

Life-Style Evangelism, Joseph C. Aldrich,
Multnomah Press/Beacon Distributing, 1981; hc., 246 pp.,

There is no dearth in literature on missions and evangelism! It is hard to keep up with new books on these themes. In these days of recession and inflation, we are forced to ask of such books whether they are worth the money, time and effort. Yet those who are looking for thought-provoking and stimulating ideas will be delighted with Aldrich's book. He speaks with candor about the effectiveness of current popular evangelistic programs and he finds that the methodology of many of them offends the sensitivities of caring Christians. "Many Christians," he notes "have personal objections to some of the approaches to 'winning' the lost. Gimmicks, pseudo-questionnaires, buttonholing, evangelical mugging, and the outright rudeness of some witnesses turn them off. The end result is that evangelism becomes a much understood term; one which most people either swear by ... or at."

How does one evangelize? Aldrich suggests that the church should do more than just train people to say the right words but that a biblical philosophy of ministry needs to be developed. Aldrich believes that the greatest barriers to the gospel are not theological but cultural. The cultural prescribed legalism of an unbalanced Christian life can hinder the advance of the gospel.

"It is the professional weaker brother, the self-appointed, rigid, unwavering, un-stumbling, unmoving, immovable, self righteous individual who often blows the whistle on Christians penetrating the non-Christian community with the gospel."

Secularization has made evangelism difficult. "Today many are totally ignorant of the most basic assumptions of the Christian faith. Another barrier looms large by virtue of the non-Christians lack of understanding of the most simple Christian terms. Heaven, hell, saved, lost, born again, redeemed, and other such evangelical buzz words used to be pretty well understood by the majority of our culture. That is no longer true. By and large, the basics of the gospel are foreign to it.

In today's world, we must not rely on programs. We need to develop a Christian life-style as individuals and as families. Evangelism is broader than a program. It must be placed in the broad context of word and deed ministry.

This is a good book for the church library. Discussion groups will find that each one of the eleven chapters contains enough material for an evening session. Those who teach a course on evangelism will find it a useful tool. We may not agree with everything that Aldrich says, but his is certainly one of the better attempts to reformulate evangelism.

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