

378 *The heart of an evangelist?*

I've gone relatively quiet of late (two weeks!), but it's because a friend recommended Brian McLaren's *a Generous Orthodoxy*, and she was right: it has resonated big time with my journey. These past seven years, I've travelled from the **massive negative** of looking back and asking how, in God's name (see what I did there?!), people came to do such terrible, terrible things in and through the church in the past few centuries...

...to the **massive positive** of seeing the panorama of what God has been doing, over millennia, to move humankind forward in our job of co-caring (with God) for one another and for the planet. But that's despite the well-meaning mess that we have (I have) created.

Specifically, I shudder to think how many people I have helped to turn *away* from God by my well-meaning attempts to persuade them to turn to (my version of) faith in Jesus!

Today, I'm being more personal than I like, but can you help me, please? Do you think I have the heart of an evangelist? Here's the historical evidence...

For 20 years (1987–2008), I published a monthly computer magazine and, after the first few issues, I (weirdly!) put a half-page (A5) 'Godslot' in every single issue, and I have met people who were helped to faith through it, often as I chatted to them by email. But how many *more* were persuaded that Christians are arrogant people who seek to justify things such as the genocide that God 'told the Israelites' to do.

In 1993, at a youth service (as churchwarden, I was sitting at the back to 'check it out'), they called me forward for prayer, and I experienced a burning sensation in my feet. They felt it was for evangelism – 'the feet of him who brings good news'. Later, I received another gift, which I called 'tears for the lost', which lasted for a several years. Every time I spoke or wrote about people who didn't know Christ, tears would well up. (Whoa, here they come again!)

As I've said,^[274,275] I've been a life-long persuader, but does that make me an evangelist? (OED: *A person who seeks to convert others to the Christian faith, especially by public preaching.*)

Actually, that's not the important question. What we need to know is: what is the evangel? the good news? the gospel? What gifts did the early evangelists (e.g. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Peter and Paul) exercise? Brian McLaren is further confirming my belief (picked up from the likes of Tom Wright and Scott McKnight) that while they did call people to repent (to turn and see things differently, to recognise how they had got things wrong), evangelists weren't primarily 'persuaders' but story-tellers.

The Holy Spirit helps people to see how the story of Jesus massively and wonderfully fulfils the story of what God was seeking to do (despite their and our getting it horribly wrong) in the lives of us all and of our (God's!) world.