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EVANGELISTIC AND PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME.

BY THE REV. L. J. COURSEY, M.A., Vicar of Taunton.

IN the opinion of some men whose judgment is of weight, the Church has got an exceptional opportunity for presenting the Gospel to the nation at the present juncture. The recent strike, dangerous as it was to the constitution of the country, was not without encouraging signs from the Christian point of view. In one city over 1,000 strikers attended a daily intercession service. In another city organized labour asked for a thanksgiving service when the strike ended. With insignificant exceptions the crisis passed without resort to violence, and some clear-headed observers attribute this to the influence of the Churches. Whatever our view may be about the political expediency of the action taken by the Archbishop of Canterbury and some of the leaders of the Free Churches, there is no doubt that it has helped to convince men that the Church to-day desires to keep out of the realm of party politics and to seek peace. From that point of view the prospect of a forward move by the Church offers encouragement, if only we can discover the wisest methods of presenting the Gospel.

The prospect is not so bright when we come to consider the more highly educated section of the community. The reconciliation between Science and Religion is not yet accomplished, but the situation is more hopeful than it was fifty years ago.

A volume of essays recently published under the title of *Science, Religion and Reality*, deserves some attention. The writers leave us with curiously mixed feelings. It is probably true that modern scientists are not so ready as their predecessors to deny the possibility of the miraculous, but there is no widespread evidence of a readiness to embrace Christianity whole-heartedly. The position is confused and difficult. Few of us have sufficient knowledge of science to contribute anything towards a solution, but all of us can watch with prayerful and sympathetic interest the efforts of the men who are working to that end. Evangelicalism, with its appeal to reason rather than to authority, is peculiarly well fitted to appeal to men of a scientific frame of mind, if only we be true to our principles and do not allow ourselves to be stampeded into positions which we are unable to defend.

Perhaps the most hopeful symptom of our day is the widespread feeling that the salvation of the country depends on a spirit of fellowship and of goodwill. The Prime Minister has rendered service of the greatest value by his constant reminders of this fact, but in the ordinary course of political warfare this spirit is bound to suffer tremendous strain, and it will crack unless it be reinforced by some agency which stands outside party politics and which embraces people of every legitimate political view. Many men are looking to the Church from this standpoint and a great deal depends on our

willingness and our ability to meet the need. It does not involve our taking one particular side in party politics, but it does mean that we shall stress the sinfulness of sins of the spirit equally with sins of the flesh. "Some people, who would scorn to underpay their own workers, have shares in companies where conditions are bad. Crimes, which individuals would shudder to commit, are done unconsciously by the community through the system which has so far evolved. When the next revival comes, it will come like all others in a wave of repentance, but it will not only be our own personal sins of which we shall repent when the light of heaven floods our life; it will be the social sins in which we share—the national pride which breeds wars, the poverty we permit to exist, the conditions we condone which a live social conscience would sweep away. No man can find a real peace with God for his own soul without facing the social sins in which he shares. For 'we are members one of another.'"

But we have got to make it quite clear that our hope of a better England depends on a fellowship which is based on a return to God. Some one has said that we cannot have a permanent form of society by binding a lot of selfish people together with a rotten cord of self-interest. Men need to be converted, and we must preach and teach conversion. Evangelism means that, or it is going to be a worthless ploughing of the sands. Modern psychological research confirms this view. In the volume of essays to which reference has already been made, Dr. William Brown, who is the Wilde Reader in Mental Philosophy at Oxford, writes on Religion and Psychology.

He says, "It also becomes clear from the evidence that the phenomenon of conversion is a fundamental process in the religious life. . . . I am inclined to believe that conversion in its general sense of turning from the merely naturalistic attitude occurs in every case, but in many cases it may occur slowly and gradually, as a process of healthy growth." Dr. Brown may or may not be willing to give the term its full evangelical content, but he goes a long way towards confirming the view of those who are working for, and expecting definite conversions. It is also striking to read such a statement as that which Bishop Carey published some time ago about the need of conversion. There is other evidence that men are reaching the evangelical interpretation of the New Testament with reference to conversion from different angles.

Whilst this is so, there is a good deal of evidence that many of us are too ready to accept outward conformity to religious observances as a sufficient indication of a vital relationship to God in Christ. The word "conversion" has fallen into disrepute owing to sad misuse and to extravagant practices and utterances. We cannot expect an identical experience in every case. George Macdonald is right. "Thou com'st down thine own secret stair." We must not, however, be content unless there is a personal experience of Christ. There are no neutrals in this war. "He that is not with Me is against Me," and it is our business to lead men to full surrender to Jesus Christ.

Conversion is not the only truth which needs to be interpreted and brought home to men. The rediscovery of justification by faith was probably the greatest service which the Reformation rendered to the Church. It still remains true. We may not use the precise term, we ought not to use it without careful explanation, but somehow or other we have got to get men to realize what lies behind the term, and that will involve a theology of the Cross. We shall not enter on any discussion of the Atonement here. But it is quite evident that if we are to guide those who are seeking the truth we must have some interpretation. It is a spurious liberalism which says that all that matters is the fact. Men ask what relation the fact bears to them.

Let us now look at our unit, the parish, from the pastoral and evangelistic point of view. We do well to remember that the parish is our unit. There is a tendency to think in terms of the congregation or even a group of congenial spirits within the congregation. Sheep which stray in from other men's folds are sometimes regarded as needing special attention lest they return to the place from which they came. We are prone to forget that a grave responsibility rests on us for every soul in the parish and that our first business is the welding of the congregation into a fellowship which shall be an instrument through which God can work, a fellowship whose predominant purpose shall be the extension of the Kingdom of God in the parish. Here we are faced by all kinds of difficulties. Class distinction is the perquisite of no one grade of society, it is found in every grade and is only one of many obstacles. But fellowship is an indispensable step. Judging by reports from scores of Evangelical parishes we are failing in many cases to make our people realize this aspect of the Holy Communion. It is meant to be congregational, a bond of brotherhood between Christ's people. Have we sufficiently considered our mode of administration from this point of view? Is the 8 a.m. celebration with a few people as widely scattered through the church as space permits the ideal at which we are aiming, or at other hours are we to be content with the small proportion of the congregation who remain to communicate when scores who ought to be there depart? We are quite right in our determination to do nothing which will involve non-communicating attendance. It cuts at the root of the truth with regard to the sacrament. But in our anxiety to avoid error, do we not tend to fail to attract many who ought to be with us? Is there anything contrary to our principles in a choral communion? We use music at Morning and Evening Prayer. Why do we use it so rarely in our great service of thanksgiving? In a working-class parish 9 a.m. is often a much more convenient hour than 8 a.m. for many of the parishioners. Why not give them a convenient opportunity of feeding on the bread of life on Sunday mornings? Is the service of Morning Prayer followed by the Holy Communion at 11 a.m. or 11.30 a.m. always and everywhere the most convenient way of getting something in the nature of a corporate communion for the bulk of our communicants? There is wide scope for experiment, and in some of the

rare cases in which ventures are being made they are meeting with some success. In one poor parish in the North, a celebration with a sermon and music at 9 a.m. promises to make a very great difference in the spiritual life of the congregation. We ought to stress the idea of a sermon at celebrations. The tendency to divorce the ministry of the Word and Sacrament is not a healthy symptom. Those who have read Dr. Carnegie Simpson's article "Grace in Sacrament," published in connection with the Mansfield Conferences, must have risen from its perusal with a quickened sense of the intimate relation between the two.

This leads us to the vital importance of the teaching side of the ministry of the Church. We are often so absorbed in problems about the Bible that we fail to teach the Bible itself. When we do we so frequently lapse into dulness that the attention of our hearers is soon lost. Somehow or other we have got to make the subject interesting; and most of us sorely need instruction in the art. There is room for something in the nature of Bible Schools; where we could be shown how to teach educated and uneducated folk. The day of mere exhortation is speedily passing. The rise of the Labour Party is the most striking illustration of successful propaganda that we have witnessed in this generation, and Labour is learning the value of intensive instruction. In some areas they are relying less on mass meetings, and their energy is being directed into the instruction of small groups of people. This is an object lesson for the Church. We have the whole world for our subject, the sacred scriptures for our text-book, and the Holy Spirit to guide us in our search. What excuse is there for the fact that we are failing to reach any considerable proportion of the adult population of England with the word of truth? If we are to do so we must copy the example of the Master and teach in the open air. One of the leading men in this type of work believes that we shall fail to touch the people whom we desire to reach through highly organized open-air services. He prefers to go alone, to stand on a box or some other convenient pedestal and to talk to a small group. This is an heroic method for most of us, but it is worth a trial. Our talks had better be illuminated by illustrations; and if we have a gift of humour we may wisely exercise it. Above all we do well to talk but little of the church and much of our Lord. Our best apologetic is the perfect life of Jesus Christ.

Space permits but a brief reference to our organizations. Some thoughtful people feel that the day of Church organizations is passing. It is becoming increasingly difficult to attract people owing to the developments in our educational system and the facilities for recreation and amusement which lie at their doors. But one organization has come to stay. The Parochial Church Councils are bound to exercise wide influence for good or for evil. Everything depends on the spirit in which they enter on their work year by year. If they are allowed to expend all of their energies on the material side of the work of the Church they will prove to be a bane instead of a blessing. If they take their due part in the pastoral and evangelistic side of the

work, and if they are wisely led; they will render service of the highest value in the extension of Christ's Kingdom. In some parishes meetings of the Council are preceded by a short service of intercession. Every Council ought to have accurate knowledge of the work of each organization, beginning with the kindergarten department of the Sunday School. Time devoted to preparation for the meetings of the Council will reap an abundant reward. The Council ought to be the inner circle, and it may be wise to postpone developments until their whole-hearted support is secured. We must not allow this very important subject to delay us further, but we do well if we sit down and think out the whole problem in the light of our experience. Let us remember that we have got to trust our Council, and for our encouragement let us also remember that men generally reward our trust in rich measure.

But in the long run our main hope for pastoral and evangelistic success lies in personal contact. The training of the twelve, the conversations with Nicodemus and the woman at the well, clearly indicate the mind of the Master. It may not be altogether a loss if new conditions render many of our organizations obsolete. This opportunity will always remain. It is a method which is open to every one, indeed all of us consciously or unconsciously exercise it day by day. Some of us have special opportunities; the clergyman with most of the doors in his parish open to him, the district visitor with a smaller area but one which can be thoroughly worked, the teacher of a Bible Class or of a class in the Sunday School, the leader of an organization and all the others to whom special tasks have been assigned. How are we facing our task? Something more than a year ago a Mr. E. Stanley Jones published a book in America entitled *The Christ of the Indian Road*. He tells of a movement towards Christ in the minds of the higher caste people of India. The book is intensely interesting, and it ought to be widely read. One chapter is entitled "What or Whom?" The idea running through the chapter is that the central miracle of Christianity is Christ. Our efforts ought to focus in an attempt to bring men face to face with Him.

Let us listen to Mr. Jones himself. "Christianity breaks into meaning when we see Jesus. The incredible becomes actual; the impossible becomes the patent.

"Do not misunderstand me: the *whats* of Christianity are important, a body of doctrine is bound to grow up around Him. We cannot do without doctrine, but I am so anxious for the purity of doctrine that I want it to be held in the white light of His Person and under the constant corrective of His living mind. The only place where we can hold our doctrines pure is to hold them in the light of His Countenance. Here their defects are at once apparent, but only here.

"But we must hold in mind that no doctrine however true, no statement however correct, no teaching however pure, can save a man. 'We are saved by a Person and only by a Person, and as far as I know, by only one Person,' said Bishop McDowell. Only life

can lift life. A doctor lay dying—a Christian doctor sat beside him and urged him to surrender to, and have faith in Christ. The dying doctor listened in amazement. Light dawned. He joyously said, ‘All my life I have been bothered with *what* to believe, and now I see it is *whom* to trust.’ Life lifted life.”

Nearly a quarter of a century ago his rector was speaking to a young deacon about his approach to non-churchgoers. He advised the young man not to introduce the question of church attendance, but of their attitude to Christ. To-day, coming from across the Atlantic and inspired by experience in India, this book clinches a lesson oftentimes driven home by sad failure. The business of the Christian is to bring men face to face with Jesus Christ. Few of us are really able to argue on critical and scientific grounds, fewer still are able to argue in such a way as shall ensure conviction, but all of us may be able to bear witness to a Person. “I know *whom* I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” The work of the evangelist lies there, the pastor’s task is in the same sphere. The one introduces men to Jesus, the other seeks to foster the intimacy that it may ripen into friendship and issue in love. Friendship involves communion, or, as we term it, prayer. In this there lies the great secret of successful work for Him. *Orare est Laborare*. Canon E. S. Woods touches a need when he writes: “The modern world needs Christians who can pray. There is plenty of activity; what is wanted is more prayer.”

More men are needed of the spiritual fibre of the late Forbes Robertson, who more perhaps than any of his generation, had learnt the secret of prevailing intercession. “It is,” he once wrote, “worth while making any efforts, however desperate, to learn to pray.” And again: “As I grow older I become more diffident and now, often, when I desire the Truth to come home to any man, I say to myself, ‘If I have him here he will spend half an hour with me. Instead I will spend that half-hour in prayer for him.’” If that tremendous belief in the power of prayer were as common as it is at present uncommon, the Church would move on more rapidly to the winning of the world.

EVER. By Alice M. Pullen. *H. R. Allenson, Ltd.* 2s. 6d. net.

This “Child’s Book of Joy,” as it is called in the sub-title, shows how a little girl learnt to discriminate between things eternal and temporal. Under the guidance of her fairy mentor “Ever,” illustrations from nature are used to prepare her mind to learn that death is merely the dissolution of a temporary “frock,” but that the “always” cannot die.

The teaching is pleasantly conveyed in story form.

H. D.