**Lessons from the Christian Evangelism History ‘1’**

During the course of history, Christian evangelism never stops.  It started with its golden era during the apostolic period, which ended around year 105 AD.  Because of its great values, I’ll talk about this period at the end of this lesson.  In the subsequent **two centuries of Christian history**, the evangelism spread out through three major factors: **the “Apologies**,” which are writings that defend the Christian faith, **evangelism work**, and mainly by **martyrdom**.  As Tertullain said during this time ‘the blood of martyrs are the seeds of faith.’ One martyr, like St. George, during the course of his torturing attracted thousands of people to Christianity, because there is no witnessing better than showing suffering for a religion and facing death without fear.  On the other hand, **because evangelism was still a clear objective of every Christian, even martyrs while they are in the midst of their trials and torturing, they never failed to evangelize by words, merciful actions towards all including those who persecuted them, and by miracles.**

After martyrdom ceased, **monasticism** was the great net that attracted many souls to the Christian faith.  It showed people who banned every pleasure of secular life to enjoy a heavenly spirituality that human being has everlasting thirst for it.  In the lives of hermits, monk, and nuns, people saw the work of the eternal kingdom of God.  It was evangelism using the most powerful method of evangelism, the spiritual module of life, which some people called it ‘**passive evangelism**.’

We will not forget the evangelism done by the great **Catechetical School of Alexandria**, which attracted people not only from all Egypt, but also from all over the world.  Again, **evangelism was a passionate desire of its teachers and students alike.**  This school followed the evangelism style of St. Paul who used philosophy and dialogue in his evangelism.  **The direct dialogues with the educated of this time won many souls to Christ.** Add to these ingredients, the high level of spiritual life the teachers and students lived attracted people too.  **In an educated society, like in USA, we need to adapt a similar approach of evangelism.**

Christian **evangelism somehow subsided** **starting from the fourth century** as a result of altering concentration from evangelism to internal heresies and conflicts. **The objective of evangelism was lost in the middle of all the changes that happened in the church at that time**.  Sadly to say, many during this age were looking for personal gaining and supremacy over others more than fulfilling the commandment of evangelism that was given by the Lord himself.  Please pay attention to what I am trying to say.  I did not say evangelism stopped, but I said it subsided, because we had witnessed great evangelistic work done in many places, as in Ethiopia by the Coptic Orthodox Church, and by individuals such as St. Cyril of Jerusalem, just to mention a few.

The **Fifth century**had witnessed the horrible schism of the church for the first time in history, which followed by more schisms that left most of the Christian world in a defense position. Each tried to prove the supremacy of his theology, and even to impose it on others, unfortunately, sometimes even by force.  In the middle of all of those sad events, **evangelism as an objective was faded dramatically.**  One joyful event of the fifth century was **the evangelistic work done by St. Patrick in Ireland**, who came to complete missionary efforts started earlier by Egyptians.

**Islam**could not start at a better time, in the **Seventh century**, when Christians were so divided, bitterness badly existed between Christians, and the Roman Empire was on the brink of falling.  In my opinion, **Christians forgot the command of evangelism by the Lord, and instead of spreading the Gospel; Christians were sadly seeking personal or national pride through the local churches**. The sword of Islam did not only stopped evangelism, but also converted masses of people to Islam or slain them. A good example for this is the Middle East, where Christianity disappeared from Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Arabia, Yemen, and Emirates. Few Christians survived in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. Egypt with the blessing of a biblical prophecy, the visit of the Holy Family, and the prayers of millions of Egyptian martyrs, survived the Islamic invasion and continued to have Christians, although with no freedom to evangelize. **Since the Islamic invasion of the Middle East until now, Christian evangelism is prohibited by the power of the state and the mobs**. Therefore, you can say evangelism was over for those nations except of a few individual cases every now and then.  Islam reached Spain and occupied it for about seven hundred years. Without the mercy of God, Islam could have invaded Christian Europe and badly damaged Christianity there.

Later on, we have seen good evangelistic efforts by the **brothers Cyril and Methods among the Slavic nations in the Ninth Century**.  **One excellent reason behind their success is their ability to realize the importance of using the local language**, the language that is spoken and loved by its people.  People are dramatically influenced when they see the recognition of their language, which internally means acceptance of the people as equally intelligent and important.  **Recognizing the lesson of the importance of local languages and cultures in missionary work is a vital tool in evangelism**.  Imposing different languages or cultures on people usually ended up in flat failure.  However, understanding that the essence of Christian faith is not in the language, nor it is in the cultural inheritance of any nation, make acceptance of Christianity is at hand. **We have a great lesson from the evangelism of the Coptic Orthodox in Ethiopia. When Copts evangelized Ethiopia in the Fourth century, they did not impose on Ethiopians any Coptic ecclesiastical melodies or music. Neither, they imposed on them certain liturgies or the Coptic language or Coptic culture products.  The result was significant.  The Ethiopian church grew to have its own liturgies (about 15), their own music which expresses the feelings of the Ethiopian person, their own musical instruments, and their own heritage.  This is a great lesson we need to learn here in USA to succeed in evangelistic efforts among Americans.**

**The eleventh century** witnessed **the convert of Russia into Christianity**.  The story of its conversion is one of a kind that I love to tell.  Prince Vladimir sent his emissaries to discover the true religion.  They visited the Muslim Bulgers’, the Roman Catholic, and others.  Then they attended a liturgy in the church of Hagias Sophia in Constantinople. The men reported back to Vladimir: “**We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendor or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you: only this we know, that God dwelt there among men, and that the service surpasses the worship of all other places because we cannot forget that beauty.”**    This story reminds me with a similar words mentioned by the liturgist Kenneth Stevenson in his book “The Liturgical meaning of Holy Week, Jerusalem Revisited.”  He traveled with his father to Jerusalem and visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher during Lent of 1982.  He attended many services offered by different denominations. Then he wrote ‘**The Copts earned their place in the antiquity of their liturgy and spirituality.”    The lesson of conversion of Russia is the realization of the power of the sacraments of the church.**  No doubt that **the liturgy is a great evangelistic tool**.  However, I have some restrictions based on experience, **before inviting people to a liturgy, I’d like to teach them about the meaning of the Divine Liturgy, what does it involve, and how to pray in it. Then I invite them to attend a part of a liturgy in English**. I am looking forward to a time when our churches offer more liturgies with a shorter time. This could be accomplished if we can reduce the time spent in taking the Holy Communion –sometimes it takes forty five minutes- and by eliminating the time spent in reading in two languages, preaching in two languages, and in giving lengthy announcements –sometimes announcements take 15 minutes.  I personally prefer the practice that was set up by the late Saint Pope Kyrillos, who arranged to have more than one liturgy on a daily basis, and each liturgy will not exceed two hours.

The Eighteen and Nineteen centuries witnessed great efforts in evangelism. An awakening in the evangelistic efforts almost started in all churches, except those who are ruled under Islamic governments.  When reading about evangelism during this period you feel the kindled fire of the passionate evangelism in the hearts of tens of thousands who left the luxury of the European life and American life to go the end of the earth with the torch of the Christian faith. In the process, many died in the sea or in the jungles of Africa or at the hands of other religions’ leaders. But, death news never stopped the waves of evangelizers, who **left everything and every person they loved behind, with one objective in mind, to transfer the salvation of the cross and light of the risen Lord to everyone in this world.**  Although, the majority of these missions came from the Catholic Church or from Protestants, but we have seen a few done by Orthodox Churches. One great example started after the spiritual renaissance of the Russian Orthodox Church towards the end of the eighteenth Century. The **Renewal of monasticism in Mount Athos had led to this evangelistic movement**, **which started by translating the book of Philokalia, originally a Coptic collection of spiritual lessons.**

  Ten monks from the Russian Orthodox Church evangelized in **Alaska**.  Tens of thousands were baptized by the close of the 19 th century.  However, evangelism of Alaska in history books is always associated with a poor monk named **Herman**, who neither baptized anyone nor translated any books. He turned down the honor of becoming a priest to stay as a humble monk.  His great “passive evangelism” was in living a holy life and allowing the light of God to shine through him and thus attracting many to the see the essence of the Christian life.  This example shows us **the importance of having Coptic monastic life in America as a tool of passive evangelism. We need monks to show the essence of Christianity through self denial and living an ascetic life similar to the one lived by the Desert Fathers.**

Another great effort was done by the monk **Marcarius Gloukharev**, who worked as a missionary worker in **Siberia** for fourteen years. However, his greatest marks on evangelism were in his working hard in formulating an Orthodox theology of missions. **He also was the person who dreamed of instilling a missionary consciousness among all Russians and of establishing a missionary center fro training missionaries.** I consider **his dream is essential, especially for our Coptic Orthodox Church. We need to instill a missionary consciousness among all Copts**. An understanding of evangelism as an objective set by the Lord himself for the church is very essential for any success in evangelism in our church.  Humbly, I like to share with you that I have the dream of instilling a missionary consciousness among Copts, and I have been working in achieving it for years, and I still do.  Nowadays, I am working in one tool toward reaching this dream.  I am in the process of writing a book about how can every Copt become an evangelizer in the Western countries. I will write it in an easy and interesting style to attract every Copt to read and to use in evangelism.  **I like you also to have this dream too and work toward make it a reality, with the grace of God.**

Another great influence of Gloukharev is his work on **changing the painful reality of the Russian masses at his time.  He discovered that they were only superficially Christians, and therefore inadequate for the great evangelistic apostolic task that God had in store for them.**  Therefore, he started working first in starting a deep spiritual renewal within the Russian People.  I admire our beloved bishop Youssef, the Coptic bishop of Southern United States, in his recognition of this phenomenon within Copts in America. He talked and wrote about **‘the churchless people.’** Truly, the beginning of any cure is to discover the sickness and to acknowledge it, which is done by H.G. Bishop Youssef.  Now, it is time for a revival that touches the deepest part of the Coptic souls.  May the Lord help our church in dealing with the ‘churchless people’s problem.

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