

What Do We Expect from the National Mission ?

“ **W**ELL, I suppose that during the Mission the clergy will have more services, preach more sermons, perhaps in each other’s pulpits, and those who always go to church on Sunday will go on weekdays also if they are leisured folk, while now and again a noted name will attract a non-churchgoer to some service. And afterwards everything will go on much as it did before.” If any churchman says, or even thinks this, let him ask himself quite frankly, “ What right have I to declare publicly and solemnly that I believe in God Almighty, in Christ whose kingdom shall have no end, in the Holy Ghost, Author and Giver of life ? ”

It is because they really believe the Creed that our leaders are organizing an effort, cradled in constant united prayer, to bring home to the nation a message concerning Repentance and Hope that comes to us all from God Himself through the War, a message saying first to the Church “ The world’s godlessness is your reproach,” and secondly through a repentant Church to the world, “ We have known and believed in the Hope of mankind, and we cannot rest until our Hope is yours also.” Bishop Phillips Brooks used to say that the measure of a man’s life lies in the amount of his expectancy. It is certainly true that in the spiritual realm, results are determined by expectations, which is only a clumsy modern way of stating that according to our faith it will be unto us. “ What do I expect from the Mission ? ” is no bare personal question, for every one who expects little is hindering, and every one who expects much is helping a movement from which we are justified in expecting results so great that they will have to be acknowledged as miraculous, even a transformed Church, a transformed nation, and a transformed world.

We are justified because it is the will of God the Father that all men should be saved, because all power is given to God the Son, because there is no limit to the possible achievement of men filled with God the Holy Ghost. And on the human side, we observe four conditions promising to prepare the way of the Lord coming in power to all who will to receive Him.

Under a burden of sorrow and suffering, of disappointment and loss, more widespread than the world has ever before known, men

are everywhere restless and spiritually hungry, and only to be satisfied by the Gospel of Christ, the good news from God in all its simplicity. "Never go into the pulpit without speaking of man's great need and of God's great love," said an old man once to a young man whose whole fruitful ministry was influenced by these few words. Christians calling themselves by many different names have overlaid this Gospel with many extraneous matters. They have uttered learned critical disquisitions, rambling emotional appeals, polished literary essays, arguments about ecclesiastical questions, arid moral exhortations, and then wondered why they preached to empty pews. The hungry sheep look up and are not fed, because, however important instruction about the Church, or the Bible, or Christianity may be, they are longing, sometimes unknown to themselves, not for that, but for Christ Himself, set before them by men who know what He is, not as a tradition of the past in other lives, or even in their own lives, but as an actual fact of present experience. The Mission is to bring us all back to the great fundamentals, and incidentally to demonstrate that living relation to Christ is not the monopoly of any particular set of Christians. "We dare not say this at home," remarked a Roman Catholic priest at the Front lately, to a C.M.S. missionary serving as an Army chaplain, "but out here we are all one. You want to lead men to Christ, and so do I."

This brings us to the second condition. It has been well said that it is because we distrust each other's intentions that we stand aloof from one another. We honestly believe that only our own type of Christianity is really true to the faith once delivered to the saints, and so we fence ourselves in ecclesiastically from fellow Christians of other denominations by a hedge of suspicions, as we used to fence ourselves in nationally from fellow men of other lands. This greatest of Wars has bound together in closest offensive and defensive alliance men of most diverse races and tongues and antecedents and character, with conflicting ideas of political organization, through a common assertion of two principles—championing the weak and keeping one's word at all costs. Britain and France are one to-day. And Britain is not disloyal to her King and to monarchy, because for a practical, urgent purpose she identifies herself with a Republic. So Germany's cynical repudiation of those principles and of all the laws of civilized warfare—ultimately *Christian* principles and

laws—has shocked Christendom into perceiving that Christianity is more than a dogma as to the Unseen, it is a unique, vitalizing force on which the highest welfare of men and nations depends. So Christians of many races and tongues and antecedents and character, with conflicting ideas of ecclesiastical organization, unite to uphold righteousness through common devotion to the Incarnate Son of God and only Saviour of men. And they are perceiving that this union in sympathy and aim involves no disloyalty to their particular convictions, and that these will gradually cease to be causes of contention and means of alienation. For after all the things that all Christians agree about are more numerous and more important than those about which they differ.

For practical reasons, the National Mission is not wider than the National Church, though all its leaders would hear with joy and sympathy of a similar and simultaneous movement of Christians not of our communion. It is, however, as wide as our Church; it is planned to embrace all the different schools of thought which are traceable, not only in our Church but in the whole Church, from the earliest ages. And we may well believe that this common action for a common end is going to promote unity in a way that no argument and no deliberate attempt to ignore or to minimize differences could ever have done, and that a united Church of England may one day contribute to a union of Christendom of which we hardly dare dream yet. In their *entente cordiale*, against the common foe of indifference and unbelief, "High," "Low," "Broad"—"Catholic," "Evangelical," "Liberal"—are appropriating each other's phrases and entering into each other's thoughts, as they never did in the old, easy-going, normal conditions. Some day they will suddenly ask, "What were we actually at issue about before the War?"

"Conversion" and "Revival," for instance, words once shrunk from by two of the three schools of thought, are now becoming common property. They were avoided because, in spite of the grand record of unselfish work for the good of the community which those who used them have, they seemed associated with a type of teaching that made religion a matter of reading one's own title clear to mansions in the skies, and that deserved the reproach of selfish "other-worldliness." But the Mission which begins by trying to lead the individual to Christ will go on to show him that

he has been saved to serve, that he belongs to the Church not for what he can get, but for what he can give. Christians whose religion is no inherited convention, and who have ceased to wrangle with each other, will be able to bring a new, irresistible force of public opinion to bear upon the purification of our social and industrial and political life. Of this all who took part in the remarkable Conference of February 22 at Sion College had an earnest. Representatives of twelve denominations, under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal Bourne, Principal Selbie, and the head of the Salvation Army, met to consider, not as philanthropists, but as Christians, how our great national sin and curse of Intemperance can be done away, how the emergency legislation which is already emptying our prisons and asylums can be rendered permanent and strengthened, how the opportunity which makes the drunkard even more than it makes the thief may be curtailed.

So the third condition that fills us with hope for the Mission is that living Christian faith, spreading from the few to the many, must eventually solve most of our problems by uplifting our whole national life.

And the fourth and last condition is that the National Mission looks beyond our own nation. For in the van of its organizers are some of the trusted leaders of our greatest missionary societies. They know that the effectual evangelization of Britain would be the grandest step ever taken towards the evangelization of the vast non-Christian world, whose still unenlightened state is the great reproach of Christendom to-day. Missionary enterprise has indeed accomplished much in the past, but if it is to be in any degree commensurate with present opportunity, it must be enormously extended in the immediate future. For as Asia and Africa inevitably drift from all their old moorings their ancestral religions conspicuously fail them. Unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, they are feeling after the treasure which the Church holds in trust for the world. Why do "heathen" parents deliberately prefer Christian schools for their children? Why does a lecture on Christianity always draw a large audience in China? Why are multitudes in India clamouring for Christian teaching? Because as old conditions pass never to return, they are faced with the alternative of a new secular civilization, or of a spiritual regeneration. It is for the Church to say whether they shall find *Kultur* or Christ.

When we have fought out the present awful fight for all that we believe in, for all we esteem of most value in our national life, we must guard that and share it as we have never done before. And we look to the National Mission to equip us for this tremendous task by making every Christian a better Christian than he is now, and by bringing many to confess Christ for the first time.

Where could we find a more instructive parable of the existing state of affairs than in the familiar story of the one miracle of which there is a fourfold record? "Send them away that they may buy themselves somewhat to eat," says the incompetent, unthinking Church of the swarming multitude. "Give ye them to eat," comes the Master's first command. "But a far larger sum than we possess would not be enough to get it," says the bewildered Church. "Find out what you really have," comes the second, followed by the third command, "Bring it all to Me." He blesses it, He gives it back, made more than sufficient; they distribute it, every one eats, all are satisfied, and the Church which has received from Him and given, is left with abundant provision for its future needs.

MARY L. G. CARUS-WILSON.

