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PRESENTER: REV. DANIEL LEVISON MHONE

Introduction

The only hope of a new creation and truly catholic church rests on the two fundamental principles, which are the spiritual status of the messengers of the Gospel and the methodology of spreading the Gospel.

New Creation

New creation is visible if the Message comes as an urge of the overwhelming experience of God's love. Michael Green asserted that the first century Christians spread not their own message but God's message 'because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they received through Jesus Christ' (Evangelism in the Early Church, p216). New Creation in the messengers of the Gospel is missing in most of the proclaimers of God's message and yet this is paramount if the whole world is to experience God's ultimate love, salvation, and justice.

The absence of new creation among most messengers of the Gospel has serious repercussion over Christian witness of God's love in the whole world. On the contrary, the Old Testament testifies of prophets like Isaiah who underwent a transforming exercise before being commissioned to proclaim God's own message. This is God's paradigm of doing Global evangelism. Similarly, John Wesley went through a Spiritual renewal in 1738 before his effective mission in Europe and America. Squarely, today's messengers need the same transforming before they can proclaim God's oracles. Unfortunately, most of the messengers in our days have not experienced God's transforming power.

The mere fact that new creation is missing in among messengers of the Gospel drives the said messengers to pursue a myriad other motives of spreading the Gospel. The key motive is, as hinted above, spreading because of the overwhelming experience of God's love. The absence of new creation leads to contextual motives. Two contextual motives are greed and competition. Greedy motive surfaces because of the current mission phenomenon where Church statistics count as the basis of soliciting funding for the mushrooming Churches. Denominations are established not focused on the new creation principle but on the nominal Christianity principle. In this case, the spirituality of the Christianity is heavily compromised. Competition, because Christians compete for Christians. Each denomination claims to have the whole truth. This is inward looking and creates divisions within the Christian Faith.

The above point is crucial to the whole Evangelism Concept because the Spiritual experience determines the content of the messages proclaimed. The messages of those messengers that are strangely warmed are christocentric. Surprisingly, the content of most of today's messages is not Christ centered but overtones of theological treatise and overloads of Denominational Doctrines. This is evident in most sermons, which propound denominational bias on Doctrines such as the Trinity, the Church, the Holy Spirit, perfection, election, etc, which have occupied the minds of messengers at the cost of Christ himself who is the Gospel. On a sad note, proclamation of Doctrines has brought in divisions instead of the much-needed unity of the Church. On the other hand messengers who have experienced the transforming power, proclaim the message out of the urge of God's love through Christ and not out of knowledge about God. A Biblical character named Nicodemus can help explain this better: Nicodemus was a religious leader. Initially, he did not experience the transforming power. After his encounter with Christ (John3:3-11), his witness about Christ focused on love and justice (John 7:50 – 51). Nicodemus became a witness of God's love to his community.

A probable solution to this scenario is a new creation of the messengers of the Gospel of Christ who will proclaim God's own message out of love for the humanity to experience God's saving grace.

Methodology

A truly catholic Church is a dream very remote in the face of divisions within the Christian Faith itself and extending to Christianity and other world Faiths. The biggest challenge is how to evangelise noting seriously that proselytism is rejected (Gerald H Anderson: Mission Trends No. 5 p190).

In this great vision of a truly catholic church, proselytism stands as a great challenger. Can we talk of evangelism without some form of proselytism? What will the Church make out of the great commission in Matthew 28:19 – 20 for those who believe? Does the Christian faith have to reject those who believe to be incorporated in the faith community? Can we therefore seriously talk of evangelism without one changing a group of a faith community? Secondly, does the ecumenical approach to doing evangelism still hold to the popular definition of evangelism? The Methodist position is very clear. It states that as “a people bound together on one planet, we see the need for self-critical view of our tradition and accurate appreciation of other traditions. In these encounters, our aim is not to reduce doctrinal differences to some lowest common denominator of religious agreement, but to raise all such relationships to highest possible levels of human fellowship and understanding (The Book Of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 1996, p82). This approach envisages new creation as the starting point in this human fellowship and understanding remembering that new creation is an act of God through the working of the Holy Spirit. An issue to be resolved is, with this approach, is proclamation still the focus of the Church in spreading the Gospel? This Methodist ecumenical approach seriously undermines the focus on proclamation and a sense of belonging to a newfound faith group. All that is involved is living in harmony with all people and understanding each group, as it stands distinct from others.

In view of the above, the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Movement propounded a methodology of doing evangelism at its conference held in Canberra in 1991. Three steps were proposed which are explications of the Nicene Creed, recognition of the apostolic faith as a means to bring visible Unity of the Church. This methodology utilises dialogue in doing evangelism.

The ecumenical approach in doing evangelism has several elements missing. First, the central place of proclamation of the Gospel. Second, it is silent on the spiritual status of the messengers of the Gospel. Third, there is no urge to move from one faith group to another.

Furthermore, as the focus is on dialogue other than proclamation, the big question is, is dialogue (be it bilateral or multilateral) another form of evangelisation? The dialogue approach of doing evangelisation falls short and suffers setbacks as a way of doing evangelism because it systematically eradicates both the principle of proclamation and the central place of the proclaimers of the gospel. This therefore hampers the spread of new creation to all God’s creation and even the new creation of the proclaimers.

In view of a serious shortfall of the above approach, I would propose a method focused on the new creation principle and heavily borrowing from the Apostle Paul’s way of doing ecumenical evangelism.

Our starting point is Paul spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to places where the gospel had not been preached. However, after his encounter (new Creation) with Christ on the road to Damascus, he embarked on evangelism confronting both the religious leaders and the worshippers with the true Gospel in the synagogues. All that Paul was doing was to bring light to already religious people but living without an accurate knowledge of a true God. After his witness, the people encountered the risen Christ in their own culture and life experiences. People therefore received God differently who was remotely known to them (Acts 17:30).

Paul’s method of doing evangelism, I would describe as containing both elements of bilateral and multilateral dialogue. Bilateral where he encouraged debates even among Jews themselves (Acts 17:17 – 20), and multilateral where his new found faith (Christianity) went into persuasion and dialogue with other faith groups in his witness (Acts 17:17 – 20). Dialogue as a method should not stand on its own but compliment proclamation.

I am persuaded to think that Paul’s approach motivated by the urge of the overwhelming experience of God’s love, was meant to bring new creation to all humanity and targeted to achieve a truly catholic church

as contemplated and desired by the Santiago de Compostela 1993 Faith and Order Movement in propounding the ecumenical concept of 'All In Each Place'.

Conclusion

Proclamation of the Gospel should remain the focus in doing evangelism and new creation first to the proclaimers and then to all God's creation should remain paramount to enable the remote vision of a truly catholic church become visible in our days where divisions have left the Church paralysed and without hope of visible unity.

Discussion Questions

- 1 Is dialogue a type of evangelism or mere compromise?
- 2 Can we do evangelism without a form of proselytism?
- 3 Can we attain a truly catholic church in the face of doctrinal differences?
- 4 Are divisions a sign of strength or weakness in the Christian faith itself?

Bibliography

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