

EVANGELISM.

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EVANGELISM is in the air! At the Sheffield Church Congress the subject was "The Eternal Gospel," and the Archbishop of York, in the most notable utterance of the week, declared that the Church's first duty was "to evangelize itself." Conferences of Evangelicals are being held to consider the best methods of evangelistic work. The Anglo-Catholics declare that their Congresses held in various centres are the preliminary to an attempt on their part to evangelize England. The Church Army has set out to evangelize great centres by United Missions or Crusades, and to evangelize the rural parishes by route marches of Crusaders from a centre to various points. The Church Parochial Mission Society states that its work of last year showed "a substantial increase," while it "can discern growing indications of a widespread desire for a large extension of evangelizing work in the near future." The Free Churches are calling all their members to a great campaign of Personal Evangelism. Popular missionaries, like Gipsy Smith, draw immense crowds, and report that in all parts of the country there is a spirit of revival. Evangelism is in the air!

Evangelism is clearly divided into two great branches. There is Public Evangelism, and there is Personal Evangelism. It is a great mistake to think, as some do, that the latter excludes the former, so that if we can get Personal Evangelism carried on, Public Evangelism will have no further usefulness. Rather, both branches of the work are equally valuable. But the practice of the two methods has not been equal. In our present Public Evangelism we have a revival, with developments, of the methods which almost ceased to exist with the declaration of war, but which are now once more coming into use. In Personal Evangelism it must be confessed that we have practically an almost untouched field of work. Let us, then, first direct our thoughts to the subject of Public Evangelism.

In Public Evangelism we again find a division into two branches of work, and again a striking inequality in the use of the two;

we may call these two branches, for convenience sake, the Ordinary and the Extraordinary, and in considering them I am simply confining myself to doing this from the parochial standpoint, not dealing with such special efforts as, for instance, the Church Army Crusades. How, then, is Evangelism to be carried into and carried on in our parishes?

(1) *By Ordinary Methods*, i.e., efforts conducted by the parish priest himself, without extraneous aid. It is this branch of the work which is, comparatively, so little used, and which in many cases, if not in all, is fraught with great promise of fruitfulness. Take such a method of Ordinary Evangelism as an after-service, following the usual Sunday Evening Prayer at which the sermon has been distinctly of an evangelistic character, with appropriate hymns, or, maybe, even the use of a Mission hymn-book. There are many earnest evangelistic sermons preached which lose most of their result because those stirred and impressed are immediately let go without any effort to reach them individually or to crystallize the otherwise fleeting impression into a definite and permanent act of decision. Let the choir be asked to remain in their places and sing a hymn after the Benediction, and all those of the congregation who choose be invited to stay for a brief period of drawing nearer to God. When those who so desire have left the church, let the choir come down into the front seats of the nave, so that the parish priest himself alone faces the people. Then let him talk, not preach, to those present with all the earnestness he can command, not at any great length, but specially addressing himself to the undecided. Then let this be followed by prayer, a short period of silence, and a hymn sung kneeling, during which let him try to bring any who need it to a definite act of decision in the way that best commends itself to him. And this again will frequently be followed by personal interviews, when, maybe, the last obstacles which lie between some soul and its Saviour will finally be removed.

Or take again the lantern service, held in church or school after the Sunday evening service, open to all adults over fourteen years of age, but children below that age carefully excluded (unless with their parents), these being dealt with in another way, as Evangelism in a mixed congregation of children and adults is an all but hopeless task. Owing to the semi-darkness it is better not to attempt to ask people to leave before an after-service, but simply to make

the appeal for personal decision to the whole congregation. It must be remembered that the address is not an explanation of the pictures, but the pictures are illustrations of the address. The signalling arrangements must be as noiseless as possible, and the slides most carefully arranged beforehand, as any confusion or mistake detracts immensely from the "atmosphere" of the service. A simple Mission solo, with four or five appropriate pictures accompanying it, is often most effective, but for this purpose no words should be upon the screen, hence clear articulation on the part of the singer is a necessity.

A Children's Mission, consisting of a succession of five or six lantern services on week-nights, for which Lent is an excellent time, has proved itself to be most useful. It is better not to throw these services open to all and sundry, at any rate in large parishes, or the lantern may attract an unruly mob, unmanageable in the dim light. It is preferable to confine the attendance to the scholars of the Church Day and Sunday Schools over seven or eight years of age, issuing tickets to be shown at the door in order to ensure this. It may be taken for granted that a disorderly children's lantern service does more harm than good. The crucial part of the children's lantern service, especially if held in a hall, is the assembling, as if the children are allowed to be noisy then it is very difficult to get that perfect stillness afterwards which is essential for the service itself. The best method that I know of solving this problem is to be present oneself when the first detachment of children arrives, and as soon as some twenty or thirty have assembled to begin to teach them to learn by heart some simple chorus or hymn, words first and then music. This provides a subject of interest for the half-hour of waiting, and allows the children to exercise their voices in an unobjectionable way. I always robe for these services, wherever they may be held, and request two or three minutes of absolute silence while I retire for that purpose. All this helps to create the right atmosphere before the service itself begins. Should the children cough much, let me urge the avoidance of a mistake which I made once—and only once!—in requesting the children to "cough and get it over." Every child of the thousand or more present considered it at once his or her duty to cough loud and long; my voice was drowned in the tumult, and it was some little time before I could get silence again!

The after-service for children is the most difficult of all. Above everything one desires to avoid unreality, and yet children are often far more ready to make their decision for Christ than are adults, and often quite as sincere. I may be perhaps forgiven for describing my own method in full. Assuming that I have five services, and that the age of attendance is limited to "over eight," I announce that an opportunity will be given to every one to attend one after-service, but that there will be an age limit each night. I explain that the after-service is only for those who really desire to accept Christ (or whatever phrase best describes the point of the previous appeal), and that, on this first night, only those over thirteen may remain. Then I ask all desiring so to stay to pass towards the doors with the others, while a hymn is sung, but to take seats at the back and wait for further instructions. When those remaining are thus seated and the rest have left, a band of workers takes the children apart separately and asks their reason for remaining, those whose answer is satisfactory coming back to the front seats, and those who only "want to see some more pictures," or something of that kind, being dismissed for that evening. This ensures, so far as it is possible to do so, a little company of children who are mostly in real earnest. Then, with the help of a few pictures, I explain what is meant by decision for Christ, after which I have found it best to have thrown on the screen three or four very simple prayers—drawn up by myself for this purpose—and after a few words on each, let the children kneel and pray them aloud. Then a simple Decision Card, on exactly the same lines as the prayers, is given to each when the lights are raised, names and addresses are taken, and the children pass out, while I speak to each one at the door. On successive nights the after-service age limit is gradually reduced, till all have had a chance to stay.

When the Mission is ended, the list of names and addresses thus secured is taken and each child is invited to come to the church at a certain hour on some evening when a band of workers is again in attendance. Each child is then dealt with personally for a quarter of an hour or so, being taken apart for the purpose, and the reality of his or her decision ascertained so far as is possible; other details are taken down, children are enrolled in any suitable parish organizations if not already members, and the forms thus filled up supply a fairly complete record of the result of the Mission.

Years later it is again and again a joy to find Confirmation candidates dating their decision for Christ as being "at the Children's Mission."

At the Sheffield Congress Dr. Locke pleaded, in very earnest and moderate terms, for the use of the Confessional, which, he said, provided the means for those in spiritual distress giving vent to their feelings and obtaining the help they needed. To that extent there is much truth in Dr. Locke's words, but this need is equally well met by the plan, which I ventured to advocate years ago, and which has met with some small acceptance and with a good deal of criticism, namely, the practice of a weekly Consultational, when the parish priest is in the vestry or the church at stated times, and can be seen by anyone desiring spiritual help or counsel of any kind. This may not be practicable in all parishes, but where it is possible it will certainly lead to some cases of Evangelism of the most definite kind, as I know by experience.

The above methods and that of open-air services—with the exception of the Children's Mission, which *must* be conducted by a man with the gift of speaking to children—are all within the reach of the ordinary parish priest, granted the one condition that he himself knows what decision for Christ means in his own personal experience. Without that, nothing can be done; but if that is a blessed fact in his own spiritual life, then, even if he have not the gifts of an Evangelist, he may yet do some real and splendid Evangelism in his own church and parish.

We will turn next to Extraordinary methods. Here the outstanding way of Evangelism is, I still venture to think, the Parochial Mission, albeit this method has of recent years been largely discredited, partly, I fear, as a result of the National Mission. But in my judgment there is no need for the Parochial Mission to be thus discredited, all it needs is to be re-directed. The old Parochial Missions were mainly an appeal to the outsider, in which they were often extremely successful, but in that respect their usefulness is largely over. To-day to the unconverted man in the street the announcement of a Mission has much the same effect as that of a Temperance meeting to a drunkard, it tends to keep him out rather than to draw him in. But, says the Archbishop, "the Church must evangelize itself." There is the opportunity of the Parochial Mission. It is the evangelization of those already inside

the Church which is our crying need. A vicar of a country parish, with some seventy communicants on its roll, in reply to a question had to confess that he could not think of one who was really an out-and-out Christian; and his experience is repeated more or less on every side, in town as well as in country. Probably there is not a parish anywhere in which a considerable number of its communicants do not need to be brought in decision to the feet of Christ. Every Missioner of any experience to-day knows that of the number who profess conversion at a Mission a very large proportion are communicants already. It is in this direction that the Parochial Mission has before it such an enormous field of work. Not that there will be no appeal to the outsider, but its main fruitfulness and its chief result must be looked for, at present, inside the Church itself. Its main bearing on the outsider we will consider later on.

It will be seen, therefore, that I write as one who is profoundly a believer in the Parochial Mission. But what is needed so much in this department of Evangelism is organized method. At present our way, as a Church, of conducting Missions is as slipshod and disorganized as is our usual method, as a nation, of making war, entailing an enormous waste of energy and leaving whole tracts of possible evangelistic enterprise untouched. Societies and committees do useful work, but they cannot possibly grapple with the Church's task. "The Church must evangelize herself"—that is, she must do it herself, as a corporate body, if it is to be properly effected. Yet, on the other hand, it cannot be done all at once, which is what the National Mission attempted, not without any success, but with very indifferent and inadequate results. It went to the opposite extreme from our usual method, and instead of the isolated and spasmodic efforts of our usual Mission work, it tried to do the whole work at once, and so far failed, as everything must fail which attempts too much with too little material. We must recognize the fact that not every one is fitted for Evangelism on the scale of a Mission, and that the supply of men qualified and experienced in this work who are available at present is quite small. There lies the problem—how to adopt a middle course, and an effective course, between the above two unsatisfactory extremes.

The solution lies, I venture to believe, *in the diocese*, as the one possible unit of organization; that is, the ideal of Evangelism

is *Diocesan*. But at present, in that form, it hardly exists. Of course many dioceses have Diocesan Missioners, and some have Evangelistic Councils? I was a member of one such body for some eight years, but we never did anything to speak of, except carry out a few isolated and fragmentary efforts, in order to justify our existence. But our composition was quite wrong, and we had *no* Diocesan Missioner. For if Diocesan Evangelism is to be thoroughly done, the one person who must be in charge of it is the Diocesan Missioner. But his qualifications and his duties need to be far more clearly understood. He should, I venture to think, have three qualifications, which are indispensable: (a) Spirituality, since without that everything else will be useless; (b) evangelistic power and experience, or he can never set others to work; (c) organizing ability, for the Evangelism of the diocese depends almost wholly upon this. With regard to his duties, he should not ever be the "jack-of-all-trades" which many of our Diocesan Missioners at present seem to have become—men who have all sorts of odd jobs that no one else will do thrust upon them, such as editing the *Diocesan Gazette*, and similar work which has no connexion whatever with the Diocesan Missioner's one and only task, Evangelism. To this latter his whole energy should be devoted, instead of, as too often, having too little of his own work to do and too much of other people's. At the same time, scarcely any man can go on conducting Missions or organizing them without himself becoming official or formal, so that probably the ideal plan—and one that would often help to meet the financial problem connected with his appointment—is for him to have a very small country parish, a curate who is practically in semi-charge, and a small car in which he can get to any part of the diocese at will. At some centre of the diocese, the place which is most conveniently reached and the most populous, he should have one or two rooms, a kind of Mission Office, at which, as a rule, he should be accessible on one day in the week, for consultation by any of the clergy on any subject connected with Evangelism; and he should be in constant and close touch with his Bishop. The Diocesan Missioner is, as it were, the Commander-in-Chief of the army on active service, and should have a paramount claim on his Bishop's thought and time whenever needed.

Assuming, then, that a Diocesan Missioner is thus appointed

and equipped, his work will fall into two main divisions, apart from his own personal evangelistic work of taking Missions, conducting Retreats, Quiet Days, etc. His first and all-important task will be—

I. TO MOBILIZE. In every diocese there must be a certain number of clergy who have the evangelistic gift. Some have already used it, and gained experience; others have it, but either do not know it or have never engaged in definite evangelistic work. It is these evangelistic forces of the diocese whom the Missioner should seek to discover and mobilize. Possibly a letter to every incumbent and curate, countersigned by the Bishop, will do much to bring to his knowledge the names of men who (a) have some experience of Evangelism; (b) are believed by others to have evangelistic power; (c) would be willing to undertake one or two Missions regularly each year in the diocese.

Then should come into being an Evangelistic Council, quite a small body, composed *entirely* of men who have evangelistic experience, and nominated to the Bishop by the Diocesan Missioner, since it is his work they are to help and his fellow-workers that they are to be. The usual method of forming Evangelistic Councils is almost worse than useless. What, for instance, does a Diocesan Conference know of the suitability of its elected members? The object of a Council is not to minister to the importance of diocesan dignitaries who think they should be members of every diocesan body; it should be a most carefully selected company of experts, who are keen on the salvation of souls, and who know the best ways to win men for God. From the men in the diocese whom the Missioner has discovered to have real experience, he should be able to nominate his Council.

Next an inquiry should be made of every man who has done evangelistic work, or who seems likely to have the qualifications even if at present untried, as to his willingness to attend a School for Missioners. It will probably be found possible to make this an annual gathering, taking place in the summer in preparation for the campaign of the winter months. It will, of course, include addresses and instruction from well-known Missioners, but it should have a considerable portion of its time occupied in *real* conference, when methods can be compared, details discussed, questions asked, etc. This School should be very fruitful in the preparation by de-

grees of a staff of men, ready to take any Missions that are required in the diocese, gaining experience as well as increasing in numbers every year, and who could be enrolled as one body of "Assistant Mission Clergy."

The other and equally important work of the Diocesan Missioner is—

2. TO ORGANIZE. This organization will lie in two directions, Central and Parochial.

(a) Central. Assuming that the Diocesan Missioner has some kind of central office in the diocese, this would be the natural place of his central organization; failing this, a room or rooms should be secured in one of the large centres of the diocese, to serve as a Bureau of Mission Information. Under present conditions, the incumbent of a parish in which a Mission is projected has scarcely any information at hand as to Mission material. He may quite conceivably never have seen any Mission printing, and his knowledge of Mission literature will be confined to any he can secure by writing to some Society for specimens. What he needs is a kind of showroom of all material connected with Missions, which he can visit, and where he can inspect and choose the best articles for his particular parish and purpose.

Here, then, the Diocesan Missioner will gradually assemble every kind of material upon which he can lay his hands. Here will be specimens of every Mission tract and pamphlet published in the country, with full details as to publisher and price marked upon each one. While these are carefully arranged, according to subject and use, in the centre of the room, the walls will be covered with as many specimens of Mission posters, bills, handbills, invitations, cards, etc., as the Missioner can collect. He will keep a watchful eye for any Missions in other dioceses, and will write in each case asking for a specimen of every kind of printed matter there used, of which any new and striking specimen will find a place on the walls of his showroom. In a case will be found a copy of every book published on the subject—a library of Mission literature.

One of the Missioner's most needed pieces of organization will consist in finding, or probably himself drawing up, lantern services, illustrated by slides of the best quality, including special services for children. These slides will be on view at this central

Bureau, and can also be had on hire by any incumbent in the diocese requiring them for Mission purposes. The outlay on these may be rather costly, but it will be well worth it. The Diocesan Missioner will also provide for hire some of those necessities for processions in the open air, or other outside work, which are difficult to make and costly to buy; such as torches, lanterns, transparencies for carrying through the street, and huge banners or streamers for fixing up outside a church in which a Mission is progressing.

Then his organizing will also be—

(b) Parochial. An announcement has recently been made of an evangelistic campaign throughout one diocese in 1923 or 1924, and similar diocesan efforts have been made previously. It is extraordinary that the weakness of such large schemes is not recognized. There are certainly not in existence Missioners sufficiently experienced to cover a whole diocese at once. The Church Parochial Mission Society has a list of just over one hundred, of whom probably not more than a third would ever be available at one time. Assume that there are double that number outside the Society's staff, and it must be obvious that to supply Missioners to all the parishes in a diocese at once is only repeating on a smaller scale the mistake of the National Mission. Moreover, parishes not in the least ripe for a Mission will engage in one because they do not like to "fall out of line," but the work will probably be done ineffectively and half-heartedly. I know of such an instance in a Diocesan Mission where a Rural Dean felt that he must join in, but had no interest in the matter, and therefore simply had an evening service for eight days in succession, with a different preacher each evening! The result, too, of such an effort is that, as parishes cannot have Missions within a period of several years at least, the whole evangelistic effort is condensed into one week, and for some years after the diocese forgets all about Evangelism!

The aim of the Diocesan Missioner should be to cover the diocese with a network of evangelistic effort which is always going on, and in this way to work through the diocese by sections in the course of some years, organizing a kind of rota of evangelistic effort. Assume for illustration a diocese of 250 parishes divided into fifteen rural deaneries, and suppose that his inquiries brought to light six men in the diocese beside himself who were experienced in

Mission work. During the first year he would be able to carry out a complete series of Missions, say, in one rural deanery, or possibly, if he could get some outside help, he might cover two. In the second year the School for Missioners might well double his little staff, so that in that year he might cover three deaneries. Working in this way he would, in the course of some five or six years, have organized an evangelistic effort in every part of the diocese, by which time the first rural deaneries possibly would be ready for a second effort. Large centres would, probably, be best treated singly, as units in themselves, always provided that the supply of Missioners was adequate. The staff of Missioners would not multiply very rapidly, as it should be a rule that an inexperienced man coming into the work should first accompany an experienced Missioner and learn from him on the spot how to conduct a Mission.

But as the work developed, and the Schools for Missioners succeeded each other, those parishes in which evangelistic efforts had already taken place would not be left severely alone for the cycle of five or six years. Gradually there could be organized, in the same way, a series of "Teaching Missions," to be followed by "Missionary Missions," so that in this way it would be possible in time for every parish, so desiring, to have one of these special efforts every alternate year, the programme of the Schools for Missioners being extended as needed in order to take in these new branches of the work. The work in the diocese would not, of course, be rapid, but it would be thorough, and, still better, it would be continuous, and a well-qualified Diocesan Missioner, backed by a keen Evangelistic Council and a sympathetic Bishop, could carry it out.

It might well be that, in course of time, some small periodical diocesan paper could be circulated, with its contents confined solely to diocesan evangelism, keeping parishes in touch with the movement, and—most important of all—calling out a constant volume of prayer.

Evangelism furnishes a common ground for all schools of thought, and in this great work men of all views could happily unite, provided that each had just one object in view, the winning of souls for Christ. That should be a *sine qua non* for enrolment on the Diocesan Staff of Mission Clergy.