ERT (2018) 42:4, 308-318

An Evangelical View of Proselytism

Elmer Thiessen and Thomas Schirrmacher

Evangelical Christians have begun to pay attention, in the past decade, to an issue that was sadly often neglected in the past—the ethics of doing evangelism. For example, the World Evangelical Alliance joined the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to produce a joint statement entitled 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct'.[1] This document spells out the ethics of mission, stressing that Christians are not only bound to the Great Commission but also to any other ethical command of Jesus, as is suggested in the Great Commission itself. This document is also our starting point for the following discussion.

The World Evangelical Alliance has also participated in discussions concerning a related issue—proselytism, understood as 'sheep-stealing'. Most recently, an international consultation of some thirty theologians and church leaders from a wide range of Christian traditions gathered in Accra, Ghana, to explore perceptions of proselytism in the exercise of the universal mandate to share the good news of Jesus Christ.[2]

1 'Christian Witness' is available at www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/1106Christian_Witness_in_a_Multi–Religious_World.pdf. See also the following articles by Thomas Schirrmacher: 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World—Three Years On,' *Current Dialogue* 56 (Dec 2014): 67–79, www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/current-dialogue-magazine/current-dialogue-56; 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World', in Richard Howell, ed., *Sharing of Faith Stories: A Methodology for Promoting Unity* (New Delhi: Caleb, 2018), 345–70; 'The Code "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World"—Its Significance and Reception,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40 (2016): 82–89; ' "But with Gentleness and Respect": Why Missions Should Be Ruled by Ethics—An Evangelical Perspective for a Code of Ethics of Christian Witness,' *Current Dialogue* (World Council of Churches) 50 (Feb 2008): 55–66. See also Elmer John Thiessen, *The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion* (Crownhill, UK: Paternoster; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), as well as his more recent book, *The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

2 This gathering, held on June 8–11, 2017,

Elmer Thiessen *taught at Medicine Hat College (Alberta, Canada) for 36 years and is currently adjunct professor of philosophy at Emmanuel Bible College in Kitchener (Ontario, Canada). He has published widely in the philosophy of religious education and religious schools, including two books,* Teaching for Commitment and In Defence of Religious Schools and Colleges *(1993, 2001). During the past decade he has been writing on evangelism, including* The Ethics of Evangelism: A Philosophical Defense of Proselytizing and Persuasion *(2011) and* The Scandal of Evangelism: A Biblical Study of the Ethics of Evangelism *(2018).* ***Thomas Schirrmacher*** *is the World Evangelical Alliance's associate general secretary for theological concerns. This paper was prepared for the WEA's Department of Theological Concerns.*

The issue of proselytism is best understood as a subset of the wider issue of evangelism. The following statement seeks to clarify the evangelical position on proselytism, as understood in the special and narrow sense of sheep-stealing.

I. Evangelicals, Evangelism and Proselytism

Evangelism is part of the DNA of evangelicals. Evangelism is typically understood in terms of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Of course, there is more to the mandate of the church than evangelism. We are also called to demonstrate the good news of the kingdom. But the focus here is on evangelism as verbal proclamation of the gospel.

Concerns about proselytism often arise in connection with efforts at evangelism. Evangelical Christians are the group most often accused of proselytism, given their passion for evangelism.[3] Evangelicals believe in proclaiming the gospel to all who are lost. They believe in sowing the seed of the gospel everywhere and to everyone, even though they cannot know in advance how receptive people will be to the proclamation of the gospel.[4]

Evangelical efforts at evangelism could therefore include reaching out to people who were once Christians but who have strayed from the faith and who as a result are no longer attending church, though they might still be on a church membership list. Such evangelistic efforts (described in Orthodox and Catholic terminology as 're-evangelism') can lead to proselytism, because a recommitment to faith on the part of those being re-evangelized often results in a change in church affiliation.

Although most Christians agree with the mandate to evangelize those who have never heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is strong disagreement about extending this mandate to lapsed or nominal Christians. Evangelicals are committed to both evangelism and re-evangelism. The key question here is whether re-evangelism that leads to proselytism can be done in an ethical manner.

---

was convened by the Global Christian Forum, whose purpose is to provide space for Christians from a wide variety of churches and traditions to meet, foster mutual respect and address common challenges. The planning and implementation of this consultation were undertaken by the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance.

3 We use the word 'evangelical' here to refer to those who are committed to the following theological tenets: a high view of the authority of the Bible, a belief in the historicity of the gospel accounts of Jesus, a belief in Jesus' death on the cross as the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of sin, a commitment to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and a commitment to evangelism. We use the term in a broad sense, noting for example that most Pentecostals are evangelicals and are therefore included here as such. We distance ourselves from any political misuse of the term 'evangelical', as occurs all too often in the USA today.

4 Such indiscrimination would seem to be part of the thrust of the Parable of the Sower, especially when Jesus explains this parable to his own disciples (Mt 13:18–23).

II. Definitions

Much confusion surrounds the definition of the word *proselytism*. Historically, this word was understood in a positive sense, equivalent to evangelism—proclaiming the good news. Today, and especially in ecumenical circles, the term has acquired strongly negative connotations. For example, in a statement by the World Council of Churches (WCC), 'Towards Common Witness', proselytism is defined as 'the encouragement of Christians who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance, through ways and means that contradict the spirit of Christian love, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the church'.[5] The WCC continues to be in dialogue with various Christian bodies regarding the definition of proselytism, but we use this text as a starting point as it describes a very common usage of the term. There are four problems with this and similar definitions of proselytism.

First, such definitions are confusing because they collapse into one concept two quite different meanings of proselytism: (a) unethical or unfaithful practices in evangelism that violate the freedom of the person, and (b) encouraging those who are already members of other churches to change their church affiliation. Clarity demands that we separate these two very different meanings.

Second, such definitions are arbitrary. Clearly, if proselytism is loaded with the negative implication of unethical practices, then all proselytism is unethical. But this is to make proselytism unethical by arbitrary definition. Again, we need to separate actions that might cause people who already belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance from adopting unethical means of doing so.

Third, such definitions are unfair when applied to evangelicals. Evangelicals are in principle strongly opposed to any forms of unethical evangelism, re-evangelism, or proselytism. They have joined other Christian denominations in condemning such activities, as noted above. Evangelism and re-evangelism must always be done in ways that are faithful to Jesus Christ and the norms of Scripture.[6]

Fourth, such definitions can lead to dishonesty. Sadly, some opposition to proselytism as defined above is in fact rooted in opposition to evangelism in general.[7] It is a betrayal of forthrightness to hide one's opposition to evangelism behind objections to so-called proselytism.

5 World Council of Churches, 'Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism', *International Review of Mission* 86 (1997) 463–73, also available at https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission–and–evangelism/towards–common–witness.

6 See especially Luke 9:51–55; 1 Cor 2:1–5; 2 Cor 4:1–2; 1 Thess 2:1–6; 1 Pet 3:13–17.

7 This point is made by Lawrence A. Uzzell, 'Don't Call It Proselytizing', *First Things* 146 (Oct 2004): 14–16. For a forthright claim that opposition to proselytism is really opposition to evangelism, see Petros Vassiliadis, 'Mission and Proselytism: An Orthodox Understanding', *International Review of Mission* 85 (Apr 1996): 257–75, esp. 260–61. Vassiliadis suggests that this assessment is common both in the Orthodox Church and in ecumenical circles.

Evangelicals are committed to evangelism, and therefore they reject any attempts to stop their evangelistic efforts under the guise of opposition to 'proselytism' understood as evangelistic malpractice. At the same time, they are very much committed to following all biblical commands that concern presenting the gospel in an ethical manner.

III. Exaggerated Charges of Proselytism

Charges of unethical proselytism are often exaggerated in various ways, partly due to the vagueness surrounding terms specifically associated with proselytism. The WCC statement 'Towards Common Witness', for example, associates proselytism with unfair criticism or caricaturing of the beliefs and practices of another church, offering humanitarian aid or educational opportunities as an inducement to join another church, using psychological pressure to induce people to change their church affiliation, or exploiting people's loneliness, illness, distress or even disillusionment with their own church in order to 'convert' them.[8]

The problem here is that many of the terms used to identify unethical means in proselytism are vague. When is the criticism of another church unfair? At what point does psychological pressure to change churches become excessive and unethical? Is offering humanitarian aid to someone in need always an inducement to join another church? What does exploitation of illness or loneliness mean? These questions are not easy to answer because of the vagueness of the descriptions of unethical methods. Critics of proselytism should spell out exactly what they find objectionable and then be prepared to defend their position that the practice is indeed unethical.

Many Christians today change their church affiliation entirely on their own, often after a long period of deliberation.[9] Here it is completely inappropriate to charge anyone with proselytism in the pejorative sense. Many people change their affiliation because they were not happy with their previous church. Surely it is unfair to charge a church that welcomes such people into its midst with unethical proselytism. (One could say that the best way to avoid losing members in this way is to make your own church vibrant and healthy.)

Other people leave a church because they experience love and caring from members of another church.[10] Surely it is not wrong to show love and caring to members of other churches. In such cases, the charge of unethical proselytism is quite inappropriate. Those making such allegations should show greater charity.

Many people change their church affiliation after moving to a new location.[11] The number of interconfessional

8 WCC, 'Towards Common Witness', 468.

9 This point is acknowledged in 'Towards Common Witness', 468.

10 Evangelicals themselves often change churches because they find another church to be more attractive or even faithful to Jesus Christ.

11 In Germany alone, about 150,000 people a year switch between the two major faith traditions, Catholic and Protestant, without either side raising concerns or doing anything about it.

marriages is also growing steadily. Theology students frequently spend a semester or two at seminaries of other confessions. In our globalized world, more Christians than ever are in contact with churches that have a different history and confession and, as a result of such contact, become interested in them.

All these trends are part of a broader international development: lifelong loyalty to institutions, including churches, is in decline worldwide. Globally, young people are increasingly leaving the religious affiliation of their parents in the same way in which they feel free to choose another profession, political party, music style or fashion.

One other caution is in order. It is incumbent on churches making the charge of proselytism to investigate carefully who is doing the proselytizing. All too often, accusations are made against evangelicals when the actual groups involved are Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses or others who are not in fellowship with the global evangelical community and would not listen to us in any case.

We also urge all churches to make a distinction between active church members (who rarely change their affiliation anyway, even if approached to do it) and those Christians who are lapsed or who have never had any further contact with their original church beyond their infant baptism. We will return to this issue below.

The problems of definition and application discussed above suggest that should be very cautious about how we describe proselytism. Perhaps it would even be better to call a moratorium on the use of the word in Christian circles.

In the following discussion, we will continue using the word, since we are trying to an address an issue that is described in this way in ecumenical circles and that is creating problems in relationships between Christian communities. But henceforth, we will characterize proselytism, within a Christian context, in a morally neutral sense, as simply referring to *activities that contribute in any way to people's decision to change their church affiliation.* We are not arbitrarily loading the term with the additional assumption of unethical means. In other words, we are leaving open the possibility of an ethical form of proselytism.

IV. Who Is a Christian?

A basic question underlies the concerns about proselytism: who is a Christian? The WCC statement 'Towards Common Witness' defines proselytism as 'the encouragement of *Christians* who belong to a church to change their denominational allegiance' (emphasis added). For evangelicals, the reference to Christians in this definition can beg the question, leading once again to an arbitrary definition of proselytism.

Evangelicals take seriously the frequent biblical warnings about Christians losing the faith, forsaking their first love, being led astray, falling away or drifting from the faith (Amos 2:4–5; Hosea; Gal 1:6–9; 1 Tim 6:3–10; 2 Tim 4:3–4; Heb 2:1; 3:7–11; 5:11–6:6). Jesus told parables in Luke 15 to illustrate the possibility of God's people getting lost: sheep that were once part of the sheepfold wander away on their own, and a son leaves a loving household only to squander his life in wild living.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who makes every effort to find lost sheep, the loving father who runs out to meet sons and daughters who have left the family and squandered their inheritance. Christians should follow the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in caring about lost sheep and making every effort to bring them back to the sheepfold.

Accordingly, evangelicals are committed to proclaiming the gospel to all who are lost, including those who were once Christian but have strayed from the faith, those who have been baptized and might still be on church rosters but who never attend church, and those who are only nominal, lapsed or inactive Christians.[12] As such, evangelicals are committed to both evangelism and re-evangelism.

Evangelicals also interpret the return of the lost son or daughter as essentially a return to God the Father and to Jesus the Good Shepherd, not necessarily to a church or denomination. Our guiding motivation is to do what is best for the sheep, not for us. The goal of all churches should be to transform lives and see people become like Jesus. Indeed, this goal is expressed in different ways in different confessions: the Orthodox call it theosis, Catholics and Evangelicals call it holiness (with perhaps slightly different meanings), and Pentecostals call it a Spirit-filled life.

Beyond all theological differences, however, the DNA of Christianity is that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit want to transform lives and bring them into communion with other believers in the church. All churches should also agree that baptized 'Christians' who do not confess their sins and live transformed Christian lives, and who have no communion with other Christians, are an anomaly. No church or confession should accept as normal a situation in which millions of baptized members have lost contact with their Christian communion and show no growth in faith and holiness. All should be happy if God uses other Christians to revive their nominal members.

Along with the issue of lapsed and nominal Christians, this serious theological question that merits further discussion. But regardless of how we address these theological questions, we need to treat each other in an ethical manner.

V. Ethical Proselytism

Evangelical Christians maintain that ethical proselytism is possible, provided that it is consistent with biblical norms. Here it is helpful to focus on what is surely the paradigm case of proselytism: evangelism or re-evangelism of people who have drifted away from the church or have even rejected the faith they once espoused. What does ethical behaviour look like in this

12 Some of these church 'members' do not even know that they were baptized as children; they find out only after their conversion to Christ and then have to wrestle with their status as Christians. If we would abstain from evangelizing these people, we would have to put a stop to public evangelism in countries like Germany or Russia altogether, because a majority of people belong to this category. It sometimes seems that these nominal church members are of interest to their established churches only after they have come to Christ and show interest in attending another church.

paradigm case?[13]

First, and of primary importance, the dignity and freedom of the individual must be respected (Gen 1:28; 2:15; Ps 8; Josh 24:15). Coercion must be avoided.[14] Any form of inducement to convert or to change churches is wrong. Exploitation of vulnerability must be scrupulously avoided.

Of course, as noted earlier, these general guidelines are somewhat vague, but the general principles still stand. God does not coerce, and we should not engage in coercion when interacting with someone considering a change in church affiliation.

Ethical re-evangelism and proselytism are always careful to speak the truth with love. Truthfulness is repeatedly held up as an ideal in the Scriptures.[15] Making false claims about other churches is unethical. It is wrong to misrepresent the doctrines of other churches when engaging in re-evangelism or proselytism.

Ethical re-evangelism and proselytism must also display tolerance. Although tolerance is not an explicitly biblical idea, the concept is certainly mandated in Scripture.[16] Tolerance, when properly defined, means treating persons who hold beliefs different from those of the evangelist with love and respect.[17] Ethical proselytism, while not precluding truthful and fair critical comments about the beliefs of other churches, makes such comments in a way that shows love and respect for people of other church traditions.

Attitudes and motivations are also important. Those engaged in evangelism or re-evangelism must display humility and a servant-like attitude.[18] Selfish motivation is ruled out for

13 Here we need to distinguish between secular or legal rules and Christian ethics. The laws of the state, international law, and statements of human rights sometimes can allow or forbid certain actions that are contrary to Christian ethics. For example, freedom of speech might allow us to say things about other Christians that we would not say if we followed Christ's commands. In this discussion we are concerned with Christian ethics, or those things that bind us because we are followers of Jesus Christ, not because we are citizens of the state.

14 See Lk 9:51–55 and Mt 10:12–15, where Jesus gives his disciples a 'theology of failure'; also 1 Pet 3:13–17 where evangelism follows an invitation to speak.

15 Jesus is the embodiment of truth (Jn 1:14; 14:6) and encourages truthfulness (Mt 5:37). Repeatedly he introduces his teachings with 'Truly, truly, I say to you' (Mt 5:18, 26; Mk 3:28; Lk 9:27; Jn 3:3, 5, 11). Paul also encourages us always to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

16 The Old Testament contains calls to love one's neighbor, including the alien and the stranger (Ex 22:21; Lev 19:18, 33, 34; Deut 10:19). Paul introduces the notion of forbearance, which is closely related to tolerance (Col 3:12–14; Rom 2:2–4; 15:1–2).

17 Paul and his co-workers, facing the outbreak of a riot in Ephesus, were defended by a city clerk who said that 'they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess' (Acts 19:37). Peter too exhorts us to 'show proper respect to everyone'. This exhortation appears in an epistle that teaches Christians to respond to hostility with love and gentleness when defending their faith (1 Pet 2:17; 3:15–16).

18 The Bible frequently applies humility to our interpersonal relationships (Mt 18:2–4; Jn 13:1–17; Phil 2:3–11; Col 3:12). Jesus objects to 'lording' it over others and admonishes us to be a servant as he was (Mt 20:24–28). Peter specifically talks about meekness, gentleness, and humility with regard to evangelism (1 Pet 3:15–16; cf. 5:5–6).

Christians, and thus preoccupation with growing one's own church is also inappropriate (Ps 119:36; Prov 18:1; Phil 1:17; 2:3). The fundamental motivation for re-evangelism and proselytizing is love for God and for neighbour (Deut 6:5; 10:12, 19; Mt 22:34-38; 2 Cor 5:14).

As should be evident, the guidelines for re-evangelism and proselytism are really the same as those for evangelism. We can generally describe them as specific applications of the Golden Rule (Mt 7:12; Gal 5:14). Put yourselves in the other person's shoes and try to imagine someone trying to persuade you to change churches. What would you find acceptable? Do the same when you engage in re-evangelism and proselytism.

So far, we have been looking at the re-evangelism of lapsed or nominal Christians. But another scenario deserves attention. Suppose that we are dealing with a genuine Christian who is deeply committed to and active in his or her church. Is it wrong to try to persuade such a person to change churches? This clearly violates the spirit of ecumenism, and such proselytism should not be a priority for any Christian.

However, one can easily imagine a scenario where this form of engagement might come about quite naturally. For example, friendly exchanges between two Christian friends might include frank discussions about the theological differences between their churches. One friend might even suggest to the other that his or her church is more faithful to Jesus Christ. This might result in the exploration of each other's churches, and in the end someone might change churches. Surely nothing inherently unethical is occurring in this scenario. However, once again, the ethical guidelines discussed earlier in this section would apply.

VI. Proselytism and Religious Freedom

Evangelical Christians are committed to respecting, affirming and promoting the religious freedom of all people.[19] This is not just a positive legal or political concept for evangelicals, but part of their theological DNA.[20] Men and women were created in the image of God, but with the freedom to obey or disobey him. God does not force anyone to accept his revelation or his offer of salvation. Jesus and the apostles always allowed people to reject the good news they were proclaiming.[21]

Religious freedom is central to human dignity. Therefore evangelical Christians support the definition of religious freedom as found in the Univer-

19 See the Resolution on Religious Freedom developed at the 2008 General Assembly of the World Evangelical Alliance in Pattaya, Thailand: https://www.iirf.eu/site/assets/files/112304/wea_res_eng-1.pdf. For translations of this statement in other languages, see https://www.iirf.eu/about-us/wea-rlc/.

20 See Thomas Schirrmacher and Richard Howell, 'Freedom of Religion or Belief from a Biblical Perspective', in *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (Oxford: Regnum, 2015), 18–29.

21 See for example Jesus' response to his disciples when they wanted to call down fire from heaven on those who rejected his message (Lk 9:51–55). Often we read of two quite different responses to the proclamation of the gospel in Acts: some believed and some did not (Acts 2:13, 41; 14:1–7; 17:32–34; 18:8, 12; 19:9, 19).

sal Declaration of Human Rights:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes the freedom to change his/her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, to manifest his/her religion or belief, in teaching, practice, worship and observance.[22]

Religious freedom also entails that Christians should be free to change church affiliation. We thus need to be careful about language suggesting that church members are somehow owned by their churches. From this viewpoint, there is something odd about understanding proselytism in terms of stealing sheep from another church. Jesus bought every believer with his blood, and ultimately we belong to the church through the blood of Jesus, not by anything a church or other Christians have done.

VII. Some Practical Suggestions

1. Evangelism or re-evangelism cannot avoid the issue of church membership for the newly converted or re-committed, because being a committed Christian entails belonging to a church. If, upon conversion or re-commitment, persons indicate that they were once baptized or previously members of another church, ethical proselytism will first encourage these persons to reconnect with their original church. If there are major theological differences between the churches, these should be explained in a fair and open manner that helps persons to make their own decision on church affiliation. If such persons indicate that they do not want to return to their original church, great care must be taken to proceed in an ethical manner in advising these persons with regard to church membership. Everything possible should be done to ensure a peaceful relation with the original church (see the prior section, 'Ethical Proselytism', especially the guidelines on truth and tolerance).

2. When someone changes church affiliation as a result of evangelism or re-evangelism, every effort should be made to notify the pastor or the priest at the person's original church of the person's desire to change church affiliation, thereby also giving the pastor or priest a chance to contact this person if he or she wishes. We should not be afraid that such contacts might lead people to change their minds. The aim is to help people to make a considered and mature decision that they will not regret in the future. We should also help people to maintain peace with relatives and friends from the original

22 WCC, 'Towards Common Witness', 467. For a review of international covenants regarding liberty of conscience, religious pluralism and equality, free exercise of religion, nondiscrimination on religious grounds, and autonomy for religious groups, see Nathan Lerner, 'Proselytism, Change of Religion, and International Human Rights', *Emory International Law Review* 12 (1998): 477–563. See also Thomas Schirrmacher and Jonathan Chaplin, 'European Religious Freedom and the EU', in Jonathan Chaplin and Gary Wilton, eds., *God and the EU: Faith in the European Project*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 151–74; Thomas Schirrmacher, 'Mission und Religionsfreiheit—eine evangelikale Perspektive', in Marianne Heimbach-Steins and Heiner Bielefeldt, eds., *Religionen und Religionsfreiheit: Menschenrechtliche Perspektiven im Spannungsfeld von Mission und Konversion* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2010), 113–33.

church, rather than creating unnecessary tensions in existing social relationships.

3. It is of utmost importance that the conscience and decision of the person changing church affiliation be respected. All too often, discussions of proselytism focus on the two churches involved, and the person involved becomes merely a pawn in the conflict. In reality, it should be the other way around: the person's wish or decision should be respected, and if we want to respect the dignity of this person, then we need to keep uppermost in our minds what is best for this individual person.

4. Evangelical Christians at local, national and international levels should develop a code of conduct regarding how pastors, priests and leaders of various church communities will handle individuals who want to change their church affiliation.

5. Evangelical Christians will be sensitive to the problem of encroaching on someone else's territory in the task of evangelism, especially if an established church is actively engaged in programs of evangelism or re-evangelism. Here we follow the example of the apostle Paul, who in his letter to the saints in Rome wrote that his ambition was always 'to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation' (Rom 15:20; see also 2 Cor 10:12–18).

We must be careful, however, not to overextend this principle of sensitivity to the problem of encroaching on someone else's territory. For example, the notion of canonical territory to which the Orthodox Church appeals is not only difficult to define but flies in the face of Orthodox principles of catholicity and unity, as well as the globalization of the modern human community. Where there is great need, and where the Orthodox Church is not evangelizing in its own country (which might be largely secularized), evangelical Christians will not be bound by the notion of canonical territory, which effectively exists only within the canon law of the Orthodox Church.[23]

6. Wherever possible, evangelicals will seek to cooperate with other churches in the task of evangelism or re-evangelism.

7. We must be very cautious about charging proselytism when clergy or other leaders or theologians change from one church or confession to another. With rare exceptions, such changes are not the result of any immoral offers or even activities by the receiving church, but of a long process of deliberation by the clergy themselves. Where the people involved have studied the matter thoroughly, we need to respect the theological reasoning behind their decision.

---

23 We humbly request that churches with a concept of canonical territory apply it only to their own church; i.e. a Catholic bishop may not act in the diocese of another Catholic bishop without his consent, and an autocephalous Orthodox Church may not become active in the territory of another autocephalous church without permission. But why should this bind other confessions? If it did, then it would also apply to the Orthodox Church's evangelistic activities in countries that are not Orthodox, such as Italy. This inconsistency suggests again that in a globalized world, the very notion of canonical territory should be re-evaluated.

VIII. Common Witness

Many of the concerns surrounding proselytism centre on the need for the church to bear common witness to the world. Though sympathetic to this need, evangelicals also caution against an over-emphasis on common witness. In a post-Babel world, complete unity is impossible and perhaps even undesirable. There is something healthy about diverse theological emphases among differing Christian communions. We can learn from each other as we seek to serve and to proclaim the good news of our common Lord and Saviour. Re-evangelism and proselytism can be conducted in 'the spirit of Christian love' and in such a way as to enhance 'trust in the Christian witness of the church'.[24]

24 These phrases come from WCC, 'Towards Common Witness', 467.

Contents

Evangelism and the Paradox of Europe and Christianity
Evert Van de Poll
page 292

An Evangelical View of Proselytism
Elmer Thiessen and Thomas Schirrmacher
page 308

The Case for Practical Theological Interpretation in Faith-based Organizations
Peirong Lin
page 319

Reverse Missiology: Mission Approaches and Practices of African Christians within the Baptist Union of Great Britain
Israel Oluwole Olofinjana
page 334

Reciprocal Mission Theology for Diaspora Mission
Samuel Cueva
page 346

Economics and the 'Present Evil Age'
Richard L. Smith
page 354

Moral Revelation in the Coming Age: An Eschatological Evaluation of Kern Robert Trembath's Anthropology of Revelation
Joshua Wise
page 365

Book Reviews
page 377

Index for Evangelical Review of Theology, Volume 42
page 382

Paternoster: thinking faith

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

0144-8153(201810)42:4;1-G

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY VOLUME 42, NO 4, October 2018

Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

Volume 42 No. 4 October 2018