

## From *The Canadian Evangelist*, Summer 1994

### BOOKS FOR THE EVANGELISTS

**The Evangelism Mandate: Recovering the Centrality of Gospel preaching** by David L. Larsen (Crossway Books, 1992). *Reviewed by T.V. Thomas*

This book is written primarily to encourage pastors of local churches to include evangelistic preaching in their pulpit menu (itself a worthy aim), but the evangelist will also benefit from chapters in Larsen's work which focus on the theology and psychology of conversion, the sociology of evangelistic preaching, and the evangelistic invitation. Five classic Gospel sermons at the end of the book – by Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd Jones, James Stewart, George Truett and Billy Graham – would inspire any preacher to declare the Good News today.

**Using Illustrations to Preach with Power** by Bryan Chappell (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). *Reviewed by T.V. Thomas*

It is helpful for all preachers to read Bryan Chappell's excellent book on the life-changing effect of the power of good sermon illustrations. After discussing the theory behind using illustrations, the author details the process of constructing and delivering illustrations. Sprinkled throughout the book (naturally) are numerous illustrations well worth using.

**Who was Jesus?** By N.T. Wright (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992). *Reviewed by John Bowen*

Attacks on the historicity of Jesus have become more strident and more popular in tone in the past few years, helped by the *Jesus Seminar*, articles in (for instance) TIME Magazine (January 10, 1994), interviews with the authors in the popular media.

These make the task of the evangelist more difficult, since the average non-Christian is aware of these attacks, but usually less aware that there is another side.

N.T. (Tom) Wright is described by TIME as "one of the most formidable of traditionalists Biblical scholars" and has done a great service to all of us with this short, readable critique of works by Barbara Thiering, A.N. Wilson and John Spong. The book is worth the price for Wright's original insights into the historicity of the resurrection and the deity of Christ alone.

## **FINDING THE CULTURAL BUTTON-HOLE**

by John Bowen

Francis Schaeffer used to talk about "the Gospel for the person with the Bible and the Gospel for the person without the Bible." This sounds strange coming from one so biblically based. How can there be two Gospels?

The way Schaeffer worked out his thesis was this. In Acts 2, where Peter is speaking to Jews, he can quote Scripture and assume a common understanding of fundamental concepts like God, sin, repentance and faith. These things do not need defining. In a setting like Acts 17, however, where Paul is speaking to the philosophers, who have no understanding of Jewish theology, he can assume nothing. So where does he begin?

He tells them that, as he looked around Athens, he noticed an altar to an unknown god. "What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you," he declares. The god they did not know, Paul does know. There is a story, told by Don Richardson in his book *Eternity in Their Hearts*, of how, two hundred years before Paul's visit, a plague was dramatically stopped in Athens when the people prayed to an "unknown god" who was reputed to be Creator and All-Powerful. No one knows if it is true, but it certainly could be true.

After all, there is no culture where God has left himself without witness. Among the Jews, it was the witness of Scripture, the law and the prophets. But in a secular culture, what is the witness there? That was what Paul had figured out.

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### ***Cross-cultural communication begins when we step outside our front doors***

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As the western world becomes more and more secular, it becomes increasingly impossible to appeal to any previous understanding of God, sin, redemption, repentance, faith, or even love. There is no common understanding to build on. Westerners are more and more "the person without the Bible." Cross-cultural communication is no longer something that begins when the missionary lands on an alien shore. It begins when we step outside our front doors.

The trick for the evangelist then becomes to follow Paul in searching out the altars to the unknown gods. Where has God been at work among these people who know nothing of the Scriptures?

Some people are looking for the Creator they know must be behind the beauties of creation. Others are wrestling with issues of truth and reality and

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meaning. Some enjoy *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoons, where the main characters often discuss issues like the existence of God, or life after death. Others are drawn to the movies of Robin Williams, who often explores themes such as: How can I live life to the full? How can I be free? Some have known deep pain in their lives, and want nothing more than a love that is strong and free and healing. Many are disillusioned with technology because it has denied their spirituality.

We sometimes talk as if the primary quality of a good evangelist is an eloquent mouth. In Acts 17, sharp eyes are the first requirement--Paul "looked carefully" before he spoke.

We too need to look, to discover where our evangelistic God has already been at work, preparing the ground for the good seed of the Gospel.

Theologian Emil Brunner used the term *anknupfungspunkt*--German for "the point where the button goes through the button-hole"--to describe the point at which the Good News of Jesus connects with a human life. God is always sewing button-holes in human experience. That's where wise evangelists begin.

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