

## III

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THE first question that we have to ask ourselves is quite simple, —What is the Gospel? The three great strands of the Gospel are these. First, man is a sinner who needs salvation. All that the humanists have taught us about man being gradually perfected has been undone by the events of our time, so that we are cast back again upon the reality of man's sinfulness as a doctrinal fact, underlined by the events of our day. Man is a sinner by his actions and man is a sinner by his nature. Not only do we find this in Romans iii. 23 and in Ephesians ii. 3, but we know it to be true from the world around us and from inward experience. We do not, however, tend to do anything about our sinfulness until the Holy Spirit really shows us this fact; the Lord Jesus Christ tells us that the first work of the Spirit is "to convince the world of sin because they believe not" on Christ (St. John xvi. 9).

As evangelicals we believe that the Holy Spirit does this work of showing men their sin, that they may then begin to discern the second great strand of the Gospel: man is a sinner needing salvation and the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Saviour who can meet his need. We therefore proclaim Christ crucified, risen and ascended, as our message. "Christianity is Christ," said Griffith Thomas in an earlier generation, and that simple phrase cannot be bettered. We evangelicals proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ as the Gospel. In so doing we come at times into conflict with those who would preach Christ and some other important matter. It is almost as though we stand upon the Mount of Transfiguration and hear Peter saying, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias". But it was not to be. They saw "Jesus only". He is unique. He is all our hope. He is all our salvation.

The third great strand of the Gospel is the necessity of personal response to Christ. This is intrinsic in traditional and historic evangelicalism. Not only is it enshrined in our Articles—"We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort", but it is the hallmark of every true evangelical reformer down the years. This is where John Wesley and Billy Graham link hands across the centuries. They cut away the matters of secondary importance and they show the essential stark reality of the Gospel: man is a sinner needing salvation; Christ is the Saviour that man needs; man must come in penitence and faith to Christ and so find in Him salvation. Now, we have been accused as evangelicals of doing nothing but stress personal salvation. But we know that unless we stress personal salvation, we are wasting our time in stressing the other things which come from it. It is only because we are intensely individualistic that we are then able to hold a high view of the Church. Now that man is redeemed through faith in Christ, he is "a new creature" (2 Corinthians v. 17). His relationships with God are now right, and his relationships with other individ-

uals thus begin to fall into place, and his relationships with society begin to have a new and a right perspective.

This leads us to a second question, What is a Christian? For too long the Church of England has comfortably believed that its task is to make good men better. We have to sound the clarion call that the primary duty of the Church is to make bad men good, and then to build them up into the worshipping family of the Church. Someone once said to me, "But does the Church of England believe in conversion?" I found that simply by reminding him that January 25th was the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul and not either of his life or death was enough! The whole emphasis of our Prayer Book is clearly that the child is brought into covenant relationship with God at his baptism. He is then led of the Spirit to a personal trust in the Lord Jesus in order that, as the catechism puts it, "he may come to a state of salvation". He then shows this forth formally in his confirmation.

A Christian, though, is not simply someone who is led to conversion. That is the beginning of discipleship. The glory of evangelicalism has always been that God has seen man first in the starkest terms of sinnerhood but has then realized the potential height to which man can rise if he is totally yielded to the Lord Jesus. In our pastoral duty we must lay stress upon the individual. We seek to bring him to conversion. We seek then to lead him on into assurance of salvation and so to grow in his personal life. To this end, incidentally, here in Islington, we have written a series of booklets called: *How can I find God?*, *How can I be sure I am a Christian?* and *How can I grow in the Christian Life?* which help to bring people to Christ, to assurance and to growth.

Parallel with the growth of evangelical influence in the Church of England, there has been emphasis upon personal holiness. Here the Keswick Movement has constantly brought before us the challenge of the Spirit-filled life. What is a Christian? A man who is converted to Christ, who has found assurance of personal salvation, is growing in his personal Christian life, is reaching towards a life of full surrender to the Lord Jesus with a corresponding infilling of the Holy Spirit and is, at the same time, taking his place in the life of the Church in worship and in the life of the world in witness. Each individual matters, and as evangelicals we lay stress upon the infinite worth and potential usefulness of the individual Christian.

A third question balances the second. What is the Church? For too long other people in the Church of England have seen our contribution in terms of dealing with the individual and then feeling that we have little more to give. I believe that only as we become intensely individualistic, can we become realistically corporate, for only when each individual member of the worshipping community is truly born again of the Spirit, can we find that unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace which lifts worship above the formal recitation of Psalms and prayers to that glorious action of worshipping God in the beauty of holiness.

The position of the Church of England is very strong because it constantly refers the life of the Church to Holy Scripture. We stand

traditionally beneath the authority of Holy Scripture. When the evangelical thinks of the Church, he does not only think of the contemporary Church as he sees it, nor of the historical Church as he knows it has developed, but of the primitive Church as he sees it in Holy Scripture. I would suggest that the evangelical is less fettered by tradition than other branches of the Church; it is important therefore that we should state in positive terms our doctrine of the Church so that other groups in other denominations may at least hear clearly **stated** what we believe. The seven marks of the Church found in the second chapter of the Acts are not merely a picture of the early Church, but an example of what we, as evangelicals, believe the Church to be. We find that Article XIX defines the Church in these terms: "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered". From the vitally important second chapter of the Acts we can draw those marks of the Church which are primitive and historic, and which are truly part of the evangelical heritage in doctrine and teaching.

1. The Church is a *fellowship of believers*. In verse 42, they continued in fellowship. The Church is intensely individualistic because people come into it one by one as at conversion they respond to Christ. At the same time, it is intensely corporate in that when we accept Christ as Saviour, there is this almost natural progression to the place where we move to service and worship.

2. The Church is a *society with doctrinal tenets*. In verse 42 they continued in the apostles' doctrine. The Church is never seen as simply a sentimental gathering together of people of like mind. It is a society with clear doctrinal agreement. It is for this reason that Sunday by Sunday in all our services we say, "I believe". The Holy Scriptures are the basis of our doctrine and so it is that as evangelicals we will never be content simply with accepting the contemporary tenets of modern man. Always we seek to drive back to the rock from which we are hewn, the Scriptures themselves.

3. The Church is a *sacramental family*. In the Old Testament there was much emphasis upon the covenant relationship of the people of God with their God. As in the early Church, so in our preaching as evangelicals to-day we must not obscure the emphasis upon the sacraments, which we may so easily do by our emphasis upon personal religion. Here in verse 41 we find the sacrament of initiation and in verse 42 the sacrament of continuance; these outward signs bring assurance and strength to the new family. God knows that many of our hearts are weak and frightened and that we need these outward signs to help us. At the same time, as evangelicals we remember that the outward sign must never become the ultimate reality. When we listen to Her Majesty on Christmas Day, we thank God for the miracle of the wireless which brings the Queen to us, but we do not place our wireless sets in a special niche and offer them reverence. Always we go past the visible emblem to the reality behind it. We therefore rejoice to use the sacraments of faith, always remembering that they are stepping stones to God and not an end in themselves. It is encouraging to see among forward-looking evangelicals to-day a renewed emphasis upon Baptism and Holy Communion, so that in the forefront

of our thinking there is the movement for baptismal reform and growing stress upon Holy Communion, as the family service of the redeemed community.

4. The Church is a *worshipping community*. Not only did the early disciples continue in the breaking of bread, but in verse 42 they continued in prayers. There may even here be a trace of a vestigial liturgy. The early Church was made up of Jews who were used to the regular worship of the synagogue and it is unlikely that they would not soon begin to hold some regular form of daily prayer. Clearly the breaking of bread became the weekly service of the Church, while the prayers became the daily service of the Church. It is also encouraging to notice that more evangelicals are to-day preaching about worship and studying it in the light of their evangelical insights. More evangelical churches are seeking to worship God in the beauty of holiness, and we are beginning to produce liturgiologists who have a real desire to put into modern terms the ancient beauty of our liturgy, and at the same time are beginning to have the technical qualifications to do so.

5. The Church is a *witness to the world*. We find that "fear came upon the people" in verse 43 and also that the Church "found favour with the people" in verse 47. As evangelicals, we must always remember, as Archbishop Temple used to say, that "the Church must be constantly preoccupied with those who are outside her fellowship that she may bring them into her fellowship". We must seek in our individual life as Christians to be blameless, that we may find favour with the world. And we must seek by every means to witness to the power of the Lord Jesus Christ in our daily lives, and thus fear may well fall upon many as with awe they recognize that we are people with authority.

6. The Church is a *supernatural unity*. In verse 44 they were together and they had all things in common. This was not Communism, which takes from the rich by compulsion, but Christianity, which gives to the poor through compassion. They shared what they had, they cared for each other, they bore each other's burdens and they lived with one accord—the outworking of a spiritual principle: that when the Holy Spirit is indwelling in the hearts of believers, whether they realize it or not or whether they like it or not, they are part and parcel of a spiritual unity, of an organism which is made of God. The evangelical constantly has to remind his brethren that we are in fact united with our brethren in the Church in South India, whether we wish to express it in legal terms or not. This means that every time two Christians quarrel in the local Church, they spoil the pattern; it also means that while the parts of Christendom are divided, the pattern is also spoiled. The evangelical recognizes a tension. It is a tension between doctrine and unity, and it is a tension which must be held, though there is a wide divergence of opinion amongst evangelicals as to how this is to be held. At this point let us recognize that we must not grasp at unity and lose definition, but none the less we must not hold so doggedly to definition that we are unwilling in charity to seek after unity.

7. The Church is an *evangelistic movement*. In verse 41 they gladly heard the word and in verse 46 with gladness they went about

their business and in verse 47 they praised God. Here was an evangelistic movement which had about it the breath of God's joy; Christianity in those early days was caught even more than it was taught. Already the Church of God had recognized itself as the agency through which God means to reach and challenge and capture the world for the Cross. We too have to recognize that the whole Church is a joyful army on the march, reaching out constantly to new triumphs of the Cross.

The result of this seven-fold pattern of the early Church was quite simple—"The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved". It is our task as evangelicals constantly to put this scriptural emphasis before people, that they may see the Church as she was in the Scriptures, as she is meant to be in the mind of God, and, God willing, as she will become through the constant renewal of the Holy Spirit in the world to do God's work until Christ returns.

Our fourth question is—What is evangelism? The essence of evangelicalism is the proclamation of the Gospel. It is the making of true Christians. It is the building up of the Church. This, therefore, comes back again to the fact that evangelicalism is not simply a code of ethics or a way of living or a method of Church government or a number of doctrines. It is a word which covers the whole way in which we evangelicals seek to live our lives and as evangelical clergymen to carry through our ministry.

There is a certain selective principle in evangelicalism. It agrees that there is need to relate the faith to every part of life whether it be in the realm of education, in the realm of race relations, in the realm of industrial disputes or in the realm of politics. It believes that such great movements as the ecumenical movement and the liturgical movement are true expressions of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church at large. But having said all that, evangelicalism keeps always to the fore the constant vision of "the rejected Christ". A Roman Catholic writer has said that it is only converts who have known what it is to be without God and without Christ and without hope, who make real evangelists, because it is they who are haunted by a world which is heedless of "the rejected Christ". Something of the same spirit has always touched the life and work of evangelicals, and particularly of the parochial clergy of our own Church of England who love and glory in this name.

What, then, is this over-riding evangelism? The evangelical would say with St. Paul, "I came not to baptise, but to preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians, chapter i, verse 17). He would not mean that baptism is unimportant, for evangelicals are in the forefront of the movement for baptismal reform, and it is in evangelical parishes above others, perhaps, where there is now regular preparation of parents and god-parents before every infant baptism service. The evangelical has this constant vision of souls without the Saviour, souls for whom Christ died. The essence of evangelicalism is evangelism, and evangelism which really works. It is not enough for us to hold true Scriptural evangelical doctrines, unless at the same time we are seeing the Evangel working in the power of the Spirit in the transformed lives of men and women and children. We hold to the importance of the individual, and we must not allow ourselves to be crowded by committees and

organizations and other legitimate duties, from giving time in prayer and personal counselling to the individuals who live in our parish and who come to our church. The individual has to be led to Christ and the movement for training counsellors in personal work, and the use of regular monthly Guest Services is another example of the way in which evangelicals are leading the way to-day.

The evangelical is also throwing his full weight into the great inter-denominational movements for evangelism which are having such a mighty impact on our country. If we study the make-up, for instance, of the Greater London Crusade Committee for 1955, we find that evangelicals in the Church of England are taking a leading part. Wherever Christ is preached, whether within the setting of our parish life or in the wider setting of city-wide and even nation-wide campaigns, the evangelical must be ready to give of his knowledge and experience, of his prayer and of his enthusiasm, and so support to the full such great opportunities.

At the same time one of the marked features of evangelism in our country in the between-wars period which has increased immeasurably in the post-war period, is evangelism through various interdenominational agencies. The Varsities and Public Schools Camps, the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, the Crusaders' movement and the Christian Union movement in colleges, schools, factories and business houses, is symptomatic of the action of the Spirit of God in drawing together people with different denominational backgrounds but with a common love for Christ and a common desire to bring their contemporaries to Him. Here again the Church of England is not only leading, but is gaining a tremendous amount from these movements. A growing stream of first-rate young men and women who first found Christ through Christian Unions are now coming forward for training for the ministry and for missionary work. We are in an incomparably stronger position potentially than any other party or part of the Church. It is not an exaggeration to say that if God continues to bless this Christian Union work, and if the tide of vocation to whole-time service continues to rise, we may see the whole face of the Church of England transformed in the next two generations. No longer is the evangelical considered an oddity in the Church. Leadership is being thrust upon him whether he likes it or not.

We have a Gospel which transforms lives ; we have a Gospel which promotes holiness and self sacrifice ; we have a Gospel which drives people not only into full time service in this country but out into the four corners of the mission field. We believe very humbly that we have the Gospel that man needs to-day. Let us then lay aside our past attitude of self-depreciation and minority minded-ness, and let us glory again in the Gospel which is our hope, and in the Lord Jesus Christ who is our Lord. I believe that when the books are opened we shall find that 1954 and 1955 are the dates which Church historians note as the days when the next great evangelical revival began. I believe we are living in history which it is our privilege to make. Let every one of us so draw near to Christ, so study the Holy Scriptures, so proclaim Christ and Him crucified, that we may see the success of evangelism as we grasp the doctrines and practices which are the essence of evangelicalism.