthermore, he asserts that it is also important that evangelism is not set over or in opposition or competition with these wider aspects of mission such as social justice.

In summary:

Evangelism is an activity of the Church: the proclaiming of the good news about Jesus.

Evangelism is a subset of mission, one facet of it that focuses on the sharing of the good news about Jesus and helping people become disciples. Evangelism is something we do, but at heart its motivation comes from being caught up in God's mission to his world.

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Evangelism however, cannot be separated from mission. Stephen Cottrell asserts that evangelism 'provides the cutting edge to mission. Without a specifically evangelistic ministry our mission ceases to be specifically Christian. 'Mission', he says, 'must address spiritual and physical need drawn from Jesus' words, "I have come that you may have life in all its fullness"' (John 10:10).

A Catholic perspective begins with the community of faith, that belonging comes before belief. Catholic evangelism draws on incarnational theology, helping people to discover the presence of God already in their lives and drawing them into the Church, a divine institution as the incarnate presence of Jesus. 'Catholic evangelism is about more than plucking out individuals for personal redemptions. At its heart is the

setting of all creation.' (Phillip North). The sacraments are of central importance as they are visual, tangible and physical signs of God's presence. Catholic evangelism is communal in its approach, the church is more than a voluntary gathering of the likeminded, it has divine authority to interpret scripture, to enable belonging through baptism and to be a place of hospitality, mutual love and togetherness, with each other and God.

Philip North identifies the key characteristics of Anglo Catholic evangelism as:

- Incarnational.
- Sacramental.
- Communal.
- Lifelong.

Relationship Between Evangelism and Witness

Often people interchange the terms 'witness' and 'evangelism' but the key question is, can we witness without evangelising?

If we begin with how the New Testament uses the word witness, Ian Parkinson writes:

Perhaps the overriding New Testament emphasis is on bearing witness to something which has happened and 'of which we are witnesses'. Newbigin was fond of insisting that the Christian faith is about 'news rather than views'. There is thus a strong link between witness and proclamation – we are heralds of the news that the kingdom has come near and we have seen its impact. So, in the New Testament there is something of a sense of authority in our witness. There is a compulsion to make known these events (see Acts 4). There is also a significant cost; it cannot be a coincidence that the verb for witness (martureo) gives rise to our word 'martyr', and that many who bore witness did so by surrendering their lives.

'Witnessing' is a crucial aspect of the Christian faith and is what makes it distinct from some other faiths...

Christianity rests on a story of events. If nobody knew the events, nobody could be a Christian. For this reason, each generation must return to the Scriptures. The Bible will always remain central to the Church's witness, for it contains the story which brought the Church into being and will continue to nourish it to the end. The difference between the apostolic generation and all subsequent generations is that they could speak of that 'which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands' (1 John 1: 1), whereas the others must repeat a story at which they themselves were not present. The fourth gospel points to the dividing line between those who, like Thomas, had believed because they had 'seen' and 'those who have not seen and yet believe' (John 20:29).

The biblical understanding of the word witness is not just about witnessing to facts, but witnessing to the truth:

But the apostles 'witness' in yet another sense of the word. Strathmann has pointed out that both in classical Greek and in the Septuagint, *martus* and its cognates are frequently used in the secondary sense of attestation of truth rather than mere fact. The 'witness' interprets the hidden meaning of observable realities. Second Isaiah speaks of Israel as a 'witness' to 'the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears' (43:8). Because Israel knows and believes and understands that 'before [Yahweh] no god was formed, nor shall there be any after' him, they are to 'witness' this to those who know it not. They are to interpret to others the meaning of God's action with them.

Chris Russell writes:

It is the Spirit that enables this witness. The question isn't whether we chose to be witnesses or not – in Acts 1: 8 it is a noun – describing who we are – rather than a verb – telling what we might do. The question is whether we are faithful witnesses or not.

However, the word 'witness' is often used differently in contemporary culture: being a 'witness' in a court of law, either as an 'expert' witness or someone called to testify to events they have witnessed.

Ian Parkinson suggests:

'Witness today may well be a more subjective thing. This may be a consequence of the fact that culture informs me that I have no right to assert my own perception/witness as "truth" in a way that suggests that it might be authoritative for another. In this era, witness will usually

be to my own perception of things, my own experience, my own reality. If witnessing previously was intended to be compelling and persuasive, today it can only aspire to be illuminating, interesting and suggestive at best, or descriptive of something subjective. Events do not inevitably have their own meaning/interpretation – there were alternative truths to be stated for example about the size and significance of the crowd at President Trump's inauguration in 2017.'

In interviewing church leaders, a few described the word witness as being 'an ambassador for Christ', another described being a witness as 'Making evident a personal faith and communicating of faith, words and actions driven by faith. Church can witness as a community of faith. People can witness on a personal level in their daily lives. Something consciously driven by faith.'

Another wrote:

'Not everyone is called or has the gift of evangelist but everyone is called to be a witness. Using the analogy of a court of law, a witness is only asked to share their experience, what they saw. It is the Barrister's job (the evangelist) to shape it into a convincing argument. If witnessing leads to an opportunity to evangelise then great, but not all are mandated to do this.'

If evangelism is about proclaiming the good news of Christ, then is being a witness to the good news the same thing or something different? Parkinson suggests

'Whilst the two concepts of witness and evangelism must be related, is the former something in which we must all engage as we all have experience to which we can point, and we all have, in some way, benefited from the events that form the essence of the kingdom coming (the ministry of Jesus and the continuing work of the Spirit in transformation and power)? Whilst witness may be evangelistic – it may prompt a response of faith – does evangelism consist of enabling people to understand more of the consequences of the events to which we are bearing witness and the response which such events may call for? So, it is one thing to tell of the way in which my life has been changed by my encounter with Christ. It is another to explain why this might have happened, how it is linked to the wider work of Christ, and what response he might be inviting from us.'

Here is how a post on Ligonier Ministries explores the relationship of witness to evangelism.

'Bearing witness to the reality of God's kingdom includes telling the story of Jesus and calling people to repent and trust in him – evangelism – but that does not exhaust the ways we bear witness to our Lord's saving reign. For example, the love we show to other believers is a powerful



testimony to the rule of Jesus our King. When we love one another in the church, we show that we belong to Christ, who pours his love into our hearts (John 13:34–35). Another way we witness to the kingdom of God is through our celebration of the Lord's Supper. Strictly speaking, the Lord's Supper is not an exercise in evangelism, though it visibly portrays some of the content we preach in evangelism. As often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we show forth the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26).

We should note two things at this point. First, that we will be witnesses to Christ and his kingdom is not in doubt. Acts 1:8 records Jesus' final words to his followers before his ascension, and he says, matter-of-factly, that those who serve him will be his witnesses. We will either be good witnesses or poor witnesses, but we will certainly be witnesses. It is inherent to being a Christian.

Second, knowing the distinction between witnessing and evangelism keeps us from confusing the two. Giving our testimony of how God saved us and is blessing us is a good thing, but it is not evangelism. Living in holiness witnesses to the work of Christ's Spirit, but it is not evangelism. Evangelism takes place only when we share the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and then call people to trust in him alone.'

We may say that the difference between witness and evangelism is witness is testifying to an experience of Jesus in your life, evangelism is making known the message of Jesus. However we define the difference, I think it is important to do so, as for our purposes it would help to enable a wider variety of people to play their part in the body ministry of evangelism.

As Paul Weston writes in *The Word's Out*, telling stories and grounding our faith in personal testimony is a great way of talking about our faith, but in a culture where people are happy to hear faith stories as 'true for you but not for me' the danger is we end up with what Peter Berger calls the 'Inductive Option'. In other words, fanning any faith into flame and not arguing the case for what makes the Christian faith true and distinctive. Therefore, from an intellectual perspective one could argue that evangelism is the same as witnessing, however, from a practical perspective and for the sake of avoiding falling into an unhelpful trap, it helps to distinguish witnessing from evangelism.



In summary:

Witnesses is a description of the Church: we are witnesses to the reality of Christ in both word and deed, in our gathered and scattered life as the people of God.

We may be faithful, helpful witnesses (salt and light) or unfaithful, unhelpful witnesses (salt that has lost its saltiness, light that is hidden). Being a witness includes a willingness to speak of what we have experienced of Christ.

The Relationship Between Evangelist and Evangelism

The word translated in the New Testament as 'evangelist' is from the verb *euangelizomai* and means 'to announce good news' or 'preach the gospel'. The verb is very common in the New Testament and is applied to:

- **God** 'Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham' (Gal 3:8)
- **Jesus** 'One day as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news' (Luke 20:1)
- **Ordinary church members** 'Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.' (Acts 8:4)
- **The apostles** on their missionary journeys.

The noun 'evangelist' however only occurs three times in the New Testament:

1. In 2 Timothy 4:5 where Paul exhorts Timothy to 'do the work of an evangelist'.
2. In Acts 21:8 Philip is described as 'the evangelist', though he was not described as one of the apostles.
3. In Ephesians 4:11 where the office of evangelist is mentioned after apostle and prophet and before pastor and teacher. 'From this passage it is plain that the gift of evangelist was a distinct gift within the Christian Church; and although all Christians doubtless performed this sacred task, as opportunity was given to them, there were some who were pre-eminently called and endowed by the holy Spirit for this work.' (New Bible Dictionary, (eds) Marshall et al, p348)

Therefore, whilst some are called to be evangelists and have particular gifts in this area, the evangelist is not the person we expect to do our evangelism for us, just as someone who has the gift of intercession can't do all our praying for us. The evangelist is someone whom God gifts in a special way in evangelism to (a) help the church be all that it is meant to be by modelling, inspiring and training the people of God in evangelism (b) be particularly fruitful in connecting with those outside the Church and drawing them into a life transforming relationship with Jesus.

One difficulty is that we have a particular image of what an evangelist might look like, what they might do. But the reality is evangelists come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, and as Gavin Reid said, 'the majority of them will never stand on a platform or in a pulpit in front of a sizeable group of people.'

Evangelism is a body ministry. Whilst some are gifted as evangelists, and have a particular role to play, we are all called to play our part in the activity of evangelism.

Final Reflections

We would not want to collapse evangelism into deed ministry. However, we recognise that loving deeds are an irreplaceable witness to the power and nature of God's grace.

'In Jesus' ministry, healing the sick and feeding the hungry was inseparable from evangelism (John 9:1-7, 35-41). They were not naked displays of power but signs of the coming kingdom (Matthew 11:2ff). In several places in Acts there is a close connection between economic sharing of possessions with those in need and the multiplication of converts. (Acts 2, Acts 4, Acts 6)'

Tim Keller

To give an example of this, a vicar I spoke to recently who has a very effective evangelistic ministry is doing so by offering a range of social action projects which address many of the needs of the area, ranging from a women's group who have experienced domestic violence, to running a food bank, to offering a stay and play group. In each of these spaces, volunteers are encouraged to talk about their faith and offer to pray for people once they have built a relationship of trust. In each space people are invited a step closer into the main body of the church, either to messy church, or sweaty church and the invite is always there to attend a seekers' course should people want to find out more.

In emphasising evangelism in all we do, we mustn't overlook or divorce it from mission.

In a post-Christendom society, missional churches are needed if we are going to evangelise effectively. The question is what is the most effectively shaped missional church that allows evangelism to flourish?

An Analogy

Male and Weston offer an helpful analogy.

'Imagine we want to share a delicious cake; the cake is the good news. If we are given that cake, not only is it greedy to keep it all to ourselves, but it was designed to share. However, so that we can keep sharing the cake, we need to understand how it was created in the first place, how it came to be cake. To say, "Oh it's just a bunch of food stuffs that came together and hey presto, here is cake" does not make it easily replicable. This is the danger of collapsing the terms mission, evangelism, evangelist and witness all into one term, it becomes difficult to help people understand and engage with the different aspects in an effective way.

'On the other hand, if we take all the different ingredients that go to make up the cake, eggs, flour, sugar, butter, and so on, examine each one closely and keep them separate from one another and never mix them, we won't end up with a delicious cake. This is the danger of not seeing the link between the different terms, each term is intrinsically linked to the other. Evangelism is a part of mission and witnessing is a part of being an evangelist and evangelism is part of being a disciple, it is the "overflow of an authentic Christian life".'

The Word's Out, Male and Weston, p59.

