

Evangelism – From then to now

(Maximum 1500 words creative part included)

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- [Please start the DVD and watch the intro before continuing to read.](#)

Introduction

- [Please watch Chapter 1 of the DVD before continuing to read.](#)

Evangelism and mission are usually seen as two separate aspects of the Christian faith. The differentiation people make is often the idea that mission has to be done abroad, in a far away country, to reach the un-reached people. With the word 'evangelism' people lean more to the idea that it has to be done in the streets, on the markets and in the slums of the city they live in. As the reader will find out British history shows otherwise. Evangelism and mission go hand in hand.

John Wesley 1703-1791

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Together with his brother Charles and with George Whitefield, John gathered together in the so called 'Holy Club'. One of the goals was to visit prisoners and help the poor—all of this was done with a strong emphasis on Christian lifestyle. Wesley believed that this was the duty of Christians, but rather than a duty

“giving to the poor is a charisma only in so far as it is a reflection of God's unmerited generosity in Christ, an act of concern for the needy freely willed and cheerfully carried through” (Dunn 1997: 250; cf. 2 Corinthians 4: 1).

The word 'mission' means more than simply converting people to be become Christians—that is to say there is an element of social work (Dictionary.com 2012). Wesley, who knew how to deal with the temper of the lower classes, recognised the needs, and instead of just preaching he expanded the work to deeds as well. The Church was blind to this great opportunity and had no sympathy nor recognition for Wesley's work (Winchester 1906: 146).

➤ [Please watch Chapter 3 of the DVD before continuing to read.](#)

Tomkins (2003: 156) states that John passionately believed that the bible promised a Christian could live (ultimately) without sin. This preaching caused a lot of division and was at the same time not relevant to anybody's life. Around the year 1738 George Whitefield had extraordinary success with his preaching. Many, especially poor, people reacted to his call to conversion. Wesley started to help, but was suspicious of the dramatic style of Whitefield, and the emotional conversions which came forth even out of his own preaching. Wesley soon embraced this new style which, in contrary to Wesley's earlier preaching, was very appealing to the people (Christianitytoday.com 2008). Newbigin (2006: 96) states that one of the basic rules in evangelism is to speak the language of the hearer. Wesley became fully aware of the necessity of the works of the Holy Spirit. Wesley

“clearly believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were relevant for the church in any age. He defined them. He described them. He experienced them. He defended them” (Tuttle 2010).

Charles Wesley 1707-1788

➤ [Please watch Chapter 4 of the DVD before continuing to read.](#)

Many of the poor people were illiterate and therefore unable to read the Bible. Charles Wesley started to write hymns with lyrics directly drawn from the Bible. Temperley (2010: 7) states that these tunes were to be taught in meetings, preaching services, and other forms of public worship. People even sang them at impromptu meetings in barns or inns. Meistad (2002: 205) notes that these hymns are to be seen as missional and probably spread the ideas of the Wesley's more widely than the preaching did.

Attractional and Incarnational

From the examples given above, the reader will have noticed that the Wesley's partially moved from the attractional model to a more incarnational model. Instead of trying to get the people into the church building, in order to convert them there, they themselves stepped out and merged among the

people. They spoke the language of the commoners. They testified in words *and* deeds, and they taught people how to live according to Scripture through popular songs. Mission and evangelism came together in four elements: merging among the people, preaching in an understandable language, works of charity, and teaching through alternative methods.

Contemporary times

The mentioned four elements can still be found in Britain. A very well known group is the Salvation Army (SA).

➤ [*Please watch Chapter 5 of the DVD before continuing to read.*](#)

This group, which origin can be traced back to the teachings of Wesley, is active in more than 124 countries (cf. Woodall 2005: 33, Salvationarmy 2012). Their works of charity are probably most known. In order to do their charity works, they often follow Wesley in his trail and go to the poor to merge among them and help them 'on the spot'.

➤ [*Please watch Chapter 6 of the DVD before continuing to read.*](#)

Music began to be very popular as a missional tool. Many (pop)groups started to make music for their own special audiences. Some of these groups started to organise concerts. During these concerts they often use short moments to preach the gospel.

Churches changed the 'old' hymn-book for modern worship and praise books. In doing this the churches enhanced the attractional model. Nevertheless this approach made sure that people, in and outside the church, began to see that the church was more than 'a dusty old place'. Swanson and Rusaw (2010: 28-29) note however that it is still better to take these songs and go to the people outside. They cite the parable about the King in Matthew 22:2-14 and state that, even when the programme is magnificent, the people are too 'busy' to come, and the servants have to go out in

order to get the 'banquet' full.

➤ *Please watch Chapter 7 of the DVD before continuing to read.*

Illiteracy is no longer the big problem as it was in Wesley's days. The main problem in contemporary times is the fact that young people no longer hear the gospel in schools or at home. New methods to teach the gospel had to be found.

Bible stories were made more visual and thus easier to remember through movies. Around 1993 a new phenomenon called 'Internet', brought even more possibilities. Online bible studies, church services, and a whole range of other material can be accessed by people who are connected.

Conclusion

The development of mission and evangelism throughout British history changed with regard to possibilities and needs. Nonetheless the four elements as discussed in this paper (merging among the people, preaching in an understandable language, works of charity, and teaching through alternative methods) have been used right through the centuries. Mission and evangelism can be seen as a whole—stepping out and preaching the good news would have to be accompanied with good works and the teachings of the Scripture.

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