THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EVANGELISTIC INVITATION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EVANGELISTIC INVITATION

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by

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TO MY TWO JEANS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I take this means of expressing my sincere appreciation to Doctor V. L. Stanfield who suggested the subject of this thesis and gave invaluable aid in its development.

To my wife, I owe a special debt of gratitude. She has sacrificed greatly that I might pursue this study.

I am indebted to the staff of the library of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for assistance in securing sources for study.

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Louisville, Kentucky

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INTRODUCTION

I. The Purpose of The Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to seek to record the development of the evangelistic invitation. Invitations are a part of almost every worship service in many evangelical churches. Yet, there is little knowledge of the origin and development of the invitation. It is to be hoped that a trail, at least a rough trail, will be marked out by this thesis which will lead to the origin of the invitation as we use it today.

II. The Method of Study

This study has been primarily of an historical nature. A study has been made of the preaching of various preachers from the Great Awakening to today. In addition, an effort has been made to trace the development of the invitation through histories of individual churches, associations, denominations, and general histories.

In the last chapter of the thesis, personal experiences and numerous conversations on the use of the invitation with fellow ministers have been utilized.

III. Plan of the Thesis

Chapter Two lays the foundation stone for the development of the invitation. It sets forth the milieu which made the evangelistic invitation a possibility. Until this period salvation had been kept within the walls of institutions for centuries. With the growth of individualism, the evangelistic invitation had an opportunity to evolve.

Chapter Three gives an historical development of the major lines that later converged to bring into being the Great Revival in the West. In these lines are found the rudiments of the invitation as we know it today. This chapter deals in particular with: (1) the Methodist movement, (2) the Separatist Baptist tradition, and (3) the Great Revival of Kentucky.

Chapter Four seeks to show the contributions made by professional evangelists, particularly in the Southern Baptist tradition.

In Chapter Five the varieties of invitations as they have developed from the evangelistic invitation, in the narrowest sense of the word, are shown along with current usage in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Chapter Six is a summary and conclusion. In a very brief way, there is an attempt to set forth what has been uncovered by this study.

IV. Limits of the Thesis

This thesis is not intended to be exhaustive. It is intended to break the ground with the hope that another investigator will see fit to utilize the new ground thus made available.

It is limited in scope. The study starts with the period of the Great Awakening and comes to the present. The emphasis is primarily directed toward the invitation as used by Southern Baptists, although it is applicable to a great extent to all evangelicals.

The origin of the invitation is not pinpointed as to an exact date. It is felt by the writer that this is an impossibility. If this thesis is correct, the invitation was a development that grew slowly from a climate of opinion molded by preaching, and did not spring into existence at one given moment of time.

CHAPTER II

THE MILIEU OF THE EVANGELISTIC INVITATION

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I. General Conditions

The evangelistic invitation came out of a climate of evangelism which was developed over a period of great time. From this climate of evangelism, the invitation as we know it today evolved quite slowly. In general, the period designated as the Great Awakening can be given the distinction of preparing the way for the invitation on an open basis at the close of a service. For the purposes of this paper, the date of this era will begin around 1720 rather than with the advent of Whitefield to this country in 1740 as is usually done. The work of John Wesley in England is also taken into consideration since it ultimately plays an important part in the history of evangelism in this country.

The main impact of this period of the history of preaching seems to be a movement from institutionalism toward that of individualism. This was brought about both through the theology of John Wesley with his emphasis on the freedom of the will, and that of Jonathan Edwards, which came to be known as personalized Calvinism or New England theology. Until this time there was little, if any, emphasis on personal salvation. Children were born into the church. In New England the deadening Half-way Covenant was in effect with disastrous results for the cause of evangelism. In

sharp contrast, the Great Awakening cut to the heart of the Christian message. It brought to focus the real plight of the churches of the land, and thus revival broke forth.

> . . .. the central fact in the great upheaval in American life, which we call the Great Awakening, and with which Jonathan Edwards had so much to do, was that religion is a personal matter; that it is an inner experience or it is nothing.[1]

This fresh approach to the message of the church laid the groundwork for the later use of the evangelistic invitation. As can be seen by an examination of the preaching of this time, the clarion call was for repentance. Included in this call was the appeal for a definite time, which was known by the individual, of salvation.

The idea of working up a revival was practically unkno wn to the ministers of that day. There was little effort on the part of the leaders to have a revival. They placed their dependence upon prayer and God's power. Services were generally limited to two on Sunday and a midweek service on Wednesday evening. As interest grew, and as there was a demand for it, meetings for the purposes of instruction and prayer were held in private homes during the week.[2] It should be noted that this was on demand of the people and not at the suggestion of the ministers.

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1. W. W. Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 85.

2. Fred W. Hoffman, Revival Times in America (Boston: W. A. Wilde Company, 1956), p. 57.

II. Representative Preaching of This Era

The preaching of this era can be adequately presented by investigating those elements of preaching, which have relevance to the subject of this thesis, that are found in the preaching of the "Log College" group--Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John Wesley.

Theodore Frelinghuysen. In no real sense can Theodore Frelinghuysen be considered as a part of the Log College group. He is included at this point because of the tremendous influence which he exerted on Gilbert Tennant, the leading preacher in this early revival movement.

Frelinghuysen preached "the necessity of a vital religious experience and a genuine moral reformation."[3] The earnestness and passion with which he preached resulted in many conversions.[4]

Three innovations in evangelism were brought into play by Frelinghuysen. He practiced itinerant preaching. He led in the formation of small groups which met for prayer and bible study, and lastly, he introduced lay preachers.[5]

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3. W. L. Muncy, Jr., A History of Evangelism in the United States (Kansas City: Central Seminary Press, 1945), p. 39.

4. Wesley M. Gewehr, The Great Awakening in Virginia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), p. 4.

5. Muncy, op. cit., p. 40.

Gilbert Tennant. Gilbert Tennant probably best represents the Log College preachers. Upon coming into contact with Theodore Frelinghuysen, he determined to adopt the "direct and searching methods of his new friend."[6]

Tennant preached what might be called a "personalized" Calvinism. This is one of the elements which contributed so greatly to the spirit of revivalism. As W. W. Sweet has said, ". . . when the New England clergy began to center their interest in a scheme of redemption for individuals, revivalism was born."[7] This emphasis was brought to fruition by Jonathan Edwards.

A second element of Tennant's preaching was that it was emotionalized.

> As to Tennant's preaching: It was frequently both terrible and searching. It was often matter justly terrible, as he, according to the inspired oracles, exhibited the dreadful holiness, justice, law, threatenings, truth, power, majesty of God; and His anger with rebellious, impenitent, unbelieving, and Christless sinners; the awful danger they were every moment in of being struck down to hell, and being damned forever. . . It was not merely, nor so much, his laying open their many vain and secret shifts and refuges, counterfeit resemblances of grace. . . whereby they found. . . themselves exposed to eternal ruin. . . This searching preaching was both the suitable and principle means of their conviction.[8]

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6. D. H. Maxon, The Great Awakening (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920), p. 21.

7. Sweet, op. cit., p. 30.

8. Muncy, op. cit., p. 33.

Tennant brought his preaching to bear on Boston in 1741 at the request of George Whitefield. One Boston pastor said that more people sought personal interviews with him in one week than had come to him in the twenty-four preceding years before the coming of Tennant.[9]

Jonathan Edwards. As one writer of the history of preaching has said, "The powerful era of American preaching began with Jonathan Edwards."[10] There are adequate reasons for this statement. Perhaps more so than anyone else, Jonathan Edwards set the stage for revivalism as we have come to know it.

> In the midst of spiritual deadness Edwards began to proclaim anew the evangelical doctrines. Remarkable conversions followed and Edwards soon had the entire community under the spell of his preaching. People became deeply concerned about preaching. People became deeply concerned about eternal things. . . They even met in private houses day and night to talk religion and pray for pardon.[11]

That such a revival broke out in this period was in itself remarkable, but the important thing is what this did for posterity. His preaching broke the sacramental

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9. Ibid., p. 33.

10. T. H. Pattison, The History of Christian Preaching (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1912), p. 354.

11. Gewehr, op. cit., p. 5.

tendency of the Puritan Church.[12] This set the stage for an increased emphasis on personalism. His doctrine of the freedom of the will became a bridge to modern Calvinism in which freedom implies a choice of motives.[13] His message was that of "older Calvinism--shaped by his idealism and made vivid by the intensity and reality of his spiritual conceptions."[14] That Jonathan Edwards was effective on behalf of evangelism is quite apparent. His preaching brought astonishing results. In a relatively short period of time the entire community had been converted.

> Our sacraments were eight weeks asunder, and I received into our communion about a hundred before one sacrament, and fourscore of them at one time, whose appearance, when they presented themselves together to make an open explicit profession of Christianity, was very affecting to the Congregation: I took in nearly sixty before the next sacrament day. . .[15]

Edwards did not make public appeals for confession of faith. He preached the gospel as he understood it and depended upon God to bring forth the fruits of his preaching. He felt that sinners under conviction would seek salvation.

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12. A. S. Hoyt, The Pulpit and American Life (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), p. 36.

13. Loc. cit.

14. Ibid., p. 27.

15. Jonathan Edwards, The Works of President Edwards, Vol. I - IV (New York: Leavitt and Company, 1851), III, pp. 238-39.

He did much, however, to clarify the idea of conversion which helped to set the stage for revivalism. He did not force decisions nor did he attempt to make everyone fit into the same mold for their individual conversion experiences. In the heat of the moment, it would have been easy to have fallen into a pattern of expected conversion, as did happen in the Frontier Revival of the 1800's. Edwards was wise enough to realize that God worked with different people in different ways.

> Conversion is a great and glorious work of God's power, at once changing the heart, and infusihg life into the dead soul; though that grace that is then implanted does more gradually display itself in some than in others.[17]

Edwards did not depend entirely on preaching. He sought to help his people in groups and as individuals. The pattern of worship of his day was to have two services on Sunday and one service sometime during the week, usually on Wednesday. In addition to the regular worship services, Edwards organized his people into small groups that met periodically for help. From these groups he drew his contacts for individual counseling and came to know those who needed special attention.

> He met his flock in small groups--children, young people, old people, sinners, saved--adapting the same counsels to their several needs. . . He invited those under deep concern to come to him privately.[18]

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17. Edwards, op. cit., III, 251.

18. Ola Elizabeth Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 163.

This then was the method used by Jonathan Edwards. He preached soul-searching sermons. He worked with those who needed help in small groups, and encouraged those struggling with salvation to come to him privately. All of this is important to note as we seek to understand the background of the evangelistic invitation, but even more important it is necessary to seek to understand what is behind, and it might be said, permeated throughout this revival movement.

In a sense the upheaval in American life brought about by the preaching of Jonathan Edwards had to do with the spread of an idea. The idea, of course, was not new. It was as old as Christianity itself; namely, that religion is an individual, inner experience or it is nothing.[19] This was not original with Edwards in any sense of the word, but it was he who set the stage through example and through the written word, for the acceptance of this idea on a universal scale. The growth of this idea did much for the development of the evangelistic invitation.

A further contribution of Edwards, which is almost if not quite as important as that noted above, was his acceptance of emotion in religion. It was his effort that made emotion theologically and intellectually respectable.[20] Not only was this brought about through his own preaching, but

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19. Ibid., p. 213.

20. Sweet, op. cit., p. 85.

in his Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, he made a deep impression on the readers of the need for the proper use of emotion in religious life.

Against this background, Edwards made appeals in his sermons for personal decisions. However, as stated above, he did not ask people to come forward. His method of appealing for the lost to make decisions can be seen in his "Farewell Sermon". Here Edwards puts in his own words what he has tried to accomplish during his pastorate.

> . . . While I had opportunity, I have not ceased to warn you, and set before you your danger. I have studied to represent the misery and necessity of your circumstances, in the clearest manner possible. I have tried all ways, that I could think of, tending to awaken your consciences, and make you sensible of the necessity of your improving your time, and being speedy in fleeing from the wrath to come. . . I have diligently endeavored to find out, and use the most powerful motives, to persuade you to take care for your own welfare and salvation . . . that if possible, I might prevail upon you to forsake sin, and turn to God and accept of Christ as your Savior and Lord.[21]

Winslow is right when she points out that Jonathan Edwards applied himself directly to the root of evangelism. As a result, he made revivals theologically possible.[22] He thus set the pattern of New England revivalism, and his example was followed by a great host of others throughout the area.[23]

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21. Jonathan Edwards, Puritan Sage (Edited by Vergilus Ferm, New York: Library Publishers, 1953), p. 471.

22. Winslow, op. cit., p. 31.

23. Sweet, op. cit., p. 31.

George Whitefield. George Whitefield made quite an impact on the evangelistic mood of his time. His most unique contribution was probably his pulpit manner and his delivery. He literally changed the definition of preaching and pulpit behavior.

> Instead of doctrine logically stated, proved, and applied, he dramatized both the Bible narratives and their application. Instead of a quiet, sedate method of sermon delivery, he laughed, sang, wept, and made violent gestures.[24]

In addition to his manner of preaching, Whitefield was the first to introduce field preaching. He was shut out of the pulpits of the Church of England for various reasons. He preached for a time at Newgate prison, but was soon denied this right. He then turned to the open field.

> After dinner, therefore, I went upon a mount, and spake to as many People as came unto me. They were upwards to two Hundred. Blessed be God, I have now broke the ice: I believe I never was more acceptable to my master than when I was standing to teach those Hearers in the open Fields.[25]

George Whitefield, like Jonathan Edwards, did a great deal to personalize Calvinism. He separated from the theology of John Wesley at this point, at least in terminology if not in actual fact.

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24. Vernon L. Stanfield, "The Preaching of the Great Awakening and Its Contribution to Political Liberty", Unpublished Doctor's Dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1947.

25. Stuart C. Henry, George Whitefield Wayfaring Witness (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 48.

> . . . underfire (he) called himself a Calvinist, but his preaching was essentially democratic. Salvation was for all who would have it. In preaching a 'whosoever will' doctrine at this particular moment, he gave a religious application to certain vague impulses toward democracy and turned an individualism as yet inarticulate into a gospel of personal safety.[26]

These elements all contributed to a climate of revivalism that made possible the emergence of the evangelistic invitation years later. However, despite the strong appeals voiced in his sermons -

> O that you repent and be converted. You old grey-headed people, Lord make you repent and be converted. . . O God bless his work on you, that you will blossom and bring forth fruits unto God. Amen and amen.[27]

> O come, come, see what it is like to have eternal life; don't refuse it; haste sinner, haste away; may the great good shepherd, draw your souls.[28]

- Whitefield apparently never gave an open invitation for public professions of faith. He preached that men of all ages and conditions must be "born again" or they would never see the kingdom of heaven. This type of preaching brought forth many inquirers with Whitefield often reaping what

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26. Winslow, op. cit., p. 176.

27. George Whitefield, Sermons (New York: John Tiebout, 1809), p. 98.

28. Ibid., p. 318.

others had sown.[29] It has been said that when he was not preaching, he was so beset with anxious inquirers that he could not find time to eat or sleep.[30]

Whitefield also helped to popularize the use of lay preachers, or exhorters. He urged new converts to exhort others to repentance.[31] This helped to spread the flames of revival but "of all the evils of the aftermath 'lay exhorting' was the most persistently disrupting to good order in the churches."[32] Still, this was one more factor that contributed to the growth of the invitation.

John Wesley. John Wesley made many contributions to the spirit of revival of his time, but probably the most unique was that he preached about the love of God rather than about his wrath. Wesley popularized the Armenian theological position.

> Insisting mainly on salvation immediate and for all who would accept it by an act of faith, the emphasis of Wesley's preaching was laid chiefly on the love of God.[33]

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29. Joseph Tracy, The Great Awakening (Boston: Tappen and Dennet, 1842), p. 45.

30. Frank G. Beardsley, Religious Progress Through Religious Revivals (New York: American Tract Society, 1943), p. 10.

31. Winslow, op. cit., p. 196

32. Loc. cit.

33. Pattison, op. cit., p. 256.

Wesley proclaimed even more of a "whosoever will" religion than did Whitefield. He followed Whitefield into the field and met with remarkable success. It was his preaching that was first attended by physical signs of conviction such as fainting, weeping, and trembling.[34]

Wesley believed that religion was a personal matter, and that an individualistic religion must seek the salvation of individual souls. His appeal was for concrete, individual experiences.[35] In his Journal are many references to his preaching of which the following is typical: "I preached in the morning at St. Ann's Aldersgate. . . free salvation by faith in the blood of Christ."[36] Practically all of Wesley's sermons end with an appeal for decision for Christ.

> Give your hearts to him, who together with ten thousand blessings, has given you his Son, his only Son. . . Let him be your God and your all,--the desire of your eyes, the joy of your heart, and your portion forever.[37]

This does not mean that Wesley was appealing for public professions of faith. Rather, after he was done preaching he talked with those who came to him and organized them into societies. This society idea was not original with him. It

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34. John Wesley, The Heart of John Wesley's Journal. Edited by P. L. Parker (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), p 87.

35. Humphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), pp. 275-276.

36. Wesley, op. cit., p 42.

37. John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855), II, 57.

was a method used in the Church of England. In the beginning the only unique thing about his societies was the wide lassitude given to those who desired membership.

> When John Wesley determined that there should be only one condition previously required in those who desired admission unto the new society, namely 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins'; he took a step which separated him from the Religious Societies.[38]

Wesley's influence was later felt in America through the early Methodist preachers and the later Methodist circuit riders who played an important part in frontier evangelism. This will be dealt with in a later chapter of this thesis.

III. Summary

From this brief survey of the early years of the Great Awakening, it becomes apparent that a milieu was coming into being out of which the invitation would naturally evolve. This milieu was structured of the following lines, which interwoven make up the warp and woof of revivalism.

A. Institutionalism gave way slowly but surely to individualism.

B. Emotion became an accepted and respected part of religion.

C. Preaching became pointed and salvation was elucidated as a definite experience for all ages.

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38. John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1923), p. 21.

D. Seekers, and those converted, were organized into small groups. This led to individual or personal work.

E. Because of the onslaught of personalized Calvinism and Armenianism, revivals became theologically possible.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PUBLIC INVITATION: FROM THE TIME OF DEVEREUX JARRETT OF VIRGINIA THROUGH THE GREAT REVIVAL OF THE EARLY 1800'S

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I. Introduction

Out of the background of revivalism presented in the above chapter, certain strands of evangelism developed, particularly in the South and in the border states. These strands came together in what is known as the Great Revival. This era set the stage for later professional revivalists who used set techniques of bringing people to decisions for Christ.

It would be nice to be able to say "at this certain point the evangelistic invitation was used for the first time." This, however, is a seeming impossibility. At some point in this period, the invitation was used for the first time. At precisely what time and place this came about, it is not for the writer to say. However, as we shall see, almost automatically it would seem, the invitation, or at least a form of invitation, was in use by 1800.

This chapter will seek to show the development of the invitation through a discussion of individuals, denominational movements, and finally, a discussion of the Great Revival.

II. Devereux Jarret Clears the Way for the Methodists in Virginia

One strand of the developing invitation came through the

ministry of the Reverend Devereux Jarrett, who was a minister of the Church of England. He had, independently of the Methodists, developed a similar way of preaching and method of organizing seekers into classes. He was one of the few ministers of the Church of England who cooperated with the Methodist circuit riders.

Jarrett recognized the condition of religion in the lives of his people and determined to do something about it.

> I therefore judged it necessary to adopt that method of preaching, which might have the most direct tendency to make sinners feel their situation, and be sensible of their guilt, danger and helplessness. Nothing short of this will turn the attention of the human race to the invitations of the gospel. . .[1]

His was evangelical preaching which appealed directly to the hearts of his hearers and made them "sensible of their sinful state."[2]

> In a word my plan was first to convince of sin, second of inability. Then, to point out the remedy and press the convicted to fly to Jesus Christ. . .[3]

Jarrett certainly believed in a personal and experimental religion. This was new to the thinking of his people and caused no small stir at first. He emphasized the fallen state of man

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1. Devereux Jarrett, The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarrett (Baltimore: Warner and Hanna, 1806), p. 88.

2. Wesley M. Gewehr, The Great Awakening in Virginia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1950), p. 39.

3. Jarrett, op. cit., p. 89.

and the absolute necessity of spiritual regeneration. His preaching was extemporaneous. In common with the evangelical school of his day, he used the direct appeal in the second person. He called upon all to repent and be saved.[4]

For the first few years, there was little response of a permanent nature to his preaching. In 1765 he wrote:

> Some were affected at times, so as to drop a tear. But still for a year or more, I perceived no lasting effect. . . Indeed, I have reason to believe that some have been a good deal alarmed at times; but they were shy of speaking to me (thinking it would be presumptuous) till their convictions wore off.[5]

This also shows that up to this time, at least in the area of Virginia in which Jarrett preached, an open invitation was unknown. However, a great revival was started under the preaching of Jarrett, which was brought to fruition by the preaching of his Methodist friends in 1776.

III. Methodist Evangelism

Officially the Methodists were originally within the folds of the Church of England. They were not well received by the Established Church's ministers. In these formative years they depended primarily upon circuit riders, men who followed an itinerant ministry.

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4. Gewehr, op. cit., p. 140.

5. Nathan Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, II (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), I, p. 91.

Francis Asbury. Francis Asbury led the way for the Methodists. Not only did he organize the Conferences, but he traveled extensively on the Circuit himself.

> . . . preaching every day, forming those who had been awakened to a sense of their sin and danger into classes, that they might the more easily help each other to work out their salvation.[6]

Asbury leaves no record of his method of evangelism. That he preached for conviction is apparent, and that he organized classes for converts is found on every hand. However, he does not indicate that he used an open invitation. He gives many references which show that something of a tangible nature took place, however.

On January 26, 1782, he records the following:

> I met a class and found many convert seekers of salvation. The poor mourners came again at night, to whom I applied Hezekiah's experience, at which all appeared deeply affected; they wept, talked together, and seemed loath to leave.[7]

> April 5, 1789
> We had a move while I was speaking on Isaiah 33: 14,15. Some souls were brought to experience peace with God. . . Multitudes came to hear, and great cries were heard among the people, who continued together. . . until three o'clock in the morning. Many souls professed to be convicted, converted, sanctified.[8]

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6. Ibid., I, 81.

7. Francis Asbury, The Heart of Asbury's Journal (Edited by E. S. Tipple, New York: Eaton and Mains, 1904), p. 204.

8. Ibid. , p. 278.

> March 11, 1790
> Some souls were converted, and others professed sanctification.[9]

This is sufficient to show that even if an open invitation was not given, people were staying as a group at the close of services and seeking salvation.

Asbury's records further show that the use of exhorters becomes more and more common.

> Mr. McGaw preached an excellent sermon. . .
> Brothers Huntley and Glendening exhorted. . .
> I preached to about four hundred people. . .
> I spoke of the necessity of getting and keeping the power of religion. William Glendening exhorted afterward; then we departed.[10]

Although there is no concrete evidence to support it, the use of exhortation could well be one more link in the chain that eventually led to the altar call.

The Methodists founded societies wherever they went. This was done in private meetings, however, and not openly at the preaching services.[11] According to Asbury, those societies were for the purpose of helping people "to become entire Christians. . ."[12]

Around 1775, there was an extensive Methodist revival in Virginia. Some of the behavior exhibited at this time would

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9. Ibid., p. 292.
10. Ibid., p. 187.
11. Ibid., p. 118.
12. Ibid., p. 67.

certainly be conducive to the giving of an invitation. Actually, there were invitations given but not on a personal basis.

A Mr. Rankin wrote a letter on May 30, 1775, telling of a sermon he preached, which brought conviction on hundreds. He states in his letter that it became so noisy that he sat down.

> Husbands were inviting their wives to go to heaven, wives their husbands; parents their children, and children their parents; brothers their sisters, and sisters their brothers.[13]

Here, as we can see, the preacher did not extend a formal invitation, but certainly a climate was established for so doing.

Devereux Jarrett throws further light on the revival of this period. He says that the revival reached its peak in 1776. At that time, ten to twelve were being converted in a day.

> Some were in such great distress that when questioned concerning the state of their souls, were scarce able to make any reply, but by weeping and falling on their knees, before all the class, and earnestly soliciting the prayers of God's people.[14]

This indicates personal work among the people during a public meeting. Again, it is not a formal invitation, but certainly, it points to the use of an invitation in

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13. Bangs, op. cit., I, 112.

14. Ibid., p. 94.

the very near future.

Western Methodism. The Reverend James B. Finley, a circuit rider in the west, relates some experiences that help to pinpoint the use of the invitation of the Methodists in the area in which he worked.

He tells of a revival in 1789 in which nothing of interest had happened during the sermon.

> . . .but (there was) no remarkable stir until after preaching, when under several exhortations some burst out into tears, others trembled, and some fell. I sprang in among the people, and the Lord converted one man very powerfully. . .[15]

In another instance he records a letter of the Reverend William Burke which relates his own conversion experience.

> The practice then among Methodists was to call upon all seekers of religion to pray in public at the prayer meeting. . .In the month of February, 1791, after the preacher concluded, he opened the door to receive members. I went forward alone and gave my name. . .[16]

This seemed to have been the conversion experience for Burke rather than just the formality of joining the church after having been converted.

Finley records how an entire family joined the church much to everyone's surprise. The preacher seized on the opportunity and "the mourners were invited to the altar. . .

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15. James B. Finley, Sketches of Western Methodism (edited by W. P. Strickland, Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1857), p. 72.

16. Ibid., p. 25.

and more than eighty persons were happily converted to God."[17] Thus we can see that by 1800, Methodists were using, at least in a fashion, some form of invitation. That this was inevitable can be seen in the Methodist Church By-laws in 1785.

> On the Matter and Manner of Preaching
> Question 1: What is the best general method of preaching? Answer 1: To convince. 2: To offer Christ. 3: To invite. 4: To build up; and to do this in some small measure in every sermon.[18]

IV. Developments Among the Baptists

The Baptist witness was divided into two camps. These were known as Regular and Separatists. For our purposes we are more interested in the Separatist movement. In general, it can be said that the Separatists leaned strongly toward the doctrine of free grace.[19]

There were a number of gifted preachers among the Separatist Baptist ministers. However, in this paper we propose to deal with their overall mode of preaching with particular attention to the growth of the evangelistic invitation.

Parson Henry of St. Paul's Parish, Hanover, Virginia, gives a description of some of the preaching of the Baptists of this period.

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17. Ibid., p. 345.

18. Bangs, op. cit., I, 191-192.

19. Gewehr, op. cit., p. 109.

> . . . Henry says that Robinson, Ryan, and Blair as well as their brethren. . . strive . . . to raise in their hearers, what they call conviction. . . All the while the preacher exalts his voice putting himself into a violent agitation, stomping and beating his desk. . . until the weaker sort of his hearers being scared, cry out, fall down and work like people in convulsion fits. . . and if only a few are thus brought down, the preacher gets into a violent passion again, calling out will no more of you come to Christ?. . . and they who thus cry out and fall down are caress'd and commended as the only penitent souls who come to Christ, whilst they who don't are often condemned. . . as hardened wretches almost beyond the reach of mercy. . .[20]

This was written in 1744 and certainly indicates the use of an open appeal for men to accept Christ. However, it is apparent that this was not uniformly true at this early date. Some men, such as Davies, preached soul-searching sermons and appealed for decisions, but not with the expectation that men come forward.

> The chief aim of his preaching was to promote genuine Christianity by changing the hearts and lives of men. . . In common with the evangelicals everywhere, he used the direct hortatory appeal in the second person, whenever possible.[21]

Other preachers, such as John Leland, do not indicate any invitation given other than when the church met in conference to receive members. Leland points out that it is customary to sing hymns at the conclusion of a service, but

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20. Ibid., p. 60, quoting Dawson manuscript in Library of Congress.

21. Ibid., p. 87.

he makes no mention of an invitation. This was as late as 1785.[22] In speaking of a sermon which he had preached at some prior time, Leland seemed surprised to learn of the excellent results gained.

> Mr. Waller. . . . told me afterwards, that in the relations which the people gave before baptizing, not less than fifteen persons had reference to the "Ginger Bread Sermon."[23]

Over in North Carolina this same evangelistic spirit was much at work through the preaching of Shubel Stearns and Daniel Marshall. The churches there were blessed with phenomenal growth and not all of the converts were brought into the church membership.

> One reason for this was that they (the people) were widely scattered. . . . Such people on returning to their homes after gladly receiving the word and being baptized would often be remote from other such converts and thus for them church membership would be almost impossible.[24]

A typical revival scene of the Baptists during this period has been described by Robert Semple. It points to what later became common procedure in the Great Revival.

> The manner of conducting the general revival, was somewhat extraordinary. It was not unusual, to have a large proportion of a congregation,

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22. John Leland, The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), pp. 115-16.

23. Ibid., p. 29.

24. George W. Paschal, History of North Carolina Baptists, Vol I, II (Raleigh: The General Board of North Carolina Baptist State Convention, 1930), I, 313.

> prostrate on the floor; and, in some instances, they have lost the use of limbs: No distinct articulation could be heard. . .many of their (ministers) would exercise their gifts at the same time, in different parts of the congregation; some in exhortation; some in praying for the distressed; and some in argument with opposers.[25]

As can readily be seen from the above paragraphs, there was diversity within the ranks of Baptists as to the procedure of spreading the gospel. However, there was enough uniformity of the use of an evangelistic invitation to warrant it being recorded as typical of the Baptist ministry. This does not pinpoint the birth of the invitation, but it does give a valid description of its use during the period from 1750 through the 1780's.

> At the close of his sermon, the minister would come down from the pulpit and while singing a suitable hymn would go around among the brethren shaking hands. The hymn being sung, he would then extend an invitation to such persons as felt themselves to be poor guilty sinners, and were anxiously inquiring the way of salvation, to come forward and kneel near the stand, or if they preferred to do so, they could kneel at their seats, proffering to unite with them in prayer for their conversion. After prayer, singing and exhortation, prolonged according to circumstances, the congregation would be dismissed to meet again at night. . .either for preaching or in the capacity of a prayer meeting.[26]

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25. Robert B. Semple, A History of the Rise and Progress of Baptists in Virginia (Richmond: John Lynch, Printer, 1810), p. 37.

26. Robert I. Devin, A History of Grassy Creek Baptist Church (Raleigh: Edwards, Broughton, and Company, 1880), p. 69.

At the night meeting a great deal of personal work was done, and many people were converted.[27]

That even this type of invitation was novel and slow in spreading is shown by the records of the Reverend Lemuel Burkitt. He records in 1801 that the giving of the invitation to come up to be prayed for was greatly blessed of God, and that this was the usual procedure just as Devin had said.

> The ministers usually, at the close of preaching, would tell the congregation, that if there were any persons who felt themselves lost and condemned, under the guilt and burden of their sins, that if they would come up near the stage, and kneel down, they would pray for them.[28]

Yet in a later entry of 1802, Elder Burkitt tells of an experience which shows that this method of evangelism was not universal.

> In January, 1802, a revival began to take place here. (Cashie, North Carolina, by Elder Burkitt). . . He preached, prayed and sang, but no good effect seemed apparently to follow. Towards the close of the worship, he told the congregation he had done all that was in his person. . . it was only the Lord could bless it, and that he could do no more than pray for them and 'if there was any person in the congregation who saw himself in a lost condemned state by reason of sin, if he would come up to the table, at the pulpit, he would pray to the Lord for him.' (About three came forward)

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27. Loc. cit.

28. Lemuel Burkitt, A Concise History of the Kehukee Baptist Association (Halifax: A. Hodge, 1803), p. 145.

> The people had never seen an instance of the like before, and beholding their great desire for the salvation of their souls, so earnestly expressed, it had a very great effect on the people.[29]

From this we can see that an open invitation was still novel even down to the Great Revival. Different sections of the country had different customs. This was true even after the news of the Great Revival had been broadcast throughout the land, as will be seen in connection with the first of the professional evangelists.

Before leaving this section, it should be noted that the invitation was not usually a call to salvation. It was really an altar call such as is used by the Methodist Church of today. Elder Burkitt makes it clear that many who came forward for prayer under his pleading were not converted until some months later.

> At the close of the meeting he (Elder Burkitt) told them that if there was any person. . .who desired to go to heaven, or be converted, if he would come up to the pulpit, he would pray . . .for him. No person came for some time. At length a young man came, with tears in his eyes, and requested his prayers.--Some months after, this young man got converted. . .and declared this was a means in the hand of the Lord for his conviction and conversion.[30]

That Baptists helped to develop the invitation as we use it today is quite apparent. It is hard to determine

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29. Ibid., p. 203.

30. Ibid., p. 237.

which of these traditions--Methodist or Baptist--influenced the other. Probably it was an interaction of the two. At any rate, all of the trends that had begun even as far back as Jonathan Edwards came together in the Great Revival.

V. The Great Revival

The Great Revival was widespread. It encompassed both East and West. In this thesis the discussion will be limited to the revival in the West. In particular this section is concerned with the methods of camp meeting. It is hard to determine the exact origin of camp meetings. Claims have been made for dates as early as the days of the Revolution. It is generally accepted, however, that camp meetings developed in Kentucky under the ministry of the Presbyterians and Methodists around 1800.

It is necessary to have a description of the early revival scenes in order to see the developing use of the invitation. It would seem that out of the chaos of the early meetings, a proper use of the altar call was developed.

Richard McNemar gives an adequate description of a typical meeting.

> At first appearances those meetings exhibited nothing to the spectator but a scene of confusion that could scarce be put into human language. They were generally opened with a sermon, near the close of which there would be an unusual oratory; some bursting forth into loud ejaculations of prayer. . . others in. . . exhortation. . . others flying to careless friends with tears of compassion. . .

> some stirred with terror. . .others trembling, weeping. . .and swooning away. . .others surrounding them with melodious songs or fervent prayers. . .others collecting into circles around the variegated scene, contending with argument for or against. And under such appearances the work would continue for several days and nights together.[31]

As McNemar points out, there was no regard for formal rules of order.[32]

Two methods of dealing with those under conviction developed at this time. One was of a temporary nature, and really helped to prepare for the complete usage of the other. Since so many people were passing out, something had to be done with them. At first they were gathered into some convenient place where prayers were continued, songs were sung, and exhortations were given that they might give themselves to God.[33] This led to the second method which was the establishment of mourner benches or pens. A space was left open down at the front--either benches or just a penned area--where the mourners gathered to be prayed, sung, and exhorted for. The exact time of this development is in dispute, but it can be verified as early as 1810.[34]

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31. Richard McNemar, The Kentucky Revival (New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1846), p. 23.

32. Ibid., p. 22.

33. W. W. Woodward, Surprising Accounts of the Revival of Religion in the United States of America (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1802), p. 38.

34. Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting (Reference to letter of Francis Asbury, Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), p. 287.

Exhorters were used more and more during this period. These were generally lay preachers, but during the heights of emotional excesses even little children exhorted.[35] The ability to exhort was considered a gift. The exhorter was to "search out the sinner, convict him of sin, and warn him to fly from it. . ."[36] This grew to be a regular part of all services.

VI. Summary

This chapter has shown how the invitation was used by various groups down through the Great Revival. We have seen that it was an invitation to mourners, those who were seeking salvation, and not for salvation itself, at least in most instances.

The stage has now been set for the work of professional evangelists. A discussion of the invitation as used by professional evangelists will be given in the following chapter.

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35. Woodward, op. cit., p. 36.

36. McNemar, op. cit., p. 35.

CHAPTER IV

THE INVITATION AS USED BY PROFESSIONAL EVANGELISTS

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THE INVITATION AS USED BY PROFESSIONAL EVANGELISTS

I. Introduction

After the spread of the Great Revival, revival fires were kept burning almost continually, in all parts of the country. Protracted meetings were popular everywhere. John Leland writes of their popularity in Virginia around 1834.[1] These meetings made great use of the "anxious seat". This was novel and apparently spread rapidly from about 1820. It was first used at Grassy Creek, North Carolina, in 1825.[2] It was also popular in the Midwest around this same period of time.[3] Western New York was another area in which revivals were popular. It was here that professional evangelism received its start. Up until this time, revival preachers had for the most part been local pastors. Occasionally, an evangelist was imported, but he was usually from the next church field.

Charles Finney is usually credited with being the first professional evangelist. Certainly it is he who first made

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1. John Leland, The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), p. 31.

2. Robert I. Devin, A History of the Grassy Creek Baptist Church (Raleigh: Edwards, Broughton, and Company, 1880), p. 70.

3. Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), p. 70.

application of the new methods of evangelism to any great extent. However, there was another evangelist of the same period who made use of the "inquiring room" system, and fought bitterly the so called "new measures" of Finney. This was Asahel Nettleton.

II. Asahel Nettleton

Dr. Nettleton was a Presbyterian evangelist in western New York. He was in great demand by the leading ministers of his day. Nettleton considered himself to be following the proper tradition in evangelism, and was opposed to any innovations. He preached dynamic, soul-stirring sermons, but was loath to use public exhortations for the purpose of conviction. He worked in a very quiet manner, trying to avoid any unusual show of emotion. In order to do this, it was his custom to stage inquiry meetings for those who felt that they were ready for such an adventure. These meetings were planned so as to end quietly.

> This evening met those that were anxious, at Dr. M---'s. About thirty were present. As I commenced speaking to them in general, all were very still and solemn. . . After conversing with each one, we bowed the knee together at the throne of grace, and then in solemn stillness, retired at an early hour.[4]

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4. Bennett Tyler, Memoirs of the Life and Character of Reverend Asahel Nettleton (Boston: n.n., 1856), p. 100.

Not only was it his custom to send people home quietly from the inquirers' meeting, but he also sent people quietly away from the general services.

At least on one occasion Dr. Nettleton was forced to forsake his usual procedure. This was because of what he termed unusual circumstances. The public meeting was very crowded. He noticed that many of the anxious had gathered at the front near him.

> When I pronounced the benediction, I know not that a foot moved. . . People did not leave--They were crowded so closely together, that I could not pass among them to converse. So I spoke to one and another here and there at a distance, as I could catch their eyes. . . All were utter strangers. . . My only method of designation was by pointing and saying, I mean you, and you, or this sinner and that sinner. . . A number were converted this day.[5]

However, Nettleton generally followed a set pattern. He preached in the general service. This was closed with as quiet and reverent atmosphere as possible. He held meetings during the course of the revival. The pattern for the inquiry meeting was as follows. Dr. Nettleton opened the meeting with a short talk of a general nature that would be of benefit to all present. This was followed by a prayer. This prayer was usually very long and very fervent. Then he went to each person present and spoke to them privately in a very low voice. Following this, he gave another short address in line with what he had discussed

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5. Ibid., p. 108.

in talking with the people individually. Again, he had prayer and then he urged the anxious to go home and pray for themselves.[6]

Before leaving a church, Dr. Nettleton held yet a third type of meeting. This was a meeting for the examination of those who felt that they had been converted and desired church membership.[7]

As has already been stated, Nettleton was very much opposed to Finney's "New Measures." He felt that they were a throwback to another day, and brought shame on evangelism. He was greatly concerned.

> . . .that irregularities were prevailing to such an alarming extent, that the character of revivals had gone back half a century. And this I knew to be the sentiments of our best ministers. . . They were all deploring the introduction of these new measures into our churches, knowing that they were the same which ran out the revival in the days of Edwards. . .[8]

That Dr. Tyler was wrong in his supposition goes without saying. It is necessary to take a look at the "New Measures" of Finney. These measures certainly are an additional step in the development of the invitation.

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6. Ibid., pp. 214-15.

7. Ibid., p. 110.

8. Ibid., p. 269.

III. Charles G. Finney

Charles G. Finney was a lawyer before becoming a minister. He brought some of the tools of his former profession into the latter. He felt that new methods of evangelism were worth trying so long as they brought results. Actually, as we have seen, Finney was not in truth the originator of a public call to repentance. The opposition to him revolved, however, around his use of a method of public invitation known as the "anxious bench." There were other innovations that were equally condemned, but this particular one was taken as representative of all that Finney was doing.

A tract was written in 1844 which was bitterly opposed to the "New Measures": "The system in question is, in its principle and soul, neither Calvinism nor Lutherism, but Wesleyan Methodism."[9] So thundered Finney's opponents. That Methodists were using an altar call has already been seen, but certainly public invitations were not limited to the Methodists. The writer goes on to say:

> An Edwards might so preach the truth as to force his hearers from their seats and yet be no pattern whatever for those, who with design and calculation call in the device of "decision acts", as they are termed, to create a similar show of power.[10]

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9. John W. Nevin, The Anxious Bench (Chambersburg: n.n., 1844), p. vii.

10. Ibid., p. 57.

A description of the "decision acts" in process is given in this same tract.

> As usual, the hymn was started, "Come, humble sinner, etc.," and carried through, with pauses; in which sinners present were urged and pressed to seek their salvation by coming forward.[11]

The writer admitted that this coming forward was not accepted at once as conversion, "but still it is taken practically for something closely bordering on conversion."[12]

By going to Finney himself it can be seen just what he did contribute to the usage of the invitation.

In the first place, he made use of two methods in his invitations. He used them according to the situation at hand. In his Lectures on Revivals, he states that he at times used anxious meetings. At these meetings he would meet with those who were concerned for their souls and deal with them individually. Later they were given an opportunity to make public their decision for Christ. However, he came to rely more on the method of the anxious seat.

> By this is meant the appointment of some particular seat in the place of meeting, where the anxious may come and be addressed particularly, and be made subjects of prayer and sometimes be conversed with individually.[13]

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11. Ibid., p. 57.

12. Ibid., p. 76.

13. Charles G. Finney, Lectures on Revivals of Religion (Oberlin: n.n., 1868), p. 253.

Finney came to prefer this latter method for two reasons. He felt that it helped to break down pride, which is the basis of all sin, and secondly, it destroyed delusions and false hopes. By this he meant that a person would be certain of what he was doing before making a public spectacle of himself.[14]

This particular method did not come into use until later in Finney's ministry. However, it was foreshadowed in his first mission pastorate at Evan's Mill. He had preached exhaustively for days and nothing had happened. One night at the close of his sermon he said:

> Now I must know your minds, and I want you who have made up your minds to become Christians, and will give your pledge to make your peace with God immediately, should rise up; but that, on the contrary, those of you that will not become Christians. . .sit still.[15]

There was no response, but this was as expected. The shock, however, caused a great revival to break forth. From this time, Finney asked people to stand on occasions for prayer, but it was not until 1830 at a revival in Rochester, New York, that he first used the anxious seat.

> I had never, I believe, except in rare instances, until I went to Rochester, used as a means of promoting revivals, what has since been called the "anxious seat." I had sometimes asked persons in

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14. Loc. cit.

15. Charles G. Finney, Memoirs of Reverend Charles G. Finney (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1876), p. 63.

> the congregation to stand up, but this I had not frequently done. . . . I had often felt the necessity of some measure that would bring sinners to a stand. . . I had found also that something was needed to make the impression on them that they were expected at once to give up their hearts; something that would call them to act. . . that would commit them publicly to the service of Christ.
>
> A few days after the conversion of Mrs. M---, I made a call, I think for the first time, upon all that class of persons whose convictions were so ripe that they were willing to renounce their sins and give themselves to God, to come forward to certain seats which I had requested to be vacated, and offer themselves up to God, while we made them subjects of prayer.[16]

This is perhaps one of the first statements of a clear cut evangelistic invitation. From this time on, Finney often gave similar invitations. He often held a block of seats open at the front for those who were anxious. People in this state could come take their seats there before the services started.

In his Memoirs, Finney tells of a second visit to Rochester some years later. One night a judge came forward without an invitation having been given. Finney seized upon the opportunity.

> I publicly invited any, who were prepared to renounce their sins, and give their hearts to God, and to accept Christ and his salvation, to come forward, into the aisles, or wherever they could, and kneel down. There was a mighty movement.[17]

That this was something newly stated, if not completely new, we cannot deny. However, later professional evangelists

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16. Ibid., pp. 288-89.

17. Ibid., p. 361.

of note did not adopt this method wholesale. They selected portions of Finney's invitations, and it was left to the evangelist-pastor to make wide use of this method of public invitation.

IV. Dwight L. Moody

The next professional evangelist of note was Dwight L. Moody. In his method can be found traits of methods of both Nettleton and Finney. In addition, he makes some unique contributions of his own to evangelism.

The following information on Mr. Moody's invitation technique comes principally from newspaper accounts of a revival held in Louisville, Kentucky. This is held to be typical of Moody's type of work.

In the first days of the revival, although the tabernacle was packed to capacity, Mr. Moody did not give an invitation to the lost. Rather, he announced prayer services immediately following the preaching service.[18] In a sense this could be said to have been an invitation to prayer.

In his first invitation to the lost, Mr. Moody gave a call for those who so desired to join him in the inquirers room. As the song, "Just As I am" was sung, a large

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18. Courier-Journal, Undated clippings, Library of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

a large company retired to the nearby Presbyterian Church. There Moody gave a short exhortation. He then asked all who were Christians to rise. These were then told to look about them and start witnessing to those who were still seated. Moody, himself, went to work and soon the church was filled with personal testimony and pleading. Many souls were won. At the close of this service, Moody dismissed all but his core of workers, who remained for further training.[19]

This report in the newspaper reveals two contributions made to the invitation by Moody. The first is his use of singing. Singing had been used since the days of Wesley, but Moody brought the use of a soloist and choir into play. The soloist was in the person of Ira D. Sankey. It has been said that:

> Mr. Sankey's singing was as direct in its appeal to the individual as Mr. Moody's speaking. . . Often Mr. Moody's word would bring a sinner to the point of conviction, and the tender pathos of Mr. Sankey's singing would let a great flood of blessing into the sinners soul, and the softening influences would work until he would cry out in his joy, "I am saved!"[20]

The second new aspect is the use of personal workers. Moody believed in training people to serve as personal workers.[21] Both of these techniques have been utilized extensive-

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19. Ibid.

20. J. W. Chapman, The Life and Work of Dwight L. Moody (Louisville: Campbell and Clark, 1900), p. 134.

21. Gamliel Bradford, D. L. Moody, A Worker in Souls (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), p. 54.

ly in evangelism.

By examining some of Mr. Moody's invitations given at Louisville, it can be seen that he tried to bring home commitment and response on the part of his audience.

> "Harlot, you are invited; drunkard, come and drink; moral man, God calls you; gambler, here is your chance; dishonest man, have your sins blotted out. Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely. God make you willing. We pass the cup of salvation. You are a free agent. You can reject it, you can say, 'I don't want rest; I don't want water; I don't want salvation.' You can do it."
>
> "I'll tell you another thing. You can take it and live. What will you do? What will you do? 'I'll take it,' said a little boy. 'That's right, my son, God bless you. . .' Oh, young man, I plead with you, cross the line to Christ. Let us bow our heads in silent prayer."
>
> Mr. Moody prayed, and while all heads were yet bowed, Mr. Sankey sang, 'Only a Step to Jesus, Why not take it now?' Mr. Moody invited all the unconverted to meet him at the inquiry meeting in the church. A great many went to the inquiry room, and forty-one took a stand for God.[22]

That Moody also made use of methods similar to those of Finney is apparent in his Louisville revival. At a meeting for women only:

> . . . Mr. Moody called for those wishing prayer in their behalf to rise, and over eighty stood up. The meeting was closed with prayer and singing of several hymns. The inquiry meeting followed at Warren Memorial Presbyterian Church, and was largely attended.[23]

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22. Courier-Journal, Ibid.

23. Ibid.

At a meeting conducted at a downtown theatre, Mr. Moody said:

> "I promised not to bore you with a long sermon. If there's any man here who wants to be prayed for, let him stand up. Don't be afraid."
>
> Many arose. Moody began to count with exhortations between counts. One hundred ten finally stood up.
>
> After prayer, the audience was dismissed and another hymn was sung by Mr. Sankey, and those who had risen were requested to assemble in the parquette, where Mr. Moody, Mr. Holcomb, and others talked with them.[24]

All of the elements used in invitations by later evangelists are based in the work of Moody and Finney.

V. Billy Sunday

In general Billy Sunday followed the Moody pattern. His sermons were simple and to the point. He made great use of singing in preparation for the service and in the closing moments as an invitation. However, he differed from Moody in that he sought public decisions in the general meeting. His actual invitation varied during his career, as will be seen, but basically, it was always a call to hit the "Sawdust Trail."

The term "sawdust trail" was early attached to Billy Sunday's name. It grew out of his great revivals in the Northwest. Here he was addressing woodsmen who understood what he meant by "hitting the trail." At the conclusion of

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24. Ibid.

his sermon, Sunday would give an invitation for all who wanted to come out on the side of Christ to come forward and grasp his hand. Robertson, his song leader, would begin to sing. The musical invitation would continue as long as people poured down the aisles.[25] The invitation as given by Sunday was usually not very long, but the appeal was pressurized.

> "You know that God has spoken to you. You know that without Christ you are lost, and that with him you are saved. . .and now without another word from me, and before anyone can have a chance to say anything to you, how many of you will settle the great question without the delay of another minute, by coming forward to take me by the hand, and by doing so confess and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? Who will come?"[26]

In the first years of his career, Sunday would wait quietly after having extended an invitation for those in need to come forward. After the first rush was over, and the stream seemed to be slowing down, he made use of a new method. He would send his personal workers out into the audience. Many more would then come. Again, as a lull would come, he would signal the choir and the musical invitation would begin. After all had come that would do so, Sunday would give an exhortation to those who had come, and then the personal workers would have them sign commitment and church preference cards.[27]

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25. William T. Ellis, Billy Sunday, the Man and His Message (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1914), pp. 161-64.

26. Elijah P. Brown, The Real Billy Sunday (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), p. 146.

27. Ibid., p. 147.

The commitment card shows that Sunday made the act of "coming forward" synonymous with the act of salvation. This remained true even after his invitation fell into wild excesses during the late years of his career.

> Dear Friend: You have by this act of coming forward publicly acknowledged your faith in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. No one could possibly be more rejoiced that you have done this, or be more anxious for you to succeed, and get the most joy and service out of the Christian life than I. . .[28]

As has already been mentioned, toward the end of his career, Billy Sunday made a farce of his invitations. There are many illustrations of this of which two have been chosen. In the first, Sunday was speaking to a congregation that was composed of a great number of railroad men. As he extended his invitation, he grabbed a green lantern and began to shout, "A clear track ahead!" He then picked up a white flag, used by railroads, and waved it throughout the invitation as he pleaded for the railroaders to come and shake his hand.[29]

Another illustration is taken from an invitation given during the New York crusade. This was during World War I. It was in this period, and following, that his invitations came to be almost synonymous with being a patriotic American.

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28. Ibid., p. 159.

29. Ellis, op. cit., p. 165f.

> Do you want God's blessing on you, your home, your church, your Nation, or New York? If you do, raise your hands. . . How many of you men and women will jump to your feet and come down and say, 'Bill, here's my hand for God, for home, for my native land, to live and conquer for Christ?'[30]

Almost two thousand people came forward on this invitation. Personal workers had them sign commitment cards, but as can be seen, the invitation was much less than a pure call to Christ.

Stripped of its excesses, the invitation, as used by Billy Sunday, is the same used by many pastors of the Southern Baptist convention. This is not to say that Sunday was the originator of this type of invitation.

VI. Billy Graham

Billy Graham has brought all the techniques of professional evangelism to their flower. He uses both a public commital and the inquiry room. He uses well trained personal workers. The entire service is planned and controlled from the moment of its beginning to the final prayer.

Graham is committed to the use of the invitation by his philosophy of evangelism. "Evangelism is not evangelism until you have gotten a man to decide one way or the other."[30]

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30. William G. McLaughlin, Jr., Billy Sunday Was His Real Name (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. XXU.

31. Billy Graham, "Address on Evangelism", mimeographed by the Public Relations Department, Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, December 9, 1953, p. 31.

With this as his motif, Graham tries to make invitations straightforward. He feels that the people should know why they are coming forward.

To give, in an overall way, the basic appeal of the invitation of Graham, one can probably do no better than that given in a brochure prepared in London.

> Billy Graham appeals to people to get right with God. He declares that all are sinners, that God has provided through His Son a way of salvation. God will forgive and restore all who "come to Christ." All who respond to the invitations that he gives are passed on to the churches to be taught and trained in the Christian way of life.[32]

The invitation is varied as to pattern from time to time but not as to content. He at times asks for a show of hands, before asking the people to come forward. Almost invariably, he requests that all heads be bowed in prayer throughout the invitation. "Each address concludes with a plea for personal commitment of heart and life to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."[33]

A typical invitation scene is described quite vividly in Time magazine.

> Most crucial and moving part of every evening's preaching is the "invitation"--when Graham calls for those moved to commit their lives to Christ to come forward to the platform. The moment is carefully planned: "When asked to bow your head

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32. Arthur H. Chapple, Billy Graham, (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Ltd.), p. 16.

33. Frank Colquhoun, Harringgay Story, (London: Hodden and Stoughton, 1955), p. 98.

and close eyes, do so," say the mimeographed instructions to counselors. "Then open your eyes and watch as unnoticeably as possible. . . Watch for those of your own sex and age who are responding, and accompany them to the front. . . DO NOT BLOCK THE AISLE AT ANY TIME." Graham's words now vary little, from evening to evening, and he delivers them hunched forward over the lectern--tensely, urgently, often a trifle hoarsely:

"I am going to ask you to do something that I've seen people do all over the world. I've seen the congressman, the governor, the film star. I've seen lords and ladies. I've seen professors. I'm going to ask everyone of you tonight to say: 'Billy, I will give myself to Christ, as Savior and Lord. I want to be born again. I want a new life in Christ. I want to be a new creation in Christ tonight. I'm willing to come to the Cross in repentance.' If you say that, I'm going to ask you to do a hard thing. Nothing easy. The appeal of Communism today partially is because it's a hard thing. They demand great things. Jesus demanded no less.

"I'm going to ask everyone of you to get up out of your seat--over here, in the balcony, everywhere--and come quietly and reverently. I don't want a person to leave the Garden, not one person. I'm not asking you to join a church tonight. I am not asking you to come to some particular denomination. I am asking you that need Christ, your heart is hungry for Christ.

"You may be a deacon, or an elder, I don't know. You may be a Sunday School teacher. You may be a choir member. You may be an usher, but you need Christ tonight. Young men, young women, father, mother, whoever you are, come right now. Just get up out of your seat and come now. Quickly right now, from everywhere you come, from up in the balcony, all around, up here, back there. All of you that are coming, come right now, we're going to wait. You come on now."[34]

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34. "God in the Garden", Time, 69:46-48, May 27, 1957.

VII. Summary

In the work of the five evangelists discussed above developing lines of the invitation can be seen. All of them used a type of invitation. Through their collective usage the "coming forward" of an individual has come to be thought of as synonymous with the conversion experience. Singing also has come to be closely associated with the evangelistic invitation.

It would also be noted that all of these have made some attempt to conserve the results of their labors. This has developed from the rudimentary inquirers' meeting to the almost professional follow-up of a Billy Graham Crusade.

CHAPTER V

THE EXPANDED INVITATION AS USED BY THE PASTOR-EVANGELIST

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I. Introduction

In this chapter the invitation as used today among Southern Baptists will be set forth. This will be done by observing how the invitation has been used by well-known pastor-evangelists; giving attention to the variety of invitations used today; and finally giving a composite picture of the typical pastor-evangelist of the Southern Baptist Convention. In these latter two sections the material will by necessity be drawn from observation, conversation, and personal experience as a pastor-evangelist.

II. Outstanding Pastor-Evangelists

There is no attempt to be exhaustive in this undertaking. The writer has chosen at random three men who are quite well known to Southern Baptists. Two of these have passed away in recent years. One of them is still active in the pastorate.

George Washington Truett. George W. Truett had a long and successful career as pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas. Truett was recognized nation-wide as an outstanding evangelist, and had the privilege of preaching in most of the population centers of our nation.

Truett gave many and varied appeals during his ministry. Primarily, he dwelt upon invitations for salvation.

> What shall I say to souls here who are ashamed of Christ? Can it be that such are here? . . . Remember you must do something with him. You must do one of two things with him. You must accept him as your personal Savior, or reject him. You must confess him or deny him. You must be for him or against him . . . No third course concerning him is possible. Oh, come to him, without further delay. Publicly register your unreserved surrender to him, to be your Savior and Master, today and forevermore. Let your hearts give their unreserved "Yes" to be expressed by your public confession of him even now as we sing our closing hymn.[1]

As can be seen in this invitation, Dr. Truett pressed for an immediate response. To walk forward to such an invitation was synonymous with having accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

A second type of invitation given by Dr. Truett was an invitation to prayer. This was an invitation which was often given at the first services of an evangelistic campaign.

> "Do you wish for God to revive you and this church and His people here just as He wishes to do? Do you men and women here tonight wish Him to send you that quickening of conscience, that renewal of strength, that restoring of the joy of salvation, that will help you to do what He asks at your hands? Do you wish that? Do you wish a revival here, just like He wishes it? What say your hearts? Answer honestly, and we are ready to be dismissed. Every man and woman here who answers back from the heart, 'Before God, I do, tonight, go on record, with. . .

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1. George W. Truett, Follow Thou Me (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1932), p. 70.

> His eye upon me, and in the sight of men, that I wish Him to come during these quiet meetings, and absolutely have His way with me and with these meetings,' will now, in this solemn moment, quietly signify such wish by standing."[2]

This is an invitation which is often used today. It is one of a great variety that has grown out of the basic evangelistic invitation, and, as such, must be considered a part of the developing evangelistic invitation.

A third type of invitation given by Dr. Truett is something of a hodgepodge. It seems to be rather typical of many invitations that are extended even today.

> "Now what about your homes? Is Christ Master there? He alone can enable you to be all that parents ought to be. . .
>
> Is someone listening to me who says: 'I am a church member, but my membership is somewhere else'? You are making it harder for every church in town to witness for Christ. . . Are you here, man or woman, with your church membership elsewhere? You are a resident now of this city. Come with us and welcome. . . Who says 'I am a detached church member, but I will be detached no longer. I will present my letter or I will have you get my letter upon my statement'? . . . Who says: 'Yes, I am coming' as we sing our hymn?"
>
> (Two stanzas later)
>
> "Who says today: 'I want to follow Christ; I want to come and link my life openly with this church and this people; I want to attend to the duty of obeying Christ'? Who says, 'I have never joined the church, but I have trusted Christ and out of my

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2. George W. Truett, We Would See Jesus and Other Sermons (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915), pp. 52-3.

> secret discipleship with Christ, I come'? . . . Is it in your heart to come? Then come as we sing."[3]

In this invitation, we see at least two separate invitations, and possibly three. There is an appeal for the moving of church membership. There is an appeal for profession of faith, and there is implied, at least, an appeal for for rededication.

From these invitations of Truett, something of how the invitation is used by many ministers today can be seen.

John R. Sampey. Dr. John R. Sampey was not, strictly speaking, a pastor-evangelist. He was President of Southern Baptist Seminary for some years.

In general, Dr. Sampey's invitations were similar to those of Dr. Truett as illustrated above. He is included in this survey because of a particular type of invitation of which he made great use. As far as can be ascertained, this was a unique invitation to him, and no one else, at least of note, has used it.

Dr. Sampey described this invitation in an article in The Watchman-Examiner entitled "A Baptist Confessional." In this article, he describes a very broad invitation which he extended at the close of evangelistic services.

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3. George W. Truett, The Prophet's Mantle (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1948), p. 40.

He invited people to come to the front during the invitation hymn and say to him whatever the Holy Spirit prompted them to say. He especially urged the confession of sins. This invitation was given to Christians and unsaved alike. They were to come to the front and unburden their hearts in confession. The people were assured that none would know what was being confessed except God, Dr. Sampey, and the confessor. Dr. Sampey states that such an invitation was well received, and that he had opportunity to lead the unsaved to Christ, and to direct Christians back to the path of forgiveness, assurance, and joy.[4]

This invitation encompasses the multitude of invitations that are in use today.

Robert G. Lee. Dr. Robert G. Lee has been pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, for almost half a century. He is a well-known evangelist.

Dr. Lee considers the invitation to be one of the most important parts of any service. In a personal letter to the writer, Dr. Lee sets forth some of his feeling toward and uses of the invitation. The essence of this letter is as follows:

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4. John R. Sampey, "A Baptist Confessional," The Watchman-Examiner, Vol. 33, June 28, 1945.

> I have given an invitation at every service--and I have done so for forty years, and more. Sometimes, I feel like giving an invitation at Deacons' meeting.
>
> I ask people to "come forward" if they will accept Christ, with repentance toward God, and publicly declare this repentance and faith.
>
> Then I ask people who have gotten cold and critical or lukewarm in their lives, who are tired of such life and will make known their purpose to live a brighter and better life to say so before all. Then I invite people who are already Christians and need to come by church letter or promise of a letter to come and unite with the church. Prayer is always had for all.
>
> . . . A preacher must give the invitation as though destinies depended upon it--life or death.

From the above letter, we can see that Dr. Lee uses a number of different invitations. In all of them he asks for a public commitment. His invitations are usually well spoken and drive to the point of decision. They are comparatively short, which is quite a contrast to the length of the rest of the sermon. This sample communicates the sense of urgency spoken of above.

> "What will you do with this superlative Christ who is the spirit of prophecy and the supreme and sufficient sacrifice of its redemptive play--'The stronghold of its integrity, the standard of its precepts, the strong rock foundation of its verity'?
>
> "What will you do with him whose resources cannot be impoverished by any degree of expenditure, who is always the verity of God's truth, the beauty of God's holiness, the purity of God's nature, the reality of God's love, the surety of God's promise, the majesty of God's power, the

> authority of God's throne, the pity of God's heart, the repository of God's fullness, the legacy of God's will?
>
> "Do the right thing, the loving thing, the trusting thing with him.
>
> "Make the decision that turns darkness into sunshine, sadness into joy, despair into hope, shame into glory, defeat into victory, bad unto good, death unto life. NOW--RIGHT NOW! ACCEPT HIM NOW!"[5]

III. Varieties of Invitations

There are numerous and sundry ways to give an invitation. F. D. Whitesell has written a book which gives a number of them.[6] In this section, however, the writer is not so concerned with techniques of invitation as with the aim of the invitation.

In personal experience the writer has met with certain basic invitations as to aim regardless of what particular dress they happened to have at that given moment.

The first, and it needs no description, is the invitation to the lost to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

A second is an appeal to join the church. This invitation is often, in fact, closely associated with the first. However, it might be an appeal to confess what is already in the heart.

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5. Robert G. Lee, The Sinner's Savior (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1950), p. 137.

6. F. D. Whitesell, Sixty-five Ways to Give Evangelistic Invitations (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945).

A third is an invitation to move a church letter. This is a basic appeal in a Southern Baptist Church.

A fourth invitation is an appeal for a person to rededicate his life. This is usually addressed to those in a "back-slidden" condition.

A fifth invitation, and very close to the last mentioned, is a call to consecration. This is an appeal for a commitment to Christ on a higher level.

A sixth invitation is made on a vocational level. Formerly, this was a call to full-time Christian service. Today, however, it is not unusual to hear an appeal for commitment of life in whatever vocation one feels to be the will of God.

A seventh invitation is based on an appeal for a Christian home. This might take very different forms, but all point to a dedication of home and family life.

An eighth invitation is based on the stewardship life of the church member. This is usually an appeal to tithing or to support the church budget.

These are basic invitations that are given today. All of these grew out of the evangelistic invitation which we have already traced.

IV. A Composite Picture

The writer has discussed the invitation with many Southern Baptist ministers. On the basis of these conversations and observations over a period of years it seems that the

typical Baptist minister gives an invitation at every service. Usually this is an evangelistic invitation.

In general, the call for salvation is accepted as being synonymous with church membership. It is sometimes thus stated with the invitation really being one to join the church. It is almost always implied.

The typical pastor gives a number of different kinds of invitations at normal morning service. Based on the writer's own experience and observation of others, these are not always clearly stated, nor even given separately. They are usually issued in such a fashion so as to confuse rather than help to guide a person to the point of decision.

As to technique, the standard form is to extend the invitation and then use an invitational hymn as a further invitation. This is backed up by exhortations by the pastor between stanzas.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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I. Summary

This thesis has sought to show the development of the evangelistic invitation. This has been done by: first, showing the milieu which made the invitation possible; second, giving a brief history of the early types of invitations; third, discussing the invitation as used by professional evangelists; and last, by examining the contemporary use of the invitation.

The climate for the evangelistic invitation was made possible by the changing emphasis from institutional salvation to that of individualistic salvation. This change was precipitated by the preaching of John Wesley, George Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards. Wesley preached free grace and the freedom of choice. Whitefield and Edwards, especially the latter, personalized Calvinism to the point that it was almost a cry of "whosoever." Both emphases demanded an individual experience of salvation.

From this milieu, the use of a public invitation evolved. It was not a sudden transformation of technique, but rather one step led to another almost unconsciously. At first, as scattered shots against the darkness, invitations were given for those who were concerned for their souls' salvation to

make this known. Meetings for inquirers were announced. Eventually, what would be designated as "altar calls" were given. These developments are found in the tradition of the Methodists and Separatist Baptists principally. Then in the Great Revival the scattered shots were brought together into a pattern and the invitation became a part of every service. Opposition was given to the so called "New Measures" for many more years, but from this time the invitation was an accepted part of the preaching service.

Professional evangelists have done much to influence the development of the invitation. Asahel Nettleton made great use of the inquiry room. This technique was adopted and refined by Dwight L. Moody, and has been further developed by Billy Graham of this day. Charles G. Finney asked for public decisions for Christ by the use of the "anxious seat". Today a public invitation is used by the majority of great evangelists although they also incorporate the use of an inquiry room as a follow up measure. Dwight L. Moody introduced gospel singing as a means of invitation. This was further developed by Billy Sunday, and is considered a part of every invitation period today.

A discussion of the invitation as it is used today by outstanding pastor-evangelists, and as it is used by a typical pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention is included. There are endless patterns followed in giving the invitation today. These seem to reduce to eight basic

types which range from the initial call to be a Christian to a variety that cover every aspect of a committed Christian life. The typical pastor uses some form of the invitation at every service.

Thus it can be seen that the invitation was a slowly developing aspect of evangelism. Today it is not only an accepted, but an expected part of the service of a typical Baptist church. It has evolved from a milieu which cried for action to a respectable place in evangelistic activity.

II. Conclusion

Based upon the material presented in this thesis, the writer has come to five basic conclusions.

(1) The idea and subsequently the fact of the invitation evolved from a theological climate. It was not thought out as such and presented as a course of action to be adopted into the program of the church.

(2) The idea, once born, eventually gave rise to the invitation as we know it today, but not without a long process of development and refinement. It developed along the line of the mutation theory of evolution. Something totally new was injected from time to time which gave sustenance to the idea.

(3) In its present day usage the basic form used is that given to us by professional evangelists. This is per-

haps because of their fame, and ministers naturally desiring to be like them, and certainly because of their success. This is not to say that the typical minister today is a little Sunday or Graham, but it is to say that he uses a basic pattern that was developed by the professional evangelists.

(4) Invitations are often misused today. Most Southern Baptist ministers use an invitation at every service. Often the invitation given is an evangelistic one even when the minister knows that no lost person is present. There has been a tendency to equate church membership with salvation by the average pastor. This seems to be changing in the more recent years. It is felt by the writer that invitations are often not clearly stated and serve to confuse rather than help a person who is faced with decision.

(5) The paucity of material available on this important subject indicates the need for a thorough study of the invitation. This study needs to be more than historical. It needs to be a study of the invitation as used today. Books of sermons seldom include the invitation. Church records show only the results of the invitation. This thesis has only scratched the surface of what needs to be done in this field.

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