

Workplace Evangelism: How to Fish Out Seekers

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Evangelism gives me joy! But I recall how I used to struggle to start a conversation. By the time I had planned my approach, my little sermon and my plea for a decision, I was so uptight that my surprised victim became embarrassed, too. But in a couple of weeks I would try again because a few of my victims did find God. Very few.

My problem—I was a hunter. A hunter with a reaping mentality. But I became free to enjoy evangelism when I shifted from hunting to fishing. Most Christians dislike hunting, so they rarely evangelize. I rewrote these pages after reading in two publications that even most Christian workers do not evangelize! They do other ministries. It confirmed my own observation. Most do not share their faith—because they do not know how!

A major hurdle is initiating conversations. We feel uncomfortable invading the privacy of unsuspecting targets and surprising them with unwanted religious information. So if hunting is the only approach we know, we will not do it often.

But fishing evangelism is different. It is selective. It draws out the seekers from a mixed group of people and focuses on them instead of giving the gospel to non-believers indiscriminately. Seekers are people who have become hungry for God through their own deep need and through observing the character and conduct of Christians and hearing their casual references to God. Seekers nibble at this bait. They ask questions. So you begin your evangelistic conversations by answering the questions of people who want to know about God!

Fishing is ideal for Christians who see the same non-believers daily—in the workplace or on campus. It is ideal for tentmakers who witness discreetly as they support themselves in hostile countries, and for all of us who try to win our own compatriots and the internationals around us.

I will consider six subjects:

- I. Fishing out seekers –explanation, examples, benefits, contexts, components of bait, and work and witness issues.
- II. Answering questions attitudes, readiness, kinds of questions.
- III. Drawing seekers to Christ –focusing their attention on God, tuning them in to God, using information and people resources.
- IV. Encouraging commitment and caring for new believers.
- V. Noting kinds of seekers.
- VI. Getting started.

I. Fishing out seekers

I stumbled onto this 2000-year-old fishing concept during my tentmaking years in Brazil, and then found that some other Christians had discovered it, too—from the Bible! This is how Paul and Peter teach us to evangelize!

I was earning my living as head of a secular international school in Sao Paulo. A teacher came into my office and said, "Weren't you lucky to find that money you lost?" I almost agreed. But instead, without interrupting my work, I turned my head toward her, and said, "Oh, it wasn't luck—I prayed like mad and God helped me to find it!" Then I changed the subject. She left, surprised at my answer. But because I did not push the matter she returned and asked, "You don't really think God cares about a little problem like this, do you?" I told her about a prayer God answered the previous week—and I changed the subject, leaving her free.

I wanted to explain the gospel to her from the start, but she might then have avoided me, fearing I was trying to convert her. She asked more questions on successive days—because she felt she had the initiative. I let her set the pace for our conversations as she was ready—and to set the agenda. Her questions showed me what answers she was ready for. It struck me that I should always act and speak in a way that would cause people to ask the questions I longed to answer! I should fish out seekers from among the indifferent or resistant people around me.

Fishing can help Christians share the good news more often, more joyfully and more fruitfully. But let us examine both approaches.

1. Explanation and examples

Christians who fish focus on a godly lifestyle where they work or study—a place where non-believers can scrutinize their lives. They learn to insert fitting comments about God casually and naturally into secular conversations. This verbal and non-verbal bait causes spiritually hungry people to ask questions. The Christians then answer the seekers' initial questions, win their friendship and gradually lead them to put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians who hunt are more aggressive than those who fish, but they proceed in the dark. Their hit-or-miss approach may lead them to a seeker, but more likely to a non-believer who is indifferent or antagonistic. So hunters often recite a one-size-fits-all sermonette to everyone because they know little about these strangers. If their small speech is memorized it also lacks the authenticity of spontaneity. Many hunters also use a model of evangelism adapted from selling. Their message is one-sided, psychologically packaged to elicit a positive response. They present their sales pitch without relating to the person. They are intent on finishing the little sermon so they can ask for a decision. They call for the deepest and most profound realignment of people's lives while ignoring the reality of their personalities and circumstances.

Hunters do get people to make decisions. But many who sign cards do not understand enough to be born again. The slant of some stereotyped presentations leads listeners to think, "What can I lose? It probably can't hurt." But it leaves many people mistaken or confused about their spiritual state. Several victims told me they just signed to get rid of the Christian. Others responded with anger. Some were disillusioned—the decision had changed nothing—Christianity was a hoax.

The hunting Christian tries to reap a harvest without first planting and watering! A few people in the U.S. may be ready for a decision because others have sowed and watered, but this is rarely true here or in other cultures.

When Jesus sent out the Twelve he instructed them to speak only to the Jews, because he saw that they were like fields white for harvest. (Mt. 9:37, 38, Jn. 4:35-38.) He sent the Twelve to reap. Although the Gentile towns scattered

throughout Galilee were needier, they were not ready for reaping and the Twelve were not at all ready for cross-cultural ministry. Only the Jews had had enough chance to see Jesus.

As Paul evangelized the Roman Empire, he had to begin near zero in each Gentile city, sowing and watering. He was doing pioneer church planting. He had to present God's Word and demonstrate it before he could reap converts and form house fellowships. He always started by fishing out seekers in the synagogues—Jews, and Gentile God-fearers—people who knew something about God from the Old Testament.

For us today to indiscriminately accost strangers with the gospel may be harmful to them, but in hostile countries it can be dangerous also for us. It can lead to job loss, arrest or expulsion, sometimes on twenty-four hours notice.

Although most Christians feel uncomfortable and even afraid to intrude into people's lives and to impose religious conversations on reluctant listeners, most books on evangelism only tell us about better ways to hunt.

Yet even Jesus fished. He did and said things to incite questions. In Jn. 4 he surprised an immoral Samaritan woman by asking for a drink of water—something no other Jewish man would have done! He saw past her promiscuity to her deep spiritual need and led her to ask the right questions. . . . But in John 3 Jesus' miracles were bait. They brought Nicodemus on a night visit. Then Jesus' puzzling statements about birth elicited the right questions from this Jewish theologian. Jesus fished!

Jesus referred to evangelism in general as fishing for people (Mt. 4:19), so the term fishing evangelism is redundant. But it is a helpful reminder that we should fish out the seekers from the ponds of people around us – our family circle, neighborhood, workplace, campus, club, etc. We can call it workplace evangelism, or neighborhood or campus evangelism, because it is ideal for those portions of this planet's great sea of people which God has assigned to each of us—those people with whom we associate most often. Above all, it is tentmaker evangelism—ideal for professional people employed in hostile environments where hunting can have disastrous consequences. It is ideal for all intercultural sharing of the gospel.

So switching from a hunting to a fishing model is one secret of effective evangelism anywhere. It frees messenger and seeker. Your bait induces outsiders to ask the crucial questions.

But bait varies in each situation. On a layover in a Texas airport I could have talked to 100 travelers in the boarding area. But which one should I choose? What should I say to people I did not know? I broke the ice with a friendly "hello" to everyone nearby as I sat down. This freed one woman to ask me what work I do. An evasive answer would have ended the conversation. Instead I said, "I assist caring Christians to obtain salaried positions abroad, so they can tell hurting people around them how Jesus Christ can help."

The woman grabbed both my hands and said, "I'm so glad you are here – I am a hurting person!" Her husband had just died. I was sorry when my plane was called, and then realized we were on the same flight. She was assigned to seat 12A and I to 12B! God had planned our encounter! On takeoff she made the sign of the cross three times—so I knew she was Catholic and that she was afraid to fly. After significant conversation I gave her a Gospel of John. (Pocket-sized Gospels and evangelistic booklets can continue your conversations, and your address inside may lead to correspondence.)

On another flight I chatted with a businessman about current events. An attendant brought our meals and I said softly what I felt, all in one breath: "I am hungry –t his looks good – Thank you God for good things to eat! Now as you were saying. . ." By returning immediately to our subject I was leaving him free. I had not closed my eyes. He did not bat an eyelash. I decided he had not heard my little one-sentence grace. After the meal we both returned to our reading. A half hour later he put aside his book and began a barrage of questions about God.

He had needed time to decide if he wanted to talk and then, what to ask. He chose when to speak. If I had pressed a conversation after my prayer, he might have been defensive.

So bait can be any casual thing you do or say that discreetly announces, "I know about God and I am willing to talk." In the workplace there may be no response for several days. But when your colleague or client or patient or student faces a crisis, he or she will know where to come for help.

This happened to me one Monday soon after my arrival in Sao Paulo to head up an international elementary school. The principal of the adjacent secondary school came to say that one of his teachers had drowned in a storm at sea during the weekend. The high school teachers were preparing a memorial service for the student body and parents. (I agreed that the elementary school should participate.) The Glee Club was learning a hymn. But no high school teacher was willing to say the prayer. He said, "They suggested you would know how to do that." Now what made my new acquaintances think that I could pray? Had someone noticed me briefly bow my head in the teachers' lunchroom?

So in my short prayer at the service I asked God to comfort the bereaved family and friends. Then I added confidently, "Thank you, Lord, that we can know about life after death!" My little prayer brought teachers and students from both schools into my office for days, to ask questions. It was also how I fished out several Christian high school students and started a Bible club in my apartment to help them win their friends. In this way I multiplied my own ministry in both schools!

This event also speeded up my ministry. It could have taken awhile for most people in the elementary school to find out about my faith, and months before I would have enough contact with the high school. But God used the service to quickly inform everyone in both schools, and many upper class Brazilian parents. Yet I was not imposing religious conversations on anyone—I was answering their questions!

This chain of events occurred because I had quietly put out bait at work where I was being watched. If I had been hunting, most people around me would already have become defensive. Fishing had proved advantageous.

2. The benefits of fishing

Note just 14 benefits of the fishing approach to evangelism.

1) Fishing evangelism is enjoyable! You look at the people around you and think, like Jesus, "If you only knew what I have to give you, you would be begging me!" (Jn. 4:10) When people ask, you enjoy telling them the gospel because they want to know, and you want to tell them!

Their first questions are often indirect, but Marta came straight to the point. I had just come to Lima to teach in a secular school and I met this Peruvian teacher at the school board's reception for us newcomers. After a bit of small talk, she asked, "Would you teach me the Bible?" I was surprised! I did not know what I had said to make her ask. But when I learned that her pilot husband had just been killed in a crash, I knew how this hurting young widow had become so open to Jesus Christ. After a few studies at my house she invited him into her life. What joy that gave us both!

Then she brought her three sons to learn about God—sons whom this doting mother had named Miguel, Rafael and Gabriel! I soon learned they were not angels—just three normally naughty teenagers whom God loved. A year later Marta died in a car crash. I was so glad God had led me to her in time!

2) Fishing evangelism is easy since anyone can put out bait—a godly lifestyle and occasional appropriate words about God. Bait is little. You need not elaborate a sermon. You learn to drop tiny spiritual bombshells in the most casual,

natural way! Speak with confidence—as if every thinking person would agree. But do not be dogmatic, arrogant or preachy. Fishing is easy because you put out bait in tiny bites.

3) Fishing evangelism is kind—never rude, not imposing on someone who might become defensive, embarrassed or angry. A graduate student at U.C. Berkeley saw me with my Bible in a campus coffee shop and thought I might help with her research paper on the Protestant Reformation. I wanted to tell Daphne so much! But she assured me she had no personal interest in religion. I soon suspected that was not true. But she was prickly! So I let her questions guide me. I answered each one briefly, adding bits of bait to keep more questions coming. It became a long, substantial conversation that let me say most of what I had longed to tell her. Then I gave her the names of two pastor friends in a fine church just off campus. She said goodbye and left. But then she returned and said, "Thank you for not being pushy." This showed me why she had been so sensitive to any initiative on my part. She had been the victim of hunters! Hunting can make people very difficult to win. Good evangelism is always kind.

4) Fishing evangelism is patient, allowing seekers to pace the conversations with their questions as they are ready. We can turn people off or confuse them by saying too much too soon and using terms they do not yet know. Speak briefly and then think, "The next move is up to you." Seekers need time to process what we tell them and time for the Holy Spirit to work on them.

That was true of Joao Olavo, a medical student in Curitiba, Brazil, who had been attending an investigative Bible study in my apartment for a couple of months. Late one evening he asked me, "What does the death of Jesus 2000 years ago have to do with me today?" I thought to myself, "Dear Joao Olavo, where have you been these last three weeks?" As I began to explain it again, tears filled his eyes and a smile filled his face. He grasped the meaning for the first time. A bad experience that week had shown this very intelligent, self-sufficient, self-righteous young man that he desperately needed God. It can take time for people to understand spiritual truths even after hearing them several times.

So we must be patient with seekers because the Holy Spirit is patient with them and we must not run ahead of him. We can let the seekers' partial responses encourage our faith and we can rejoice over each small step they take toward God. I put small t's after their names in my prayer notebook for a small "Thank you, Lord," and then a big T when they make their commitment. A whole row of t's tells me God is working, so I can be patient.

5) Fishing evangelism is respectful of individuals. You treat people as persons, not objects. You customize your approach for each one. When you get a nibble, determine what kind of seeker your bait has drawn. Listen to what that person says, making sure you understand. As I started university fellowships in Brazil, I spoke differently to Catholic philosophy student Ramon, to Marxist economics professor Maria Eugenia, and to my maid, Benta, who panicked at rainbows, fearing they could make her pregnant! Individuals are as unique as their fingerprints.

6) Fishing evangelism shows you what to say. It puts you right on target, with little hit-or-miss. You will not be giving a lot of answers to questions no one is asking. Seekers' questions reveal their spiritual history, the gospel truths they already understand, their misconceptions, their felt needs, and obstacles that might hinder their turning to the Lord. Listen to them. Build on what God's Spirit is doing with them. Do not fear their questions. (See Section II.)

7) Fishing evangelism shows you what to pray. None of your effort or expertise can bring anyone to the Lord unless you pray. Hunters can only offer general prayers. Fishers can be specific. You ask God to change Lucho's concept of him as a severe Judge, and the idea that he may get by if he balances his sins with good deeds. You pray that he will do well on his math exam, and won't be distracted by the soccer game or his girlfriend, and that Friday's study on the rich young ruler in Luke 18 will touch his heart. Our prayers free the Holy Spirit to do what he is longing to do for us.

8) Fishing evangelism is wise and discreet. It is not indiscriminate, but selective. You let your light shine for everyone, because it can turn indifferent and hostile people into seekers. You answer their questions, too. But you focus on those whose questions show they are seeking. You take them aside to talk without arousing the opposition of the spiritually hostile people around them. (Evangelism is so risky in non-Christian countries that I will return to this subject later.)

9) Fishing evangelism is versatile. If you do not get a nibble, wait for an appropriate moment and try another kind of bait! There is a right kind of bait for every kind of fish. Many Christians should cultivate broader interests in order to have more in common with non-believers. At least we should be able to ask intelligent questions about current events, business, sports, literature, art, music, TV, etc.

Scripture is versatile, containing a variety of salvation metaphors to help people respond to the Lord—terms like finding him, believing in him, inviting him in, being born again, submitting to him, making a commitment to him. As alienated from God, they can be reconciled to him. As guilty and condemned they can come to the Judge for acquittal. As disobedient children they can beg forgiveness from the loving Father. As lost sheep they can let themselves be found by the seeking Shepherd. As broken people they can be made whole by the Great Physician. As slaves to sin they can let the Redeemer buy them out of the slave market and set them free. As rebels they can change sides and make an unconditional surrender to the King of Kings! Use the metaphors and Bible passages best suited to the seeker's questions.

In a crowded but quiet hotel elevator in Manila, a well-dressed Filipino man saw my Bible and asked me if I was one of those people who believe Jesus is the Good Shepherd. I said, "Yes—are you one, too?" He said, "No. My brother is. But I value my freedom too much to give it up." So I asked, using his metaphor, "Which lamb has the most freedom—the one near the shepherd's rod and staff, or the one in the dark alone with the lions and bears?" He said, "You have just put a whole new perspective on the subject!" (A captive elevator audience listened.) I had no time to explain how Jesus can make us truly free (Jn. 8:32). I did not have with me the booklet, *Becoming Free*. I pray his brother has won him.

10) Fishing evangelism is rightly motivated by a biblical definition. It is not headhunting, chalking up numbers or filling a quota. Evangelism is not even winning people to the Lord, although that is a desired result. Evangelism is joyfully, reverently, tactfully "declaring the glory of God" as we know him from Scripture and personal experience. It is storytelling! It is the purpose for which the church exists (1 Peter 2:9, Psalm 96:3)

A bad definition kept me limping along for years. I feared starting a conversation that would not result in a decision—I could not risk another failure. But this biblical definition freed me to sow and water. God was pleased whenever I spoke of him. Because I was no longer uptight, seekers came to me. Even if I see no response in a listener, I rejoice—God can make my words bear fruit in coming days or weeks—for other Christians to reap.

11) Fishing evangelism is biblical. It is not another gimmick. Both Paul and Peter describe evangelism as answering the questions of seekers.

Listen to Paul in Col. 4:5, 6: "Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of each opportunity. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so you may know how you ought to answer every one." A godly, non-judgmental, attractive lifestyle and tactful, thirst-inducing comments elicit the questions we long to answer.

Listen to Peter in 1 Peter 3:14-16: "Have no fear of them (persecutors), nor be troubled. But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. (His presence gives courage and wisdom and power!) Always be ready to make a defense (an answer) to any one who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear (lifestyle)." According to Peter, what most attracted non-believers? The Christians' hope!

They puzzled over what secret gave the Christians joy and peace and confidence even as they suffered physical persecution, property confiscation and economic discrimination.

In our hectic, anxiety-filled world today, non-believers wonder what hope gives Christians peace and patience in the daily grind of work and the frustrations of life, and peace in spite of future uncertainties.

But fishing evangelism cannot work if no one asks questions. Three reasons they do not ask: a) Too little contact. The Christians ignore non-believers, eating meals and spending free time with each other. b) Seekers see nothing different in the believers' behavior—they gripe like all the rest. c) Seekers admire the Christians' conduct but do not relate it to God because they rarely mention him. Christians must put out bait, in a context they share with outsiders—the neighborhood, workplace, campus or club. This is biblical evangelism.

12) Fishing evangelism leads to evangelistic Bible studies. After a few questions, even if you could answer, say, "I'm not an authority on this subject—I'm still learning about my faith. (You are non-threatening.) But would you like to see what Jesus said?" Pull out a New Testament or Gospel and do a one-on-one study of a few relevant verses. Ask questions and let the seeker find answers in the text. These will raise new questions. Agree when to meet for a longer passage. This kind of study usually grows into weekly encounters with several seekers. (Say investigative Bible study—IBS, because an outsider could be offended or put on guard if you say evangelistic.)

IBS's are not a new idea. Remember Philip, the social services administrator who fled Saul's persecution and evangelized in Samaria and the Gaza Strip. He hitchhiked south along the international highway and hooked a ride in the luxurious chariot of a foreign dignitary, who turned out to be the treasurer of Queen Candace of Ethiopia! Philip knew he was a seeker because he was reading aloud from an Isaiah scroll! He got the man to ask him to explain Isaiah 53, then led him in an IBS of this wonderful passage. He helped him to trust in Jesus and then baptized him by a roadside pool!

I have seen more people find God through IBS's than any other means. It is a patient way to provide the background seekers need to make an intelligent decision. Each one discovers truth as he or she is ready for it. You study gospel narratives. Stories have always been the main conduit for truth, especially in non-Western cultures. Stories link mind, heart and emotions in a way that abstract teaching and linear arguments do not. In the Bible, the gospel stories are the main evangelistic literature. John 20:31 says, "These things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ. . . and that you might have life in his name."

Most important, the stories are about Jesus, who is always the shortcut in evangelism. You watch him in action, listen to his words and to the testimony of his friends and enemies. As you stress his humanity—he is tired, hungry, thirsty, sleepy, lonely or sad—his deity stands out in sharp contrast. Ask questions that help participants interact vicariously with him through the characters in the story.

IBS discussions are quite different from the usual Bible study. The majority of the participants should be non-believers. They share more honestly and spontaneously when there is no psychological pressure from a Christian majority. But emphasize the ground rules—to answer the questions from the text—to discover what the passage means, not to exchange religious opinions. This avoids arguments and makes sure the participants will not leave with wrong conclusions. (But note the opinions they present and discuss them privately between studies.)

IBS's enable you to rejoice as seekers take small steps toward God. Their comments and questions show when you should ask for commitment. It produces converts who are lay evangelists, because the new Christians can immediately win others, as they were won—leading an IBS with a question guide on the gospel stories! In Spain, Marisa had not yet made a verbal commitment herself when she took a page of questions to lead that week's study with her non-believing father and sister! See GO Paper: Investigative Bible Studies.

13) Fishing evangelism facilitates follow-up, because it quickly leads to an IBS, which not only helps seekers find God, but provides the matrix in which the converts are taught and nurtured. The IBS turns into a DBS—a discipleship Bible study. You also begin new IBS's, with the converts inviting their friends and leading them to God.

14) Fishing evangelism facilitates church planting, because it quickly leads to an IBS which soon turns into a DBS—and that soon becomes a house church! A larger congregation can be formed if tentmakers bring two or three DBS groups together. But in Muslim countries they may have to wait until the converts learn to trust each other, since they fear infiltration by spies (phony converts) seeking to report them to authorities.

The above 14 benefits of fishing can be experienced in different situations.

3. Fishing contexts

Fishing evangelism is useful in our travel, our nuclear and extended families, our neighborhoods, our places of work or study and in our social activities. We will consider first where Paul evangelized, then our contemporary workplaces or campuses, and then hostile environments.

1) Paul's contexts for evangelism.

Intellectual Paul, who supported himself by making animal skin tents, integrated work and witness in the workshop. There he probably saw some fellow laborers, customers, suppliers, and artisan guild members with shops on the same narrow street. He may have worked for an employer or hired his own employees, managed a workshop or trained apprentices. In the streets of Corinth he talked to drunks, thieves, idlers and other bums—and won many to the Lord! (1 Cor. 6:9-11) Conversations would have spilled over into his residence—maybe above or behind the workshop, especially when he lived with Priscilla and Aquila. He talked to people in the market squares and was invited to lecture to the philosophers in the Aeropagus council in Athens and to the Asiarchs in Ephesus (Acts 17,18). But he always taught first in synagogues to fish out seekers, until Jewish hostility forced him to move meetings to a convert's home—like that of Jason in Corinth. In Philippi there was no synagogue so he looked for worshipping Jews along the riverbanks, and found the Gentile God-fearer, Lydia. (Acts 16) In Ephesus Paul taught during the long noontime siesta hours in a borrowed lecture hall and evenings in large local households. (Acts 19:8, 9, 20:20.) He evangelized on board ship and on long journeys on foot (Acts 27, 28, 19:1ff). He witnessed in several jails (Acts 16) and won converts under Nero's very nose—in his palace prison! (Phil. 1:12-15, 4:21,22.) He turned his arrests and trials into evangelistic outreach! (Acts 21-26.)

Although theologically educated, he served as a working man, not clergy—because it gained him credibility with the skeptical, suspicious Gentiles. He was erudite and upper class but he identified with artisans. He modeled and taught fishing evangelism in all these contexts. (Col.4:5, 6).

2) Today's workplace and campus.

What makes fishing evangelism so necessary where we work or study is that we see the same people over and over. We must not turn them off by saying too much at the beginning.

Maria Celia learned this in her first year of medical school in Curitiba, Brazil. When she came to share my apartment, she said, "Don't expect me to evangelize. Last year I talked about God so much that when I walked down the hall everyone disappeared into classrooms!" She was right. More talk would be counterproductive. I said, "Let's not talk to them about God unless they ask." I knew they would ask if we used the right bait in a context of caring about them as whole people—not just religious souls.)

Students came to our little apartment mainly from the Catholic medical faculty next door and the federal medical school a block away. Once we had 60 people! Sometimes groups studied all night for exams, with human hearts and lungs on the table exuding formaldehyde! We provided coffee, Brazilian mate tea and cookies. Students dropped by almost any time of day, and some asked about God. When they started working on cadavers Orlandina had trouble sleeping, so she asked me what happens when we die. As we sat down to study 1 Cor. 15 others came in, and she called them to join us. We had these spontaneous Bible studies almost any hour of the day, and a scheduled study each Saturday. We ended these studies in an hour, but discussion continued for another hour or two. When we divided into three groups, some came three times a week! Maria Celia became popular and wisely used her evangelistic gift.

This discreet approach is even more important in antagonistic milieus.

3) Hostile environments. Fishing evangelism is ideal among that 80% of the world's people that is off-limits to missionaries. China comprises about 22% of the world and India 20%. Muslim countries add another 20%. Even some fairly open countries no longer issue missionary visas. Yet all governments welcome expatriates with expertise they need. But fanatics can get you dismissed, arrested or expelled. Yet how could you face God if you did not tell the gospel to local people who had never had a chance to hear it?

Solution: You fish! You do selective evangelism, finding the spiritually hungry people in any group and taking them aside to talk. Genuine seekers are not likely to report you to authorities. Non-seekers may not even notice your subtle bait. But your godly lifestyle can turn even them into seekers.

Jesus evangelized in an extremely hostile situation, not unlike Muslim cultures today. Jewish society was characterized by the same fanatical monotheism of people who do not believe in a triune God. As opposition to Jesus grew, he used parables to fish out seekers. The crowds could react with curiosity, indifference, anger, sentimental approval, mockery or perplexity, but only those who stayed and asked, discovered the meaning of his stories (Mk. 4:12). He did not "cast pearls before swine" (Mt. 7:6). He did not speak precious truths to the hostile crowds who would trample and mock. They would discourage timid seekers. Jesus fished out hungry people and explained the life-giving, spiritual meaning of his stories to them in private.

A similar tactic would have helped Dick, a music teacher in Kuwait. He related warmly to the local people, and the Muslim men in his neighborhood invited him to join their evening chats outdoors or in their homes. It was an honor to be invited to a diwaniya and Dick courageously talked to the men about Jesus Christ. Once they even asked him to bring his Injil (N.T.) But soon they were fiercely arguing among themselves in Arabic. If a hesitant seeker was present, he was probably discouraged by the majority. Dick needed to fish out the seekers and talk with them elsewhere.

Engineers Roy and Carol, working in a sensitive Muslim country, became discouraged when she and the children fell ill with hepatitis and he injured his back. The Arab employers were never happy with his work—it is how they control employees. The two bosses lied to each other and Roy would get caught in the middle. The couple asked for thirty days vacation leave in the U.S. They wanted to reconsider if God expected them to stay in this hard place.

The bosses protested. If Roy left for a month the whole factory would fall apart! For the first time he saw how pleased they were with him. Just before the couple left, one boss came with a little suitcase, asking for books about Jesus! Roy thought he was entrapping him—to get him arrested. He would not have dared to bring a whole suitcase full of Christian books into this country! But Roy gave him an Arabic New Testament and a book about Jesus.

The boss proved to be sincere and the couple returned. The boss had been made hungry for the gospel, first by Christian radio, then by how Roy related to them at work and how the couple faced their multiple problems. Anyone can do right when all goes well. But suffering enhances our testimony.

However, even tentmakers who are discreet can be expelled. It had taken us only two weeks to get Tom a civil engineering job in Saudi Arabia. He was helping a small fellowship of mainly Asian Christians. He returned to his job after a four-week break outside the country, and found the whole group being expelled, because of the exuberance of a few new believers. In a week or two Tom was also ordered to leave. But in a short time all had jobs elsewhere in Muslim countries and their ministries continued.

Tentmakers should not flaunt their religious activity before authorities. But if arrested, they should see God's hand in it, since no one can touch them without God's permission! Jesus said his followers should expect arrests so they could witness to authorities. (Mt. 10:16-20). The first tentmaker ever has assured us that God "makes all things work together for good for those who love him, and for their families!" (Rom. 8:23-28)

So Christians must be in a context where they can be regularly observed by the same outsiders, and they must put out bait that will draw seekers.

4. Components of bait

Note first what is not bait. Bumper stickers and Christian motto shirts are not witnessing, but advertising. These turn off most non-believers. But as I traveled in Asia, my tiny cross or fish lapel pins fished out a surprising number of seekers. But effective bait where we live, work or study must contain these four characteristics.

1) Personal integrity. The first component is moral integrity. Our relationships with the opposite sex must be above reproach. Our lives must be characterized by honesty, truthfulness and transparency. In most cultures people ask personal questions, like how much money we earn, what rent we pay, the price of our car, why we are in their country. If you are single, they ask why. If married, they ask why you have no children, etc. It is good to have nothing to hide. Openness gains trust.

As tentmakers in sensitive countries we must be who we say we are, with no pretense. A math teacher who knows Jesus Christ must be just that. Christians who see themselves as regular missionaries with a job as a cover or a front, often develop a clandestine mentality which sooner or later destroys their credibility. Fear may lead them to evade questions, to speak half-truths or use code words. Each small deception requires others. Local people catch on quickly. The believer's evasions and inconsistencies puzzle them and undermine trust. Their actions can result in the very detection they fear.

No passage of Scripture permits half-truths or other deceptions. The end does not justify the means. Truth and righteousness are major parts of our spiritual armor that we must consciously put on—daily, as we dress. (Eph. 6: 10ff.) In this cosmic war we dare not risk holes! An untruth gives Satan a foothold. He can turn us into perpetual liars by keeping us in hot water. The problem is not only that people will find us out, but Satan knows, and our lack of trust dishonors God!

Jesus said our evangelism would bring us before authorities. (How else would they ever hear the gospel?) He promised that the Holy Spirit would tell us what to say. Does the Spirit of Truth ever coach us to lie? Don't short-circuit what God is trying to do when you are face to face with potentially dangerous authorities. It is how God turned the chief persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus, into Paul, the beloved apostle! (See GO Paper on Tentmaker Ethics.)

Tentmakers who genuinely earn their living in substantial positions for which they are qualified, have more freedom in almost every way to live out the gospel in the workplace and to answer the questions that invariably arise. Tentmaking is not regular missionary work, but a unique approach to spiritual ministry. To abstract Paul's model of secular work but ignore his instructions for workplace evangelism is to forfeit most of the benefits of tentmaking.

The Christian professional must live out the Christian life under the unrelenting scrutiny of non-believers. Personal integrity is seen in small things. We all fail under stress so it matters how we deal with failure. We must be willing to apologize, to say we are still learning. We do not claim perfection, but we long to please God in all that we do.

Paul's manual labor enabled him to model the Christian life for converts (2 Thess.3:8ff). They had never seen a Christian! It was not enough to tell them how to live holy lives. It was not enough to show godliness in church. Paul demonstrated holy living in the same seductive, idolatrous, immoral cesspool of Roman society in which the seekers lived and worked.

Paul lived out honesty, truth, holiness and love in the same atmosphere of persecution that tempted new believers to lie and compromise their faith. But he did not let fear short-circuit what God was doing in people around him.

Two thousand years after Paul, it is equally important for us to live out Christ in the world's diverse marketplaces, to speak the truth, to refrain from bribery, to avoid illegal monetary exchange, to respect authority, to deal kindly with everyone, to be irreproachable in our relationships to the opposite sex—according to the Bible and local customs. Our integrity matters!

And so does our work. Note some of Paul's most astonishing instructions!

2) Quality work. The second component of bait is honest work for our employer. Paul also taught and modeled a biblical work ethic in a society that had none. A contract with an employer was a contract with the Lord.

Slaves made up 90% of the population in Rome and the Italian peninsula and 70% in the provinces! The basic social unit of Greco-Roman society was the wealthy household. It consisted of the owner's extended family, slaves who did house chores, slaves who did farm labor, and slaves who were artisans and managers who ran the family businesses. A household also had teachers, and often a doctor and a lawyer. Who were all these slaves? Some had been born to slave parents and were the master's property. Some were picked up as abandoned babies. Some were freeborn people who fell into debt. The majority were foreign captives, taken in war or peace and sold in slave markets. These households were multicultural!

But in Eph. 6:5-8, Paul speaks not only to slaves but to wage earners—to free citizens, to ex-slaves, to small business proprietors, to day laborers. He says, "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with good will as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is slave or free." See also Col. 3:23-25.

Regardless of the Christian's social status or the work done, Jesus was the real boss—rather than the person who gave the orders or authorized the paycheck. Quality work might even win the employer to the Lord, improving life for many! To win a householder could result in a new house church! The households became the main social unit of the church!

Paul gives us a new perspective on secular work. Jesus observes us and evaluates the quality of our work. We are to serve our human employers as though they were Jesus Christ! Even if they are cruel slave masters. If we do it consciously for Jesus Christ it is no longer secular work. Even a hard job, or a boring one, is transformed into sacred ministry and worship!

So architect Don served God, in the Arabian Gulf, not only by his evangelism, but also by the Arab style houses he designed for Muslim extended families! Engineer Stan pleased God by providing water resources for rural southeast Asians. Tim did surgery in Turkey, and Norma played violin in Portugal's national symphony orchestra. Brian managed a supermarket in Saudi Arabia. Keith taught high school math in Kenya. The Ponds taught children in Belarus. The 70-year old Johnsons taught English in China. But all had the same employer—Jesus Christ.

Work is part of our cultural mandate (Gen.1:28). It is one of the ways in which we reflect the image of God. It is how we care for the resources God has entrusted to us. It is how we "bless" our new host country. It is how we let God love people through us. That God "so loved the world" means he loves the rebels everywhere. He wants his followers to make life better for them. God told his exiled people in idolatrous, pagan Babylon, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, for in its welfare is your welfare." (Jer. 29:7) We must integrate our cultural mandate and our missionary mandate (Mt.28:18-20). Daily work done for God is spiritual ministry.

But the witness of our work can never take the place of the witness of our character and words. Both verbal and non-verbal testimony are as necessary in evangelism as both wings are to a superjet! All the tentmakers above also shared the good news on their jobs as well as in free time. Their quality work opened doors for verbal witness and gave credibility to their words.

3) Caring relationships. The third component of bait is how Christians relate to people in the workplace or on campus. They must be pleasant to all around them and give comfort, encouragement and practical help where they can. They may help a colleague at work, help a family move, take meals to the sick, do the shopping, babysit the children, prepare a fellow student for an exam, find him part-time work or a place to live. They may invite their neighbors or colleagues for meals.

Carlos Garcia, fourth year law student, came to our Bible study group in my apartment in Lima, Peru. The next Saturday was his birthday so I baked a cake. I should have guessed he would spend that day with his family. So the next Saturday I baked another cake for a late celebration. After he found the Lord and became a pastor he told his congregation that no one had ever baked him a birthday cake—and it had touched him that I had baked two! More recently this godly leader was elected Vice President of Peru.

For Paul's converts, hospitality and generosity were part of life and witness. (Gal. 6:9, 10, 1 Tim. 3:2) He wrote in 1 Thess. 2:8: "We shared with you not only the gospel of God but our very own selves, because you had become very dear to us."

Americans are judged by foreigners to be friendly, but unavailable when needed. Most cultures make a big distinction between friends and acquaintances. People test your friendship by requesting favors, but they expect you to request favors, too. You cannot have many real friends at once. Find a few seekers and focus on them and their families.

When Bob and Betty taught English in China, the government did not want students to associate with foreign faculty outside the classroom. But this couple loved the students and knew how boring their lives were. So they found a way to invite a few at a time for meals in their pleasant apartment. They designed a course on how to be a guest in an American home. These students saw a Christian book or two on the coffee table and a Bible verse on the wall. On one visit, a young engineer said, "I want to know about God. Is there any kind of a book about him?"

In another city a young Chinese woman expressed surprise that her English teachers were volunteering their free time to provide sacrificial service to children in one of China's desperate orphanages. (People abandon girl babies at these institutions almost daily.) She protested that orphans are the government's job!

But she became ashamed that it was foreigners, not her own people, who gave loving care to these abandoned little ones. She said, "Soon I begin to suspicion that these teachers are Christians. I ask, and they say to me 'yes.'"

Christian groups can show caring on an even larger scale. An IFES-related student group in Peru painted the filthy restrooms on campus as a service to the student body! A few years ago in Communist Hungary the persecuted churches canceled a Sunday morning's services so members could help clear away flood debris for their neighbors. Their labor became worship.

Whenever possible, our personal help to people should be reciprocal, not paternalistic. In Yemen, Clare, who is an engineer, stays home to care for her children and to befriend her Muslim neighbors. But the local women were not friendly until her first baby was born. Then they came to help this young mother whose own mother lived so far away. After that Clare could go to market with the women—her hair wholly covered, like theirs. She adjusted their sewing machines and they taught her to sew their long colorful gowns. Give-and-take allays suspicions that a one-sided relationship creates.

In every conversation we must play the role of either host or guest. Shy people are often guests—passive. We must learn to be hosts. Take the initiative to make others comfortable, instill confidence, free them to confide. Make yourself vulnerable by sharing personal experiences. Being the host takes your mind off yourself, reducing your shyness and freeing you to love others.

So we must live out the gospel in a non-judgmental, non-compromising, attractive way. We must maintain personal integrity even in the most difficult situations, with quality work and caring relationships—and watch for openings to talk about the Lord.

4) Verbal witness. This is the fourth component of bait. If you do not speak of God, an exemplary life may merely confuse people. So you must casually, naturally and confidently insert fitting comments about God into secular conversations. Do not overdo. Avoid being preachy. But watch for openings. Your informed, pleasant conversations on non-religious topics make your occasional religious comments acceptable.

Section II gives more help on verbal witness. But first, consider mission issues in integrating work and witness.

5. Work and witness issues

Quality work is basic to tentmaker witness everywhere, along with integrity, caring relationships and speaking. But the following problems are due to cultural factors or to an undervaluation of secular work in evangelical circles.

1) Social barriers that inhibit witness. It bothers Christian faculty in some countries that they may not socialize with their students without losing respect. Students will expect favors and good grades without effort. Usually tentmakers find ways to converse with them. But they have more freedom to evangelize colleagues, former students and students in other people's classes.

In many countries, business people also may not associate freely with subordinates. But even in this situation, God helps you fish out the seekers.

2) Little appreciation for efficiency. Many countries have no work ethic and quality work may be resented. Your efficiency may mean fewer employees are needed. You do not want to jeopardize the job of a friend who needs to support his family. How do you reconcile biblical teaching on work and your responsibility to your employer, with problems you could cause coworkers?

Paul faced a similar dilemma. The Jews had a work ethic from the O.T., but the Gentiles had none. Paul made a big issue of work. He taught and modeled a biblical work ethic for his converts. Why? Many had been idlers and thieves, and even after their conversion Paul had to exhort them to quit stealing! (1 Cor. 6:9-11, Eph. 4:28). He said that idlers unwilling to work were not to eat. Without a biblical work ethic there could not be godly, respectable church members, nor well-supported families, nor indigenous, independent churches. Converts could not give to the needy, nor have any positive effect on their community. In many countries today a small Christian minority has great influence partly because of its work ethic.

In spite of initial disadvantage, in the long run the work ethic is better for everyone. But rather than compete with coworkers, earning their enmity and threatening their jobs, help them all to do better. Help your superior to raise the productivity of the whole department in a way that gets him the credit. Gain both the short- and long-term benefits of a biblical work ethic.

3) The myth of the Christian presence. Some expatriates who go to China are persuaded not to evangelize. If they just show what good people Christians are, it is said, the government will give permission to evangelize a few years from now. But it is doubtful that any country ever gained religious freedom this way. How can Christians refrain from giving the gospel to the Chinese around them who have never had a chance to hear it? They must do low key evangelism now, eliciting questions to answer.

4) Evangelizing elsewhere but not on the job. It is easy to understand why some tentmakers do not want to risk their jobs and work permits by evangelizing in the workplace. They wish to avoid the cost and hassle of moving their family to another country. But the people we see daily are our main responsibility before God. Biblical evangelism is a lifestyle, not an activity to switch on or off. The solution? Quit hunting. Fish! God provides a particular job so the tentmaker can witness specifically in that context. They must trust him to care for them and their families. No one dare touch them without his permission!

5) A supposed conflict of interest between job and ministry. Many tentmakers are told by their Christian superiors, "Do not put so much effort into your job because that is not what you are here for." This puts stress on the workers. The job is viewed as a necessary nuisance to permit residence in the restricted country. But it is wrong to use an employer for a visa unless one intends to give wholehearted service.

Tentmaking and regular missionary work are not just two different means of financial support, but two quite different mission strategies for different people in different situations.

Scripture gives us examples of both approaches. God called Peter to leave his two-family fishing business forever and to fish for men, as a regular missionary, on donor support. Years later Paul reports approvingly that Peter and his wife still traveled and ministered on church support. (Luke 5:1-11, John 21, 1 Cor. 9:5) Paul then gives a long list of arguments to establish his own right as an apostle to church support. But then in the same chapter Paul says three times that he has never made use of this right! Three times! (1 Cor. 9:12, 15, 18) He writes near the end of his third missionary journey, so all his journeys are included. God called him to a self-supporting, tentmaking ministry. His pioneer church planting among Gentile unreached peoples required a different strategy from the work of Peter, which was mainly among Jews.

Paul says the Christian's job is important. He tells slaves and paid workers that they must serve their human employers with the same dedication that they would give to Jesus Christ! Col. 3:23-25: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ." See also Eph. 6:5,6. We dare not minimize tentmakers' jobs, because they are an integral part of their spiritual ministry, and can produce more churches than any other approaches.

The incompatibility of job and ministry is exaggerated in mission circles for three reasons: a) A failure to heed Paul—his considerable teaching on work and witness, and his marketplace example. b) Leaders' inexperience. Few mission leaders have done self-supporting ministry. Many have not held secular jobs! Even most tentmakers did little or no workplace evangelism in their previous jobs at home. c) The problem of hybrid ministries. All combinations of self-support and donor support are legitimate if they are honest. But people who depend mainly on donor support are not tentmakers, but regular missionaries, pretending self-support, using a minimal job as a front or a cover. Each finds "a secular identity" behind which to hide his or her true identity. But they tend to develop a clandestine mentality that can lead to deceitfulness and loss of credibility. It predisposes them to do the very things which can make them suspect.

Tentmaking is not regular missionary work. But it is full-time ministry, since work and witness are integrated on the job. In their free time tentmakers have additional ministries. A linguistics instructor translated the New Testament into the language of five million Muslims as he supported himself in the local university! Paul considered tentmaking better for pioneer church planting in hostile regions than the donor-support approach of Peter. (See GO Paper: Why did Paul Make Tents? A Biblical Basis for Tentmaking.)

6) The problem of an unethical employer. Deal with the situation with prayer and patience. Daniel's bosses were no saints! Yet he won Nebuchadnezzar to the Lord! But if an employer's reputation compromises your testimony you must take the proper steps to resign. We know of no tentmakers who have had to do this.

7) The danger of jeopardizing the employer. All vocations have occupational hazards. Tentmaking in sensitive countries adds another—persecution. A Christian expatriate in Saudi Arabia may be willing to take risks for Jesus Christ, but what if he jeopardizes his employer? What if his firm loses its contract because of his indiscretion? a) The firm risks more by hiring non-believers who are immoral, or use drugs, or home-brew their own liquor. Most Christians share Muslims' objection to alcohol and their other scruples. b) Tentmakers may not remain silent in any country. It is usually legitimate to answer the questions of local people, so fishing evangelism reduces the risks. c) They must trust that God brought them there to witness and he cares for them, their families and their employers.

But tentmakers must fish, not hunt! Bait is similar everywhere: personal integrity, quality work, caring relationships and fitting words about God.

But there is more to evangelism than fishing out the seekers. Fishing helps you to get started. It helps you over a major hurdle. Your lifestyle evangelism draws seekers into your friendship evangelism. As the relationship develops you can take more initiative in the conversations. But how do you proceed? How do you handle the seeker's questions?

II Answering questions

1. Basic attitudes

Confidence and humility. Do not fear the questions! The key is to evangelize as a learner, not as an authority. It is less threatening to the seeker and it takes the pressure off of you. You never claimed to have all the answers. The Christian faith is not going to be hurt because you haven't yet learned everything. After 2000 years no one is going to think up a question that no Christian can answer! But we must share our certainties, not our doubts. Be honest. Rather than bluff or answer poorly, say, "Let me have until tomorrow so I can give you a clear explanation." Then work on the answer.

2. Preparedness

1) How do you find the answers? Consult books like Josh McDowell's *Evidences that Demand a Verdict* (CCC) or Cliff Knechtle's *Give me an Answer* (IVP). (See Bibliography.) Do you have access to a church library? Talk with fellow Christians—a pastor or campus staff worker. Organize your data. Make a simple outline of your best arguments and related Scriptures. Find a relevant booklet to lend. We should not be unprepared twice for the same question.

2) How can you prepare beforehand? Both Peter and Paul tell us to be ready for the questions. I found the following helpful.

a) I started a question file in a shoe-box. On divider tabs I wrote the questions people asked or that I feared they might ask. Then I filed outlines of my best answers, with Bible verses. I kept adding scraps of paper with notes from books, magazines and sermons—as I found them.

b) I prepared inductive Bible study guides on several passages for IBS's like: the woman at the well (Jn.4) the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mt. 15), blind Bartimaeus (Lk.18), the rich young ruler (Lk. 19), Zacchaeus (Lk. 19), the Roman centurion, the widow of Nain, Simon and the sinful woman (all in Luke 5). These simple stories have tremendous theological and evangelistic content. 7). I also did mini-studies on even shorter passages, like Jesus' promise of freedom in John 8:31-36; Jesus at the door in Rev.3:20, 21 and on the cross in 1 Peter 2:18-25, etc. (See Bibliography and GO Paper on Inductive Bible Study: Preparing a Passage.)

c) I memorized evangelism Bible verses—and their addresses, so I could find and use them quickly. I started with salvation verses like John 1:12, 3:16-21, 5:24, 1 John 5:11, 12, Rev. 3:20,21. (The Navigators memory system and packet are helpful.)

These three steps should prepare you, as they did me, to answer questions with more confidence. You must depend on God's Spirit to bring to remembrance what you should say in each case. But the Holy Spirit cannot retrieve data from your memory bank that you have never stored there!

3. The questions

People ask three main kinds of questions—all of them important. Understanding them can give balance and keep us from spinning our wheels. They relate to apologetics, personal testimony and gospel proclamation. Consider samples of each.

1) Apologetics—that is, defense of our faith. Peter's Greek word for answer is *apologia*, reason, defense. It divides into two kinds of questions. a) Philosophical: If God is good how can he allow evil? How can he allow a hell? How can he let the innocent suffer? Is there absolute truth? Where do we get our feelings of right and wrong? Are human beings more than biochemical machines? What is death? Is incarnation a reality? b) Historical: How can we know that Jesus existed? Why not regard him merely as a great teacher? Why not regard him merely as an impersonal Christ principle or Christ consciousness? Why should we believe he is God in a unique sense? Why believe that he arose bodily from the grave, never to die again? Why believe that the Bible is true? Why is it more valid than the The Gospel of Thomas, The Unknown Life of Jesus or extra-sensory messages? Why believe that biblical, historical Christianity is uniquely different from and superior to all other religions?

It is permissible to argue, to give reasons, to persuade—as Paul did. But he said to do it gently and courteously (2 Tim. 2:23-26, Eph. 6:10ff). The non-believers are not the enemy, but victims of the enemy, blinded and held captive by him. It is possible to win all the arguments but to lose the seeker.

Some years ago, Paul Little pointed out in his book *How to Give Away Your Faith* (IVP) that only a few intellectual questions occurred repeatedly, even when you worked with students and professional people. Today, in our much more complex society, his observation is still true. Most people are not well informed nor interested in religious and philosophical issues. Most have little understanding of the Christian faith and have accepted popular objections with little thought. We can confidently undermine their shaky foundations.

But we hear more varied questions today than two decades ago, for two reasons. a) Our increasingly pluralistic society brings new questions from eastern religions. (See Section V.) b) We are undergoing a shift from modernity to post-modernity all over the world among urbanized people. This is a major shift from three centuries of culture dominated by science and rationalism—to a new anti-rational, metaphysical, neo-pagan era. People are less likely to ask, "Is it true?" and more likely to ask, "What does it do for me? How does it make me feel?" Post-modernity consists of a variety of cults, under the loose term New Age. They claim Jesus as an enlightened guru, but deny his deity, distorting all that we know of him. They use spurious books about Jesus and turn to the mystical, the magical, to channeling, to supposed contact with the dead and with spirit beings. Angels are popular. Many believe in reincarnation. For them the Bible is not more valid than any other writings or extra-sensory messages.

There is no need to panic. The devil is not very creative. Many of these false teachings are like those of the Docetists and Gnostics in the ancient Greek world—the same heresies the apostles confronted! Some New Agers today even use old Gnostic texts found in Egypt. So the tactics and the answers the apostles used are valid also for today. Just because non-believers' first concern is not truth does not mean they have no interest in it, nor that we must discard this weapon. God's absolute truth is our sword, which remains as powerful as ever! (Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12,13). This great cosmic war is still a war of ideas—between God's absolute truth and human lies, which we must demolish with his Word (2 Cor. 1::3-5) How can we tell if we are speaking to a modern or a post-modern person? By their questions! (We will continue to deal with basic evangelism and discuss special kinds of seekers, like post-modern ones, in Section V.)

The Christian faith is on trial, but so is every belief system! Not a single one begins to have the vast amount of evidences that we have! Many will see that the overwhelming evidences for the New Testament make it more credible than exotic books with not a shred of evidence, or the extrasensory messages of strange gurus.

God's truth makes sense of God's world and everything in it. No religious system that rejects the existence of our Creator God can present an alternative view of the world that people can live with. If God is dead: a) Then there can be no supernatural. Yet in a recent jet crash everyone on board prayed. b) If there is no God, then human beings are only chemicals, elusive atoms—yet people know their loved ones are more than that. c) Without God, morality and sexual ethics are just a matter of taste, yet these same skeptics are rigid moralists concerning child abuse or racial prejudice. d) Without God, everything is meaningless. But people have to live their lives as God's creatures in God's rational world, so they constantly butt their heads on this objective reality.

Most important, no matter what people in any era or any culture say they believe, we know they have that same inner emptiness—that God-shaped vacuum which only God can fill—as the French mathematician-philosopher, Blaise Pascal, said in the mid-1600's.

We also have the Holy Spirit coaching us and reinforcing what we say!

We also have God's Word which is self-authenticating and powerful. Defend the Bible as you would a lion—let it out of its cage! Get seekers into Bible study. They do not need to believe the Bible is true, but only that it is worth investigating. Do not raise the issue of credibility—assume they have that much confidence in it. Even Muslims consider it a holy book. It has the "ring of truth."

It speaks to people's hearts whether they believe it is from God or not, because it agrees with the reality they experience as God's creatures in the world God designed. While their mouths argue against God's Word, their hearts and consciences are saying "You know it's true!"

If people want evidences for the truth of Scripture, begin with *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* by F. F. Bruce. Once they accept this verification of the New Testament, they must accept Jesus' authentication of the Old Testament.

Some Christians consider all intellectual questions insincere. But many questions come from doubters wanting to believe. Paul made a distinction between unbelievers in the synagogues who rejected the gospel, and outsiders who had never heard it. (1 Cor. 14)

You can discover if a person's questions are only excuses to reject the gospel. After a few answers, ask if they would be willing to receive Jesus if all their questions were resolved. If they say No, try to determine their real obstacle to faith. An immoral life? Fear of losing freedom? Fear of persecution? Fear of family opposition? (A Jewish convert can be disowned and a Muslim one put to death!)

But watch for people like Jean Louis, a student I met in France. He had never met an evangelical until he came by accident to a French GBU (IFES) leadership conference at Valbonne. His girlfriend, Armelle, a seeker, somehow heard about this student activity, and came, bringing him along. He asked me many questions between classes, until the last day, when he said he had no more questions and he was satisfied with all my answers.

So I asked, "Then are you ready to invite Jesus Christ into your life?" He said, "It is all so new to me—I need to think it over." So I said, "Yes. You must not make such an important commitment lightly." I explained again how he could do it. Two weeks later he wrote that he and Armelle had both invited Jesus Christ and were being helped by the local GBU group.

If your evangelism is of the Holy Spirit, you can trust him to continue the convicting work he has begun in seekers' hearts. Often we are one link in a chain of people God uses to win someone to himself. Your answer to a single question may be such a link.

2) Personal testimony. Another kind of question relates to your experience of God. How did you find God? How do you know he accepted you? How do you hear him speak? Could your experience be self-suggestion? What difference does Jesus Christ make in your life? On your job? In your marriage? In other relationships? Could your answers to prayers be mere coincidences? (Someone said, "When I pray much my life is full of coincidences and when I pray little, there aren't any!")

Post-modern seekers and people from non-Christian religions may be more interested in evidences of God's presence and power in us than in our apologetics. Both are needed. (See more below on spiritual power in evangelism.)

But talk about your spiritual experience in ordinary English. Avoid evangelical cliches, because most outsiders will not understand them or will think you quaint. Spiritual language or a shift to a religious voice or facial expression are bad habits some Christians learn in church, but they turn outsiders off. So be casual and be yourself.

Answer experience questions with honesty and humility—not how Christians should be, but how we are. We are God's children, saved for eternity, but we are still sinners, constantly learning and growing and needing forgiveness.

I recall a dark stormy night in southern Brazil, when I finally boarded a little prop plane that was two hours late. The businessman next to me had asked what I was reading and I said it was a book on how God accepts us as we are and cares for us. But as the little plane lurched into the air for a very bumpy flight, I dug my fingernails into the armrests. I didn't pray, "God, protect us," but rather, "Don't let this man see that I am afraid because I just told him you protect us!" Christians should not be afraid, should they? But we are human, and the fear instinct is God's gift for our protection. I had caught myself being phony! So I turned to the man and said, "I really believe God protects us, but on a rough flight I am still afraid." He said, "I'm afraid, too, because if this plane goes down I'll go straight to hell. God could never accept such a wicked man as I have been."

My honest admission of fear gave me the chance to tell this man about God's grace and forgiveness, as tears filled his eyes. On debarking, I gave him the little book I had been reading, because I knew God had intended it for him.

Seekers will sense phoniness and an attitude of superiority. Even when God's Spirit has helped us grow spiritually and to pray effectively, we are still learners. It is wise to give out the good news "the way beggars tell other beggars where they have found bread." Bread is the gospel—the third kind of question people ask.

3) Gospel truths. Seekers cannot be born again through apologetics or personal testimony alone. They need the facts of the gospel. The minimum the seeker must understand fits a three-point outline, and a fourth for response. You would not usually explain these points in order, like a sermon. Rather, they are your mental checklist to evaluate how much the seeker knows and what still needs to be clarified. Remember four words: God, people, Jesus, and response.

The first word is GOD—Creator of everything, including ourselves. So we owe him all that we are and have. We should respond with worship, thanksgiving, love, trust, obedience, loyalty and willing service. Sin is the insult of withholding this response. If there were no Creator, there would be no sin. (Rom. 1:18-32)

But do not get sidetracked into a discussion of: Evolution or Creation? A bad question cannot have a good answer. What matters is a prior question: Does everything owe its existence to God or to blind fate or chance? If to God, then it becomes secondary how he chose to create—over a long period, in six literal days or in six seconds. The how is not essential to salvation and the Bible is silent on the subject. Genesis answers the far more important questions of who created, what he created and why he did it.

Do not argue about the existence of God unless seekers ask. Assume they believe in a supreme Being. In America 90% do. (See Section V for those who do not.) But what kind of God?

God is love. "He so loved the world that he gave his only Son." But love is not just a sentimental feeling. It seeks the beloved's highest good. God's love is limitless, unfathomable, undeserved and unconditional. "He does not love us because we are valuable, but we have infinite value because he has set his love upon us." (Thielicke)

God is holy. (Hab.1:13, Dt. 4:24) His love makes him hate everything that could harm us. His love keeps us away from the fire of his holiness until we allow him to enter by his Spirit and give us life. His Spirit cannot die. So we become eternal beings, able to be in God's presence. He wants to reproduce his holy character in the diverse personalities of his children. His laws are valid for all time. They are not arbitrary. They are not to fence us in but to keep danger out. They are the Manufacturer's instructions for how we can function best physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. Emphasize God's holiness to the self-righteous and complacent, and his love to the guilt-ridden.

The second word is PEOPLE. They were created by God in his image, so they have worth, dignity and meaning. They were created for himself to find their purpose in fellowship with him (Col. 1:16). But they rebelled (Rom. 5:12, Is. 53:6). The result is separation from God—spiritual death. They are cut off from their only source of life—the living God.

A sawed-off, toppled apple tree may look as green and fruit-laden as the upright one growing next to it. But it is only a matter of time before the toppled tree will reveal its deadness.

So human beings are not just spiritually needy, but spiritually dead, unless God makes them alive (John 5:24). Their deadness shows itself in active or passive rebellion against God. Sins are the symptoms of sin—the fatal disease of independence from God. Legally all people are already under God's condemnation (Rom. 3:23, 6:23). There is no neutral place from which to make a decision. Even kind, moral people need conversion. The question is not Are they good or bad? but Are they dead or alive? Is God's Spirit in them?

The third word is JESUS. He is both God and man. He is the second Person of the Trinity who was active throughout the Old Testament era, sometimes as "the Angel of the Lord." He became man as Jesus Christ, to restore the broken fellowship and give us new life. (Col. 1:19-20, John 5:24, 1 John 5:10, 11). He lived a sinless life as his friends and his enemies attested (1 Pet. 2:22). He died a voluntary death—he could have called 12,000 angels! (Mt. 26:53, 54) He chose the moment for his arrest and his crucifixion and the moment to give up his spirit to the Father. He died as our substitute, paying our penalty (Rom. 5:8). He was buried. Muslims claim that Jesus never died because at the last moment God provided someone else who just looked like him. We must insist that he died and was buried.)

Jesus arose bodily to live forever (1 Cor. 15:3,4)—a resurrection, not a mere resuscitation. His followers became convinced by the empty tomb and by his personal appearances during forty days. (See The Evidence for the Resurrection, J.N.D. Anderson.) That Jesus lives today we know from his Word, from history and from our constant personal and collective experience with him. (Rom. 5:1ff.)

The resurrection proved God was just in saving the O.T. saints on credit (and the N.T. saints prepaid. Rom. 3:25,26) It signified Jesus' triumph over all his enemies, human and non-human! (Col. 2: 13-15). He sat down on the throne at the Father's right hand and received all power and authority! Now he enters his followers by his Spirit, multiplying himself many times over, and goes into the world through them, to win rebels in every tribe and nation to himself. He will return to judge the world, to sentence many and to reward the faithful.

These three terms—God, people and Jesus, indicate the minimum to believe. But math student Jose Manoel in Portugal made a commitment the day he learned Jesus would return to earth! Two Vietnamese girls asked me about "the Christian heaven." The best Buddhism offers is total loss of identity in a nebulous Nirvana. I told them Jesus will reunite us forever with all our departed family members who loved God! Our new bodies will never be less than those we have now, but more, and our planet will never be less than it is now, but it will be transformed into much more. Even the plants and ani-mals groan, waiting for their transfor-mation when we are glorified! (Rom. 8:18-24)

Belligerent Bob at the University of Oregon responded to the kingship of Jesus Christ. He heard I was on cam-pus and asked me to debate him before a large roomful of fellow athletes. They came to ridicule. So I gave an overview of history as a cosmic war for control of the world, beginning with the devil's coup in Eden. I told how Adam and Eve betrayed God's world into the hands of his arch-enemy, how death entered the human race, how God then visited our enemy-occupied planet, in Jesus, to reconcile everything again to himself—to undo all the damage of the coup. (Eph. 1:9, 10, Col. 1:19, 20).

I told how Jesus' death and resurrec-tion were the decisive battle in this cos-mic war—that Jesus triumphed over all his enemies, human and non-human (Col. 2:13-15). But it is useless to take enemy territory unless there are troops to occupy it. So till the King returns, we are commissioned to occupy every nation. But not by force. We lovingly persuade rebels to change sides—to turn against the imposter and pledge their allegiance to the only rightful King. He is patient because he loves the rebels, as he loved us while we were still his enemies. He is not willing any should perish (Rom. 5:8, 2 Pet. 3:9). He will save all that he can!

Instead of presenting his arguments, Bob said quietly to the men, "For the first time it all makes sense!" After many questions, I had to leave. I do not know what happened to them all, but rebel Bob surrendered to his new King a few days later.

The fourth word is RESPONSE. We must act upon what we believe. Conversion requires three steps: a) To believe the gospel facts about God, people and Jesus. b) To repent of our passive or active rebellion toward God and our resultant sins. c) To invite Jesus Christ into our innermost being, to be Lord of our lives, to manage us, our relationships and activities. To deny him this would be an insult.

We respond with faith. But this word needs clarification—even Christians are influenced by popular misconceptions. So before proceeding, I want to deal with the question: What is faith?

4. What is faith?

Faith has no saving power in itself. People say faith can save (or heal) if you have enough of it—like a magic substance. Some years ago, my driving instructor said he believed God would accept him as long as he had faith—in something. I said, "Now Mr. Dixon, my faith could kill us both if I believe I can race through the busy intersection ahead." He said, "Slow down—I get your point!" Faith can bring death as well as life. It is good only if its object is worthy of our trust.

Faith has no value without action. Eternal life depends on how we act on the facts we believe. "Even the demons believe and they shudder!" (James 2: 17-24) We can believe the identity of a person at our front door, yet not ask him in, especially if he will stay forever and take charge! (Luke 6:46). But if we really believe that Jesus loves us more than we love ourselves, we will invite him in to take over. To ask seekers only for mental assent to a few facts and a signature, is to delude them, and to make them harder to win.

Faith is not against reason. People say if we can't know, we must believe. But faith that is not based on facts is superstition! It is pretense. God asks us to believe what we cannot see, but not what is against reason. He made our minds and renews them and wants us to use them. He doesn't manipulate our minds with proofs, but gives evidences so it is more logical to believe than disbelieve. Faith is a gift—created in us by gospel facts. (Rm. 10: 17, Eph. 2:8-10).

It is logical to believe what God says because of who God is! Saving faith is trusting God—acting on God's word.

So we must be prepared to answer seekers' questions about apologetics, our personal experience and the gospel facts, under the key words: God, people, Jesus and response. We will consider response further in IV. But first, how do we bring seekers to that point?

III. Drawing seekers to God

The fishing approach we have described solves major obstacles in evangelism by helping us fish out hungry people and initiate conversations. But once we have begun a friendship with a seeker and we know where he or she is spiritually, we can take more initiative. We can ask our own questions to draw them to Jesus Christ.

The most important activity by far is the investigative Bible study. But consider four additional suggestions: Focusing them on God; tuning them in to God; using information resources and people resources.

1. Use a God-centered approach

Focus on who God is and what we owe him. The popular man-centered approach focuses on people's felt needs—how to have a happy, fulfilled life. God's love is emphasized but his holiness neglected. Gospel facts are selectively presented to attract buyers for quick sales. But the gospel is no Band-Aid for personal or social inadequacies, no cheap insurance against problems, no guarantee of health or wealth. Paul scorned the evangelists who packaged the gospel to disguise its cost. He said, "For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word; but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ." (2 Cor. 2:17) To converts he wrote: "We told you beforehand that you would suffer." (1 Thess. 3:1-4)

Jesus turned down volunteers who came on false premises. They must put him first before family, possessions and personal safety. If not, they would never endure. The dropout rate would damage Jesus' movement. (Lk. 9:50ff, 14:25-35) His conditions for discipleship do not contradict grace—undeserved merit. Salvation would be forever impossible except that God offers it to us freely. How could anyone presume to buy what it cost God his own Son to provide for us? God's love is unconditional, but our acceptance by God is not. No one has to receive God's gift of salvation, but whoever does, must accept its obligations with its privileges. It is like marriage. Two people freely enter into the relationship, but both have rightful expectations of each other.

So we aim to please God by our love-motivated obedience (Jn. 14:21, 23, Lk. 6:46). Paul defines evangelism as bringing people "to the obedience of faith." We do not obey to gain life, but because we have it. We do not focus on a legal code. But in pleasing God we inadvertently fulfill his law (Rom. 1:5, 16:26). Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments as loving God wholly and loving people as ourselves (Mk. 12:29-31). (This verse has nothing to do with self-esteem, but with unselfishness.)

To invite Jesus Christ is to put our lives under new management (Rev. 3: 20, 21). To eat together depicts a shared life—confiding, seeking the other's highest good, sharing common goals.

Although people's felt needs matter, a God-centered approach begins with God as our Creator, to whom we owe all we are and have, and whom we have offended and insulted by our active or passive rejection. He owes us nothing.

Yet he has provided salvation for us at great cost to himself. He gives his Son. The Son gives his life. But many people have no chance to hear the good news. Paul completes what is lacking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, by getting the word out—spreading the good news, or else Jesus' death would have been in vain! (Col. 1:24) Paul cares about Jesus' reputation in the world and for the salvation of people.

God-centered evangelism produces more disciples willing to endure hardship, than converts who only care what they can get out of God. Jesus' clear command is for us to make disciples.

2. Help seekers tune in to God

This is helpful because many seekers in this post-modern period who dabble in cults and in the occult, look for spiritual reality and fulfillment but they value experience over beliefs. Here are four God-centered ways to bring them into direct contact with God.

1. Turn the tables—remind seekers God has the initiative. They think they do, so they postpone decision to some day. But no one can come to the Lord unless they have a chance to hear the good news (Rom. 10:17ff) and unless the Father "draws them" (John 6: 44, 65). Rev. 3:20 says Jesus stands at the door of each person's life, gently knocking and calling.

But he may not always do so. "Now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2) God has no obligation to save anyone. Let seekers begin to worry if God will receive them!

Two women students in Portugal told me, "We invited Jesus in, but as we expected, nothing happened." I said, "Rev. 3:21 shows that the person you have ignored for many years is the King of Glory! He never rejects a sincere invitation that is without reservation. If he sees that you mean this more than anything else in the world he will hear you." (John 6:37) A few days later they knew he had come into their lives.

2) Explain how seekers can recognize God's overtures to them. Luke 19:1-10 shows that Zacchaeus, the wealthy, extortionist tax administrator in Jericho, had already repented and was busy cleaning up his act, before Jesus arrives in his city. When Jesus comes, Zacchaeus makes enormous effort just to get a glimpse of him, not expecting more. But Jesus comes to his house, and this seeker for Jesus learns that this Shepherd-King had come to Jericho seeking him! All seekers, when they are found, discover Jesus has been actively seeking and calling them.

How does Jesus gently knock on the door and call to seekers? When their thoughts turn to ultimate questions it is always God's prompting. He also gives good gifts, hoping they will thank him and repent (Rom. 2:4, James 1:17). He allows suffering, hoping they will call for his help (Psa. 119:67, 71). He sends the good news via literature, TV, radio, even Internet! He sends his people. Since he indwells his messengers, these are his own personal visits to them—more important than visits from angels. (2 Cor. 3) None of these messages are accidental, but are special signs of God's love!

Last week in southern California an auto mechanic named Mike realized that. My car battery died on Saturday and my repair shop was closed. I found another one—and Mike. We chatted. I said, No, I had never been to Hawaii, but I lived overseas for 21 years. He asked what I did there and I said, "Missionary work." He made no comment and I did not intend to reopen the conversation. But he came back full of questions. (He had needed a bit of time.) When I left he said, "I know God let your battery die today so you would come here to talk with me."

Have seekers ask themselves about daily events, "What may God be saying through this?" In Sao Paulo, a few days after a Zacchaeus study, a Jewish atheist student came to say he had an awed feeling as he played violin. Was it God? I said, "It could be. He loves you and wants your attention." People begin to suspect God speaking everywhere. Because they are listening for God, he speaks to them!

3) Get seekers to converse with God over the texts of the Bible, to tune in to God through Bible reading. Encourage even atheists to read Mark or Luke, a few paragraphs a day, and to assume God is speaking through them. They must interact honestly with him. They may say: "I want You to know I cannot believe this verse. Why does this story make me uncomfortable? This story is beautiful—but is it true? What does this verse mean?"

God begins answering, often from the Bible—maybe a few verses down. This can be startling! He answers through circumstances, people or books. Invite the seekers to bring you their questions on what they do not understand.

Becky Pippert adds a step. She asks seekers to try to obey every instruction as soon as they can. Obeying predisposes them to more light. It is a good tactic—post-modern seekers are concerned about doing. An agnostic friend, whom Becky led to the Lord in my apartment later called these exercises her former "pagan Quiet Times!"

4) Show seekers how God answers prayer. This fourth way to tune seekers in to God works best if they mention problems. Ask if you may pray for them. Pray aloud briefly. Even skeptics are touched. God may give an un-mistakeable answer. Tell seekers that God may answer Yes or No or Wait awhile, but he always hears and cares. Seekers in this post-modern period, and especially adherents of non-Christian religions often show more interest in a demonstration of Jesus' presence and power than in the truth claims of Christianity. Prayer shows God in action.

You can pray briefly for friends as you give thanks before a meal. I tell guests it is my custom and would they mind. Then I say, "Thank you Jesus for this food and for my new friends, Yusef and Sulema. Amen." Or "Help Gudrun prepare for her anatomy exam." The guests are often visibly moved. I pray also in restaurants if it will not embarrass my friends. (Muslims pray in public on prayer rugs five times a day!)

You can pray for God to heal someone's cold or headache, or reduce pain or give sleep. You will know that all healing is ultimately from God. But the healing may occur in a way that convinces the seeker God has intervened. You do not have to be a healer, nor use a healer's methods. Simply pray. But it would be counterproductive to ask God to give instantaneous sight to a blind person. Pray what you can believe. Use prayer wisely in your evangelism.

In addition to these four tactics, we must use Christian materials.

3. Use information resources

Make sure each seeker has a modern language Bible, or N.T. with Psalms. In a hostile country start with a tiny pocket-gospel they can hide in a pocket or purse. Or a magazine format gospel with pictures. An excellent N.T. in easy English is Good News for Modern Man (TIV). Bilingual N.T.s—with English opposite the local language—are popular even with non-believers, as an English-learning aid.

My favorite book for seekers is John Stott's Basic Christianity (125 pages), now in 50 languages, with translations in progress in 22 more! Evangelistic Bible study guides are available in quite a few languages. Look for attractive evangelistic booklets for various kinds of seekers. In other countries make sure the literature is culturally and spiritually appropriate. If you cannot read the language, ask someone you trust to evaluate the material you wish to give out. Ask missionaries, or the leaders of the Christian campus ministries in your new host country. Avoid tracts that look like cheap pro-paganda. (See Bibliography.)

People more readily read a book if it is small and you lend it. They know you will ask their opinion when they return it. You can give it to them then.

Many tentmakers use videos. English teachers find that even secular videos raise issues for evangelism. An English teacher in China used Fiddler on the Roof. Christian videos are available, too. The excellent Jesus Film (and video) is dubbed into 394 languages, with 200 more in progress! In a North African country, an enterprising Muslim discovered it could also be lucrative. He made illegal copies and sold them all over the city! He inadvertently did for the gospel what no tentmaker at that time dared to risk!

Thousands of sermons are available on audio-cassettes in English and in other languages. Gospel Recordings makes cassettes in tribal languages, especially for the illiterate.

Young people learn English through popular music cassettes. A tentmaker in a strict Muslim city could hardly believe his ears, when the music blaring from the public square loudspeakers gave way to "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!" It could be played only because it was part of a Whitney Houston album!

Discover when Christian radio and TV programs transmit in your new host country, and encourage people to tune in. Then discuss the content with them. TWR has announced that TV satellite transmissions have now begun in the Middle East from the new Christian Sat-07! Ninety percent of Middle Easterners have TV!

In sensitive countries tentmakers find seekers who have been made thirsty for the Lord by Christian radio. Then they see the gospel lived out by the tentmaker. So our Christian aerial forces and our ground troops work together in this cosmic war for human hearts.

The gospel is already being transmitted all over the world through the Internet! Even backward cultures leap directly into the 21st century, so learn how to make the best use of this new resource.

Just as important as using media resources is involving your Christian friends in your evangelism.

4. Use people resources

Introduce seekers to your Christian friends. Take them to larger group activities. Note four of the benefits:

1) The larger group more fully demonstrates the gospel. Francis Schaeffer said true Christian fellowship is our most compelling evidence for the truth of the gospel, because everyone longs for it and the devil cannot duplicate it. In John 13:34, 35, 17:18ff, Jesus prayed for unity and love among his future disciples, because it would guarantee their survival, and compel the belief of outsiders. An individual cannot demonstrate Christian interrelationships. To see Christians love one another (1 John), be patient and forgive one another (Col.3:9), help and comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18), or trust one another (Rom. 12:10)—you must have a minimum of two together!

Larger group contact is important, because post-modern seekers yearn for community, because many come from dysfunctional families, where there is little understanding and security. But people from almost any background seek love and acceptance.

Take Marisa, in Barcelona. She finally agreed to come to a meeting in my apartment so Ana Maria would quit bugging her. But she was surprised that the GBU students seemed to love each other and seemed to care about her—a stranger. She had to find out why. It was the love she sensed that kept her coming to Bible studies until she understood the gospel and received Jesus Christ. She became our first IFES staff worker in Spain.

Rodolfo, from Madrid, was amazed at the mutual trust of Christian students. His first contact with them was a week-end camp on a Spanish beach. He said he could hardly believe his eyes when they left their books and clothes and even their handbags and wallets out in the open—unguarded! A group can demonstrate Christ in a way individuals cannot.

2) The larger group exposes seekers to more Christians. The Lord expresses his character through our diverse personalities. A seeker may explain away one believer, but not a dozen! A seeker may relate more comfortably to someone other than you. I could not win my college friend, Lois, because I knew nothing about Catholicism, but my ex-Catholic friend, Marie, won her quickly.

In the larger group, Christian men can refer female seekers to women members and take over the evangelism of the men—while all remain friends. The spiritual and the emotional are easily confused. It can be devastating if a seeker and a believer of the opposite sex have different expectations for their friendship. Some seekers cannot sort out the spiritual from the emotional in their decision. Christians should refrain from any romantic involvement with a seeker or new convert, since seekers should be free for a time to focus only on their relationship to the Lord. (To use a romantic relationship to lure someone into God's kingdom is despicable, and usually backfires.)

3) The larger group may help you reap. If six Bible study leaders bring eight non-believers each from their small groups to hear an evangelistic speaker, expect good response. This is not the typical meeting of mainly Christians with a handful

of merely curious, first-time visitors. Your audience contains 48 prepared, partly evangelized seekers! It will be easier for some to commit to Christ in a large meeting where others are doing it, too.

4) The larger group helps you fish out new seekers. In this case, advertise widely. It is like casting a net. Your audience may include some who are indifferent, curious, hostile or intensely interested. At the end of the meeting offer a printed copy or audiocassette of the lecture. Have people leave name and address so Christians can take the items personally, to gauge their interest, and maybe invite them to an IBS.

(You should charge a little. To give things free arouses suspicion. Students in Latin America suspected subversive foreign organizations to be behind high quality color handouts, so we used poor campus quality paper and printing.)

Large group activities can take many forms. When Billy Graham came to Sao Paulo, our ABUB student movement had him speak in a rented auditorium on Peace with God—based on his book in Portuguese . Hans Burki lectured on topics like Human Dignity and Sexual Ethics and Samuel Escobar on Dialogue between Jesus and Marx. Dr. Ross Douglas spoke on Bible and Science. We did a book discussion on Bertrand Russell's Why I am Not a Christian, when it was hot in campus bookstores. In Barcelona, Os Guinness led us in a discussion of the Ingmar Bergman movie Seventh Seal. We went to see Jesus Christ Superstar and discussed it. At Christmas we listened to Handel's Messiah and explained the words.

We took seekers to concerts, fun nights, picnic outings, camps and one-day social work projects in the slums, like getting sick people to free clinics, and children registered in schools. Some students started literacy pro-grams for campus hired help.

Today social work projects appeal to post-modern young people, many of whom genuinely wish to do good—to help solve social problems.

So larger group activities can give a fuller demonstration of the gospel, ex-pose seekers to other Christians, fish out new seekers, and facilitate decisions for Jesus Christ.

IV Encouraging commitment

How can you know a seeker is ready to invite the Lord? You can damage a harvest if you reap too soon or too late.

1. Helping seekers to decision

A few people will invite the Lord the first time you meet—if others have sowed and watered. When I told Dutch folk dance star, Lientje, to think it over for a few days, she said, "Oh, can't I do it today?" Other people need months.

Why do I not pressure people for a decision? For a time I did, and my converts did not stick. I want to be sure the Holy Spirit has them ready. But if I think someone has understood and is delaying for wrong reasons, I stress that postponement can be dangerous.

Seekers' questions, comments and even body language show when they are ready. GBU students, leading Bible studies on a beach in Spain, were finishing a section in Romans. As I passed by one group I saw first-time visitor Pilar lean forward, her perplexed face suddenly brightening. The study ended and I asked, "Pilar, did you understand what St. Paul said about justification by faith?" She said, "Oh, yes!" I had her explain it to me, and then asked, "Do you think Jesus' death provides this justification also for you?" She said Yes, so I asked if she had thanked God for this. She said, "No—I

never heard about it until today—but I would like to thank him." We prayed, and two hours later she was in a sidewalk cafe answering the questions of strangers!

You can also test readiness by asking key questions. Often when I visit a campus a Christian introduces me to a friend from his IBS group. I ask, "How are you enjoying the Bible studies?" And then, "At this stage of things, what do you think is the most important reason why Jesus died?" My question allows for several correct answers—I am not giving an exam.

If the student says, "Jesus died for my sins," I ask if he has invited him into his life. If he says Yes, I ask for details. We pray, thanking God, affirming his new life, and then make sure the group welcomes and disciples him. It is damaging to be left out because no one knows about the conversion.

But when I asked Karl about the crucifixion he said, "Jesus died to give us an example of love." I agreed, showing him where Peter says Jesus left us an example so we should follow in his footsteps. (1 Pet. 2:18-25) But then we concluded that the footsteps were so big no one could ever follow them. I said I was glad Peter added v. 25—that Jesus also died as our substitute, to pay for our sins. No other passage combines these two ideas so well.

When seekers understand Jesus' death I urge them to invite him in. But if they are reluctant, I explain how they can do it later. Catholics often feel insincere unless the atmosphere is right and the moment deeply felt. I ask them to tell me when they have made this commitment. I want to affirm them.

If seekers are willing to make a decision, I explain a promise like Rev. 3:20, 21 or 1 John 1:11, 12. I do not say a prayer for them to repeat since I do not want to put words into their mouths. The Lord will understand their hearts. But the seeker may ask, "What shall I say?" Suggest the 3-part response—what he believes, and his desire for forgiveness and his invitation to the Lord. A sentence is enough. But a good prayer would be:

Lord Jesus, I thank you for dying on the cross in my place to pay for my sins. I am sorry for my rebellion against you and for my sins. I invite you to come into my life to forgive and cleanse me and be my Lord forever. Help me obey you. Amen.

When they have prayed aloud—usually a shorter prayer—I pray, thanking God that he keeps his promises. I ask him to receive and reassure the seeker.

Most often, new believers are filled with joy and wonder. But not always. I do not tell seekers, "Now you are a Christian." A decision is not a new birth—though they may coincide. Only God's Spirit knows if they have understood and are sincere. It is he who must give assurance. But I repeat Jesus' promises and remind them he keeps his word regardless of our feelings.

Watch the people in your Bible study groups. When I see a new glow on a participant's face and a hunger for God's word, I suspect we have disciplined one more seeker into the Kingdom. I ask a few questions to verify this and to affirm the person. In Sao Paulo, after a John 3 study, Isabel prayed aloud for the first time, "Oh, thank you, God, for showing me today that I can be born again!" In Barcelona, medical student Pablo mistakenly invited class-mate Juan, to a meeting on how to help seekers take this crucial step. But at the end, Juan prayed for the first time, saying, "Thank you, God, for finally showing me how to receive you!"

Should you ask new converts at the same time to take a second step and invite the Holy Spirit? Many Christians do this regularly in conjunction with the Four Spiritual Laws. It is very bad theology and confusing to the converts. When they receive Jesus Christ they have received the Holy Spirit because he is the Spirit of Jesus! If any do not have the Spirit, they have not received Jesus. (Rom. 8:8, 9, 1 Jn. 5:11, 12)

In fact, genuine new converts are filled with the Holy Spirit! He pours the love of God into their hearts! They often feel great joy and peace and purity. After that, the Spirit will never leave them, but he can be grieved. They must daily confess their sins and be-come filled again. New believers need instruction on the Christian life.

2. Caring for new believers

How can you know if a seeker has been really born again? Good signs are peace and joy and a hunger for God's Word. But Jesus said initial peace and joy can be snatched away by the evil one or crowded out by cares or pleasures. When this happens you know the decision was based on an inadequate understanding of the gospel (Mt. 13: 18-23). Jesus said the mind is important in conversion. Spiritual birth, like physical birth, is a process, which may begin with a decision, but may need completing during follow-up.

1) Meet the convert regularly. De-sign a good plan of prayer, counseling and Bible study. Give immediate first aid—verses on assurance, with varied metaphors, like John 3:16, 5:34, Rom. 10:9,10, Phil. 1:6, John 10:28, 1 John 3:1-3. Tell them sins may take away their joy but not their salvation. Ex-plain how to receive daily forgiveness—1 John 1:9, Psalm 51, 32, 103.

Tell them God will speak to them mainly through their Bible reading, as it relates to their thoughts, prayers and circumstances. (Psalm 1; 119:11, 24, 103-105; Acts 20:32; 1 Pet. 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:15.) Prayer is how they talk to God. (John 16:24, 15:7, James 1:6,7, 1 Pet. 5:7, 1 John 5:14, 15, Heb. 4:15, 16.) Pray with them. Help them start a small prayer notebook.

Their faith and love must be shown by their obedience to the Lord (Lk. 6:46, John 14:21, 23) and by their witnessing to others. (John 15, Mt. 10:32, 33, Col. 4:5,6, 1 Pet. 3:14-16.)

I like to give them a copy of Quiet Time to read, and then take them through the study guide, Christ in You (both IVP). Navigators who popularized the follow-up concept, have a 13-week Bible study guide—Growing in Christ, complete with perforated pages of memory verse cards.

New converts may not immediately look and act like Christians. We should resist giving them a list of do's and don't's. Study passages that teach Christian conduct, so their changes are inner-motivated and for right reasons.

2) Should converts tell friends and family? They should tell a few Christian friends. But parents may interpret their child's words as judgmental. They can be hurt or offended by the implication that in the most important area of life they have failed their child. Too often a great wall builds between the new believer and the parents, which makes it exceedingly difficult ever to win them. Parents may even ridicule the new Christian for any lapse in conduct. It is usually better to wait a few days or weeks until the parents see a difference in the son or daughter and ask about it. By then the new believer will have a better idea how to lovingly answer. Rosa said to her parents, "Thank you for bringing me up Catholic, or I might never have loved God, and I would not have been open to this wonderful new experience." Her gratitude freed her parents to want to share her new life instead of feeling guilty and judged.

3) Continue to nurture the new converts in a Bible study group. Re-mind them that Heb. 10:23-25 says fellowship with Bible-studying, praying believers is not optional. When they are willing, invite them to church.

4) Baptism is an important public declaration of new life. Apart from its deep meaning, the fact that it is a ritual makes it attractive to many converts. But if parents object, it is usually wise to honor them by waiting awhile. When Juan told his mother he wanted to be baptized in an evangelical church, she became physically ill, even though she had not been a

practising Catholic for some years. But his postponement of the baptism let her know he loved her and gave her several months to understand and appreciate his new life.

On the other hand, a dear, illiterate old woman in my church Bible class in Spain said that when she went ahead with baptism, her husband and grown sons mistreated her. But in the end it was her costly obedience that brought them all to Jesus Christ.

5) Encourage converts to share their experience with non-believing friends. They can invite them to the IBS. It is ideal if new believers win and then disciple their own converts exactly as they are being discipled. Spiritual parenting hastens spiritual maturity—our goal for every convert (Col.1:28).

Of course, what you do will depend partly on the seeker's background, and this may vary greatly.

V. Noting kinds of seekers

Seekers are as different as their finger-prints! Millions of immigrants with non-Christian religions present us at home with many of the same challenges missionaries and tentmakers face abroad. Expect superstition—maybe even some demonism. Whoever you seek to evangelize will have a spiritual history—some kind of religion or cult, or the absence of them.

Remember that nothing—no religion— can ever satisfy a person's deepest need, except Jesus Christ!

We will consider only a few kinds of seekers you may fish out, and there may be overlap among them. (See GO Papers and bibliography.)

1. Nominal Protestants

One in three American adults claims to be born again and read the Bible and share their faith, according to a Gallup poll. But the terms are used loosely and even many cult adherents answer Yes. But a great many who consider themselves Protestants, are Christians in name only. Many were baptized as babies and sent to Sunday school, but dropped out in their teens. Or they were from churches that do not preach the gospel. Some made childhood decisions, which are valid if reaffirmed as understanding grows. But many adults who wandered away still count on their childhood decision and the teaching of eternal security—that "once saved is always saved." This reassuring doctrine is in the Bible. But so is its opposite—that you can be lost. Which is true? Charles Simeon, a godly professor in Cambridge University in the 1800's, gave a satisfying answer. He said the truth is not in either extreme, nor in the middle, but in both extremes at once. Congregations usually have tares along with the wheat. (Mt. 13) All who live in obedience and fellowship can rejoice in eternal salvation. All others must consider if they are just out of fellowship (dangerous) or if their early experiences were inadequate for salvation.

Other nominal Christians are the product of bad evangelism. They made a decision to receive Jesus as Savior, but not Lord. They had wrong information or wrong motivation. Some become socially conditioned by the church, but have no life. They may not be worried because they see others like themselves there. They may be called "carnal" Christians. The Bible recognizes their existence, but does not allow us this option. "He who refuses Jesus as Sovereign may not have him as Savior." Many church members are rightly confused about their spiritual state.

Two daughters of a pastor in Sweden told me they did not know if they were born again, and they wouldn't dare ask their father. The idea that a pastor's daughter, baptized in infancy, might not be a Christian would be scandalous. The sisters came separately, not revealing their doubts even to each other. I said, "Why not tell the Lord you are uncertain

about the past, but today you invite him in for sure?" Both did, and found new assurance and joy and began to help each other.

Some find the Lord for the first time when they attempt to rededicate their lives, or seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Robert Munger's *My Heart, Christ's Home* (IVP) can help.

Many nominal Christians who leave the church in their teens return when they marry and have children. I recently heard a prosperous businessman say that for several years he and his wife dropped their children off at Sunday school. But one Sunday, when they went to get them the daughter came to the car, but the little son did not. Finally, he arrived. His teacher had said that any who were not sure they would go to heaven if they died, should stay and talk. He said, "I wasn't sure, so I had to stay. But now I am absolutely sure." The father said, "You can't be sure—you're only 9 years old!" But he was so deeply convicted that he drove home slowly, fearful to risk a fatal crash. On Monday, he knew exactly where to get help. He would talk to his co-worker Bill— whose life he had long admired. Because Bill had been tactfully putting out bait, he could now introduce his colleague to Jesus Christ.

But other nominal Christians remain hostile and are exceedingly hard to win. Quite a few very anti-Christian writers and philosophers grew up in church—like Herman Hesse, Nietzsche and John Paul Sartre.

2. Catholics and Orthodox

There are many Catholic and Orthodox factions, so learn what each seeker believes. Not many know God because most were forbidden to read the Bible, and few are encouraged to do so today. Find out if the devout ones trust Jesus, or if their devotion is to Mary or the Church. Some say they have always loved Jesus. To question their claim can be damaging. If they are moving toward God as their Bible knowledge increases, you may be able to disciple them into the kingdom. In a Bible study group in Spain, Mercedes said, "I told you I had God in my heart, but I think I did not even know what that meant until we studied John 3."

Bible study groups are essential for drawing Catholic and Orthodox seekers to God. In Bible study, many of us avoid cross-references because they can confuse newcomers. But we must use them with Catholic and Orthodox participants because their priests claim that we make the Bible mean whatever we wish. We must show how we let Bible passages interpret each other.

Many Evangelicals insist that the seekers must renounce the Pope and Catholic beliefs about the Virgin Mary before they invite Jesus into their lives. But it is better not to attack their doctrines. You can win all the arguments and lose the individuals. Do not take away their beliefs, but give truth and more truth, and it will replace doctrinal error. But if they ask what you think about one of their teachings, show them what God's Word says.

I had never argued with Roberto, a young Spanish policeman who met God in my apartment. After a few days he came to ask what I thought about praying to the Virgen Mary. But almost immediately he said, "Of course, I do not need Mary – I have Jesus." It reminded me of C.S. Lewis's answer to a Catholic couple he won: "If you do not have a lot of extra time for praying, it is faster to go directly to the Almighty."

When I lived in fascist Spain it was illegal to proselytize—as in many countries. That is, to get people to change religions (often with material inducement). Good evangelism is not proselytizing. It was liberating for me not to aim at getting Catholics out of their Church, but to help them find God, as Catholics. Once they have his Spirit, he guides them whether and when to leave. All but one eventually left. But most needed time. Some attended both Catholic and Evangelical services and soon felt more at home in the latter. Don't rush them.

The initial testimony of new converts can be powerful in their Catholic families, churches and social groups. Paul advised converts not to make hasty changes in their situations (1 Cor. 7:17-24). God has established new beach-heads on enemy territory. The convert should not short-circuit God's plan for the larger circle. (1 Cor. 7:17-24)

Christians in Spain told new convert Josue that his old friends were not suit-able companions, his job was unethical (advertising) and his recreation was worldly (skiing). His family was distressed. Later he longed to win the old friends but found himself cut off.

In Portugal, engineering student Cesar, found God and started a Bible study in his Catholic church, using our study guides. The parish priest was de-lighted to see so many young people! Then he began listening in and stopped it. Cesar joined an evangelical group.

Meanwhile, in this intermediate period, continue to nurture the new converts in your group. Show them Heb. 10:23-25. Oddly, Catholics interpret this passage to mean you must never leave the Catholic Church. But show them it really says that fellowship with other praying, witnessing Christians is not optional. We need each other. (See GO Paper: Evangelizing Catholics and Orthodox.)

3. Atheists and agnostics

Most secularists have given their dogmatic positions little thought so we can evangelize them with confidence. A former chaplain at Harvard, George Buttrick, said students would come into his office and announce they no longer believed in God. He would say, "Sit down and tell me what kind of a God you no longer believe in." He then said he could not believe in such caricatures either, and proceeded to tell them how God really is.

Some secularists raise the God of the gaps argument, that science is pushing God into a corner. As remaining miracles are explained he will become obsolete. But informed Christians know God is just as active in the phenomena that can be explained as in those not yet understood. Jesus Christ who made everything sustains everything! (Col. 1:15-17, John 1:1-4.)

Some explain away miracles, like the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea. The parting of the waters was no big deal—there are plausible explanations. True. But none explain why the waters part-ed the moment Moses lifted his rod and rolled in again when he put it down! (Ex. 14:21-29.) Many Bible miracles are in the timing, not the mechanisms. It would seem strange indeed if God never used forces he invented—as though he did not know about them!

Here are three tactics to try.

1) Have them defend their position. Show the devastating implications of their beliefs. If there is no personal Creator, then people result from chance and have no meaning, right and wrong become a matter of preference and this world is an illusion. Becky Pippert relates that her biology professor insisted human beings are just protoplasm. But then he confided that his 13-year old daughter had run off with an older man and would be forever scarred. Becky reminded him quietly that according to his belief system protoplasm could not scar. He said, "Touche. But I could never regard my daughter as mere protoplasm. I can't push my beliefs that far."

2) Back them into a corner. Gently. If people say they are atheists, I can hardly resist the urge to pounce! I talk about something else and then say calmly, "It is hard for me to believe that an open-minded, thinking person like you could say there is no God—it seems a bit arrogant." I respond to their surprise by saying, "To assert there is no God, you would have to know every fact there is and ever will be. Or else some fact out there could be God."

Then they always say, "I guess I am an agnostic." I say, "Oh, that's better." And I squelch another urge to pounce. After a bit I say, "I think "agnostic" is a word Huxley invented for someone who believes it is impossible to know if there is a God nor not. Isn't that correct?" (Be sure to repeat Huxley's definition.) Then I say to the now wary new agnostic, "This is also a difficult position. To assert honestly that God cannot be known, you would first have to make every effort to find him—do Bible study, read books, interview Christians, etc. Besides, there is a Catch 22. God says, 'When you seek me with your whole heart, you will find me.' (Jer.29:13) But unless you make this risky search, you can only say that you don't know because you don't want to."

Backed into a corner, you can get some to start this search. Martin, from Scotland (whose mother held seances in their home) was studying in Spain. I finally got him to read Stott's Basic Christianity. That is, 40 pages. Then he held the book out to me, saying, "Here. I am now convinced there is a God. Some day I'll read the rest." I said soft-ly, "Martin, you coward!" So he read the rest. A few days later, Junior Year Abroad student, Becky Manley (Pip-pert), who lived with me, helped him make a commitment to Christ. (See her excellent books in the bibliography.)

3) Take the shortcut to God—Jesus Christ! Jesus tells us he is the way—the only way to the Father! (John 14:6) He is both God and man, teaching and demonstrating what God is like, how he would act in our situations. As seekers accompany the man Jesus in the gospel narratives they realize he could not have been just a good man. He claimed to be God! So either he was a liar or a lunatic (both highly implausible), or he was, and is, the Lord of the universe!

Remember the three L-words—liar, lunatic or Lord. There is a fourth L—for legend. Is the record true? Credible legends cannot form while eye-witnesses are still alive (1 Cor. 15:3ff). But do not raise the issue of a fourth L unless the seekers do. Assume they accept the gospel records. No ancient literature has nearly so much attestation as the New Testament! There are more than 5000 partial manuscripts and a few complete ones! A few fragments date to the time of the apostles! Also, Jesus was so far beyond human imagination that it would take a Jesus Christ to in-vent a Jesus Christ!

But remember that secular atheism is not irreligious. Secularism is a religion, complete with its set of beliefs, its literature, and its resulting secular humanism. Some even have meetings and their own hymns. Several of my college profs repeatedly argued against Christian beliefs. I know now that it is a sure sign they are not comfortable in their professed atheism. Those who really do not believe in God tend to be indifferent to the subject.

Do not fear secular atheists or agnostics, nor their post-modern counter-parts, who seek spirituality, but with-out Jesus Christ.

4. Post-modern, New Age cults

God made human beings as religious creatures, and when they reject him and his truth (to be free to sin), delusions rush in to fill the vacuum. God gives them up to believe what is false. (2 Thess. 2:9-12, Rom. 1:18-32). For example, the movie star and New Age guru, Shirley MacClaine, grew up Southern Baptist. New Age is an eclectic movement—a wide variety of cults lumped under that term. Most of them promote Jesus, but falsely. They say he lived, but was not uniquely God, but a spiritually evolved human being, an example of spiritual advancement, a master or guru or yogi or avatar—along with Buddha, Krishna or Lao Tze. Like the ancient Gnostics, they separate Christ from the Jesus of history and refer to him as an impersonal Christ Principle. They say we are all "manifestations of Christ consciousness" and can tap into cosmic power, as he did. They reject him as the supreme and final revelation of God. He was only a son of God as anyone else can be. They exploit, but do not worship him. If he died, it had nothing to do with human need. They reject the idea of sin and an ethically perfect God. They deny his resurrection and ascension or spiritualize it. They also spiritualize his second coming—all the enlightened are God and part of the Second Coming. But Acts 1:11 says, "This same Jesus who you see going into heaven will come back in the same way as you see him go. . ." New Agers believe in re-incarnation instead of final judgment.

Doug Groothuis says, "In the New Age, Jesus is understood apart from biblical moorings and placed in an alien intellectual and spiritual atmosphere. Jesus, the Christ-conscious Master, is hailed as our prototype for spiritual discovery and power. He is a Christ without a cross or physical resurrection, preaching a gospel without repentance or forgiveness, before an audience of equals who have no sin and are in no peril of perdition. Is this the genuine Jesus, obscured by the church and orthodoxy?" (Unmasking the New Age, p.10, IVP.)

New Agers make selective use of Bible proof texts, but do not consider them better than extra-biblical sources. They refer to Gnostic texts found in Egypt, to a Gospel of Thomas, a Gospel of Peter, both banned by orthodox Christians long ago. They refer to The Unknown Life of Jesus, a fiction writ-ten by a Russian in 1894, about "the lost years of Jesus" between the ages of 13 and 29. They identify Jesus with the Essenes, but disregard what those ancient Jews taught. They claim that a 3-volume set called A Course in Miracles was written by Jesus himself, even though it denies most of what he taught in the N.T. They accept mes-sages supposedly from departed spirits through channeling. John wrote to believers in his day, in a similar atmosphere, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. . . ." (1 Jn. 4:1). He says that all are false prophets who reject the biblical Jesus, as the unique, divine-human Son of God.

New Agers reject the Bible, even though there are at least 5,300 partial or complete Gospel manuscripts, several of them dating to the time of the apostles! They reject 2000 years of field testing—the testimonies of church fathers and many ordinary Christians who knew and loved Jesus Christ.

But if you ask New Agers to validate their sources, they cannot. Evidences do not exist.

But we can approach them on the basis of their felt needs. William Dyrness, dean of Fuller Seminary's School of Theology, lists several of the main concerns of New Agers. They seek spiritual reality, but value experience over beliefs and distrust institutions and leaders. They stress personal fulfilment yet yearn for community. They want to see goodness done. They are apprehen-sive about the future. ("Can Americans Still Hear the Good News?" in Christianity Today, April 7, 1997, p. 33.)

We need not be afraid of New Agers. They distort the concept of Jesus be-cause they are biblically illiterate. Many do not know more about Jesus than a little girl who was asked the meaning of Easter. After a pause, she said, "Every year on Easter Jesus comes out of the grave, but if he sees his shadow, he crawls back in again."

An investigative Bible study group is an ideal way to evangelize New Agers. They do not need to believe the Bible is true. But honesty requires that they at least examine the Christian source books before rejecting them! The IBS is the best way to introduce them to Jesus, allowing them to observe him in action and hear him speak in the Gospels, and then listen to his early followers testify about him in their letters. Show how he fulfilled at least 60 clear O.T. prophecies.

This association with Christians gives New Agers a chance to see the reality of Christ in our lives, and to find it themselves. In Jer. 29:13 God says: "You will find me when you seek me with your whole heart." Knowing him will allay their fear of the future. Their association with Christians can give them a taste of genuine community. As to their desire to see good done, most probably have little idea how much individual Christians quietly do for others, and the enormous social work evangelicals do in the U.S. and around the world. (Our spiritually hostile press does not report these things.) In our student work we sometimes included seekers from our Bible study groups in our one-day social work projects.

But in the Bible studies let them note what Jesus says about himself and his deity and about his Father. The impersonal New Age deity—an amoral Force, a Principle or Vibration, appeals to no one. But we all yearn to be accepted and loved by a heavenly Father.

Note that Jesus did not view human beings as deities needing to discover themselves, but as guilty, and spiritually dead. What good news that we can be forgiven and made alive for all eternity!

Jesus said he was the only way to the Father, the only truth, the only life—Jn. 14:6. Peter said no other name under heaven can give salvation. Acts 4:12. He said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. . ." (Mt. 11:28).

Some Christians believe that in this post-modern age with its dabbling in the occult, we should be using more power encounter. What is power encounter?

It is demonstrating God's power in action. It is dealing directly with Satan and demons. His tactics are much more overt in cultures where the gospel has barely penetrated, or where demonic religions predominate, like the voodoo in Haiti and Africa. It can be important to demonstrate that God can heal and do greater miracles than the witch doctors or spirit mediums. Where there are many Christians, Satan more often presents himself as an angel of light, and his tactics are more subtle. But today many Christians in the U.S. are fascinated with power encounter because large immigrant communities have brought their pagan religions with them and because our neo-pagan New Age groups are fascinated with super-natural experience.

Eph. 6:10 says we must be aware of the devil's tactics. He takes advantage of even seemingly innocent items to capture people—like ouija boards, horoscopes, palm reading—even fortune cookies. Of course, all dabbling in the occult is forbidden by Scripture.

A friend became concerned when her family's fun with a ouija board turned sinister. Some neighbors could no longer make decisions without consulting the board. So she walked in on one session, and asked, "Is Jesus Christ the Son of God?" The answer was an emphatic No—and a curse. They were all terrified and threw the board into the trash.

But many Christians have developed an unhealthy preoccupation with the demonic—another fad. To attribute everything to Satan is to run the risk of practising the presence of Satan, as we practise the presence of Christ. They even speak to Satan. If I sense his presence, I prefer to resist him by asking the Lord to oppose him for me. (James 4:7-10)

Many Christians find it more interesting to participate in a prayer walk, or a healing or exorcism meeting than to do basic evangelism. I spoke to a pastor's wife who considered all her new neighbors demon-possessed. Her attitude will make it impossible to develop healthy friendships with them. Many American Christians may never meet a possessed person in their lifetime.

It is important to distinguish between ordinary physical and mental illness and that which results from direct demonic activity. The N.T. makes that distinction (Mt. 4:24). The victim often knows if the problem is demonic. God heals and exorcises evil spirits through some Christians. It may become a major part of their ministry. I have a friend in Brazil who has seen remarkable breakthroughs that have changed whole communities. If you become convinced a person you are evangelizing is under demonic control, seek the help of an experienced Christian. No Christians should ever do this alone.

But we must not exaggerate the value of healings, exorcisms and miracles for evangelism. Jesus and the apostles used them to catch the initial attention of crowds in a new area, and maybe to predispose some people to believe the gospel. But all who did not want to believe just explained away the super-natural!

The Jewish religious leaders had to acknowledge Jesus' power was super-natural, because he did things no Jewish leader could do. But they did not want to attribute his power to God, so they said he acted with the power of the devil! Mt. 12.

Even people he healed did not put their trust in him. He healed 10 lepers, but only one sought a personal relationship with him, while the others did not even stay to thank him.

Jesus' story in Luke 16 is significant. The rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, had both died, and were in separate parts of Hades – the temporary place of the dead. The rich man begged Jesus to send Lazarus to warn his five unbelieving brothers about hell, because such a miracle would convince them. Jesus says, "Even if some one goes to them from the dead, they will not re-pent. . . . If they do not hear Moses and the prophets [the Word of God], neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead."

The other problem is that all healings and miracles and even resuscitations from the dead can be counterfeited by the devil and his human accomplices. Healings have long occurred in places like Lourdes in France, and Fatima in Portugal, etc. Voodoo and other kinds of spiritism are all-pervasive in Brazil, and I have seen massive, public healing services conducted by spiritists—healing by satanic power. How many non-evangelicals on TV talk shows, news-papers and magazines today, claim to have died and returned to life! They describe their out-of-body experiences. All this diminishes the value of power encounter in evangelism.

But Dr. Francis Shaeffer said rightly that in our post-modern day there are only two supernatural evidences that Satan cannot counterfeit. The first is a Spirit-filled believer, because God reveals his character in our uniquely different personalities in the ordinary activities of everyday life. It takes more spiritual power to live a consistently attractive, caring, holy life than to do healings and miracles. This is evident from all the televangelists who claim exceptional powers, but whose moral lives are bankrupt.

The second is a spirit-filled community of believers. Jesus prayed just before his death that succeeding generations of believers would demonstrate unity and harmony, and love for each other—because this would convince outsiders that the Christian faith is genuine and that Jesus is the Son of God! (John 17:18-23.)

So we should know about power encounter, but not allow it to distract us from basic evangelism. It is no substitute for sharing the gospel.

Rick Love, U.S. director of Frontiers, learned how valuable power encounter can be in Indonesia. But he says that truth encounter and moral encounter are more important. What matters is Christian character.

So winning seekers among New Agers need not be much different from winning other people, except that the bait may vary a little and some of their questions will be different. In fishing evangelism you let their initial questions show you what they feel and believe and what you need to tell them.

But we must consider one other factor. The influence of New Age and post-modern relativism is seen in their strong social and political agenda—the politically correct agenda they have sought to impose by force, especially in educational institutions.

They have caused a dramatic shift from the Judeo-Christian absolute moral system that enabled Western Civilization to flourish, to a new moral code that is rapidly eroding our society's ethical consensus and giving rise to our present culture wars. These new ortho-doxies are epitomized by radical feminism, aberrationism, extreme environmentalism (a religion), statism and historical revisionism – the falsification of history. They are pro-abortion, pro-homosexual, and pro-euthansia and assisted suicide.

In our increasingly pluralistic society, intolerance is considered the greatest of sins—that is, intolerance of their views. They are highly intolerant of any other views, using neo-fascist methods to impose their politically correct agenda on both our public institutions and our private consciences. They focus on schools, the government, the media and the business world. They are openly anti-Christian, aggressively seeking to eliminate from public view any expression of Christian belief. In many ways we now have less religious freedom than many countries in the world!

Many Christians who are strongly feminist or environmentalist, actually advance New Age agendas, and hurt the Christian cause. We must be sure that we hold a biblical feminism and environmentalism, and that we promote them in a godly way that makes clear that we disassociate ourselves from the post-modern agenda.

This culture war is part of the cosmic war for control of God's world. Many public school teachers must work and witness in an acrid environment, under New Age restrictions. In some schools they can be fired for any Christian reference, even at Easter or Christmas. Opting out of neo-pagan milieus is not the answer. Christians must infiltrate, participate in discussions, get into leadership, and reclaim whole sectors for Christ. Veteran missionary to India, Leslie Newbigin, says we must not forget that missions is not only winning individuals to Christ, and planting churches, but also engaging cultures!

But in this paper we must limit our-selves to winning the individuals. We must fish out seekers among New Agers, as with any other group, and lovingly let them know there is a cosmic war on and they are on the wrong side, but there is still time to unconditionally surrender to Jesus.

5. Other sects and cults

The two words mean essentially the same thing, but some people refer to groups that distort Christian truth as sects, while groups that have little or no connection with Christianity as cults. The distinction is not rigid.

But how do you spot them? Detectives who go after counterfeiters, do not study every kind of phony money, but they memorize genuine bills, so that they can immediately spot a fake. The wide range of truly evangelical traditions regard only the Bible as their supreme authority, so all teach the same central apostolic doctrines. But groups may vary on peripheral issues, like mode of baptism, gifts of the Spirit, the end of history, etc. But if any group puts its peripheral distinctives in the center, in place of the core truths, it verges on being a sect.

Many Seventh Day Adventists are true evangelicals, even when they worship on Saturday and hold some dietary rules. But those who focus mainly on the writings of Mrs. White, Saturday as sabbath, and dietary rules– are over the edge.

Most charismatic groups are genuine-ly evangelical, even though many other evangelicals do not fully share their views. But those who make tongues the central experience or who claim revelations contrary to the written Scriptures, are borderline.

But the prosperity gospel—the health and wealth gospel, is a heresy, even though some of its proponents – TV evangelists – almost certainly know the Lord. Some sects are subtle because they still contain much truth, but they tend to become more extreme. Their basic assumptions (like their dualism) are not biblical, but were deliberately taken from

Christian science. These are some of the same Gnostic heresies of ancient Greece. The TV preachers use proof-texts—only those Bible verses favorable to their beliefs – and take them out of context.

The best antidote is to get their followers into Bible study groups.

Sects are borderline Christian groups, but cults are completely outside of historical Christianity because the Bible is not their only authority.

Christian Scientists view Mary Baker Eddy's Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures on a par with the Bible. They have about 2000 reading rooms in the U.S. and 1000 elsewhere, but no pastors. No one preaches sermons. Each group has two readers, who read aloud from the Bible and from Eddy's book, but are forbidden to comment. In this way the founder has protected her teachings from being critiqued by members.

They deny materiality. Sin, sickness and death are illusions. People are co-existent with God. Jesus never died nor rose. Angels are important in their beliefs. Think of their adherents as victims deceived by Satan and a false teacher. True Christianity is materialistic, in a healthy sense, because our Creator made a material universe and then pronounced it good! He gives us all things richly to enjoy! He promises new bodies forever and a transformed planet! Show them Jesus' unique deity. Use Hebrews to show Jesus and his followers are superior to angels.

Jehovah's Witnesses revised the Bible to back up their teachings. They do not accept the Trinity. They say Jesus is God's son, only as his highest created being. As mere man he died to ransom people from physical death. There is no soul apart from the body. To be saved one must believe their ransom doctrine, receive their baptism, live a moral life and do many hours a week of door-to-door proselytizing.

They proselytize in pairs—one a leader, the other a learner. I engage them in conversation in hope of persuading the novice. Even the veterans often cannot continue their memorized spiel, if you interrupt. They call God Jehovah (instead of Yahweh.) Show them John 12:39-41, where Jesus says he was the eternal King that Isaiah saw in his vision. But in Isaiah 6:5 this prophet says the figure he saw on the throne was Jehovah. So Jesus was claiming that he and Jehovah are one!

Mormons say that all Christendom was apostate for centuries until 1830 when Joseph Smith, and then Brigham Young, produced three new revelations. These books are co-equal additions to the Bible. People are all pre-existing spirits. When they are born as humans, they have a chance to become gods by heeding Mormon teaching. So Mormons do not believe in one God, but in a vast hierarchy of ex-human deities. It is a polytheistic religion—idolatrous. Jesus is not uniquely divine. He is higher than we are only because he had a head start. The eternal state is an earthly millennium. Jesus will return to rule from Jerusalem and from Independence, Missouri! Most people will go to one of three eternal kingdoms, depending on their level of divinity.

I lent one young Mormon a copy of The Mormon Papers (Harry L. Ropp, IVP, 1977), which tells us how to convert them. I asked him to read it and tell me if it is a fair critique of Mormonism. I heard later that he found God and left the cult.

To learn more about cults, including newer ones like the Children of God and Rev. Moon's Universal Church, see bibliography for A Guide to Cults and New Religions by Enroth, and books on specific cults—some you can lend to cult adepts.

Regardless of the group, it will contain hungry seekers, so fish them out and get them into Bible study.

6. Non-Christian religions

You need some understanding of each seeker's religion, but it is more important to know how they understand their own faith. They may not know as much about it as you do! Find common ground. All religions contain truth. Praise what is good. Criticize gently. Their basic assumptions may impede their understanding of the gospel. That was true also of pagans in the first century Roman empire. Paul disparaged the idols. But mainly he spoke of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion and resurrection, so that is the best course also for us in our neo-pagan world.

Terminology is a problem. Do not ask non-Christians to become Christians. They consider all Westerners to be Christians because they were born into Christendom. They think you want them to accept American capitalism or the moral decadence in our movies! For one Saudi, becoming a Christian meant freedom finally to drink whiskey! Rather, talk about reading God's book, believing God's word and becoming God's child.

Muslims focus on external observance detailed performance of five duties. They must recite the Creed, say rote prayers in Arabic five times daily as they face Mecca, fast in the daytime during the month-long season of Ramadan – even though they party all night. They must give alms to the poor—but only one-fortieth of income. They must make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a life-time. But the only way to be sure of Paradise is to die in a jihad—a holy war! (Hence, the suicide bombers.) The rituals impose no moral obligation on the people. For us heresy is wrong doctrine; for Muslims, it is small deviations in the rituals.

Islam rejects the Trinity—God, Mary and Jesus. It is blasphemy to call God "Father." Allah has 99 attributes, but love is not among them. Islam is fatalistic – whatever happens is Allah's will. Muslims accept Jesus as a great human prophet, but Mohammad supercedes him as the Koran supercedes the Bible. But their high regard for Jesus gives us excellent common ground.

Muslims have the same deep needs of all people. A tentmaker told us of a great-grandmother in a hospital who asked, "Why am I so afraid to die? Why are my people so afraid to die? It is because we have dirty hearts—we cheat and lie and steal." He said, "Let me tell you how Jesus cleaned up my dirty heart."

A fourth of the world has no knowledge of Jesus! On an Oregon campus I met a young Chinese medical doctor, just arrived from China, before it opened up to the world. She shared a dormitory room to improve her English. Students had just given her a Jesus Book. She pointed to the title and asked me, "Please—what is this word? Who is this person?"

I could not start with Jesus' deity. So I said, "This is a man who man lived 2000 years ago." I patiently explained his claims and actions and how his followers became convinced, against their wills, that he was God! She looked skeptical. I explained how the Jewish political and religious establishment then crucified him and how Jesus' followers tried to deal with their disillusionment. How could God die? But three days later, there he was again—very much alive!

She said, "I am a doctor—I cannot believe this." I said, "That is exactly how his closest friends felt." Then I explained how they became convinced that he really had risen to life!

Perplexed, she asked, "If he really was God, why would he let people kill him?" Now I had to begin over again at Genesis, to explain the one and only Creator God, a tri-personal Being, who made the planet and entrusted it to the creatures he had made in his image. But they were tricked, and they betrayed God's world into the hands of his treacherous archenemy.

Death, already in the plant and animal world (fossils), now entered the human pair. So all their descendants inherited death! People were alienated from God, from other people, from their environment and from them-selves. We are all damaged people in a spoiled, enemy-occupied world.

I explained how God the Son became man, died to pay for our sins and rose to life so our Righteous Judge could forgive us and become our Father. Now he restores us to life, and gives us new bodies to live forever on our remade planet. I told her how we talk with the living Jesus and the Father, and how they answer. With tears, she said, "It is beautiful—I wish I could believe it." A few days later she did believe!

After our first conversation, I was surprised that her Jewish atheist room-mate, on a bed behind us, had been listening for a couple of hours. She had brusquely refused a copy of the Jesus Book, but now asked me for one. If I could have talked more with her I might have shown her O.T. prophecies about the Messiah, who would descend from David and be born in Bethlehem. He would be more than man, would be crucified by his own people, but would rise again. Daniel 9 says all this would happen just before the destruction of Herod's temple in 70AD. Who could it be except Jesus? He fulfils 48 specific messianic prophecies! The odds are highly unlikely that this could happen. I might have told her about a Jewish professor in Israel who requires his students to read the New Testament, because it is the best historical source of information available about the Jews of that day.

I heard quite different questions from two Hindu men from India who were sitting next to me on an international flight. I told them that most people in Christendom are not real Christians—that no one can be born a Christian. They expressed surprise because the only way to become a Hindu is to be born one. Converts can never rise to a higher status than Hindu outcasts.

They asked, "How then can anyone become a Christian?" I told them what people must believe about Jesus and how they must respond to him because he lives! They seemed touched when I said Jesus died for Hindus, too, and loves them as much as he loves Westerners."

Hindus have no objection to adding Jesus and the Father to their pantheon of 33 million gods! One Indian who did this was hoping for forgiveness from Jesus. A Christian asked what he would do if Jesus did not forgive him. He said it was no problem because he would just find himself another god who would do so. When Hindus decide for Jesus, we must verify if they have "turned from their idols to the living God"—or no new birth occurs. God does not share his glory with any other deities. As Paul said, idols are nothing—but behind them lurk demons.

Watch for Hindu seekers. During my brief ten days in India, I looked up two IVCF students doing a short term in Delhi. John and Ed had both been ill and were discouraged. I suggested they take a day off and go with me to Agra to see the Taj Mahal. As we sat down for the 2-hour train ride, an Indian man came to occupy the fourth seat in our compartment—a university Hindi language professor. He said the advantage of 33 million deities is that you have so many from which to choose a few favorites! But it became clear the professor was critical of his religion and soon we were answering his questions in a Bible study.

In the evening, after an enjoyable and spiritually refreshing day, as we settled into the same train seats—here came the professor! We felt we should not push more religious conversation. But he was full of questions!

He said he had often tried to read the Bible, but had trouble understanding the Old English of the King James Version. (So he had been a seeker for some time!) I bought him a Bible in modern English and a New Testament in Hindi. After I left, John and Ed continued to study with him. The professor has since written to say he has found God and is evangelizing his family and students.

See bibliography for more on each religion.

When you evangelize and disciple people you set off ripples that never end, as new converts win others and they win yet others! Many Christians miss out on this joy because they do not know how to fish. Many others do not even try to evangelize because they misunderstand the three basics below.

VI. Getting started

1. WHO should fish? Many Christians, including missionaries and tent-makers, think they are off the hook because they do not have the gift of evangelism. Our GO application form asks, "How is God already using you in evangelism?" A frequent answer is: "I am a good discipler." It implies evangelism is not going well.

Witnessing has more to do with our essence than with gifts. In Mt. 5 Jesus said we are light and salt—although we can fail in these roles. In John 15 he says we are his witnesses, like it or not. Once our names are linked to his, we either ruin his reputation before our associates, or we exalt him. He takes an enormous risk!

The New Testament contains few exhortations to evangelize, but Jesus said, "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 10:32,33. See John Stott's *Our Guilty Silence*.) Jesus promises to make us fishers of men if we let him (Mk. 1:19) We need training, but we learn by doing.

Paul says God gave the church pastors and teachers to equip every member to make Jesus Christ known to outsiders (Eph. 4:10). Yet almost every book on mobilizing lay Christians aims to get every member on a church committee. Instead, a congregation with 300 members should have 300 ministers, all working and witnessing in the lost world around them! A pyramid style each-one-teach-one program lets experienced members encourage and teach others in the workplace.

Lesslie Newbigin says missions is not only winning individuals and planting churches, but engaging culture, challenging its wrong assumptions and giving it truth. This must be done by lay people. Jacques Ellul says the world is in desperate condition and the church has the remedy, but it is silent. It is silent because it can speak to the world only through its lay people. But few of them receive any encouragement or training from the church, and the few who are effective witnesses in the workplace find little recognition or affirmation from church leaders.

Some people say the Great Commission was just for the apostles. (Mt. 28:18-20) But look at Jesus' final promise: "And lo, I will be with you until the close of the age!" That means us—2000 years later, when this age of grace may be drawing to a close!

2. WHEN should we fish? Paul tells Timothy to evangelize whether it is convenient or not. (2 Tim. 4:1, 2) Peter and Paul insist on evangelism as a life-style, not an activity or project. There are no ON and OFF switches, no vacations, no retirement. When I first went to Peru, I made myself a daily schedule so I would use my time wisely, but there were constant interruptions. Then I realized the interruptions were my ministry! It was the people who mattered! I learned to fit the rest of my life into the little spaces around the people.

Satan will use every device to keep us from evangelizing—making us too busy or even tempting us to sin. But we can foil his attacks. In Spain a cab driver mistook me for a tourist and began a circuitous route. I angrily scolded him, then remembered I had come to Spain to win people like him. But how could I now witness to him? Immediately, I said to him, "Forgive me. I have Jesus Christ in my life and he must be displeased with how I just expressed my anger."

The driver asked, "What do you mean—you have Jesus Christ in your life?" My apology began a significant conversation the devil almost ruined.

We must be alert for opportunities to witness. Jesus said, "As you go—about your life and work—make disciples."

3. WHERE should we fish? In this cosmic war for control of the world, every believer is already assigned—to where he or she already is. Your Jerusalem is your immediate family, your extended family, your neighborhood, and your place of work or study—because of the hours you spend with many of those people. (Acts 1:8).

God cares about where you serve and does not leave it to chance. (See Packer's *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, IVP.) You did not get where you are by accident. If you could map your community—every house, business, factory and school, and draw an X for every Christian, you would see God has chosen his own evangelism teams that cut across national, racial, denominational, generational, social and other affinity lines. He chooses your team with members who complement each other. Round up the Christians at work and form them into a team that meets for prayer, Bible study, and mutual help in evangelizing your workplace. Form another team in your neighborhood. Are there believers in your club? Many Christians who do little individually become fruitful in a team.

Thousands of little student teams meet regularly on secular campuses. I have spoken to faculty groups that meet one noon a week, to engineers in an aeronautical firm who bring lunches once a week, and to nurses groups. Even Pizza Hut employees meet!

You are assigned to your present spheres of influence until God moves you—to a new job in your homeland, or maybe to Austria, Laos, Kazakhstan, Mali or China! An ocean full of fish awaits! But in whatever location, God will always assign you to a pond or two at a time, where you can fish out seekers. Your faithfulness, not your success, determines your next assignment! (Mt. 25: 23) Why promote someone who is not faithful where he?

Conclusion

We must evangelize prayerfully, tact-fully, honestly, confidently, humbly, patiently and kindly—there is so much at stake. "Evangelism is no hobby!" Whenever we speak to people about God they are forever changed—drawn closer to God and closer to eternal damnation. In each encounter we signify life to some and death to others. (2 Cor. 2:4-17)

We should speak with joyful urgency and excitement. The gospel is so extra-ordinary that if we talk in a mundane way, no one will believe we believe it!

Yet we take our salvation for granted. How can we keep alive its wonder? Maintain worship, fellowship and Bible study. Keep a diary of answered prayers – things don't "just happen." Records remind us how constantly God intervenes in our lives.

View the gospel from the vantage of people who have never understood it. I watch their eyes so I will not miss the moment they grasp the truth! I try to imagine how a seeker will look and act after finding the Lord. I recall Marisa's hard little face and how it softened soon after her conversion—how she radiated the love of Christ!

Evangelism itself renews our awe and wonder, motivating and enabling us to win yet others. I wish for you—a long life of joyful fishing!

—Ruth E. Siemens