

RESPONSE TO BRAD KALLENBERG'S "THE GOSPEL WE PREACH"

FOR THE BILLY GRAHAM CENTER EVANGELISM ROUNDTABLE "ISSUES OF TRUTH AND POWER: THE GOSPEL IN A *POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE*"

*April 22-24, 2004*

**"THE GOSPEL WE PROCLAIM" BY LORNA DUECK**

**What sort of community must we be in order to properly live out the verb, evangelize ?**

Dr. Brad Kallenberg presents a life action thesis reminding us that we are to be about the business of teaching the lost to learn a new conceptual language. He challenges us that core words which embody the truth of the gospel will never be understood unless it is incubated into lives through instructional living communities. The ancient words are simply too unknown to take root otherwise in a culture illiterate of biblical concepts. I couldn't agree more.

Thirty years ago, a psychological pioneer launched a warning into evangelicalism about language and community. Dr. Karl Meninger, urged clergy to take individuals burdened by guilt into community, specifically, the pastoral care community. His thirteenth book, Whatever Became of Sin argued that when sin was redefined to the word crime, we began the downward slide into losing our answers for guilt. Moral and mental health were identical, said Dr. Meninger, and he regarded clergy as partners in healing. He wrote on sin because he was worried the pulpits of the land were becoming morally silent and it would only increase mental suffering and disease among humanity. He begged the world to find its spiritual connection when he wrote to clergy: "Cry comfort, cry repentance, cry hope. Because recognition of our part in the world transgression is the only remaining hope." <sup>1</sup>

His call to community teaching of sin illustrates the process of word lost, concept lost,

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Meninger, M.D. *Whatever Became of Sin ?* (New York:Hawthorn, 1973.) p.228

Christian conversion lost. Dr. Kallenberg challenges us to make words enmeshed with community so we reverse this trend in our Post Christian world. “The message must be bundled with messengers,” he reminds us.

Can you name someone who, because of your relationship with them is, as Dr. Kallenberg hopes, constructing a life where the “persona of Christ can be read off of the shape of their life as easily as one reads a letter ?” (2 Cor. 3:2)

Thank you Brad for reminding us that this is the inescapable core of evangelism - that “gospelizing” cannot take place apart from life sharing. The problem however is that our lives are also littered with encounters and relationships of people who never move into the vocabulary of Christian truth because of life sharing. The bad or hurtful life sharing of a parent, spouse, friend, even a pastor are often cited by those who judged Christianity by the experience of community and found it wanting.

As the believing community incorporates newcomers in its ranks, we must help them thrive in a near independent mastery of Bible reading and its devotional and lifestyle interpretation. To be members who themselves incorporate what Dr. Kallenberg describes as, “the distinctive vocabulary of our new first language. ” There must be an emphasis on input, a rigorous promotion that knowing your Bible is the anchor which holds you to community, rather than community which holds us to the Bible.

Without that emphasis we will not be able to discern if the community we are in is Biblical or not. Earlier this year, the Essentials movement within Canada’s 150 year old Anglican Church issued a call for their church body to protect its status with the worldwide communion of Episcopal churches by returning to Biblical orthodoxy. A worldwide unity that has been broken because of a Vancouver area diocese decision to bless same sex unions, and in

the U.S. because of the New Hampshire's decision to install a gay Bishop. Essentials, a vibrant evangelical movement within this historic mainline church, issued this challenge to Biblical orthodoxy through a national conference, using satellite link up in churches, and community and university halls to gather discussion from 22 centers across the country into one studio. Discussion that was then broadcast on purchased time on cable television in major Canadian cities so the public could hear biblical dialogue. The aging church was using media to communicate where its normal Synod settings were insufficient.

I marvelled at how quickly a prominent Toronto businessman, an Anglican, stepped forward to undertake financing of this revolutionary idea. His Christian conversion was less than twenty years old, had occurred within market place witness, and was so radical even his mother in law, a life long Anglican, wondered what kind of cult he was in. An email on an unrelated experience gave insight into what motivated his donation. It said, "I'm only a lay person, but since 1987 having read my bible 17 times cover to cover and in several translations ..." It was his biblical literacy that drove him to build biblical community rather than community that took him to biblical literacy.

This illustration is my segue into a most important question that Dr. Kallenberg's work missed as it presented the angst over how we must retain the language of the "timelessly true Gospel."

**How do we define community and how it learns from each other ?** We cannot overemphasize how rapidly our sense of community is changing because of new media and television. **Community can no longer be defined as the people we see and gather with.** To act on Dr. Kallenberg's challenge that "the message must be bundled with messengers" our language must be enmeshed with media. As the disciples borrowed homes in which to teach -

we now need to borrow these technologies to retain our language lifestyle. Whether it's the mega movement like CBN which negotiated its deal to air in prime time on ABC Family Channel for perpetuity, or the smallest of church using blogging, this is the community we must engage. Blogging - sharing of your diary and personal musings online, is part of the new community that teaches the conceptual language of our inner transformation. Will we build relationships strong enough to tell our own stories, to teach our language on a CBN, CBS, PBS, USA Today, or the blog in your office? Entering the virtual connection to your community may be a ride like the stormy seas that carried the Apostle Paul from port to port, but the reality is that's where the audience is learning.

Each church should have authentic relationships with at least one media manager in their community, because these are after all, the gatekeepers of the stories that shape the culture. I hope we are long past the shame of the televangelist era that seriously derailed the church's ability to join in on community through media. We ran and hid from each other, criticizing and mocking, rather than redeeming and recreating this vital part of our community infrastructure. We cannot master communicating without mastering the media. The form of life necessary for making our language intelligible is led by lifestyle modelling that pervades our audience from these venues - and all forms of media are the "community-constituting linguistic practice."

Onward to Dr. Kallenberg's challenge then that the "message be bundled with the messenger."