

320 *Communicating God's way*

(Historians beware – this is simplistic, but maybe there's a thread of truth here?)

My starting assumption is that God loves us, and wants to communicate that love – *to* us and *through* us – so how does God do that?

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets *at many times and in various ways*, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...^{Heb 1:1,2}

God uses many and various ways, through fallible humans, but supremely he uses one specific human – his life and teaching. That's God's way of communicating, right?

Evil powers always work against God's way: Roman and Jewish powers killed Jesus – that should stop it! But God's supreme coup: Jesus triumphed through sacrifice. Brilliant!

When the early followers of Jesus' way realised what had happened ('Did not our hearts burn within us as he opened the Scriptures!' ^{Lk 24:32}), the love and life of Jesus spread like wildfire. The communication method? People recounted the story of Jesus (= 'the gospel'), sometimes using verses from the OT; the clinching evidence was the life and love of the people of The Way.

Evil powers tried to stop it through fear: the Romans killed hundreds of followers, but God used that awful evil to spread The Way throughout the Roman empire. Brilliant!

Next ploy? Jesus' followers probably rejoiced when Emperor Constantine came to faith, but then maybe people 'converted' through fear?

Other ploys? Because people feared hell, rich people were willing to pay huge amounts of 'insurance' money. The church got richer and more powerful, and power corrupts.

The Reformation: people got back to more like the original teachings of Jesus, and The Way spread through people's life and love. Brilliant!

And also through the great revivals, too – but was there a large element of fear?

One recurring ploy: Christians argued as to exactly which church was right, and they used fear, force and even violence to make their 'right' views prevail.

From the best of motives, Christians saw colonisation as a chance to spread the message of Jesus globally. Evil's ploy was to use power and fear to bring conversion and, by imposing Western cultural forms onto local communities, they gave false ideas of Jesus' teachings.

With the Enlightenment, thinking people stopped believing all the apparently unscientific stuff in the Bible. Next ploy: church leaders imposed their 'right' view: e.g. if the Bible says God created the world in seven days, that's what happened – believe it or you're risking hell!

Another ploy: Christians study their Bibles and come up with carefully argued statements about exactly *how* God works, *how* people are saved: 'systematic theology' deflects people from the simple story of Jesus. Intellectual fear and power turn people from The Way.

Today? If we welcome people, if we lay down our lives for them, if we tell them the simple story of Jesus (the gospel), and stop trying to tell them 'what's right', we'll be communicating God's way – The Way of Jesus.

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