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The Wholeness of Evangelism: A Bible Study (Part D)

by Alfred C. Krass

This is the fourth in a series of four Bible studies based on the National Council of Churches' "Policy Statement on Evangelism." Four areas of evangelism receive attention: personal (Nov./Dec.), social (Jan./Feb.), communal (March/April), and public (this issue). Each article, as printed in the TSF Bulletin, includes two studies on one of these areas. The time guidelines may help a group avoid getting stalled on the introductory questions. The studies could be helpful in several settings—seminary classrooms, TSF chapters, church classes or committees. The author and the editors would appreciate hearing about results. See the materials order form for reprints.

Commitment to Jesus Christ Is a Public Event D

"Commitment to Jesus Christ," the Policy Statement goes on, "is a public event; new confrontations with the institutions of society occur, for the 'principalities and powers' which impoverish and enslave humanity cannot go unchallenged by Christians."

Now what does this mean in practice? The Statement goes on to explain: "Commitment to Jesus Christ in our public lives means to be engaged more earnestly in the work not only of relieving the poor and hungry, but removing the causes of poverty and hunger, in the struggle to remedy both inequities and iniquities, in the liberation of the oppressed and the vindication of the deprived, in the establishment of God's rule in the affairs of humanity."

In many countries of the Third World which have authoritarian governments today, the governments have sought to divide Christians, praising those churches which give unquestioning support to the regime, and even encouraging their religious activities, and condemning (and often persecuting) those Christians and churches which call for justice and democracy. Their argument is that the latter groups have gone beyond their religious mandate in dealing with "affairs of state." Those groups usually argue, however, that to fight for justice and freedom is part of their religious duty, that the "religious" cannot be limited to worship and personal evangelism.

The Policy Statement would give support to this latter definition of the proper realm of religious activity—evangelism, the Policy Statement says, has a necessary public dimension.

SESSION ONE Text: Acts 16:16-24

Other references you may wish to consult in this session and the next: Matt. 28:16-20, Mk. 5:1-20, Acts 4:1-31, 1 Cor. 15:20-28, Rev. 5

Preliminary discussion questions (20 minutes)

1. What do the members of your churches think about unseen powers? Do they believe they exist? How did they respond to *The Exorcist*?
2. When people today talk of invisible powers and spirits, in what realm do they feel they operate—the personal? The inter-personal? The public, historical realm?
3. What did Jesus say about unseen spirits like demons?
4. Complete this quotation of our Lord: "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then—" What did Jesus mean by that?

Study of the Text: Acts 16:16-24 (40 minutes)

At the time of writing, Alfred Krass was a consultant to the Evangelism Working Group. He is currently involved in neighborhood ministry in Philadelphia, and contributing a regular column on urban mission to The Other Side. Studies © National Council of Churches, reprinted by permission. The entire policy statement may be obtained from the NCC, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 10027.

1. How was the slave-girl being used by her owners?
2. Why did Paul become so upset?
3. What kind of power had Paul assaulted by his exorcism: (a) economic, (b) political, or (c) social?
4. With what kind of power was this power allied? Do you see such alliances in our world today?
5. Did the slave-girl's owners describe their actual reason for being angry with Paul and Silas? What appeal did they make in order to cloak their actual reason for opposing them? Have you seen people cloak their opposition to the church's activity in a similar way?
6. Would it not have been better for Paul and Silas to have left well enough alone in order to have been able to carry on their evangelistic mission? Should they have risked going to prison?

Summary questions (20 minutes)

- A. How are people you see bound by oppressive forces? Is it the role of the church to challenge these forces?
- B. Is it part of our duty to "remove the causes of poverty and hunger," or is it enough to relieve those who are suffering from them?
- C. Does holistic evangelism threaten the powers that be? If so, how can we be law-abiding citizens if we engage in such evangelism?

Prayer

SESSION TWO

Text: Ephesians 3:7-13

Preliminary discussion questions (20 minutes)

1. What are the "principalities and powers" of which the New Testament speaks? How are they related to political powers, to economic and social systems?
2. What does it mean to witness to the principalities and powers?
3. Does God's plan for the world concern the principalities and powers?
4. Does the gospel promise only internal, spiritual liberation, or do its promises go further? Does it envision actual liberation from oppressive forces within the span of human history?

Study of the Text: Ephesians 3:7-13 (30 minutes)

1. How does Paul describe the gospel in these verses?
2. What is God's "secret plan"?
3. What role does the church play in that plan?
4. Whom does the church address in this witness? Where are the powers found that they might be addressed?
5. Was Paul's imprisonment due to his making this kind of witness?

Summary questions (35 minutes)

- A. A young writer has said, "The most political act the church can perform is to preach the gospel." Do you agree?
- B. As you look at the community and world in which you live, what do you feel is God's "purpose" concerning it? How will holistic evangelism further this purpose? What kind of "spiritual warfare" will we have to engage in, and with what powers?
- C. Can holistic evangelism be furthered by deeds of love as well as by preaching? Will this be a sign to the powers?
- D. Do you agree with the Policy Statement where it says we are called to "remedy both inequities and iniquities"? How do these differ?
- E. In what ways can you be engaged in "the establishment of God's rule in the affairs of humanity" in your city or town? Do you sense that the Spirit is calling you to be so engaged?

Prayer