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THE ROLE OF THE EVANGELIST TODAY

*(Dr. Brian Stiller is President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and spoke with **The Canadian Evangelist**. Evangelist John Bowen conducted the interview on June 17, 1994)*

TCE: *Brian, what has been your own experience of being an evangelist?*

BS: I finished university in 1966 and immediately hit the road with my wife, as a travelling evangelist. I had developed a manual on holding crusades before I had even held a meeting. I was in disaster. I was in the wrong place doing the wrong thing. I was too academic, not simple enough. I flogged myself to do it because I believed I had the gift. It took me years to figure out I did not have the gift of an evangelist. I had more of a prophetic gift.

My role now, I think, is as a pre-evangelist. My TV show, for instance, seeks to intrigue non-believers, and to cause them to ask, "Why are Christians not afraid?"

TCE: *What do you see as the role of the evangelist today?*

BS: I recognize the gift of the evangelist as a gift of God to the church. It needs to be seen that way even though the whole notion of evangelism seems incompatible with today's culture. I don't know any tougher job these days than that of an evangelist.

Yet God continues to give the gift and the gift will find a way of being expressed. At the same time, we have to understand that the old tradition of the neatly dressed man speaking from a platform surrounded by geraniums may be something of the past.

TCE: *One survey showed that evangelists are included in the top bracket of North America's most despised jobs along with prostitutes, drug dealers and second hand car salesmen. How can the gift be expressed today in view of society's view of the evangelist?*

BS: For one thing, we should not underestimate the importance of the work of the evangelist within the local church itself. After all, God has no grandchildren, so the evangelization of each new generation in the local church is crucial.

Beyond the local church, I see evangelism moving increasingly into the field of 'narrow casting'. Radio has moved from broadcasting – trying to promote programming that suits all interests and ages – to specialization.

I believe we need evangelists who are economists, opera singers, gardeners, rock stars, political scientists ... you name it. They would evangelize not only to "come to Christ now" but would also demonstrate the absolute validity of biblical faith in their own professional quadrant.

This is not to say that God cannot or will not raise up another Billy Graham, or Terry Winter or Michael Green. But I think we need to see greater diversity as well.

TCE: *Talk more about some of these new forms that evangelism might take?*

BS: A second paradigm I would like to see expressed somehow is more radical. I believe God would raise up individuals or groups who surprise our culture by the toughness of their call to Christ, lacking the smoothness of some evangelists.

Another expression we might see is a new religious order, of people who take a vow of poverty and band together to serve people, and to spread the Gospel, a sort of Franciscan order.

TCE: *Are there ways the traditional evangelist should adapt to present conditions?*

BS: With respect to being in tune with our times, you need to find the vehicle of information that suits your interest. Some are, called to emphasize apologetics and questions of truth. Others like John Wesley White, spend more time keeping up with the newspapers. Some, like Robert Schuller, have a natural interest in psychology, and will try to keep abreast of developments in the study of psychological well-being. Others follow cultural trends, in music and movies. Those with a special interest in eschatology will look for signs of the end-times. Each one needs to follow their expertise, their own personal window of interest.

TCE: *What does the evangelist do about the fact that fewer and fewer people have even the slightest; Biblical literacy, so that references to "the Old Testament" or the "Gospel of Mark" or the "prophets" are like a foreign language.*

BS: I think for evangelists to memorize whole passages of Scripture, and to stand and quote them at length is both intriguing and compelling for an audience that knows nothing of the Scripture.

TCE: *Brian, thank you for this.*

BS: My pleasure.