

THE PRESENT PHASE IN THE MOVEMENT FOR EVANGELISATION ¹

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AT this time of day it can hardly be necessary to reproduce the contents of the Report of the Archbishops' Committee on the Evangelistic Work of the Church. The Report has been read and reviewed and summarized many times. It now remains to inquire whether the Church is ready to put into operation the central clause—we might say the "black rubric"—of the Report.

"We desire to see as the means to this concentration a further call from the Archbishops to the Church, summoning it, by the all-powerful aid of the Holy Spirit, to nothing less than the evangelisation of England and the English people."

There can be no doubt that the Archbishops are willing enough to call the Church to this great task, but they await some indication that the Church is willing to respond to the call. No great wave of evangelistic enthusiasm is overspreading the Church yet, and it would be folly for the Archbishops to stultify themselves and the Church by sounding a call which might meet with no response.

The Church has learned many a lesson from the world in the course of the War. She may learn more yet. We are told that the United States had to tackle a year or so ago "the serious problem of training men to become skilled shipyard workers, and produce the present great output of merchant tonnage. She had, in abundance, the men, the raw material, and the money; but at the outset of her great shipbuilding adventure she had not the necessary amount of skill. To her credit she had the very great assets of adaptability, power of organization, energy, and enthusiasm, which enabled her to spread the knowledge of the few among the many.

¹ In continuation of the series of articles appearing in the CHURCHMAN on the Report of the Archbishops' Committees we print to-day one dealing with the Report of the *third* Committee, *The Evangelistic Work of the Church* (S.P.C.K., 1s.). The members of the Committee were the Bishops of Southwark (Chairman), Chelmsford, Dover and Kingston; Canons Bell, Eickersteth, Hopher, Robinson and Willink; the Revs. C. C. B. Bardsley, A. Butterworth, W. B. Trevelyan, and E. S. Woods; Mr. G. A. King, Mrs. Montgomery, Head Deaconess Siddall, Miss J. M. Douglas, and Miss W. M. Sedgwick.

The result is that to-day records of ship-construction are being established by men who, only a few months ago, were 'green' hands" (*Times*, October 22, 1918).

The Church has in abundance the men, the raw material, much of it very raw, and the money. Has she "the very great assets of adaptability, power of organization, energy and enthusiasm," which will enable her to put forth the light, heat and driving force necessary to effect the re-evangelisation of England?

It is instructive to notice that much of the success of the American effort is attributed to a preaching mission, which was entrusted mainly to a Christian minister. The preacher made a tour of the shipyards, not indeed to preach Christ to the men, but to make a religion of the men's endeavour, or, at least, to illuminate and ennoble with the light of the Gospel the effort which the men were called to make.

It is quite clear as to the quarter from which similar instruction and inspiration should proceed, for the potential shipwrights of the ark of the Church. The similarity of the words "evangelical" and "evangelistic" is, of course, more than accidental. It was a love for the Gospel and its proclamation which first gained for our ecclesiastical predecessors the title "Evangelical." The name has often been a term of reproach. "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." We have gloried in the name. We have emphasised it. We have spelt it with a capital initial letter. It is open to question whether we have to-day a right to use that capital letter; whether we know the Gospel, love the Gospel, preach the Gospel, as our forefathers did. It rests with us to see that the sceptre does not depart from Judah till Shiloh comes. If the sceptre passes into other hands, we shall have no more right to the capital letter; perhaps even to the title itself, than the King of England had to the title of King of France years after he ceased to rule a single acre of French territory.

It was in keeping with our traditions that the first request to the Archbishops to follow up the findings of this Report should have emanated from the Church Pastoral-Aid Society. The Bishop of Chelmsford, whose evangelistic fervour and power with men are known in all the Churches, headed a deputation to the Archbishops at Lambeth Palace on March 6, with a view to draw from them some pronouncement as to their future policy in evangelistic enter-

prise. The Society has arranged a series of conferences in various dioceses for the consideration of the Report and for suggestion of methods of evangelism. Birmingham, Liverpool, Darlington, Sheffield, and other centres have followed the initial Conference at Ware in November, 1918. A hopeful sign of the proceedings at Ware was the conclusion "that there is a new readiness to respond to the invitation of the Gospel when preached with faithfulness and from conviction." From this conclusion and from the conclusion that "the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad" has been, we might say, the privilege, the province, and largely the prerogative of the Evangelical school, is deduced the inference that the Evangelical clergy and laity are the natural leaders for a new evangelisation of our land. Five requisites were stated as preparatory to the actual effort. (1) Raising the level of spiritual life in our parishes; (2) Setting ideals high; (3) Paying more attention to preaching; (4) Fostering fellowship among Christian people; (5) Training workers. The Conference ventured to make several recommendations. All of them appear to be along the lines of method. The recommendations suggest a departure from stereotyped and conventional methods and a vigorous adoption of such measures as may meet the needs of the time. It cannot be said, however, that they carry us any further than the Report of the Archbishops' Third Committee of Inquiry has taken us.

Our special contribution to this movement ought to be the delineation of the message of the Gospel as it should be presented to-day, and a communication of that spirit which marked our forefathers in achieving their evangelistic triumphs.

Many years ago some members of the High Church school in one of our universities established a guild for open-air preaching. Their Evangelical brethren had carried on aggressive evangelistic work in the open-air through good report and ill for many years. The new guild were without experience. They appeared to be casting about for the right message for proclamation in the streets and fields. They resorted to their Evangelical brethren for guidance and help. That guidance and help was willingly given. Would our High Church brethren resort to us to-day under similar circumstances? They have adopted our methods, they have appropriated our message, they have assimilated our motive to a remarkable degree, and we thank God for it. Even so we ought to

be specialists in the mystery of the Gospel, and in the power to unfold it to all who will resort to us for help.

Are we as sure of our message as we ought to be? The Report remarks that the demand to-day is for "definiteness. It may appear surprising that in an age of freedom like our own there should be a demand for a definite and authoritative message, but it is the desire of a restless age for something that it can depend upon; of an age, which, though impressionable, is extraordinarily critical, for something which is above criticism. Much of the phraseology that has crystallized round the great truths of the Gospel has little meaning for this generation, and reinterpretation with authority is a crying need in evangelistic work" (page 16).

Here comes in an obvious difficulty. The Gospel presents itself in different lights to different minds. Hence arise our schools of thought and our denominations. In former days these were content to differ from one another with considerable vehemence. Each was sure of its ground with dogmatic assertiveness, laying down the law, or rather the Gospel, in a cut and dried manner. Other teachers were "not Christians" or "not Churchmen." Their teaching was "false doctrine," "Popery" perchance, or "Socinianism." We see clearly that this attitude was wrong, that truth has many sides, that difference of view is as reasonable in theology as in philosophy, science, politics, art, or medicine. Still, we have lost something in the change. Jowett, of Balliol, in his sermon on John Bunyan and Benedict Spinoza, preached at Edinburgh in 1871, said, "There is more toleration, more knowledge than formerly, but is there the same heroism, the same self-sacrifice, the same intensity, the same elevation of character, the same aspiration after an ideal life, the same death to the world, the same continued struggle for the good of mankind?" (*Sermons, Biographical and Miscellaneous*, pp. 45, 46).

We have to face the fact that the Gospel is interpreted in different ways. This may take the edge off our statement of its message. Some one else puts it in a different way. We have learned to tolerate that man, to regard him as a disciple of another school, to look upon him and perhaps to love him as a brother. We rejoice in the fact that the Gospel is preached by many who follow not with us. Yet this has meant that preachers have become less dogmatic, less sure of their own ground. Hearers are tempted to think that the

trumpet gives an uncertain sound, and they fail to prepare themselves for the battle. There is thus, as Dr. Jowett suggests, a lessened keenness on the part of those who are put in trust with the Gospel.

The attitude which we now adopt involves a willingness to reconsider our presentation of the Gospel. We may have lost sight of some essential features or over-emphasized some minor details. We study the message of other teachers in the hope of correcting our expression of the faith. As one result we have changed our conception of conversion.

Its content is in some ways narrowed, for we include in it less of what properly pertains to regeneration and renewal. We regard it less as the act of God and more as the act of the soul. We see that in the light of the New Testament conversion is an active step on the part of the man who experiences it. In other respects the content of conversion is widened, for it is realised that the faith which accompanies conversion includes faithfulness, both towards God and towards one's fellows. Conversion possesses social implications in its present interpretation.

It is not only the practical view of conversion about which we need to be clear, but the theology which lies behind it. Theology has to take account of sin. Here the preacher of the Gospel is placed at a twofold disadvantage.

The doctrine of the punishment of sin is discredited to-day. Hell loses all terror, all reality. If there is to be any punishment hereafter, it will be of a corrective character. Judgment to come scarcely comes into view. With this much goes out of the Gospel which we used to preach. The Cross is robbed of its vicarious character. The Atonement loses much of its meaning. It becomes, in fact, more, much more of a question than before why God became man. We have to make up our minds on these subjects. Few Evangelicals have a theory of the Atonement which can be stated with any cogency to-day. It is to be feared that many have no theory of it at all. Further, if there be a Moral Governor of the world, the element of punishment must enter into our message. We do not want to emphasise it, still less to exaggerate it. We would wish to eliminate it altogether. But we dare not do so. Ultimately there must be at some point a punitive element in our theology. We retain this without any idea of driving men to God

by the fear of punishment. If the fear of hell does not appeal to men to-day, we might hope that a loftier motive might draw men to the Cross. We might think that a living faith in Christ would lift men out of contact with sin. But here again the preacher is at a disadvantage. The sense of sin is minimised so much to-day that men feel little need of union with Christ with a view to rising to a far higher level of character and life. The average man to-day does not worry, we are told, about his sins. He goes further ; he feels that he has none to worry about.

We must make sure of our message in this connexion. We must emphasise the fact of human sinfulness. The recent débâcle shows that civilisation needs some potent and purifying influence to remedy its ills. The dread reality of sin is written plainly across the face of society, however dim the sense of sin may be and however much sin may be discounted by modern philosophy. We have been bidden to square our theology with facts, to revise our interpretation of the Bible, to admit that the Bible cannot contradict the word of God as written in the book of nature. It is now our turn to demand that sin as a fact, though not necessarily as an entity, must be recognised, and that philosophy must do what religion has done—square its theory to accord with fact.

Christ must be preached : His Suffering : His atoning Cross : His divine and daily Companionship : His Kingship and Leadership. We shall recognise that while our Lord came to save us from the punishment of our sins, He came to save us even more from the damage and defilement of sin. A heightened sense in the Church of the majesty of God may lead to a realisation of the unworthiness and baseness of the life of which self is the centre.

It has been questioned whether the Report is right in emphasising equipment for service rather than the blessing of salvation as the right reason to be advanced to-day for the acceptance of Christ by the individual man. The Report has not been criticised always quite fairly in this connexion. True, the appeal of service is emphasised, but so is the appeal of salvation. We are told (page 15) that " never more than to-day do we need to uplift the Cross of Christ, and to glory in nothing save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing must be allowed to overshadow this ; nothing can take its place."

The appeal of service does come home to many whom the

appeal of safety affects but little, yet we have to bear in mind two considerations.

(1) The younger generation is not bursting with zeal to make this world a Christian world. Many hearts are stirred with this ambition. Yet it is not so widespread as to make the appeal to service a decisive "Praeparatio Evangelica." (2) Many who desire to see a better England and a better world raised from the sufferings of this present time think that it can be done without bringing in any Christian reference and still more without the aid of the Churches. If the Churches sound a new call, if they affect zeal for reconstruction, it is only because their old message is played out and because their own skin is in danger. Even if their new social zeal is genuine, we are told, it is only exhibited the better to attract people to their fold.

Our message must still be one of salvation through Christ. The old appeal to men to flee from the wrath to come may seem meaningless from us. If we utter it, we must beware lest we seem to our hearers "as one that mocked." At the same time the call to repentance, the note of judgment and of retribution must not drop out of our preaching. The War has rehabilitated somewhat those sterner attributes of God, which the spiritually pacifist inclinations of pre-war congregations had caused preachers to keep in the background. What we want is not so much a new Gospel as a renewed Church. Bishop Phillips Brooks defines preaching as the presentation of truth through the medium of personality, and, however correctly truth is expressed, it will effect little unless personality comes out in its presentation. If the Church does not care very much whether the nation is evangelised or not, it is not likely that the nation will be roused. The Church will not care unless the clergy are moved by some such passion for souls as caused Whitefield so to preach to the Bristol colliers that the tears made white gutters down their blackened cheeks. The spiritual life of the Church needs deepening. We must pay every attention to the fostering of personality.

We need not fear the effects of criticism. We need not fence some of the articles of the Creed from the approach of critics, hostile or friendly. Criticism cannot touch the experience of the love of God and the ardour of loyalty and devotion to Christ. So far as criticism can affect our theology, we have to remember the influence

of St. John the Baptist. He knew that the theology of his day would need complete restatement. He realised that his time was one of great spiritual transition. Yet he preached with convincing power. King, church and people alike, felt the spell of his message. They went out into the wilderness to hear him and were baptized of him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

This is the day of evangelistic opportunity—the Report tells us. Need it be one of spiritual impotence? The nation's need of the Gospel is obvious. No one can bring together the various sections of society in the way that the Church can. No one else can bring them to God. The Church may draw upon a store of force in the young life associated with the Student Christian Movement. The Christian students of to-day, however, are by no means satisfied with the Church as they find her. The Report states at some length their position. The Church must adapt herself to the needs of the people and to reasonable requirements of the young life which she would draw into service.

There are signs that the Church's message is just what the age needs. Dr. Benjamin Kidd, in his recently published book, *The Science of Power*, tells us that power in civilisation rests on the collective emotion of the ideal, not on reason. He says that "in the social integration which is proceeding, the eternal law of efficiency cannot be stated in terms of reason. For it can only be summarised in one word—Sacrifice."¹ The only cause which is able to render the individual capable of the principle of sacrifice is that which expresses itself through the emotion of the ideal. If Dr. Kidd be right¹ the Gospel has an unique chance. But if it has, is this aim capable of realisation? Dr. Kidd argues that "civilisation can be altered so radically and so quickly that the outlook of humanity on nearly every fundamental matter can be changed in a single generation."² We have in the Student Christian Movement a force waiting to carry our ideals into effect. If we can only absorb in the Church the enthusiasm which inspired its splendid motto, "The Evangelisation of the World in this generation," some of us may yet live to see our beloved nation re-evangelised and brought to the feet of Christ.

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¹ *The Science of Power*, page 125.

² *Ibid.*, page 106.