

LEADING IN EVANGELISM

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EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP AND LEADERSHIP How do They Relate to One Another?

Background

The relationship between leadership, discipleship and evangelism has seen significant shifts over the last 30 years, partly related to the post Christendom context we find ourselves in, which means there is a degree of confusion over certain terms, as well as a reluctance to use some or all of these terms in some quarters (which we are not going to address here). Alongside this, the 'competition' between these three aspects of Church life has often led to an overemphasis on one or other of them, which has been detrimental to the overall health of a church.

Definitions

MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Definitions of mission and evangelism have often changed as the social contexts have changed: for example, in the West

from Christendom through colonial modernity to post-colonial nervousness to post-Christian contemporary society. Here are two contemporary working definitions:

Mission: '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.'

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

Evangelism: '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



- For a longer explanation of the terms mission, evangelism, witness and evangelist see Leading in Evangelism 2: Typology of Terms.
- For a longer article on 13 characteristics of discipleship see s3.amazonaws.com.

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 Lausanne Covenant

DISCIPLESHIP

The fruit of effective evangelism is that a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. Dallas Willard describes such discipleship:

'As Jesus' disciple, I am his apprentice in kingdom living. I am learning from him how to lead my life in the kingdom of heaven as he would lead my life if he were I.'

Dallas Willard

There is both a journey to becoming a disciple (sometimes short, sometimes long) and the journey of being a disciple. The process of making, marking and maturing disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:16-20) is the process of discipleship.

When exactly someone has crossed from darkness to light, from the broad way to the narrow way, is not necessarily known by the person themselves or others around them (but is known by God). Being able to date that moment isn't ultimately important. What is important is that the person knows they have (following the biblical language) crossed from darkness to light, have been born again, have started to

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orient their life in a radically different way around the person of Jesus and the priorities of his kingdom, and that there are signs of fruit of this rebirth having occurred.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is also defined in a variety of ways, but core to them all is a sense of going somewhere and animating others towards that goal. For example:



Leadership: 'A relational process of social influence through which people are inspired, enabled and mobilised to act in positive, new ways, towards the achievement of God's purposes.'

Understanding Christian Leadership, Ian Parkinson

Part of the role of leadership is to animate the people of God to be the body of Christ in the world today, continuing his mission and ministry. In this sense, leadership is a servant of the bigger reason why a church exists.

To summarise:

- **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, and issues of social action.
- **Evangelism is an activity of the Church:** the processes by which people become disciples of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is a subset of mission, one facet of it that focuses on 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.
- **Discipleship is a fruit of the Church,** the result of the evangelistic activity of the Church (and of course the work of the Spirit in people's lives): followers (apprentices) of Jesus who have received forgiveness and a new start through repentance and faith in Christ, and are committed to living out the implications of his lordship over the whole of life for the rest of life.
- **Leadership is a servant of the Church:** a means by which God orders and mobilises a community of people around the person of Jesus and the priorities of his kingdom.

A Way Forward

In a blog post some years ago Mike Breen argued that the Church tends to swing from an emphasis on mission, to an emphasis on leadership, to an emphasis on discipleship (not necessarily in that order) on a regular basis, perhaps every ten years or so. As the pendulum swings from one to another

of these things, it skews the focus of the Church in a particular direction.

Ideally we need to hold all three in relationship with one another. Mission requires leadership, and produces (amongst other things) disciples. Leadership requires discipleship, and animates mission. Discipleship engages people in mission, and communities of disciples require leadership.

We see this in our work. When we talk about mission/evangelism we recognise that the longed-for fruit of all good evangelism is disciples, but also that key to evangelism happening is the discipleship life of existing Christians ('There is no effective evangelism without authentic spirituality'). And because the Christian life is communal, and the key hermeneutic for the gospel is the church, those gathered will benefit from godly leaders who animate the people of God to be about the mission of Christ in his world.

Within the life of a local congregation there will always be seasons where we focus on a particular aspect of congregational life. Indeed, it is hard to maintain focus on investment in all such areas simultaneously. Probably the best way of ensuring that we keep momentum in each area is to invest in each one sequentially. One of the key questions for a leader to ask at any particular time is 'which of these key dimensions to the life of our church are we most in danger of overlooking at the moment?'



In one season we may need to restructure the leadership of the church, in another revise the gathered worship of the congregation, in another focus on a particular mission opportunity. This is inevitable. These three (sometimes described as the Up, In, and Out of church life), are best kept bubbling along at all times in the midst of particular things we may need to address at any one point.

Therefore:

- Because there is always a relationship between these three things any work focused on one area will be helped by a recognition of the symbiotic relationship between them all.

- Recent reports within the Church of England have highlighted the need to embrace a diversity of leadership roles within churches, increasingly including lay leaders and focal ministers alongside those operating as incumbents. It is vital that when we think of leadership we don't just think ordained.
- The interrelationship of all these vital activities means that if we are leaders then our leadership will be focussed on enabling all God's people to grow as disciples, a key component of which involves engaging in mission and evangelism.

Leadership serves the church by nurturing disciples who shape their whole life around the mission of Christ to his world.

Recent Developments

Over the last 30 years some significant developments have occurred in the theological thinking around evangelism discipleship and leadership. Some of the trends include:

- **Missio Dei** has become a fundamental theological focus in missionary thinking. Captured well by the Moltmann quote 'It is not that the Church has a mission, but that the missionary God has a Church', its focus is on our missionary endeavours flowing from the work of God in the world. It may be caricatured by the shift from the idea of 'taking Jesus to people' to 'discovering what Jesus is already doing and joining in'. A false dichotomy in my opinion. However, the flow to Missio Dei is reflected in the five marks of mission adopted by the Anglican Communion.
- **The role of the Spirit.** Linked to this, within certain parts of the Church in this country, and many parts of the Church in the majority world, is increased recognition of the prevenient work of the Spirit. Thirty years ago, those who talked about 'power encounters' tended to be regarded as somewhat eccentric or unrealistic. Through the influence of Soul Survivor, New Wine, Alpha and so on such understandings have become more mainstream, especially amongst younger (under 40's) Christians. Furthermore, wider exposure to world Anglicanism (where such notions are often taken for granted) have raised expectations that people's first encounter with God may well be through the miraculous or through dreams or another type of spiritual encounter.
- **Ecclesiology** has become more centre stage in missional reflection, as the world of Fresh Expressions and Emerging Church have raised questions about the nature and identity of church. The current theological trend is to talk about Christology leading to missiology leading to ecclesiology.