

THE 'OFFICE' OF EVANGELIST

THE noun "evangelist" (*euangelistés*) simply means "one who brings good news," or "one who preaches the gospel." This term in a general descriptive way might apply to anyone of whom the verb "to preach the good news" (*euangelizo*) was used—apostles (Gal. 1:7f.) or any other Christian (Acts 8:4).

In point of fact only three times does the word "evangelist" occur in the New Testament, when it is used in a technical sense. Paul exhorted Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5); in so doing he would "fulfil his ministry": the evangelist, therefore, had a specific work in the church. In Acts 21:8 Philip is called "the evangelist": the article suggests that being an evangelist was what was distinctive about him. Finally, Ephesians 4:11 is conclusive that evangelists constituted a distinct class of workers in the church. The grammatical construction shows that different classes are being enumerated.

Much preaching was surely done by many Christians (Acts 15:35), but it is clear that there was a restricted sense in which the term "evangelist" was used. Just as the exercising of oversight in his family did not make one an "overseer" and just as one might teach without being recognized as a member of the order of "teachers" (James 3:1), so the fact that all might evangelize did not make all Christians members of the group recognized as evangelists. The work of the evangelist was a specific task or function in the church.

Permanent or Temporary?

Were evangelists to be permanent functionaries in the church, or did they belong only to the days of inspiration, as the apostles and prophets of Ephesians 4:11? That passage also refers to "pastors and teachers," and these are permanent activities in the church (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2—literally "pastor the flock of God"; and Gal. 6:6). The principal consideration for regarding the evangelistic office as a continuing part of the church is the nature of the church and its mission. As long as the church feels the press of Jesus' Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) and remains evangelistic, it will need evangelists. The continuous place of preaching in God's plan is evident from Romans 10:11-15, but the "preacher" is one who has been "sent." Just as oversight is necessary in the nature

of things, so is the preaching of the gospel necessary to the continuance of the church. For a necessary responsibility there must be functionaries to discharge it. Even as the church of the Apostolic Age had a distinct group to carry on the evangelistic work, so the church in all times needs the services of those who give themselves to the "work of an evangelist," beyond that done by every member. The evangelistic "gift" belongs to all ages of the church.

Paul recognised this truth, for up to his death he chose and instructed others in the work of preaching so that they might carry on the work of evangelists after his apostolic supervision was withdrawn. The entire purpose of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus is to prepare these men for activities in the on-going life of the church. And Paul in 2 Tim. 2:2 specifically expressed the provision for a continuous supply of men prepared for the ministry of the word: "And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." Paul obviously had Timothy's equals in mind, men who would continue the same task performed by Timothy.

From what is known of the activities of Philip and Timothy (see further below) many others who performed the same functions may be added to the list of New Testament evangelists. A good example is Titus, for the instructions given to him are so similar to those given to Timothy that what the one was the other must have been also. If we ask, "Who would the people of Asia Minor, who read Ephesians, think of as evangelists?" other names come to mind. The church at Colossae apparently owed its existence to the labours of Epaphras (Col. 1:6-8). The Ephesians especially would know of another prominent man, who laboured without being under direct apostolic oversight—Apollos. The description of him in Acts 18:24-28 is that of a powerful preacher. Hints of others also are to be found. Archippus may have been an evangelist (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2); probably the same is true of Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7f.). Many others of Paul's associates could be cited, but these are reasonably certain and cannot be placed in other categories. The passages cited indicate that these men laboured in the ministry of the word. Other designations were used of such men, but were not exclusively theirs: (*diakonos*—1 Timothy 4:6); attendant (*huperetés*—Luke 1:2); fellow-workers (1 Corinthians 3:5-9; Philippians 4:3); slave (*doulos*) of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Timothy 2:24) and "man of God" (1 Timothy 6:11).

Qualifications

Definite qualifications for the evangelist are laid down in Paul's writings to Timothy and Titus. These qualifications suggest a distinct class. Since they are qualifications open to any man of spiritual development (like those for bishops and deacons—1 Tim. 3:1ff.; Titus 1:5ff.), the evangelist is not dependent on a supernatural gift to qualify him. There are general lists of virtues applied to the evangelist (1 Tim. 6:3-11; 4:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5), but there are also specific demands. It is required that he be an example (1 Tim. 4:12), be pure (1 Tim. 5:22), be diligent (2 Tim. 2:15f.), be gentle and forbearing (2 Tim. 2:24f.), be an apt teacher (2 Tim. 2:24).

These qualifications prepare one for the activities of an evangelist. A look at the work expected of evangelists further confirms the permanent nature of their position and the church's need for their services. This work, of course, was primarily to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). As a "bearer of glad tidings" the evangelist laboured to win new converts to Christ (e.g. Philip in Acts 8). For this purpose he might travel about or settle in one place (Philip did both—Acts 8:40). A comparison of Acts 8:40 with 21:8, if the chronological order can be relied on, indicates Philip was at Caesarea some twenty years (from the time of Paul's conversion until the end of his third missionary journey). Whatever length of time it takes to make one a "located preacher" Philip seems to fit the description. The instructions to Timothy contemplate regions being constantly in need of the services of evangelists, and, if necessary to meet this need, there was a value in their changing places of labour (Tit. 3:12f.; 2 Tim. 4:10, 12).

Work

The evangelists also worked to strengthen the faith of those already converted

(1 Tim. 4:6; Titus 1:13; 2:1-7); that is, they instructed the church. 1 Timothy 4:6 tells Timothy to put the brethren in mind of the things already taught in the letter, including instructions about worship (2:1ff.), personal morality (2:9ff.), church organisation (3:1ff), and threatened apostasy (4:1ff.). Therefore, the evangelist was more than a "herald" who announced the first principles to unbelievers. This is further evident from the many injunctions about teaching in these letters: "Command and teach" (1 Tim. 4:11); "with long suffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2); "give attention to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). The evangelist was to give special teaching to different age groups in the church (Tit. 2:1ff.). The fourth chapter of 1 Timothy, which is most fruitful in studying the evangelist's work, gives as his public work not only teaching but also reading (the Scriptures—the word means oral reading) and exhortation (1 Tim. 4:13). In preaching the word he was to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" (2 Tim. 4:2).

The negative side of instructing the church was to refute error (1 Tim. 1:3). This was to be done in a church that already had elders (cf. Acts 20:17). This was necessary in order to "guard the deposit" (1 Tim. 6:20) of healthful words, which formed the norm of true teaching.

An important phase of the evangelist's work was training others to carry on the work (2 Tim. 2:2). It was the evangelist's task to perpetuate the gospel. Not only did Paul train Timothy, but Timothy was to train other Timothies.

Another responsibility of the evangelists was organising new congregations. Paul had left Titus in Crete for the specific purposes of setting "in order the things that were wanting" and appointing "elders in every city" (Tit. 1:5). Under his supervision the congregation would have chosen those men it regarded as "blameless" (Tit. 1:5ff.). Titus' role was to approve the choices and "place in office" (*kathistémi*) those selected.

Support

A right attaching to the evangelist's work was that of receiving pay for his labours (1 Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6). These verses show that some were to dedicate "full time" to the ministry of the word. It is not this, however, which makes one an evangelist. The situation is neither "preaching for pay" nor even "paid for preaching," so much as "paid while preaching." The person who dedicated himself to evangelistic work was entitled (as others who laboured in the word—1 Tim. 5:17f.) to financial support by their brethren.

Were evangelists "ordained"? If one understands ordination to mean that the church or some official conferred upon another the privilege of preaching, then they were not ordained. But if ordination is understood in the New Testament meaning of setting apart for a work with the approval of a person or group (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:1-3; 14:23), then they were ordained. 1 Timothy 4:14 refers to such a ceremony for Timothy. The language of Colossians 4:17, "ministry which thou hast received in the Lord," might refer to some solemn religious service. Requiring that a preacher have the approval of his local eldership or congregation would have been a safeguard against false teachers. Thus Apollos carried letters of commendation with him when he went into Achaia (Acts 18:27). Apparently the only "ordination" he received was the approval of the brethren at Ephesus. Still, such action is proof that the evangelist was a recognized functionary with a distinct office.

Relationship to Elders

What relationship did an evangelist sustain to elders? When it came to appointing elders he was for that moment "over" them. Once elders were appointed, he would be "under" them, like other members of the congregation; otherwise elders would not really exercise the oversight (1 Pet. 5:2). In another sense evangelists were to an extent independent of elders in that they could take up new fields of labour independent of the supervision of the congregation with which they were working (Tit. 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:9-12). Although the duties of evangelists and elders might overlap, they belonged to two different spheres. The evangelist's authority is only the authority of the word of the Lord: as he speaks that, he has the authority of heaven behind him; if he speaks false

doctrine he has no authority whatsoever. Thus he has no inherent or official authority, but considerable moral and personal authority as long as he takes heed to himself and to his doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). If elders and evangelists keep to their respective spheres, there would not be strife over rank.

The place of the evangelist is perhaps best summed up by Colossians 1:7: he is a "servant of Christ" but "on behalf of" men.

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