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Jeffrey Barlow
Pacific University

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Jeffrey Barlow

An Editorial Review

This is a relatively old book intended to introduce highly evangelical Christians to the use of the web as a tool for proselytism. We review it less as a book to be read by others, though it may indeed be useful to some, than for what it tells us about religion on the web.

Religion and the WWW is not a new topic for us.¹ One of our most popular book reviews---as indicated by the fact that the traffic crashed our server when it was "digged" shortly after we posted it--- was Peter D. Hershock's work, *Reinventing the Wheel: A Buddhist Response to the Information Age*.²

We cannot recommend this book for a wide audience simply because it is deliberately intended for a rather narrow one: Christian evangelicals who wish to learn to use the web to proselytize. The book came out of a 2005 conference, "Internet Evangelism for the 21st Century" at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia on web evangelism. The book incorporates, fairly directly, the transcripts of 21 workshops held at the conference and presented by well-known Internet evangelists.

The book is edited by Henrich, though it might be considered to have been written by him more than edited; he is clearly the guiding light among the Internet evangelists. He has a great deal of experience as a consultant as well as a practitioner, apparently largely within college environments.

The audience for the conference was primarily evangelical Christians, whom many might consider to be among the most conservative of Americans. The blend of traditional protestant religious approaches and references to the WWW is very interesting. The book is a fascinating one because it is evident that this conference indicated a sort of turning point for many evangelicals, perhaps the first time they were exposed to practitioners who had successfully used the Web. As the transcripts show, many participants had a certain amount of resistance to the idea of electronic evangelism. Evangelism, especially in these particular

¹ Fair disclosure: If asked (usually while teaching in China) what my religious beliefs might be, I reply that I am a Christian or a Buddhist on alternate days. I have occasionally subbed for the ministers in my local United Methodist church and attended Buddhist rites in China, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam as well as in the U.S.

² See the latter half of a review article which leads off with a work irrelevant to this discussion at: <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/article.php?id=185>

churches, has long been extremely personal and very face-to-face in its approach³. Growing up in Southern Illinois, in a largely rural area, I was exposed to many touring tent evangelists and always found, regardless of how I felt about any particular theological message, that the preachers had a very sharp understanding of their audience which depended on their ability to quickly “read” participants in a brief personal meeting.

The big tent message seemed to me to serve primarily to permit the preachers to identify audience members who might be further cultivated, for religious purposes, of course. It would have been impossible for me to imagine at the time that anything resembling the World Wide Web might one day be viewed by such preachers as a useful tool.

The churches at that time (1950's) tended not to make a very good use of even film. Touring religious films were not unusual, but often had very low production values featuring biblical spectacles, such as the flood, the mass drowning of pursuing Egyptians, or the destruction of Sodom. The newspapers ads, as often as not, featured Eve en route to the Fall, her offending bits artfully concealed by fig leaves, apples, or a serpent.

These films were what Hollywood disparagingly called, “Four Wallers for the Goon Trade,” meaning films which were distributed through an area almost simultaneously and for which tickets were often sold to church groups.⁴ A recent much more sophisticated---and highly successful--- example of a religious film, of course, was Mel Gibson's “The Passion of the Christ.”⁵

The primary media tool of evangelicals in the U.S. was first the radio, at which many were adept. A common approach was to blend American folk music, not always of the religious sort, with their messages. Later, of course, evangelicals took with equal success and fervor to Television.

³ For a useful discussion of McLuhan's distinction pertinent to this piece, see *Bob's Blog* at <http://bobington.blogspot.com/2007/02/hot-and-cold-media.html>

⁴ In 1979 a very successful film, “The Jesus Film,” was very effectively used, particularly in evangelizing abroad. Some credit this single film for most of the conversions made in the developing world since that date. See the project site at: <http://www.jesusfilm.org/>

⁵ There is a very thorough Wikipedia article on this film found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Passion_of_the_Christ As it is largely about the making of the film and the controversies around it, it may be of limited utility for many readers. We have to hope that such details as the statement that the assistant director was twice struck by lightning while filming in Italy are both true and irrelevant in a theological sense.

When compared to either radio or television, however, the Internet seems a much “colder” medium.⁶ Too, as the Internet has developed, it has come with a great deal of baggage, including pornography and other content which the fundamentalist Christians view as extremely degraded and sinful. The impact of such content on Christian youth is a particular concern, of course.

For evangelicals to even consider going onto the WWW then, is a really remarkable development which runs counter to their traditions of face-to-face proselytizing as well as requiring the use of what is sometimes thought of as Satan’s sharpest new tool.⁷

As the book makes clear, however, the evangelical churches, like the older “mainline” denominations were, at the time of the conference in 1995, suffering substantial losses in memberships. This was particularly true among younger Christians, and overall the number of un-churched Americans was growing very rapidly.

This problem was most usually presented in the work as a sort of cultural gap; the Boomer generation making up most congregations were beginning to encounter Gen-X youth who were much less interested in formal church membership than they were interested in the Internet.

It seems from the presenters at the conference that the use of the Internet for evangelizing began on college campuses, particularly with the Campus Crusade for Christ. It has frequently been the case in American history that progressive religious movements have begun on campuses. These college congregations produced a number of electronic evangelists, who then worked into more established organizations, such as the Billy Graham Crusade, from which several of the presenters also came.

On balance, the book represents many of the most notable practitioners of digital evangelism and serves as a very useful introduction to the important issues facing them. Again we can see the widespread impact of the Internet on a niche audience.

⁶ For a useful discussion of McLuhan’s distinction between hot and cold media pertinent to this piece, see *Bob’s Blog* at <http://bobington.blogspot.com/2007/02/hot-and-cold-media.html>

⁷ See a discussion to this point on “My Digital Life” at: http://www.mydigitallife.co.za/index.php?option=com_myblog&show=2331&Itemid=29. Clearly this is sometimes tongue in cheek though the original posting seems sincere.

Many of the conference panels were addressed to very basic issues such as how to optimize page views, effectively use Google key words, developing podcasts (“Godcasts”), religiously themed blogs, chat rooms and other media formats. The speakers are, in some cases, confrontational with the local audience as they try to overcome established evangelical opinions, which they frankly challenge as prejudicial ones.

There is certainly a pronounced preacherly or evangelical style to the discussions. A common opening to the pieces, which are as much transcripts of an oral event as prepared papers, is a confessional one. Here the presenter offers up his or her past evil behavior, relates seemingly miraculous cures, and other tropes of American evangelical Protestantism. There are very few female voices, and seemingly no Catholic ones. But among the group are very sophisticated techies, some of whom are quite familiar with very advanced forms of digital communications, and all of whom are highly committed both to their digital congregations and to their shared religious views.

Who should read this book? Anyone interested in maximizing their electronic audiences for their web pages or other digital media would find many of the examples utilized here very useful, though there may be many culturally more comfortable ways of securing the same information on the web or through mainstream publications. Other audiences may find the tone and content of the book off-putting. But it is fascinating to see the impact of the Web upon that old time religion, and eye opening to see the great technical sophistication as well as the high level of tolerance of these electronic evangelicals.

However, the 21st century could be the greatest moment of the Church. 2. four trends that pose a challenge to christian evangelism page 4 of 8. 5 A. UNCONTROLLED URBANIZATION By 2000AD: people (about three times the number of people living at the dawn of the 20th century.Â The Challenges of Evangelism Sharing your faith in the 21 st Century Definitions What is Evangelism? Evangelism, definitions of: zealous preaching and dissemination of the gospel, as through missionary. More information.Â Ecumenical Vision: Perspectives of Indonesian Seminaries Daniel Nuhamara 1 Introduction Historically the churches and seminaries in Indonesia have been very closely related, mutually benefiting from each. More information. This timeline of antisemitism chronicles the facts of antisemitism, hostile actions or discrimination against Jews as a religious or ethnic group, in the 21st century. It includes events in the history of antisemitic thought, actions taken to combat or relieve the effects of antisemitism, and events that affected the prevalence of antisemitism in later years. The history of antisemitism can be traced from ancient times to the present day. They'll get % off too. Evangelism in the 21st Century. By. Verdade na PrÃ¡tica.Â This has also permeated several Christian communities, and upon a continent that is in the midst of slowly replacing its Christian heritage for more humanistic principles, I believe that the church must strive to understand this dynamic period in which we live. This can only occur if the faithful seek to reaffirm the power of Scriptural decrees, in order to regain ground and lift a prophetic dedicated to guiding this generation back to Christ. In order to achieve this objective, we must be prepared, as Christians, to engage in thought provoking debates in the proper arenas, such as schools, co Dan Henrich is a mediastrategy consultant who has been working in this field for over 20 years. He is currently works on a number of entertainment-education media projects in Asia. Henrich served as a media consultant in the Middle East, China, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Kenya since 1982.Â The book came out of a 2005 conference, "Internet Evangelism for the 21st Century" at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia on web evangelism. The book incorporates, fairly directly, the transcripts of 21 workshops held at the conference and presented by well-known Internet evangelists. On balance, the book represents many of the most notable practitioners of digital evangelism and serves as a very useful introduction to the important issues facing them.