

## A Critique Of “Functional Services In Relation To The Central Task Of Evangelism”

---

*Donald F. Ebright  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois*

This paper reveals a wide reading and a wrestling with a profound topic. With Prof. Jackson’s statement on page three, I can agree that the problem of functional services “to the central task of evangelism is universally recognized and universally resolved.” But while we agree at this point there will be many of us who differ with the basic theme of this paper. If we look at the pattern of Jesus we will see that as long as there is one needy man in need of a cup of cold water, there will be the need for functional services.

We can range our attitudes concerning the relationship of functional services to the central task of evangelism in some such form:

1. Some missionaries would confront people with Christ to the end that they may believe and be saved from an evil world. This is called “preaching for a Verdict.” It reduces education and medical aid to a bare minimum, I saw this type of missionary at work in the floods at Balliah, India, where a “faith mission” group was distributing tracts to the destitute and criticized our very worldly Methodist-Presbyterian team for taking only food and clothing to the flood area. While this group is on the decline, it is an attitude that dominates the programs of a number of societies.

*First Fruits*  
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

2. Others would say: "Proclaim the Lordship of Christ, both to help individuals find 'life' and establish Christian churches in every land." This is an institutional interest. It is widespread and characterizes the majority of "old-line" Protestant denominations. It represents much Roman Catholic enterprise. Functional services are a necessary part of demonstrating the Lordship of Christ over all the earth.

3. A third group would define functional service relationships with the central task of evangelism as expressing through hospitals, schools and orphanages the discipleship of the Christian who supports and participates in missionary programs. This is the motive of most laymen. "It is a good thing to provide a clinic and establish scholarships."

4. Another group would make the ethical principles which are implicit in the Christian Gospel operative in the lives of men and societies, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God."

5. At the far end of the scale would be the complete humanist who saw in education and medicine ends in themselves.

But whatever our stand we must not consider functional services as demonstrations to "win non-Christians." The Church exists as a Church only in the act of sharing its life; this includes both faith and love, both among its members and with those not members. The Church exists as His instrument – functioning as teacher, preacher, healer, welfare worker, caring for human beings regardless of their education, character or station in life. If the Church does not share its life beyond itself it is lacking in the very thing which constitutes a Church, namely, the love of Christ. For the love of Christ exists by giving itself without concern for profit or gain. Thus we share our medical skills, agricultural effectiveness and education that Christian love may be expressed.

It is obvious the functional services are essential to the central task of evangelism. In fact, there is a danger in suggesting separation. The separation of functional services and evangelism gives rise to the evil of "spiritualizing" the Christian world mission under a cloak of selfishness. We may affirm that we are not sent into the world to share because we are commissioned to share a greater treasure, "our Christ." This can lead to smugness. We retain the fruits of functional services [literacy, a

refrigerator, and station wagon] but we will share Christ. Hence the old criticism: “the white man brought the Bible but took our land.” We can tell the Good News by giving one cup of cold water in His name.



*First Fruits*  
THE ACADEMIC OPEN PRESS OF ASBURY SEMINARY

THIS PUBLICATION IS NOT TO BE USED FOR COMMERCIAL PURPOSES.  
FREELY AVAILABLE FOR EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH USE.