

A REVIEW ARTICLE

TELL THE WORLD, by Eric Wright, an I.C.F. missionary to Pakistan
(Evangelical Press, 1981. £ 1.95. Obtainable from I.C.F.)

Reviewed by Jim Young, Summaries added by Elsie Maxwell

The purpose of this review article is to stimulate reflection and discussion relating to the three major areas touched upon by the author. Even if you have not read the book, the content is general enough and we have supplied enough of the author's argument to enable us to follow the thought and to raise questions that apply to the depth and breadth of the ministries in which we are involved.

Eric Wright's book is divided into three main sections: the Apostle's message, the Apostle's Audience, and the Apostle's method. His study is basically limited to the study of the book of Acts where he has painstakingly attempted to get at the foundation or the "nutshell" of the apostolic approach to ministry. One might be tempted to criticize Eric for limiting his study to Acts, but this does not seem to have hampered the breadth of his content. Basically, Eric is calling for a moratorium on "trendiness" in missions today, as he puts it. His analysis of the apostolic ministry challenged me to re-think my presuppositions and the reasons for doing what I (we) do. The book has useful frequency tables of the apostolic terms for the Christian message, phrases or terms that express the content of the message, and terms that express how the Apostles communicated the message.

The Apostle's Message

The apostolic message was characterized by the breadth of its content ("the whole counsel of God"), its frequent use of the Old Testament, and by the balance of its content; it is Christ-centred and Christ-exalting (all His offices are there--the prophetic, the priestly, the kingly), the Trinity is not decentralized, it is not overly preoccupied with man. The framework of the message is the Biblical concept of the Kingdom or Reign of God. In response to the message, the audience asked: What shall we do? The writer felt that we often neglect the apostles' strong emphasis on repentance. Stressing repentance results in (a) an awareness of the majesty of God, (b) turning from sin, and (c) turning to God. The correct response brings forgiveness of sin; the apostles offered the audience no other blessings or false incentives.

"Balance" is the watchword which most impressed me in this book. Are we apostolically balanced in our "message"? in our acquaintance with the cultural nuances of our "audience," and in our chosen "methods" to reach the masses of Islam today? Eric stresses, and rightly so, the Biblical order of priority: first message, then audience, and

finally method. "Let us not choose our methodology until we are crystal clear on the content of our message and character of our audience. Nor dare we lead off with a study of our audience, and then begin to pick those parts of the message that we feel are relevant, or which fit our particular methodology." Here are some questions that are raised by this section.

- Are we trinitarily balanced in the content of our preaching, radio programs, B.C.C. courses, discipling? (p. 23ff)

- Have we unconsciously reduced, streamlined or condensed the gospel message to a mere jingle for the sake of a given methodology? (p. 35ff.)

- Have our messages been theologically correct? And are our missionaries theologically well-prepared? Are we serious about Continuing Education for our mission members? (p. 38ff)

- Are we guilty of producing nominalism in Christian groups because we have failed to preach and teach Biblical repentance? Are our appeals man-oriented or God oriented? (p. 49ff)

The Apostle's Audience

The audience of the Apostle had been divinely prepared by the Lord; there were promises in the Old Testament to be fulfilled; the fulness of time had come which included John the Baptist and Jesus. The Jewish synagogues in every city in the Roman empire, the Greek culture and language, and the Pax Romana all served to help prepare the way for the proclamation of the message. Events were also providentially arranged: Philip's detour into the desert, Paul's vision for Europe, Peter's vision that prepared the mission to the Gentiles. The audience was the world--every person on earth. Three categories are discerned: those who are prepared for harvesting (the Jews), those in whom the seed is to be sown (the Gentiles), and those to be trained for service (the church). In a word: the responsive, the resistant and the redeemed.

Wright expresses disapproval of the Homogeneous Unit principle. According to him, the early church was heterogenous and there is no evidence of a Homogeneous Unit group in the New Testament. In Jerusalem, the church included Pharisees, Galileans, learned, unlearned, merchants, fishermen, villagers, foreign-born Jews, and so on. When a problem arose concerning Hellenistic Jews, the church was not divided into two groups. He feels that the epistles with their lists of names in various groups, with Acts 15, reveal the same heterogeneity. Furthermore, Jews and Greeks are admonished to adjust to, and be sensitive to, one another, rather than separating into HU groups. The apostles transcended the HU and went to everyone; differences were minimized, not stressed.

Wright also examines the question of contextualization. The Apostles were amazingly sensitive to their audience. We too need to become

audience-oriented through a conscious adaptation to the culture. Principles suggested are: adaptation of language, use of terms that are appropriate, use of the audience's literary and religious heritage in communicating the message. The content may be modified but without changing the message overall. There was some freedom of cultural adaptation as to form of worship and manner of life under the moral law (Acts 15).

If there is one criticism to be made of the book, it would be the author's over-brevity and over-simplifications particularly in his treatment of the HU principle and contextualization. He wisely points out the folly of pushing the HU principle to the extreme, but oversimplifies Kraft's and Cragg's views of contextualization. He does not answer some of the hard questions: how do we know which terms give the hearer the association we want him to get? It is fine to say, use the religious heritage, but precisely what from the Muslim's heritage do we use?

Consider now some questions that flow out of the above:

- When considering our audience, the Arab World, are we being sensitive to how God is preparing (sowing) the harvest? At what stage in the process are we? Are we involved at all levels: i.e. the responsive, the resistant and the redeemed? (p. 67)
- Are we maintaining a balance between prayerful waiting on God's direction and thoughtful planning? (p. 73ff)
- Are we serious in our attempt to study the cultural, political, linguistic, educational and economic factors in our fields?
- Have we gone too far in our mission strategizing to miss the divine irregular in the harvest? (cf. Acts 1:8 & 8:1 where persecution brought growth) Remember no one planned the Reformation or the Evangelical Awakening (p. 74ff)
- Are our strategies theologically tested and soaked in prayer?
- Do you agree with Wright's evaluation of the HU principle and contextualization, and why? (You will need to read Chs. 8 & 9.)

The Apostle's Method

Evangelism was an outflow of the early Christians' worship and their relationship to God. Their life was consistent with what they said; they practiced what they preached. Their methodology was characterized by variety and flexibility. They were mobile and dealt with people on a personal basis; they were not experience-oriented but their preaching was full of theological content. The appeal was to the mind, not the emotions. The questions that flow from this section are:

- Is our method an overflow of our worship and prayer-life, individually and corporately? (The vertical method)
- Are we sustaining the variety, flexibility and mobility that is necessary? Or are we succumbing to the powerful temptation to familiarize and institutionalize our forms, a tendency which leads to fossilization? (Our horizontal methods)
- Have we allowed our Radio and BCC ministries to usurp the place of a person-to-person incarnational ministry. Mission numbers are important.

BOOK REVIEWS

Anne Cooper, Compiler. Ishmael My Brother: A Biblical Course on Islam. London: MARC Europe & the Evangelical Missionary Alliance, 1985. £3.95. Reviewer: Elsie Maxwell

Here is another book on Islam, hot off the press. But it is special, it is unique, and not just "another book." It is designed as a home study course. Cassettes, leaders notes and other discussion materials are available. The student is expected to spend three to four hours studying each chapter. The course is for serious students, yet is not presented in technical or complicated jargon. It is useful for beginners as well as the more advanced student.

The layout is as follows. Each chapter opens with the instructional objectives of that lesson. The material in each chapter is subdivided into units which clearly present each subject. At the end of each chapter, and even of some units in the chapter, there are activities for the student to use to test himself or apply his new knowledge. The questions are thought provoking, and not the simple question-answer format. Then there is the recommended reading list (considered part of the study course) from which the student must read in preparing the lesson. There are sometimes additional optional readings.

The material is organized under four major headings as follows:

- I. Christian attitudes to those of other faiths.
 - Ch. 1. The Christian and other faiths
 - Ch. 2. Making Muslim friends
- II. Muslim beliefs and practices
 - Chs. 3. & 4. Muslim beliefs and practices
 - Ch 5. The Qur'an
 - Ch. 6. Christians and Muslims debating together
 - Ch. 7. (Bridge) Muhammad, Prophet of Islam (theologically and historically)

III. Historical Development of Islam

- Ch. 8. History and political development of Islam
- Ch. 9. History and significance of sects within Islam
- Ch. 10. Islamic law
- Ch. 11. Christian-Muslim relationships
- Ch. 12. (Bridge) Islam today (politically and culturally)

IV. Cultural dimensions

- Ch. 13. Folk Islam
- Ch. 14. The Gospel and culture
- Ch. 15. Case studies of cultural significance

This book was a team effort; Anne Cooper compiled it with the help of Ron Waine, Ron George, Colin Chapman and Bill Musk. It is a useful new addition to the growing list of study guides on Islam for the Christian worker. It can be studied individually and is excellent for study groups. The activities and reading list are especially suited to student needs. It is excellent because it gives the basics on classical Islam clearly, but it also presents popular or folk Islam--and how it is lived out. I appreciated the opening section that helps the student reflect on his attitude toward Muslims and his need to love others. It is well worth the price even if you are not a beginner. You can use it for training others for witness among Muslims.

Colin Chapman. You Go and Do the Same: Studies in Relating to Muslims. London: C.M.S., 1983. £1.50. Reviewer: Elsie Maxwell

This is a small book, but really useful. It too is designed as a guide for group study. The first six chapters consist of basic studies in Islam, while the last four cover more difficult issues relating to Christian witness among Muslims. The facts are presented, followed by questions to answer and discuss as well as activities to complete.

The book provokes us to think through the issues and rethink what we believe. I found it extremely practical. It makes us check up on ourselves to find how understanding of Muslims we really are. It gives practical help in dealing with controversies raised by Muslims (p. 49-54). There is an excellent chapter of helps for sharing your faith (Chapter 10) This little book makes an excellent gift to give supporters. You will make a big mistake if you do not add it to your library. It would make good prerequisite reading for Islamic seminars.