

EVANGELISTS OF CHURCH HISTORY:  
WISDOM FOR EVANGELISM IN WESTERN CONTEXTS TODAY

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In our Western context, where Christianity is increasingly displaced from its earlier place of prominence and influence, evangelism appears more challenging than ever. If modernism and post-modernism have not been challenging enough, contemporary critical theories have raised suspicions toward evangelical theology and those who seek to evangelize. Christians who hold convictions about the evangel (from Greek, *εὐαγγέλιον*, *euangélion*) are also confronted with religious pluralism. Moreover, they face a broader secular society with an acceptance of moral alternatives and diversity of sexual expressions and experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Despite challenges, Christians can glean insights from evangelists of church history. Christian practices from past centuries can inform our contemporary understandings and methods of sharing the gospel, even in our late- or post-Christendom contexts. While the history of evangelism is filled with both positive and negative examples, this article sets forth seven evangelists who provide positive examples and give helpful insights as to what may be beneficial to the church's witness today. We will examine Basil of Caesarea, Patrick of Ireland, Proba of Rome, Ansgar of Bremen, August Francke of Halle, Rebecca Protten of St. Thomas, and David Nasmyth of Glasgow. Following the examination of the seven examples from history, the essay will present contemporary correlations and applications. Since the evangelists described in this article carried out their ministries during the era of

1. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 18–21, 491–95.

Christendom, we begin with a brief description of developments in the fourth century.

*Development of Christendom*

In 313, Emperor Constantine met with Emperor Licinius and together they agreed to end the persecution of Christians by signing the Edict of Milan.<sup>2</sup> With this act, Christianity received legal status from the Roman state.<sup>3</sup> In the following years, the church not only enjoyed legal status but Christianity received favorable treatment by Constantine as he enacted legislation to benefit the church.<sup>4</sup> This introduced a new era—the Constantinian era—that brought significant changes to the relationship between church and state.<sup>5</sup>

While Christians benefited from their new legal status, the change also brought negative consequences and dangers. As Christianity became favored by the state, vast numbers of people streamed into Christian congregations. As could be expected, many people identified as Christians because of the civil, social, and political advantages, and not for spiritual or convictional reasons tied to the gospel of Christ.<sup>6</sup> The confluence of the Roman Empire and Christian faith led to what has been described as *corpus Christianum* or Christendom, the “alliance of throne and altar.”<sup>7</sup> The alliance became official in 380, under Emperor Theodosius, when he issued an edict mandating Christianity as the authorized religion of the Roman Empire.<sup>8</sup>

2. Bettenson and Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 17; Bainton, *Christianity*, 89.

3. Bettenson and Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 17.

4. Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine* 1.28–38 (NPNF I:494–95).

5. Bainton, *Christianity*, 90–91.

6. Rudnick, *Speaking the Gospel*, 16.

7. Patterson, “Politics,” 765.

8. Bettenson and Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 24.

For Augustine’s view, see Bainton, *Christianity*, 122–23. The church was to direct the state and the state was to uphold the church. Robert, *Christian Mission*, 18.

During Christendom, evangelism became not merely a matter of preaching the gospel to those unfamiliar with the person and work of Jesus, but a matter of convincing nominal Christians that they needed to be converted to Christ. Often the latter proved more difficult than the former, especially as Christendom became increasingly identified with the Empire, Christian rulers, and majority Roman culture.<sup>9</sup>

Some devout Christians reacted to the influx of nominal Christians into the church by fleeing the church and Roman society altogether.<sup>10</sup> Although they were critical of what they observed and did not want to break fellowship with the broader church, they did so nevertheless for a life of prayer, fasting, and self-denial.<sup>11</sup> By the fourth century, the monastic movement became widely popular, both as an element of protest against the secularization of the church and as a counter-cultural witness to Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Basil of Caesarea (330–379)*

With time, monastic communities began to turn from inward to outward pursuits that included proclaiming the gospel. With this outward movement, monks became the leading evangelistic force of the church. Basil of Caesarea, in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, led the development.<sup>13</sup>

Basil established a monastery in Pontus of Cappadocia, modern-day Turkey. While he embraced the communal life, his rule for monks turned their lives outward in gospel witness and service to their neighbor.<sup>14</sup> For Basil, the ascetic life of a monk was not to be self-serving but to include gospel witness in word and deed to the wider society.

9. Kreider and Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom*, 15.

10. Rudnick, *Speaking the Gospel*, 47, 49–50.

11. Sheridan, “Early Egyptian Monasticism: Ideals and Reality,” 15.

12. For a sociological perspective of costly demands of religious groups to mitigate “free-rider” problems that lead to lower levels of member commitment and participation, see Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 177.

13. Robert, *Christian Mission*, 25.

14. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 178–79.

In order to practice this, Basil established a complex of buildings on the outskirts of Caesarea. The complex, known as the *basileas*, contained a home for the poor, a hospital that cared for the sick, a workshop where the poor developed job skills, a storehouse with food supplies, and a hospitality house for travelers.<sup>15</sup> He challenged the rich to remember their obligation to give to the poor, and thereby they would show gratitude to God for all that he had given them.<sup>16</sup>

While Basil was burdened for the poor and sick, he regarded preaching the gospel as the central task of his ministry.<sup>17</sup> He was well-known as a defender of Nicene theology and preached twice a day, expounding the gospel of the Nicene Creed. He praised the earlier work of Gregory Thaumaturgus for bringing the gospel to Cappadocia.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Basil knew the importance of instructing Christians in the gospel and sending preachers who would reach pagans with the good news. He said:

The faithful should be instructed in all the precepts of the Lord in the Gospel and also those transmitted to us through the Apostles as well as all that are to be inferred therefrom. . . . That the preacher of the Word should visit all the towns and cities in his charge. . . . That all should be summoned to the hearing of the Gospel, that the Word must be preached with all candor, that the truth must be upheld even at the cost of opposition and persecution of whatever sort, unto death. . . . That we should not preach the Gospel in a spirit of strife or envy, or rivalry with anyone. . . . That one who is entrusted with the preaching of the Gospel should possess nothing more than is strictly necessary for him. . . . That we should instruct our adversaries in forbearance and mildness in the hope of their conversion until the full measure of kindness has been exercised toward them. . . . That we should depart from those who through obstinacy do not receive the Gospel, not allowing ourselves to accept even corporeal necessities from them.<sup>19</sup>

15. Smither, *Mission in the Early Church*, 132–39.

16. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, 136–40. Cf. Holland, *Dominion*, 140–43.

17. Smither, *Mission in the Early Church*, 139.

18. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 37.

19. Basil, *Morals* 70:5, 11, 12, 24, 27, 31, 33.

Basil provided these instructions to prepare Christians for gospel witness. They were instructed in the precepts of the gospel, carried its message to towns and cities, and communicated it in a spirit of peace and patience.

The gospel witness that Basil and the Christian community practiced did not go unnoticed. Emperor Julian, known as “the apostate” (361–363), testified to the charitable acts of Christians.<sup>20</sup> In the spirit of Decius and Diocletian, Julian tried to restore the popularity of Roman paganism.<sup>21</sup> In doing so, however, he recognized that the greatest challenge was the sacrificial love demonstrated by Christians. In a letter to Arsacius, Julian wrote:

Why then do we [pagans] think that this is sufficient and do not observe how the kindness of Christians to strangers, their care for the burial of their dead, and the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance their cause? Each of these things, I think, ought really to be practiced by us. For it is disgraceful when . . . the impious Galileans [Christians] support our poor in addition to their own.<sup>22</sup>

Basil’s pioneering work to establish Christian benevolent institutions such as homes for the poor, hostels for travelers, and hospitals for the sick, was combined with verbal witness to the story of Jesus Christ and became a common evangelistic practice for centuries.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Patrick of Ireland (389–461)*

In the Western part of the Roman Empire, Patrick promoted the monastic movement with his work across Ireland. The number of historical sources about him, including his own *Confessions* (*Confessio*) give details of his life, mission, and theology. While some sources that are attributed to him may not have been written by him, others such as his *Confessions* are without doubt written by him.

20. Bainton, *Christianity*, 100.

21. Bettenson and Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 22.

22. Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 94; Cf. Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 83–84, 189.

23. Ferguson, *Church History*, 214.

Before the gospel arrived in Ireland, Celtic islanders were known for their druid culture that revolved around nature, dreams, and spirits. Celtic priests and druids lived in huts or caverns in the forest and professed to know the secrets of astrology, medicine, and arts of divination.<sup>24</sup> Celts were known even to practice human sacrifice and to decapitate their conquered enemies.<sup>25</sup> For these reasons, Romans categorized Celts as “barbarians.”<sup>26</sup>

The Christian faith came first to Ireland by Palladius, who in 431, was appointed bishop of Ireland by Celestine, the Bishop of Rome.<sup>27</sup> Palladius’s charge from Celestine was not to evangelize the pagan natives but to minister to Roman Christians working in the coastal trading villages. As with later cases, this form of colonial mission was an extension of Christendom, not evangelism among pagans. The ministry of Patrick was different.

Patrick was an Englishman born on the west coast of England in the Romano-British town of Banneventa. His father was a deacon in the local church from the pre-Constantinian tradition, and his grandfather had served as the church’s presbyter-pastor.<sup>28</sup> When Patrick was sixteen years old, he was captured by Celtic marauders and transported by boat to Ireland. He was sold as a slave to a man named Miliucc at Connaught near the woods of Foclut. Patrick worked there as a shepherd for six years. During this time, he prayed a hundred prayers a day. According to his writings, he did not value his catechetical training from his youth, admitting that he “cared nothing for religion” and that he was “an atheist from childhood.”<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, his years in captivity changed his views; he became a devoted follower of Jesus Christ.

24. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 22–23.

25. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 19.

26. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 17. In addition to the Celts, the Romans categorized Goths, Visigoths, Vandals, Franks, Frisians, and Huns as barbarians.

27. O’Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 38.

28. O’Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 43.

29. Freeman, *St. Patrick of Ireland*, 13; O’Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 53.

Patrick escaped from his master and traveled to the European continent on a boat carrying Irish hounds.<sup>30</sup> When he returned to England, he hoped never to see Ireland again. However, in a dream, an Irishman named Victoricus came to him with letters from the Irish people. As Patrick read one of the letters, he heard a voice like that of the people of Foelut begging him: “Walk again among us.”<sup>31</sup> Patrick tried to forget the dream but when not able to, he concluded that God was calling him to return to the land of his captivity to bring them the gospel.<sup>32</sup>

Patrick prepared for his mission, receiving theological training in Britain, and likely in Gaul because of his ties there with the monasteries of Martin of Tours.<sup>33</sup> After his studies, he was ordained as a presbyter-pastor. In the 432, he returned to Ireland with his “apostolic team,” a band of twelve that included priests, seminarians, women, and a brew-master.<sup>34</sup> Although Patrick knew the language and culture of Ireland, he viewed himself as an alien and sojourner among the barbarians.<sup>35</sup>

He and his disciples held open-air meetings where they engaged Celtic people in discourse around the gospel using poetry, story, song, and symbols.<sup>36</sup> He told of a deity greater than those of the druids. He preached the good news of the “God of the three faces” in reference to the Triune God. He preached about this God who provided the sacrifice for the sins of people through his divine Son, in contrast to an angry Celtic god who demanded human sacrifices. Patrick effectively connected revered objects of nature such as trees, fire, and mountains to explain the God of the Bible. He summarized the message of the gospel, saying:

30. Bainton, *Christianity*, 128.

31. St. Patrick, *Confessio*, 9.

32. Marshall, “Patrick,” 96.

33. Bainton, *Christianity*, 128. John Finney (*Recovering the Past*, 54) says: “It is generally thought that Irish monasticism was imported via Martin of Tours.”

34. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 21; Mansfield, *The Search for God and Guinness*, 21.

35. Patrick, *Epistola militibus Corotici*, in O’Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 173.

36. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 21, 73–74.

For there is no other God, nor ever was before, nor shall be hereafter, but God the Father, unbegotten and without beginning, in whom all things begun, whose are all things, as we have been taught; and his son Jesus Christ, who manifestly always existed with the Father, before the beginning of time in the spirit with the Father, indescribably begotten before all things, and all things visible and invisible were made by him. He was made man, conquered death and was received into Heaven, to the Father who gave him all power over every name in Heaven and on Earth and in Hell, so that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and God, in whom we believe. And we look to his imminent coming again, the judge of the living and the dead, who will render to each according to his deeds. And he poured out his Holy Spirit on us in abundance, the gift and pledge of immortality, which makes the believers and the obedient into sons of God and co-heirs of Christ who is revealed, and we worship one God in the Trinity of holy name.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to preaching the gospel, Patrick did not hesitate to call on the Triune God to prove himself to the pagan druids. He believed that the power of the gospel must interact with their world and redeem the Celts through Christ at several levels.<sup>38</sup>

When entering a new area, Patrick engaged first with the tribal chief. He knew that if the chief were to convert to Christ, the rest of the tribe would follow. As pagans converted to faith, Patrick and his disciples baptized them. He would then ask the chief or local leader for a plot of land in order to establish a monastery where converts were taught Christian doctrine.<sup>39</sup> Patrick and his disciples then placed the converts in charge of the monastery while he and his disciples moved to an area where the gospel had not yet been preached. Following this pattern, Christians of Ireland were organized around monasteries.<sup>40</sup> These monastic communities

37. O'Loughlin, *Discovering Saint Patrick*, 144.

38. Finney, *Recovering the Past*, 87; Gustafson, *Gospel Witness*, 166–68. It is acknowledged that some legends of Patrick in the Celtic church tradition appear embellished.

39. Bainton, *Christianity*, 128.

40. Ferguson, *Church History*, 354; Finney, *Recovering the Past*, 28.



were centers of evangelism, education, and copying of books, particularly the Scriptures and writings of the church fathers.<sup>41</sup>

Celtic Christians were characterized by evangelistic zeal. Like Patrick and his evangelistic band, they believed that every Christian should communicate the gospel with others.<sup>42</sup> One peculiarity of the Celtic monastics was the *peregrinati*, meaning “wanderers,” who traveled far and wide.<sup>43</sup> Their zeal led them to function like itinerant evangelists and wandering prophets of earlier centuries.

The ancient document titled *Annals of the Four Masters* reported that Patrick’s mission planted around seven hundred churches, ordained about one thousand clergy—both monks and presbyter-priests—and saw the conversion of thirty to forty of Ireland’s 150 tribes.<sup>44</sup> According to this pattern, Patrick sought to contextualize his message to listeners while holding to the orthodox teaching of the faith. He worked alongside his evangelistic team who raised up indigenous leaders to multiply Christian communities across Ireland and beyond.

#### *Proba of Rome (c. 352–384)*

In another highly contextualized form of evangelism, Faltonia Betitia Proba employed poetry as means of sharing the gospel during the fourth century. After her conversion to Christ, she arranged a type of Latin poem called a *cento* in which she drew from poems of Virgil such as the *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*.<sup>45</sup> Proba’s work titled *Concerning the Glory of Christ (De laudibus Christi)* selectively used excerpts from Virgil’s writings to tell the story of Christ within the Bible’s narrative, beginning at creation. In this work, she imbued “the Christ with heroic virtues” akin to the Virgilian hero.<sup>46</sup>

41. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 52; Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 41.

42. Ferguson, *Church History*, 354.

43. Finney, *Recovering the Past*, 56–57; Tuttle, *The Story of Evangelism*, 171.

44. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 23.

45. Balmer, *Classical Women Poets*, 111.

46. Clark and Hatch, “Jesus as Hero in the Vergilian ‘Cento,’” 36.

In a creative and contextual manner, Proba described the events that led to the fall of Eve based on the story of Dido from book IV of the *Aeneid* by Virgil.<sup>47</sup> She employed lines from book II of the same work, specifically about Laocoön's death, in order to describe the words of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In telling about the birth and crucifixion of Jesus, she selected lines that related originally to Dido and Venus.<sup>48</sup> She wrote: "Because your Son descended from the high heaven and time brought to us with our hopes at last succor and the coming of God whom for the first time a woman bearing the guises and habit of a virgin—marvelous to say—brought forth a child not of our race of blood . . . one with God, the very image of his beloved Sire."<sup>49</sup>

The final section of her poem focused on Christ's ascension and return in glory. Again, Proba conveyed elements of the gospel from the words that originally described the god Mercury and prophecy in the Oracle of Delos, both taken from book III of the *Aeneid*.<sup>50</sup> She stated her purpose for the *cento*, saying, "But baptised, like the blest, in the Castalian font—I, who in my thirst have drunk libations of the Light—now begin my song: be at my side, Lord, set my thoughts straight, as I tell how Virgil sang the offices of Christ."<sup>51</sup>

#### *Ansgar of Bremen (801–865)*

Ansgar—who became known as the "apostle to the north"—was born in Picardy in the diocese of Amiens in northern France, and educated at the abbey of Corbie, a product of Charlemagne's plan to evangelize his empire.<sup>52</sup> In 822, Ansgar was sent with a band of missionaries north to found New Corbie abbey at Westphalia in Germany, and seven years later, he was appointed as a missionary to Scandinavia. Ansgar traveled north knowing that he was

47. Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, 142, 145.

48. Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, 176–83.

49. Liefeld, "Women and Evangelism in the Early Church," 99.

50. Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet*, 185–86.

51. Balmer, *Classical Women Poets*, 113.

52. Rimbert, *Anskar*, 9; Tuttle, *The Story of Evangelism*, 200.

risking his life in an attempt to evangelize the barbaric Norsemen.<sup>53</sup>

Despite any perceived dangers, Ansgar and his assistant Witmar were received and saw Norsemen convert to faith and baptized at the marketplace of Birka on Lake Mälaren, near modern-day Stockholm. Ansgar and Witmar also began a hospital and worked to ransom captives including Christians who had been brought to Sweden from raids and held by Viking chieftains.<sup>54</sup> Ansgar himself purchased Scandinavian slave boys, taking them with him in order to educate them so that they would return to Sweden as missionaries, able to speak the native language.<sup>55</sup>

Beginning with Ansgar, missionary monks in northern Europe used *Biblia pauperum* to communicate the gospel. *Biblia pauperum*—or, in English, “Paupers’ Bible”—were collections of graphic illustrations of the life of Christ and corresponding images of prophetic types from the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup> A single volume of *Biblia pauperum* commonly consisted of forty to fifty pages of scriptural images. The biblical illustrations told a story and sometimes contained brief texts. They were designed for common people, especially useful for the vast numbers of illiterate people in northern Europe during the medieval period.<sup>57</sup> Historian N. H. Humphreys stated that *Biblia pauperum* were “popular as a religious work for the instruction of the ignorant . . . the work having been composed by St. Ansgarius [Ansgar], in the beginning of the 9th century.”<sup>58</sup> Humphreys further explained:

It was while occupied in his missionary labours that he [Ansgar] is said to have composed the series of scriptural designs, briefly explained by passages from the Holy Scriptures, which afterwards became known as the Bible of the Poor,—“*Biblia Pauperum*.” In an old copy of the

53. Tucker, *Parade of Faith*, 149.

54. Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings*, 201. When Ansgar arrived in Sweden, Christianity existed there in some form. The church at Kata Gård, a Viking-age farming estate in Varnhem, Sweden, appears to have been founded by a lay lord. Vretemark “Aristocratic Farms and Private Churches,” 143–57.

55. Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings*, 110, 203.

56. Melin and Öberg, *Biblia pauperum*, 12–14.

57. Heesen, *The World in a Box*, 65.

58. Humphreys, *A History of the Art of Printing*, 38.

xylographic “*Biblia Pauperum*” at Florence [Italy], there is an entry, in Latin, in writing in the 15th century, to the effect that the author of the book was St. Ansgar; and this view is further corroborated by several passages in mediæval chronicles to the effect that Saint Ansgarius wrote a book for the conversion of the pagans, entirely composed of signs,—the signs alluded to being no doubt the series of simple outline devices which were afterwards improved into those which served as the models of the first block-book.<sup>59</sup>

These scriptural illustrations were used later to create sculptures at the cathedral of Bremen, and paintings at Hanover, Germany. Bremen became the seat of the combined Bremen and Hamburg archdiocese where Ansgar served as bishop, beginning in 848.<sup>60</sup>

*Biblia pauperum* were a simple and effective means to communicate the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies and biblical images that pointed to him. Each illustration had three scriptural images. The central figure came from an event in the Gospels and was accompanied by two images of Old Testament events that prefigured the central one. For example, the crucifixion of Jesus was associated with Abraham’s call to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22) and Moses lifting up the serpent on a pole in the wilderness (Num 21:4–9).<sup>61</sup> In a second example, the scene of Longinus, the “unnamed Roman soldier” who speared Jesus when hanging dead on the cross (John 19:34), was accompanied by the image of God bringing forth Eve from the side of Adam (Gen 2:21–22) and Moses striking the rock so that water flowed out (Num 20:11). In a third example, the entombment of Christ (Matt 27:59–60) was accompanied by the image of Joseph being let down into the well (Gen 37:21–29), and Jonah being cast into the sea with the great fish (Jonah 1:11–17).

59. Humphreys, *A History of the Art of Printing*, 38.

60. Volz, *The Medieval Church*, 43–44.

61. Berjeau, *Biblia pauperum*, 33.



*Biblia Pauperum*, “Crucifixion, Old Testament,” Catalogue of Early German and Flemish Woodcuts, 2 vols (C.1) Willshire 1879–1883. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

*Biblia pauperum* became an effective means to share the story of the gospel using images. These images of accounts of Jesus’ life, death, burial, and resurrection helped listeners to perceive with their eyes while they heard with their ears the good news story. *Biblia pauperum* served as aids for Christians—whether monks, priests, educators, parents, or lay people—to share the gospel more easily and clearly with others.

*August Francke of Halle, Germany (1663–1727)*

August Hermann Francke was born in Lübeck, Germany, where he was raised by devout Christian parents.<sup>62</sup> At sixteen, he enrolled at the University of Erfurt but then transferred to Kiel. In 1684, he entered the University of Leipzig where he became associated with a group of Christians who shared a desire to know the Bible better, and together they formed a campus society for Bible study and its application to daily life.<sup>63</sup>

Before long Francke became aware of his need for a deeper relationship with Christ. While preparing a lesson on the topic of faith, he experienced conversion, later recalling:

In great fear I knelt before God on Saturday night and called out to the One whom I yet neither knew nor believed, for rescue from such a miserable state. . . . While I was still on my knees, He [God] suddenly heard me. Then, just as if one were to turn over one's hand, my doubts were all gone. My heart was sealed to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.<sup>64</sup>

Following this experience, Francke's conversion became paradigmatic for others within his pietistic circles. They viewed conversion as a crisis moment or datable event that was preceded by an "agonizing conviction of sin . . . to which one can point for confirmation."<sup>65</sup> From this time, Francke led others to a similar encounter with the grace of God. With promptings by the Holy Spirit, he sought to glorify Christ by "winning souls in every place and by every means possible."<sup>66</sup>

In 1688, Francke launched a full-time ministry to university students. Under this work at Leipzig, students were enthusiastic to read the scriptures, and in so doing, they experienced a spiritual revival that spread to others. As this pietistic awakening gained a large following, opposition came from university administrators who suspended the meetings. At the same time, a friend who

62. Olson and Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism*, 51–52.

63. Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 262.

64. Scharpff, *History of Evangelism*, 29.

65. Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 2:262.

66. Scharpff, *History of Evangelism*, 29.

served as a pastor in Erfurt asked Francke to come and assist him there.

Francke traveled to Erfurt where he carried out an extensive evangelistic ministry in homes. Whenever he was invited to dinner, before they ate he asked his hosts if he could lead them in a brief Bible study.<sup>67</sup> Despite his work in the parish, Francke soon realized that he preferred ministry with university students.

With a recommendation from Philip Jacob Spener, Francke became Professor of Greek and Oriental Languages at the new University of Halle, founded in 1694.<sup>68</sup> While there, he reoriented the theological faculty toward evangelical pietism by establishing conventicles—small group Bible studies—at the university. Similar to Spener, Francke said:

Not everyone who calls himself a Christian is a Christian. For a Christian has his name from the Lord Jesus Christ and means as much as one who belongs to Christ, is his faithful disciple, believes in his name from the heart in unfeigned love, even in affliction, imitates him, and is gifted and anointed to that end with his Spirit through whom he is willingly led and controlled.<sup>69</sup>

As for Francke's philosophy of theological education, his objective was to employ "the science of theology," which he posited could "be understood only by means of a lively faith" and in "connection with other means of grace to awaken and advance the Christian life."<sup>70</sup> Moreover, he sought "to establish [students] in the faith and to increase their ability to lead their [future] congregations to Jesus Christ."<sup>71</sup> In order to accomplish these educational goals, Francke not only taught theology in the classroom but lived it before his students by inviting them to join him in his various ministries in Halle.

67. Scharpff, *History of Evangelism*, 30.

68. Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 262.

69. Cited in Sattler, *God's Glory, Neighbor's Good*, 243.

70. Tholuck, *August Hermann Francke*, 464, cited in Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, 230.

71. Tholuck, *August Hermann Francke*, 464, cited in Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, 230.

They began in the neighborhood of Glaucha, known for its deplorable conditions and economic blight.<sup>72</sup> This part of Halle contained a row of “degrading beer huts and dance houses” that were frequented regularly by people for entertainment. Francke considered Glaucha to be a “den of iniquity” but also a mission field in which to test the transforming power of the gospel.<sup>73</sup> In this neighborhood, he and his students preached the gospel and engaged in discussions in the street and in homes, generally on Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons. His approach was never to preach a message without including the gospel of repentance and forgiveness so that if any hearer heard him once, she could receive salvation. The discussions were based on passages of the Bible or sections of Johann Arndt’s *True Christianity*.<sup>74</sup> For a time, Francke distributed bread to the poor every Thursday and invited those who received it to join him for a fifteen-minute gospel message.

Francke and his students met with those who converted to Christ, catechizing them “from house to house” and organizing prayer meetings in homes.<sup>75</sup> Eventually he and his band of student-disciples established a home for Christian single women. Francke purchased a building for the home that had been used previously as a tavern. All of these ministry experiences were spiritually formative, not merely for the newly converted but for Francke’s theology students who put their theology into practice.

Francke’s experience in the slums of Halle made him aware of the need to provide education to neglected children who did not have opportunities to attend school. After he solicited funds, he started a “citizen’s school” for children gathered from the streets. He purchased school supplies and initially used his own study for the classroom.<sup>76</sup> When he discovered that children came from homes that undermined much of what he taught, he began a ministry that furnished living quarters for the students in addition to their education. In 1693, he purchased a house large enough for

72. Sattler, *God’s Glory, Neighbor’s Good*, 38.

73. Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, 231.

74. Scharpff, *History of Evangelism*, 30.

75. Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, 231.

76. Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, 231.



twelve students in which to live. He added another house the following year. In 1698, he launched out by faith and built a larger facility called the “Orphan House” and a year later, he formed the Orphan Latin School for students to prepare them for advanced studies.<sup>77</sup> In 1709, he established a school for sons of nobility, and added a catechetical school associated with the university. His theological students worked with children of the Orphan House, allowing them the chance to practice their newly acquired pastoral skills in the catechizing of children.

Beginning in 1717, despite his other responsibilities, Francke launched an evangelism tour for seven months, holding meetings in cities in central and southern Germany. He preached in churches and homes, and visited numerous public institutions, schools, and orphanages.<sup>78</sup> By 1727, records indicate that in the Latin School there were 400 students, in the citizens’ schools for boys and girls, there were 1,724, and in the Orphan House there were 132 residents. The home for single women in Glaucha had eight residents, and a home that he purchased for widows had six.<sup>79</sup> In regard to publishing and distributing books, Francke established the Orphan House Book Establishment that printed and distributed inexpensive Bibles. Editions of the scriptures were not limited to German, however. Testaments and Bibles were printed in Bohemian, Estonian, and Polish.<sup>80</sup>

Despite his work, Francke and his conventicles were criticized for their biblical revivalism and social activism. Even though he was dismissed by the established Lutheran Church for his pietistic views, he received favor with King Frederick William I of Prussia who initiated legislation for similar educational and charitable institutions in his realm. Surely, Francke was a pioneer in university evangelism, small group ministry, and theological education that engaged students in the practice of making disciples.

77. Sattler, *God’s Glory, Neighbor’s Good*, 59–62.

78. Scharpff, *History of Evangelism*, 30–31.

79. Tholuck, *August Hermann Francke*, 467–68, cited in Taylor, *Exploring Evangelism*, 232.

80. Sattler, *God’s Glory, Neighbor’s Good*, 84–89.

*Rebecca Protten of St. Thomas (1718–1780)*

Rebecca Freundlich Protten was born a slave on the Caribbean island of Antigua, the daughter of an African mother and European father.<sup>81</sup> When about six years old, she was kidnapped from Antigua and sold to a plantation owner by the name of Lucas van Beverhout on the island of St. Thomas.<sup>82</sup> She worked for the Beverhout family as a house servant, and learned from them—members of the Dutch Reformed Church—the gospel of Jesus Christ and subsequently converted to faith. At age twelve, shortly after Lucas van Beverhout’s death, the family set her free.<sup>83</sup>

In 1736, when more Moravian missionaries arrived to St. Thomas, Rebecca met Friedrich Martin who noted in his diary, “I spoke with a mulatto woman who is very accomplished in the teachings of God. Her name is Rebecca.”<sup>84</sup> The Moravian missionaries taught her to how read and write, and involved her in evangelism to the slaves. Despite the hostile environment by slave masters, including violence toward the slaves and verbal abuse toward the missionaries, Rebecca and the Moravian missionaries walked “daily along rugged roads through the hills in the sultry evenings after the slaves had returned from the fields” in order to converse with them about Jesus.<sup>85</sup> For Rebecca, her evangelistic ministry “took her to the slave quarters deep in the island’s plantation heartland, where she proclaimed salvation to the domestic servants, cane boilers, weavers, and cotton pickers whose bodies and spirits were strip-mined every day by slavery.”<sup>86</sup> Despite the challenges, she shared the gospel with hundreds of slaves, and along with the Moravian missionaries, saw hundreds of slaves convert to faith in Christ.<sup>87</sup>

81. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 30.

82. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 31–32.

83. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 25–26, 41–45.

84. McCall, *Aspects of Modern Church History*, 54. Cf. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 45–46, 52–53.

85. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 3.

86. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 3.

87. Woodbridge and James, *Church History*, 459.

In addition to evangelism, Rebecca taught at the church located “at the end of a rugged road through the hills of St. Thomas known to the enslaved as ‘The Path.’”<sup>88</sup> In 1738, she and the Moravian missionary Matthäus Freundlich were united in marriage.<sup>89</sup> A few weeks later, Rebecca was named a deaconess of the Moravian community.

In 1742, Rebecca and Matthäus set sail for Germany with their daughter, Anna Maria. Matthäus needed to return to his homeland due to his failing health. Sadly, he died just after arriving to Germany. Rebecca remained at Herrnhut, where two years later her daughter also died. Despite the grief, Rebecca became a respected member of the community and assumed leadership in the Moravian women’s ministry.

In 1746, she married Christian Protten, similarly noted for his heritage of an African mother and European father.<sup>90</sup> Eventually, Rebecca and Christian moved to Christiansborg on Africa’s Gold Coast in modern-day Ghana, and with the blessing of the Moravian community, taught African children at the Christiansborg Castle School. The children learned not merely how to read and write but the learned the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>91</sup>

#### *David Nasmith of Glasgow (1799–1838)*

David Nasmith of Glasgow, Scotland helped to found over sixty Christian societies. At age fifteen, he and his friends founded three youth societies that supported foreign missions, tract distribution, and a Bible Society. He began work in manufacturing but hoped to become a missionary, applying to go to Africa and the South Seas, but was rejected because of his lack of education. He then turned his evangelistic zeal toward outlets in Glasgow where he devoted his time to evangelistic and charitable work that included

88. Hempton, *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 85.

89. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 102–5.

90. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 162.

91. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*, 217–18.

visiting local prisons. He once spent an entire night in a cell with two men who were to be executed the following day.<sup>92</sup>

In 1821, Nasmith became secretary of the Religious Societies of Glasgow. He founded the Young Men's Society for Religious Improvement in 1824, and two years later, founded the Glasgow City Mission that took Thomas Chalmers's district visitation a step further by making the work inter-denominational, enlisting participation from all evangelical churches.<sup>93</sup>

When Nasmith founded the Glasgow City Mission, the society's objective was "to promote the spiritual welfare of the poor of this city, and its neighbourhood, by employing persons of approved piety, and . . . properly qualified to visit the poor in their houses."<sup>94</sup> At the society's first annual meeting, his message to the missionaries was:

You will convert the houses that [are] tenanted by men of the foulest passions, into churches of the Redeemer, where the Lord the Spirit will dwell and the God of Salvation will be loved and served. You will arrest the progress of vice and promote the interest of virtue. You will make our poor, our ignorant, our degraded population stand forth in all that freshness and fairness of moral and of spiritual excellence.<sup>95</sup>

Besides the Glasgow City Mission, Nasmith formed the Edinburgh City Mission in 1832, and the London City Mission in 1835. With his vision for city missions, he toured Scotland, Ireland, United States, Canada, and France, encouraging local church leaders to form city missions and other evangelistic societies.

Nasmith clearly possessed an ability to organize mission work; however, he was not simply interested in founding mission societies. He stated his conviction plainly, saying, "Every church shall be a missionary body, and every member a missionary."<sup>96</sup> He called churches to awaken from their slumber and to evangelize their neighborhoods. On one occasion, when Nasmith worked in Ireland, he reported:

92. Campbell, *Memoirs of David Nasmith*, 57.

93. Shaw, "Thomas Chalmers," 35–36.

94. Burger, *Practical Religion*, 27.

95. Burger, *Practical Religion*, 28.

96. Scharpff, *History of Evangelism*, 94.

Some of the Lord's people here, are speaking of forming a mission church with a pastor, teachers and evangelists; whose object it shall be, not only to edify those who may be associated in church fellowship, but to go forth and preach the gospel and plant churches in the cities, towns, and villages of Ireland, considering that every church is a missionary body. If this is of the Lord, it will prosper; if not, may it come to nought.<sup>97</sup>

In his writings, Nasmith plainly stated that mission societies were merely an “artificial substitute” for the churches of Christ “which are the natural missionary societies, the proper instruments for diffusing the Gospel, both at home and abroad.”<sup>98</sup> Nasmith explained further saying:

These societies are of two classes, the natural and the artificial; the former Christian Churches, and the latter voluntary associations of Christian men [and women]. In the order of nature, conventional movements are first, and absolutely necessary. There is no other means of operation in a district of country, or in a locality of a town or city, where churches do not exist, or do not exist in number and strength sufficient to act congregationally upon the population around them. But these [voluntary associations] are only temporary expedients, which must ultimately give place to measures based on other principles. In proportion as churches come to exist in numbers and means adequate to the work of evangelizing their vicinities, the necessity for artificial combinations [voluntary associations] will gradually subside, and may at length be safely dispensed with.<sup>99</sup>

Nasmith's ecclesial view was that “Gospel Churches” should “act on surrounding unbelievers, and at once to absorb the faithful [converts] into their several fellowships.”<sup>100</sup> In a letter, written to Mrs. Connell, a relative of Mrs. Nasmith, David reverted to this important principle, saying, “I long for the period, when the churches of Christ, instead of these voluntary associations, formed for this purpose, shall become missionary bodies. There is a

97. Campbell, *Memoirs of David Nasmith*, 188–89, 190–91.

98. Campbell, *Memoirs of David Nasmith*, 190–91.

99. Campbell, *Memoirs of David Nasmith*, 449–50.

100. Campbell, *Memoirs of David Nasmith*, 450.

considerable shaking in that respect, in this place, not amongst the churches, but amongst individuals, as to the duty of churches.”<sup>101</sup>

### *Contemporary Applications*

Certainly, there are examples of evangelistic ministries of the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries that follow earlier models in church history. For example, Basil of Caesarea’s ministry is reflected in the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) founded in the twentieth century by John Perkins. Patrick of Ireland’s practice of “power evangelism” and emphasis on planting Christian communities is seen in John Wimber’s emphasis on gospel proclamation with signs and wonders, and church planting as the most effective means of evangelism. Proba of Rome’s creative expression of the gospel using poetry is reflected in “Life in 6 Words: The G.O.S.P.E.L.” performed by the contemporary Rap artist named Propaganda. Ansgar of Bremen’s use of *Biblia pauperum* to explain the gospel within the Bible’s redemptive narrative with images is reflected in James Choung’s *The Big Story*, using a diagram with four circles to tell the good news of Jesus. Francke of Halle’s use of small groups, equipping Christians for gospel-sharing, and publishing evangelistic tools occurred centuries before ministries like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Cru that serve on university campuses today. The ministry of Rebecca Protten of St. Thomas to take the gospel to people with little hope was reflected in the work of Consuella York of Chicago who visited Cook County Jail weekly for forty-three years to bring inmates hope through Jesus. David Nasmith of Glasgow spoke more than a century before Lesslie Newbigin about the missionary nature of the church, calling congregations to function as mission societies and for Christians to serve as missionaries in their neighborhoods and cities.<sup>102</sup>

101. Campbell, *Memoirs of David Nasmith*, 188–89, 190–91.

102. Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 4–5.

*Conclusion*

Our perception of evangelism is shaped by models we have seen. For the past two thousand years, Christians have practiced a variety of means for communicating the good news of Jesus Christ. Examining the evangelism of Basil, Patrick, Proba, Ansgar, Francke, Protten, and Nasmith helps us to expand our perceptions of the evangelistic task that Jesus gave to his church, and to appreciate and learn from their contributions which can shape our gospel witness today.

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