

The Church and Home Evangelization.¹

OF vital issues associated with the Church life evangelization must be primary. In the forefront of her task is this work; it is pre-eminently her vocation. Whatever else she may do, this she dare not leave undone; it is the *raison d'être* of her existence. She must, as one has said, either evangelize or fossilize. The recently issued report of the Archbishops' Committee on Evangelization shows that the leaders of the Church have awakened to the fact that Evangelization is not one of many vital issues, but the vital necessity, urgent beyond all others. Before I quote a few of many passages from this excellent and most welcome production, may I say its publication just at this juncture has made my task to-day at once more difficult, and at the same time easier. More difficult since it is practically impossible to say anything that is not dealt with there more fully and more forcibly; easier, since it gives me the restful consciousness of knowing that any shortcomings in this paper will be more than atoned for there. Whilst its contents are humiliating, and must send every man who has the honour of his Lord at heart to his knees, in penitence, as he learns how far the clergy have by their insincerity, unreality, remoteness, and effeminacy alienated masses of the people from Christ, yet its new ideals, new hopes, new possibilities challenge and inspire us. But this by way of parenthesis.

Let me turn to give you one or two emphatic utterances as to the need, vital and paramount, of evangelization:—"Ours is the golden age of evangelistic opportunity. . . . The evangelization of England must pass from the margin to the centre of the mind of the Church. The return of our armies to civil life increases immeasurably the urgency of the evangelistic situation. We now know (as result of experience gained in the National Mission), not only that we of the Church have an imperative duty to our country, but what that duty is. It is to evangelize." At the moment we will not stay to ask in detail what has led to this conclusion. It is the finding, the considered and measured verdict of a committee, acting in the capacity of both judge and jury, which has carefully sifted the evidence brought before it from every part of the country

¹ A paper read at the Southport Conference.

and every party in the Church. In arriving at this decision they are deciding simply to place once again "first things first," giving to the proclamation of the evangel the place it occupied in the Early Church. It is an open confession that much of our present-day weakness is due to secondary things having been allowed to usurp the place which alone should be occupied by the Gospel. The first message of the ministry of Jesus was an "evangel," broad in its scope, and beneficent in its purpose. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me to evangelize [proclaim good tidings] to the poor. . . ." His final words concern the evangel, "Go ye into all the world evangelizing." St. Paul speaks for the Early Church, and for our own, when he says, "Woe is unto me, if I do not evangelize." And now as the committee has looked into the heart of the nation's life, through the eyes of leaders keen to discern the facts, they have decided that the one essential thing is to revert to the apostolic order, and put evangelization in the first place.

But what is meant by evangelization? First let me give you the definition of the report: "To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church." This wise and wide definition of a task sublime, but by no means simple, is in harmony with the thoughtful words of Mr. J. H. Oldham. In his book, *The World and the Gospel*, he answers the question, "What do we mean by preaching the Gospel?" by replying, "The evangelization of the world is sometimes regarded as primarily a matter of preaching, and it has been assumed that if a sufficient number of preachers could be provided to cover the entire geographical area of the mission field the world would be evangelized." But this view is too simple. It takes for granted that words have a meaning apart from the context of life. And then he asks—and here he comes very close to the question before us now: Is the Gospel preached to the dwellers in our slums, even though in every street there is a church or mission hall where Sunday by Sunday it is faithfully proclaimed? The conditions of their lives may so completely obscure the love of God that this essential core of the Christian message has for them no conceivable meaning. If the Gospel is to reach through these adverse conditions, it must

be not in word only, but in power. If it is to penetrate, it must not only be preached, it must be presented—the whole life of the Christian community must be behind the spoken word—and it must be applied fearlessly, not only to get through the conditions and reach one soul here and there, but to get rid of the conditions wherein souls are bound. This aspect of the Evangel has been, I venture to think, overlooked. The Gospel is not only a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, it is also the power of God unto destruction to everything that hindereth. We must set no limits to the Evangel's effectiveness, we have not evangelized the slum when we have passed through singing a hymn and issuing an invitation. We must evangelize the slum out of existence. The slum has been described as "The negation of God erected into a system." It is concrete Atheism, more adversely effective than all the Hyde Park orators; and, like the concrete blockhouse of the German defence system, it must be shattered to pieces before those who are captives behind its lines can be liberated. In Burke's fine phrase, "The evil must not only be detected, it must be destroyed." We must cease to regard attacks upon social wrongs as side issues. The evangelized men and women of our congregations are to be engineers in the army of Jesus Christ. Who has not read of the brave men at La Cateau who gave their lives to shatter bridges that might be of value to the foe, and Christian soldiers likewise who are in possession of the Gospel, must, even at the cost of life, be prepared to shatter, by the application of the Gospel, every bridge which gives the enemy easy access to the souls of men.

This leads me to say that one of the first essentials of effective home evangelization is an honest facing of the facts, a careful and accurate diagnosis of the situation with which we are called to deal. First we see a large tract, which I thought might be described not unkindly as veneered Paganism. This statement from Mr. Masterman's *Condition of England* justifies that description. Amongst industrial people the prophecy of Taine, thirty years ago, would appear to be fulfilling itself to-day! "By an insensible and slow backward movement, the great rural mass, like the great urban mass, is gradually going back to Paganism." Your own experience must confirm this. Take any street in any ordinary town or city or parish, and I ask, could more than one in ten give intelligent answers to some of the simplest questions of the Christian faith?

There is appalling ignorance, and with it a languid indifference. They take their religion lightly, and are much inclined to believe that it will all come right in the end. Both amongst the cultured and industrial classes the great majority are out of touch with organized religion. They have no conscious fellowship with Jesus Christ. Prayer, if used at all, is frequently nothing more than a superstitious relic. They never enter the house of God. Respectability is mistaken for religion; civilization for Christianity.

When we pass within the church, two or three tracts meet us and fill us with dismay. The first of these we meet with is vain professionalism. It constitutes a very real hindrance to the cause of Christ. "The real cause of the weakness of the spiritual force and moral witness of the Church seems to us to be the widespread failure of church people to exhibit in their lives the power of Christ working through them and in them to cleanse and set free and uplift." And if we proceed to ask why do they not exhibit this life, the answer is an obvious one—They do not possess it. A vague profession of a creed, but no vital possession of Christ. They attend regularly the church, they do not contend valiantly for its Lord. They are the bane of the Christian Church; its bad advertisements.

There is a further tract within the Church, which may be summed up as "vapid piety." Nothing virile or strong; it sings but does not serve; more exercised with services than with service. And these disquieting features both without and within the church have, from some points of view, been accentuated by the experience of the past four years.

At the same time, we must faithfully recognize that the effect of the war has not been wholly antagonistic to the cause of Christ. The fires through which the nation has passed have destroyed in large measure the "materialistic conception of life," have separated the dross from the gold, have rendered molten and impressionable many hardened hearts; and the illuminating flames that have leapt up from the fires have revealed to the world how inadequate is civilization to make the ideal man or meet his deepest needs. This is at once our responsibility and opportunity, in this day, when the destiny of nations, the ideals of life, the hearts of men are molten in the crucible to stamp them with the image of the invisible God, which is Christ Jesus.

There is only one way ; that is, Evangelize. The nation and the Church have need of many things. There are new demands, new desires, new dreams, but what they require above all else is life, life, life—something eternal—something vital. The needs we have cursorily glanced at in our national life will only be met with the life-giving evangel. Evangelism, it has been said, is not a programme, but a principle. Not a method of work, it is a spirit—the spirit which permeates, animates, and fructifies all work. It is that animating spirit, that principle of life, of life abundant, which centres in Jesus Christ, which alone can radically alter the indifference outside the Church, and the indolence within it. England, thou hast a name that thou livest ; thou art called a Christian country ; in great measure thou art dead. The evangel alone can with its creative force make you worthy of the name. The utterance of the evangel is vital also to the life of the Church. It is the circulation of its life blood. The whole body will be healthy in proportion as the Gospel courses through its veins. The out-poured blood of the Redeemer in all its full and sacred significance, in its widest implication and application, is the life blood of the Church. That message of redemption is the evangel. And the utterance of this evangel is, let me repeat, vital in its issue. Without it there will come paralysis ; with it, every organ in the body will worthily perform its appointed function. It will be the driving force of the Church's brain ; it will improve her thought. Theologians will think again in the terms of the Cross. It will give new vision to the Church's eye, a deeper insight into the needs of men. It will peer beneath the surface of things, and a penetrating foresight which will discern the demands of the future. It will give new strength to the Church's arm, whereby she will address herself fearlessly to new tasks. It will give quick movement to the Church's feet ; she will move no longer with hesitating, halting gait, but as the bearer of glad tidings will speed forth on her benign mission. The whole body will be re-vivified, re-vitalized, when the evangel enters into and out from the very heart of the Church. For this and many other reasons which I cannot enter into the place of evangelization must be primary—always first.

How shall we proclaim this evangel ? is our next question. How shall we present it—in sermon, in services, in service ?

First, in the sermon. Where shall we place the emphasis ?

What shall be the nature of the appeal? Shall we call men as sinners to embrace salvation, or shall we invite them as soldiers to engage in service? We are told men to-day have little sense of sin, the fear of wrath to come has ceased to weigh with them, and consequently it will be unwise, unprofitable, a beating of the air to repeat the old message. Change your emphasis they say. Call men to a great campaign. Inspire them with the vision of a gigantic task in which they may play a soldier's part, a warfare which demands their best and their all, and to that they will give a respectful hearing and a glad response. It is the alternative between the call to safety and the call to service. I venture to express my view with all humility, that in the Archbishops' Committee's report and in books like *The Church in the Furnace*, these have been regarded too emphatically as separate and in some measure contrary. But can they be separated if a full evangel is proclaimed? The appeal to service ought not to supplant the call to safety, but to supplement it. The evangel of the great Apostle St. Paul was vast enough to embrace both. It was the "Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ," and as Dr. Denney points out, commenting on this expression in the 2nd Epistle to Corinthians, it is the evangel not only of a crucified Saviour, but also of an enthroned and glorified Lord, and the full evangelistic appeal must enshrine the implications of both. It is my own conviction it will add nothing of permanent value to the fighting force of the army of Jesus Christ to ignore the fact of sin. There is no short cut to the Lord's battlefield. The health of the soldier is the measure of his fighting value. He must pass the health test before he can be drafted to the front. A weak, anæmic, consumptive soldier might in the moment of fierce conflict jeopardize the whole of his platoon, he might involve a regiment in disaster. So for service in the army of Jesus Christ, salvation, which means spiritual health, is an essential and primary requisite. At the same time it must be granted that in the past a full-orbed evangel has not been proclaimed. We have emphasized safety almost to the exclusion of service. We have allured men to a sheltered peace, we have not urged them to a strenuous war. In strident tones we have called them to seek the shelter of a "dug-out"; we have disguised from them the necessity of "going over the top." The offer of a "divinely prepared dug-out," whose walls are salvation, is a blessed part of

the evangel—a shelter from all the devastating force of the penalty and power of sin. And into it, all down the centuries, tired, wounded, broken sinners have crept in glad joy. But the “going over the top” is another equally blessed part of the full evangel. “If any man will come after Me, let him take up his Cross and follow Me.” We have wronged men by suggesting the “dug-out” as the end. We have deprived them of the inspiration of a noble venture in a glorious campaign, and resting in their sheltered seclusion they have become weak and insipid, listless and useless. They have missed the bracing tonic of hazarding their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus. In our proclamation of the glorious evangel which centres in and radiates from Calvary, we have stopped too abruptly at what the Cross gives, instead of proceeding to show what it demands. If this message is the vital one of life, and life more abundant, then are we not compelled to ask that the life born at the Cross shall henceforward bear the marks of the Cross? A far too large proportion of the army of the Church of God is lounging in “rest camps,” when it is desperately needed in the firing line. We dare not minimize the forces of evil arrayed against us. A new offensive is called for. Therefore we must without delay, worthily and adequately, present a full evangel in the sermon. This will both call out men from sin to their Saviour, and call up men for service to their King; for whilst the “Gospel of the Kingdom is the objective of the Church’s life, its dynamic and mainspring is the Gospel of salvation.”

Two further observations concerning the sermon. Its message must be related to the needs of our own day. It must be brought to bear upon every perplexing problem created by the war, and upon every aspiration in the Labour world. And again, the message must be illumined with present-day knowledge. A renowned preacher said recently “the great need of the present time is to take our commonplaces, and burnish them until they shine with a new lustre.” Must we not confess that our presentation to men of the evangel has oft-times been commonplace? The thought, the phraseology, the illustrations are so timeworn, dust-laden, and dull, that the gold of the Gospel is obscured within its setting. The secretary of the Student Christian Movement says: “It would probably be easier to present Christianity in the colleges if the majority of students had heard very many fewer sermons than

they have." This is a very serious indictment of present-day preaching. There lies behind it the suggestion that the sermons are so out of touch with the modern mind as to be ineffective in their appeal to the educated and thoughtful laity. A veteran amongst evangelical mission preachers, and one greatly used to the conversion of souls, launches his attack against what he describes as the "almost absurdly conservative attitude towards even the most obvious and reasonable criticism." May we not use as bur-nishing materials for our "commonplaces" the rich store placed in our hand by many modern writers, the reverent and constructive criticism of spiritually-minded teachers, men well abreast of their time in scientific and philosophic thought, and some of the dulness will pass, and the message will shine with a new radiance. The vital thing is that we do present the Gospel. No two men ever presented the Gospel in exactly the same way. Luther differed from Calvin, Whitfield from Wesley, Moody from Drummond, Spurgeon from Liddon, yet one and all proclaimed the evangel. The external presentation varied according to personal idiosyncracies and the current thought of their day; but within the wrapping men found the unsearchable riches of Christ.

If home evangelization is not to be stultified more elasticity must be allowed in the Church services. Authority should be given for a mission service at least once a month. Suitable forms of service capable of adaptation to varying needs should be issued. Open-air services must take a more important place in our activities. The open-air meeting must cease to be the practising ground of incompetent speakers. We must get rid of the idea that anything is good enough for the open air. If we are to come out into the open, the open must have the best. Our ideal for the open-air service—and I know how difficult the ideal may be of achievement—should be the best organization, best singing, and best speaking the parish is capable of. I speak in general, and with no disparagement of the earnest zeal of open-air workers of the past when I say the out-of-door witness of the Church has oft-times been calculated to do more harm than good; a display of weakness rather than a demonstration of power.

I pass hurriedly and abruptly to my third point: "The Presentation of the Message in Service." And I shall content myself with saying a brief word with reference to one aspect only of ser-

vice, and that is visitors. Pray and visit ; pray and visit, is the secret of evangelistic work, according to one experienced missionary. It is not true to fact to say the house-going parson makes a church-going people ; but it is, I venture to think, true that the secret of home evangelization will be the evangelization of the home. If this is to be done effectively it must not be left entirely to the clergy or the official staff ; the laity must co-operate. Parishes for this purpose might well be divided up into allotments, and consecrated men and women asked to give of their time and strength to dig up the hard soil, sow the seed of God's word, water by prayer, gather out the weeds, and tend with loving, patient, fostering care their holding. This devoted service, well planned and patiently persisted in, would go far to transform many of the waste places of our land into veritable gardens of the Lord.

I have spoken of the place of evangelization and the Church programme. I have spoken of the presentation of that evangel. May I conclude with an altogether too brief word as to the preparation for the task ?

"The supreme evangelistic need of the Church is reality in its members." Wherever we turn in current literature this is the ever recurring note—a demand for reality, and especially in the life and witness of the ministry. It is the call that comes from the soldiers at the front and at home, from the students of our Colleges, from the social leaders in the Labour world. Reality, a manifestation that we believe the things we say we believe. "What the Church needs is not more of us, but a better brand of us." If we are to proclaim the message of God we must be men of God. This implies intense personal conviction concerning the reality of our message. Is the evangel still to our own hearts, as Tennyson once described it, "Old news, new news, and good news." Old yet ever new. As fresh to-day and as forceful as that day long ago it may be when we first saw the Lord. Does the love of Christ still constrain us, or have we forgotten our first love ? When Christina Rossetti sings :—

"None other Lamb, none other name,
None other hope in heaven or earth or sea,
None other hiding place from guilt and shame,
None beside Thee,"

does she express your conviction and mine ? If the disappointments, the difficulties, the doubts have caused the fires to burn

low and then down let us pray the Holy Spirit to fan them to a flame again. God waits to evangelize England through men who say, "I believe and therefore will I speak." I believe that Christ has never met the century to which He is not equal, that there is no problem but has its solution in Him, though dimly how we may descry it; no heartache He cannot soothe, no fetter He cannot break, no sin He cannot pardon. And if this intense conviction is never to lose its freshness it must be accompanied by intimate communion. We must live with God if we are to live for God. We must listen to Him if we are to be like Him. We must be like Him if we are to testify of Him. We who bear the message of the Cross must bear the marks of the Lord Jesus. Communion is the prelude to commission. He appointed twelve that they should be "with Him," and then that He should send them forth. Whilst the secret of "going forth" is the Divine presence, the secret of retaining the presence is the "going forth." "Go ye into all the world and evangelize, and lo I am with you all the days." Deliberately we have focussed our attention on "home" evangelization, but let me say as a closing word we shall only accomplish it in evangelizing the world. Varying slightly Mr. Temple's words, we may say, "It will be easier to evangelize the world and England than England without the world." As we consecrate ourselves to the bigger task we shall accomplish the smaller task to which we have confined our thoughts this morning. So shall arise a fairer England, a land wherein dwelleth righteousness; a land worthy of the love of God and Christ, worthy of the sacrifice of the lads at the front; England amongst the nations, a city set on a hill, whose light spreads to the dark places of the earth.

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