



Soul Development

by Jonathan Aitken

ONE OF THE TOUGHEST CALLS in 21st-century evangelism is how to reach out to nominal believers and non-believers who are doing so well in the materialistic world that they don't have much inclination for the spiritual world. I feel I understand the position of such people because I used to be one of them. For most of my adult life I was at best a half-Christian, which I now know is about as much use as being half-pregnant. The disciplines of the spiritual life such as prayer, meditation, Bible reading, and church going were so low on my agenda that if I ever engaged in them at all it was in an uncommitted, semi-detached frame of mind. I did not begin to understand the great truth so well expressed by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: "The meaning of earthly existence lies not, as we have grown used to thinking, in our prosperity but in the development of our souls."

But how do prosperous and successful people find the path to development of the soul? One route, increasingly popular in the U.S. business community, is through what is called small group ministry. This means creating a peer group whose members feel sufficiently comfortable with each other that they become willing to exchange spiritual confidences and conversation. The essential ingredients

in such a gathering are the right people and the right tools. In an ideal Christian atmosphere the Bible is the supreme tool of evangelism. Yet using it the way preachers do can be a turnoff. So a wise peer group of businessmen often prefers to enlarge the feeling of mutual confidence by engaging in more subtle pre-evangelism activity in the form of structured discussions that need to be interesting, relevant, and relational.

I recently took part in two evenings of such discussions in Edinburgh, Scotland. The event was run by the Trinity Forum (TTF), an organization that has been successfully reaching out to business leaders with faith-based curricula for some 15 years. This particular curriculum, which carried the title *Doing Well and Doing Good*, was all about money, motivation, giving, and caring. The peer group that had assembled to study it consisted of lawyers, accountants, company directors, and entrepreneurs running their own businesses. The moderator or principal guide to the curriculum was the Hon. Alonzo McDonald, one of the original founders of TTF who for many years had been CEO of McKinsey Worldwide.

Most of TTF's curricula were compiled by Dr. Os Guinness, the well-known author and specialist in

Christian apologetics. *Doing Well and Doing Good* was exceptionally challenging. It took our group through the three major views of money in ancient civilizations. The Greeks, who believed in common ownership; the Romans in absolute individual ownership; and the Judeo-Christian tradition that ownership is God's while stewardship is ours. Al McDonald sent frissons through his well-heeled hearers by analyzing a famous short story by Tolstoy "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

The gist of it is that prosperous Pahom, the anti-hero of the story, gets a chance to add to his property portfolio by taking part in a land race. He is allowed to keep all the land he can run round in a single day between sunrise and sunset. As his day's journey progresses, Pahom extends his route to take in extra fields and estates. His greed and exhaustion eventually cause him to collapse from a heart attack. He is buried in just six feet of earth after uttering the dying words, "All my labor has been in vain."

This Tolstoyan parable set off a terrific discussion on human financial motivation, and many people's insatiable love of money. Then we considered other sections of the syllabus on topics such as Social Calvinism, Andrew Carnegie's Gospel of Wealth, Christian Compassion, and contemporary challenges to philanthropy. By the end of the two evenings, which were only a taste-

er for the full text of the curriculum, all of us had been stimulated and some of us wanted to engage in this form of spiritual and intellectual searching far more often. In our different ways we had each started on or been strengthened on our journeys.

I HAVE LONG BEEN A FAN of the Trinity Forum's many readings and curricula, because I hunger after the kind of thought-provoking excellence in the fields of literature, history, the arts, science, and spirituality that their well-presented publications often achieve. However, I only recently began to think of TTF as a faith-based equivalent of the Aspen Institute, enabling leading business people and others to examine salient personal and public issues in the context of Christian spirituality. Such peer group discussion can be a profound experience. Over the last 15 years TTF has established a long

record of lives transformed through its forums. Some observers say that TTF's work is "top end evangelism" at its most effective.

As a Christian prison visitor I am a practitioner of "bottom end evangelism." In the last five years I have been principally committed to what might be called "down and outer" ministry among prisoners.

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TTF has persuaded me to enlarge my efforts to take in "up and outer" ministry in the world of business leaders. So I have just become part-time executive director of the Trinity Forum in Europe. What chance has such a ministry in our secular age and place?

On our increasingly pagan side of the pond, the business community of Europe has largely cut itself adrift from its ancient moorings of faith. In the rising generation, however, there are signs of a growing recognition that materialism and multiculturalism without spiritual roots makes a meaningless existence, with too many Pahoms finding six feet of earth the only end result.

So it may be an opportune time to be trying interesting new forms of evangelism. My first venture for TTF in this field was to persuade an old friend, Paul Johnson, to give a lecture to an invited audience of European top enders in London. His talk, "The Human Race: A Success or A Failure? A Historian's View," offered an apocalyptic view of the mounting perils that a secularized world will face. "I believe art, science, and religion are inseparable, a tripod of the human spirit on which civilization rests," declared Johnson as he warned that the religious leg of the tripod was crumbling with dire consequences. His magnificent *tour d'horizon* followed by a lively discussion enabled me to recruit several new participants for TTF forums on this tripod of curriculum subjects. So thanks to Paul Johnson we are off to a good new start with this peer group or small group ministry of Trinity Forum in Europe. Watch this space! ☼

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