

Who is the evangelist?

By Victor Beshir

Since the Coptic Orthodox Church uses the word “Evangelist” to refer to one of the four gospels’ writers, then when we use the same word to refer to workers in the field of evangelism, we need to inform the reader of our intention to use the word “evangelism” in its broader meaning to include each person proclaiming the gospel. In this lesson, I will use these two words interchangeably.

The evangelist is the person who proclaims the Gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God. St John summarized the work of the evangelism worker in those golden words:

*“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— **the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life** which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that **you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.** And these things we write to you **that your joy may be full**” (1 John 1:1-4).*

Therefore, we have good news to declare; the news of salvation that human soul longs to hear and to taste, and that the human spirit waits for patiently. No wonder, our Lord Jesus started His service after His baptismal by going to the Galilee’ synagogue and reading the passage from Isaiah 61:1, 2:

*“ The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me **To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.**” (Luke 4: 18 -19)*

Here the Lord Jesus talks about: the poor in spirit whose spiritual treasures were stolen by the devil; the brokenhearted from the wounds of sin; the captives of devil and sin; the blind whose sights were clouded by sin; those oppressed by the slavery of Satan; and the acceptable year of the Lord during which He will issue a declaration of freedom, offer salvation, and reinstate joy to all.

The acceptable year of the Lord mentioned here refers to the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25) which was celebrated by the Jews every fifty years. That year used to be a source of great joy and liberation, because on its arrival every debt was forgiven and every slave was freed. Those living in the cities of refuge, because of crimes they have committed, were also pardoned on this year. (Number 35:11-18). In summary, this was the year that was anticipated by those who were enslaved, indebted, or in captivity. The year of Jubilee was a symbol of the year of our salvation that was completed by the Lord.

Therefore, the main topic of evangelism is the Good News, the Gospel. We don't preach from our own but rather we simply declare His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, and His second coming, explaining the results of salvation and the eternal life it grants us, as summarized by the Lord in the above words.

The Good News we carry needs to reach blocked ears, hardened hearts like stone, and enslaved souls in captivity. How can we open the closed eyes or soften the stony hearts? This mission although beyond our human capabilities, but with the help of the Holy Spirit it is definitely within the reach of the word of God. So, our work is impossible unless it is accompanied by His eminent power.

The dead spirit can't hear your voice but she can recognize the voice of the Son of God. The closed eyes may not see the freedom you offer, but they might obey the order of Him who knows the secret code to open them. The blocked ears can't hear your words, until the real doctor comes and removes the blocking materials from the ears.

Needless to say then that the work of the evangelist is to cry to God, to intercede on behalf of those whom he/she longs to show the way of salvation.

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The Characters of an Evangelist:

The first character of an evangelist is he/she a **person of prayer**. Evangelists need to kneel down before the Lord in deep prayers for those in need to the gospel. After prayers, the evangelism workers need **persistence** to awaken those who are separating themselves from God, those who are living in sin, or enjoying temporal false happiness, or inclining to the deception of the devil. This doesn't mean to act without sensitivity to people's time or circumstances, or to impose one's self on people. On the contrary, you need to be **sensitive**, but at the same time, you have to be able to recognize and distinguish the deceptions of the sinful souls and the devil, and to gently disclose every deception so the sinner can realize the danger that lies ahead of him/her.

So, an evangelist is gentle, but strong.

He/she is sensitive but revealing.

He/she is respectful, but honest enough to disclose spiritual danger

He/she doesn't impose himself/herself, but approaches with love

He/she performs an act of mercy that comes from a heart full of compassion for those who haven't seen the Light yet.

Evangelism is a peaceful encounter with people, but in reality, it is engaged in a ragging war with Satan.

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Loosing Evangelism Objectives

Sometimes evangelism utilizes social services, educational activities, sports, or other acts of love to reach out to people; however, there is a real danger in involving in these services without declaring the kingdom of God and the Good News. It is so easy to get carried on, to forget the real objective, and to go after minor ones. The main objective of evangelism is the salvation of others. You may use any method to get you closer to the hearts and minds of the people but please don't forget your objective. Once you get closer to the heart and the person starts to open up and listen to you, you should begin, without hesitation or delay; to talk about the Good News (the Gospel of Jesus Christ).

A long time ago, I read a book about South Africa. The author was comparing the efforts of missionary workers in South Africa. Interestingly, he said that the Catholic missions in South Africa established schools and hospitals but they forgot the main reason for their mission and as a result they attracted very few to Christianity. He said, however, that Protestant missionaries attracted so many, because while helping others they preached the Gospel.

Islam learned the lesson and started to develop procedures and to teach them to their youth. They teach them what to say and how to directly approach a person, after only a few encounters, and ask him/her to accept Islam. They announced that the "Invitation to Islam" (AL DAWAA in Arabic) should be the objective of every Muslim in America, especially students and college professors, and worked very hard to teach each Muslim the necessary techniques to use when conducting ALDAWAA. There are printed books and manuals used by Muslims that were written by help from the top psychologists and sociologists in the world.

It is a shame to compare these zealous minds and hearts with what many Copts say, 'Serve Copts in our church first and then evangelize others.' But serving Copts in the church is an endless job; it will never end, which means we will never evangelize.

The first church during the days of the apostles gave us a great example. St. Paul never stopped evangelism and missionary work, while at the same time never stopping to take care of the members of the churches he established. The reader of his epistles realizes that he had to deal with so many spiritual and dogmatic problems within the churches, while enriching people's souls with spiritual food. Reading the book of Acts shows St. Paul's tireless efforts of evangelism that never ceased, even when he was a prisoner bonded by chains. Not only did St. Paul do that, but also all the other apostles, thus establishing the pattern for work in the church. Accordingly, evangelism and pastoral work should go hand in hand all the time without sacrificing one on the account of the other¹.

Schools of Evangelism

It is needless to say that an evangelism worker's first school should be the school of prayer where he opens his heart to the love of God so that he may reach the stage where his heart and his whole life become consecrated for Him, who loves us to the cross. This consecration doesn't necessarily mean going to a monastery or priesthood, but rather having a heart that is wholly consecrated to God, and a life dedicated to move within His circle of thoughts and love, allowing the person to be an instrument in God's hands.

The **consecrated heart** leads to a passion for evangelism, since evangelism is not the work of specific people, but rather is the mission of every Christian who loves Christ. It is impossible to taste His love, His sweetness, and His salvation and not talk about it or at least refer to it and long to share it with others. The fruits of the salvation would be well manifested in the life of every true Christian, forcing others to ask and the Christian to answer.

The **life of prayer** certainly acts as the reservoir that the evangelism worker visits over and over again to arm himself with the needed tools of evangelism.

The Obstacle of Fear:

Evangelism workers need to be **courageous** and to get rid of all fear. Copts are afraid to talk to others about their beloved Christ without a clear good reason. After almost fifty years in the land of immigration, you find a few non-Egyptians in our churches. We are afraid of talking about our church, our faith, our spiritual heritage, or the work of God in our lives.

While the world around us is similar to the man that Christ mentioned in His **Parable of the Good Samaritan**. That man who, on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothes, wounded him, and left him half dead. Many times we imitate the Levite and the priest who came and looked, and passed by on the other side, although Christ asked us to act as the Good Samaritan.

How do we explain our behavior when we see the world burning in the flames of sin and lust, rapidly descending to the Hades, while we are doing nothing? Is it lack of courage, prayers, care, or love? Probably, the long history of accumulative persecution against Copts may explain some. However, today we are not in a land of persecution, we are in a land of freedom, where countless groups and religions take full advantage of this freedom, and spread out their principles or religions with no fear.

What is the worst thing that could happen if you talk to a person about God? Worst case scenario the person will tell you that he/she is not interested. What did you lose? Nothing! At the same time, there is a good chance that the person may listen to you, especially after good preparation through prayers and thinking. In telemarketing, there are a well calculated percentage of people who will respond positively to cold phone calls. Think about it; the telemarketer will get some people to answer favorably every certain number of calls. However, you don't only have the chances suggested by the Probability Theory, but, in addition, you have the mightiest power in the whole universe, the power that opens the closed hearts and eyes, and sets the captive souls free. We need to learn to be courageous, accept rejection when it happens, and have faith in Whom we follow.