

Evangelism in the Early Church by Michael Green.
Wm.Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.
Revised version, 2004. Paperback, 474 pp.
Reviewed by Johan D.Tangelder.

In this classic *Evangelism in the Early Church* Michael Green argues that it would be wise to go back to the beginning and see how the first Christians succeeded in making such an impact upon their world. The odds were heavily against them. Wherever they went, they were opposed as anti-social, atheistic and depraved. Within thirty years of the founding of the new faith, to join the Christians meant to court martyrdom. How could they possibly succeed? And yet they did. Green points out that neither the strategy nor the tactics of first Christians were particularly remarkable. What was remarkable was their conviction, their passion and their determination to act as Christ's ambassadors to a rebel world, whatever the consequences. These early Christians demanded repentance and faith in response to the proclamation of the Gospel. They were bold about it, despite the opposition they encountered. There was no trace of compromise in their preaching. They didn't accommodate the gospel to the culture of the day. They did not enter into dialogue with the world, except to understand it and to present their life-changing message in terms comprehensible to their contemporaries. They were passionate about reaching the lost. They really believed that men without Christ might suffer eternal and irreparable loss, and this thought drove them to unremitting labours to reach them with the Gospel. There was no hint of universalism in the early church.

The early Christians relied on the Holy Spirit, on prayer, and on the infallible Word of God. Their message was Christ-centred. They proclaimed that the wisdom of God was exhibited in the cross of Jesus. He suffered and died on the cross for sinner's gain. He rose victoriously from the grave and ascended to heaven. The missionary zeal of these early Christians was spurred on by their belief in Christ's return in glory. They eagerly looked forward to the coming Kingdom. While anticipating the Lord's return, they proclaimed the Gospel and walked the talk. Their changed lifestyle made a deep impact upon classical antiquity. They shared in God's own love, poured out on a needy world. The Gospel affected everything they did and everyone they met.

Green's eminently readable, comprehensive, and carefully researched book, with its copious endnotes and Scripture references, will show contemporary readers what they can learn from the past to renew their own evangelistic vision. It should be studied carefully by every Christian who is concerned about our lack of evangelistic power today. It is a book every pastor should have his library. It offers abundant illustrations for sermons and gives Biblical and theological depth to the work of missions and evangelism. I still treasure my copy of a well-marked and underlined 1978 edition of Green's *Evangelism in the Early Church*.