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EVANGELISM.

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SOCIETY needs salvation and it knows it. There can be no doubt on this point. From every side evidence comes that our industry, our social life and our national outlook need a new orientation and a revivifying power. The number of workers registered as unemployed, the effects of the long drawn out coal struggle and the disturbed and unsettled state of all the political parties show that we have reached a state at which dissatisfaction takes the place of self contentment and there is crying need not for a slogan or a formula, but for some dynamic that will give fresh aspirations and the power to carry them into effect.

The individual needs salvation and although it may seem that he does not know it, he is aware of it. In a recent novel a woman who had secretly fallen receives a bunch of white roses from the man who loves her, and they show her to herself in a very different light. And in the midst of the hurry and bustle, the careless gaiety and the *abandon* of our age, men and women everywhere are anxious to get right with themselves. They may not have consciously in view the call to get right with God, but a gnawing discontent tells them of a lack of equilibrium in their lives that needs putting right. It may not be ever present, but in their hours of weariness, perhaps, or in the quiet of the night-time, they feel all wrong and wish they could be all right.

We have reached in the higher realms of human thought one of those rare stages that prove the turning-point of intellectual development. It has been said by one of our greatest thinkers "there are many modern philosophies, but no modern philosophy." It is true that the old materialism has passed away, and men no longer are subject to the conceptions that were associated with philosophic thought of the late nineteenth century. But while materialism is dead, it cannot be said that Theism—Christian or otherwise—has taken its place. A general agnosticism, prefaced by the word pious, very often has taken the place of the definite agnosticism which was a polite word for the materialism of thirty years ago. And man can never be satisfied with the conscious unsatisfactoriness of thinking that leads nowhere. In Science our old conceptions have disappeared one by one, and we are in the presence of ruling ideas that are hard to be understood by those trained in the old schools, and understood in different ways, by the men who are at work in their development. We may believe that Einstein's theory is the greatest synthetic achievement of the human mind, but when we come up against the quantum theory, we are aware that synthesis has still more to do before we know everything. It is hardly too much to

say that the greater the thinker or the scientist the less he is impressed by any finality in his own domain.

And the Church of Christ, too, is in need of salvation. We have no sympathy with the pessimistic cry that the Church is a failure. Christ in His Church has accomplished and is accomplishing what, without the Church as His Body, would have been impossible. We thank God for what has been done and look forward to even greater things in the future. But is all well with the Church—in the broadest sense? Is there not confused thinking that leads to ineffective preaching? Is there not a revival of superstition due to the lack of central convictions that can alone satisfy the soul of man? Is there not a struggle of an internecine character within Christendom that is the reverse of that unity which our Saviour desired? And does it not all arise from the lack of the conviction that God is, Christ lives and the Holy Spirit works? In the domain of the highest part of human existence there is a sickness felt most deeply by those who are most steeped in the teaching of the Master and most anxious to be out and out for Him.

One who has the trust and confidence of many Evangelicals not long ago wrote to a friend "I am convinced that in the Cross lies the solution of human troubles, and I would give all I possess, to know how to apply the Cross to the surging problems of our day." He is not alone in his conviction and in his uncertainty. And it is an uncertainty born of hesitation due to the conflicting currents of thought that rush through the minds of men to-day. They have lost that certainty in fundamental truth—even when they are keen in work for God. They are oppressed by the weight of this unintelligible world—for the world to them is unintelligible and they can find no intellectual formula or outlook that will satisfy them. Most men are like the great inventor and discoverer:—"they have no real place for any view of the Universe that cannot be reduced to a mechanical model." And it may safely be said, that the continued power of certain conceptions of Catholicity rests largely on this intellectual fact. Men want a mechanical organization, they want mechanical means for proving the organization to be real and "valid" and they find a certain "indefectible certitude" in the belief that the Organization exists and claims to be everything that satisfies them. But this is not the teaching of Christ. For Him organization is not an end in itself but a means to an end. We in one sense accept the saying of Baron von Hugel that "as historians, we now know that the institution of the Church is far less directly and completely attributable to our Lord than used to be believed," for the idea of a Catholic Church with its sacerdotal ministry, apostolic succession and fully developed sacramental system is foreign to His teaching, as well as to the New Testament and Primitive Christianity. The Church is a means to an end, not in any sense an end in itself, and it depends for its very life on the fact that it is founded in Him and grows up into Him its living Head in all things.

If what has been said is true, and it is hardly controvertible, the

times are ripe for Evangelism :—the preaching of the Gospel of Christ to men and women and Institutions that are sick and need health. “ Good News ” of healing is sought and men are seeking it in all sorts of strange cults within and without Christianity. We need the presentation of Christ in all His fullness to an age that knows not where to look for the satisfaction of its deepest needs. Those who are convinced that in the Gospel of Christ there is the one hope for humanity, are bound to consider prayerfully how it may best be given to this bewildering chaos that surrounds us. We need a sense of Mission and a definite Mission message. Have we this, and if not where can we obtain it ?

It is widely held that our old Mission methods have failed. The Parochial and District Missions—called by many fancy names—it is said, have had their day. Movements of revival have passed over cities, districts and parishes and have seemed at the time to be very real. “ But after two years it has often been almost impossible to detect any remaining influence from them. The flicker of the light that appeared in many souls would seem to have gone out, leaving only the old darkness.” Missions have been carefully and prayerfully prepared. They have been simultaneous in Churches and Chapels. Every family has been visited and revisited. Meetings of all sorts have been held for workers and helpers. None of the modern arts of advertisement have been neglected. And the people do not come. Those who are attached to the Churches attend. The fringe of the hundreds of thousands of non-Church goers has not been reached. And the results disappoint.

Here and there a parochial Mission has been a centre for a neighbourhood, *if* the Church be one of those exceptionally well attended under normal circumstances. The communicants of other Churches flock thither and there is undoubtedly enthusiasm and resultant blessing. As far as can be observed these local Missions have a stronger appeal than the larger Mission, conducted, as is generally the case, by Missioners of all types, preaching doctrines in conflict and without any real unison of utterance. The confusion of normality is intensified and the aftermath is far from encouraging.

Men write even now of the great Moody campaign and no one acquainted with the recent history of Evangelicalism within the Church of England can fail to acknowledge that the great outstanding men of the past generation owed their inspiration and definite consecration to the splendid work of the simple American preacher who proclaimed Evangelical Truth with an intensity of directness and a breadth of outlook learned at the foot of the Cross. Moody has had no successor, and those who came to us with a Transatlantic reputation failed to catch the ear even of the Evangelical public. And our home Evangelists have not been more successful whether they worked on denominational or undenominational lines. Specially written press narratives are not always a true guide to the influence on local Churches, much less to the penetration on the multitude that wander as sheep having no shepherd.

If reasons are sought for the disappointment they are many.

In the first place modern life is full of interest that leads people to anything but concentration. The Press, cheap literature, easy transit, picture palaces and the opportunities for study all help to occupy the minds of the oncoming generation and the young married folk. Practical philanthropy of an associated type has passed from the Churches to the State and non-religious organizations. The simplicity of entertainment that satisfied men and women of thirty years ago no longer satisfies and there is a restless search for novelty, and opportunities for gratifying it are forthcoming. Our parishes have organized departmental work for all ages and classes and these have withdrawn a very large number [from our churches, which are now for the most part attended by the middle aged and Christian workers. We have lost the habit of worship by all ages and all classes in the churches, which struggle hard to keep going. The old type of congregation has passed away, and it is doubtful whether the many side shows of the Church have not developed a type of thought that the Church has no place for the people as a whole. This is disastrous, for God's family should meet together as a unit and no class or age should feel excluded by the formation of a sectional habit of worship.

It cannot be forgotten that forty years ago the general outlook of the people was individualistic. Men did their own thinking. The recent developments of all social, political and religious life has been collective, and most men are glad to have their thinking done for them. The group has supplanted the individual, and this fact is evident in every department of life. From political parties to industrial unions, from the centre to the circumference of Church activities, everything is organized into groups, and the group mind is supposed to have an authority which the individual does not possess. All this means, in the long run, a loss of personal responsibility and in religion, in the last resort, the individual is everything. We cannot pray by deputy, we cannot worship by proxy, and our thoughts of God if they are to be real must be so personal that they are inalienable. Forty years ago the mass of English people accepted without question the main doctrines of Christianity as true. The appeal to the multitude was to translate into action what they knew in their hearts to be true. It was a summons to be real, to be honest with themselves and God, to show that they are not believers only but active doers—men who practise what they preach. Decisions made, placed life in agreement with either real individual conviction or with latent conviction "that what was said must be true because all we most respected accepted it as true." To-day everything is different. Institutional religion is at a discount, the root facts of the Gospel are in dispute and the theories of the lecture room have infected with their uncertainty the average citizen who does not attend any place of worship. Consequently he is under no mental or spiritual obligation to attend and he is led in this respect by the action of the particular group with which he is associated. Religion has been put in its place and that means out of the individual life. The Evangelist to-day has no settled or latent convictions to support

him on the part of those to whom his message should be directed. Between the loss of personal responsibility and the failing hold of Christianity on the mass his difficulties have largely increased.

And it must be added that belief in human immortality has lost its grip on the multitude. Most men in the past believed in immortality, and put off for a more convenient season the consideration of all it involved. Postponement of decision—not the inability to see the duty of decision—was what the Evangelist had to overcome. And this has created an entirely new temper. “Men are almost afraid of any considerations concerning the other world entering their plans or moulding their schemes; the ‘here’ and the ‘now’ are all important and the reason for this is the widespread doubt of any further life beyond the present. No preacher to-day could write ‘Immortal life has become the most unquestioned, the most elementary principle of all human speculation’” (Bishop of Norwich). As has been said, “immortality has for its main importance the existence of God, and the sense of belief in a future life depends for its control of conduct on belief in the being of God.” God and immortality have been written more widely off the slate of human beliefs in contemporary England than is generally accepted. And this is very largely the fruit of the prepossession that the group is everything, the individual nothing.

In this condition of modern life the danger of an extreme Institutionalism capturing the minds of many is very real. Emphasis on the Institution fits in with the latent acceptance of the importance of the group. Ceremonialism that has been associated with the teaching of the institution gains hold of minds that find it easy to rest in the outward and not go behind it. Sacramentalism of a type that localizes for the group through the group official the benefits and privileges of the group makes its appeal and there is an absence of any desire to ask “Is this true?” Just as the member of any industrial group, or of any organized Society depends on the leadership of the chiefs, so in the Church, the average member rests content with the provision for him by the Priest of what the Priest as the traditional and executive officer provides by symbol, which becomes identified with the thing symbolized for all the members. This again strikes a blow on the definite conscious acceptance by the individual of the Living Head—Redeemer and Lord—with whom conscious communion is a personal necessity. The Institution when institutionalized, as it has become, shuts out the great Head who alone gives life to the Institution. And institutional religion has always had the twofold sequel—the mechanicalization of services and the supplanting of the end by the means.

Then there is the general uncertainty of the age. Good men say “How can I preach as the Truth what men wiser and better than myself deny? Is it not my duty to see for myself and to impress on others that truth has many facets, and I can only see one or two and pass them on to those who can see, from a different angle, what I cannot see? How can I preach as necessary the Atonement when some of my best friends believe that the Sacrifice of Christ was

only the highest type of Self Sacrifice, and how can I proclaim, as essential, the miraculous aspect of the Gospel and the Resurrection when it is denied by some of the leading Christian thinkers of the day? How can I, ignorant of science as I am, teach that God is the Creator when all scientists believe in Evolution?" These questions consciously or subconsciously work in the minds of men whose troubles are increased when they read in the New Psychology that religion is necessary but it is entirely subjective and has no relation to objective reality. Crudely put—this is accountable for the uncertain note that is sounded to-day and for the disappearance of definite teaching and the onrush of æsthetic aids to worship that act as an anodyne and lull to sleep the higher aspects which make men realize the presence of the *mysterium tremendum*—God Himself. They may bring with them the hush of sensational satisfaction, but they do not reach that awesomeness that comes from communion with God. The means satisfy the craving of emotion and the end is forgotten in the realization of a self that is lower than the true self.

We need to-day a return to simplicity of faith and outlook. It is impossible for any man to be an expert on all the theological and critical problems of the day. Most men have to face them in one form or other, but they cannot answer one-tenth of the questions they ask. Life cannot be supported on theories of nutrition and the soul cannot be fed by the posing of theological problems. There must be a belief in the food we eat that it will sustain us—in spite of the devices of the laboratory for the balance of calories. And so it is with the Evangel—bread must be given and not stones to build up a house of theory. And the one way to reach the people is the way that our Lord and the Apostolic Church trod. Take the New Testament—remove from its pages the Cross, and what is left? An Incarnation without a Cross was unknown to the Apostles. The Evangelists saw the centrality of the Cross and gave the space they give to the story of the unforgettable hours that preceded it and were passed upon it. The writers of the Epistles took the same stand—sin and a crucified Saviour were their theme. Evangelism must begin at the Cross and place it in the New Testament position. There it is central and for us it is crucial. It is the source of our Redemption and it is our cause for glorying. In spite of the many assertions that the modern man does not worry about his sin—he does worry about it but he calls it failure. He has failed to be the man he ought to be and he knows it—and the Cross shows him the cause of failure and gives him hope of redemption. The Cross presupposes what men are and sheds light on what men may be. "He died for me" must be definite and individual if the Evangel is to be effective and the man who proclaims this must know it in his own life, if his message is to have that contagious influence summed up in the phrase "religion is not taught but caught." The Spirit of God works in the hearts of men and utilizes His working in human spirits to bring men to Christ. The ambassador must have a message in which he believes if he is to be successful in his work.

But his message does not end there, for the Cross has before it the

Risen Lord who helps and keeps. The Gospel is not a life-boat that lands men on the shore of safety to congratulate themselves that they have escaped a sudden and death-dealing danger. They are saved to serve—they are alive to live. And here we see how the Gospel fits in with the cry of many of the naturally Christian souls that are in uncertainty. They wish to leave the world better than they found it—not to secure for themselves privileges denied to the many. What they have, they can and must share, they have to pass on what they have themselves received from and through the Redeemer in social redemption, the amelioration of human ills and the building up of better men and women. They must have certainty at the centre if they are to possess assurance and hope in their work. Evangelism based on the New Testament gives them this; and although they can only escape doubt by escaping thought, they can ever find that central certainty by abiding in Christ.

Certainty is liable to fade into the acquiescence of custom and life to flow in little trickles instead of the full stream that comes from its great source. There is the human co-operation that can never be overlooked. We retain our life by union—an indwelling that has fullness of life. It is a grave error to proclaim a Christianity of emotional spasms. It is quite true that under the influence of an inspiring Evangelist we reach a mountain top that enlarges our vision, just as when in our apartness from man, we find ourselves lost in God and have experiences that come but rarely. The only sure source of maintained certainty is abiding faith and consecrated living. And for this the co-operating will is necessary.

To sum up. An age of uncertainty craves the Gospel. It is the one certainty in the midst of a world that leaves men nothing certain when they think but a consciousness of their own existence. It adds certainty to morals, gives strength to overcome, as well as redemption from sin. It should be proclaimed from every pulpit and on every Christian platform. Our Churches must become living centres of definite Evangelism—not centres for facing the spectres of the mind and running away from them by doubting attacks. God in His own way will bring a revival that will be wide reaching and permanent but it must be prepared for by the faithful teaching and preaching of the Cross in all our pulpits. To-day as ever the Cross is to the intellectual foolishness—are we not reminded of this in innumerable volumes?—and to the Jew who must have tradition in the form of institutional religion—a stumbling-block, but it is still to every one that believeth the Power of God unto salvation. If it be true that the Christ lifted up draws all men unto Him, why then do we hesitate to preach Christ crucified for us, as the Evangel? Behind and above the sin and suffering of humanity as we pass it in review stands the suffering Master of masters, love triumphant, invisible and saving, calling men to God who gives them sympathy, joy, hope, as well as redemption through the death of His Son. The Gospel is ours—unflinchingly proclaimed it works, because it is eternally true and comes from the bosom of God who is our all.