

## What is evangelism?

1. Evangelism, simply put, is the explicit witness of the church.
2. As such, it is part of mission, understood as witness both implicit and explicit. The church is sent to witness; and this includes, although it is not exhausted by, the explicit witness to Jesus Christ which is properly meant by "evangelism."
3. This explains both why evangelism is not simply everything the church as such properly does and why it is not simply one church function among others, like teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments, etc. Evangelism is not simply everything the church properly does because the church properly bears implicit witness as well as the explicit witness that is properly called "evangelism." On the other hand, evangelism is not simply one church function among others, because any of its functions involved in bearing explicit witness is eo ipso an evangelistic function.
4. This can also be expressed by saying that everything the church properly does by way of bearing explicit witness is evangelism, or has an evangelistic function or aspect. But, again, not everything the church properly does is properly called "evangelism," because the church properly bears implicit witness as well as the explicit witness that is evangelism.
5. This, however, is the only reason for distinguishing evangelism. It is not distinguished, for example, because it has to do with those "outside" the church as distinct from those who are "inside." For the New Testament, the object of evangelism is "the world" that is the object of God's love. Insofar as Christians, who as such are commissioned as subjects of evangelizing, are also always in the world, they, too, are objects of evangelism--not in their office as Christians, but as human beings who are part of the humanity that is "the world." Therefore, each Christian is both

subject and object of evangelism--and this is so throughout one's Christian life, in accordance with the dialectic of indicative and imperative.

6. And this, of course, explains why evangelism is also not distinguished by having peculiarly to do with "the initial stages of Christian existence" as distinct from its later stages--with the decision of Christian faith as distinct from the formation of Christian life (Albert Outler). Wherever one bears explicit Christian witness, one is a subject of evangelizing, or evangelism; and wherever one is the recipient of explicit Christian witness, one is an object of evangelizing, or of evangelism, regardless or whether one has already been an object of such evangelizing before and even of whether one has accepted and, perhaps, exercised the responsibility of being a subject thereof.

7. Through Jesus Christ God has decisively called all to faith and to a life of witness. Therefore, Christians as well as all other men and women are the recipients of this call, and of all that presupposes it, such as e.g., the call to make effective use of the appointed means of salvation. But this is true of Christians in their existence as human beings and members of the world, not in their office as Christians. In their office as Christians, they have accepted the call to share in the gospel of God, in God's evangelizing, as well as all that presupposes this call, such as, e.g., sharing in validly and efficaciously administering the appointed means of salvation.

June 1984 (rev. May 1987)