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# The Church and the Docker— Another View

BY THE REV. H. B. HUGHES, M.A.

**A**S an incumbent of a dock-side parish I was very interested in the recent article under this title. This difficult problem of how best to present the Gospel to the docker, and indeed to all factory and industrial workers, must be a matter of deep concern to those called to serve in such parishes, and the problem was very well stated in the article. The writer recognized the variety of working arrangements and customs at different ports. For instance, Bootle was a "day-port" which included the profitable Sunday shift; Swansea is a "tonnage-port" where the dockers are paid by the weight of cargo they move, and where the dockers have always refused to work on Sundays. Furthermore, there would appear to be a different attitude about the docker, his job and his place in society in this locality. There is no evidence of an "inferiority-complex" among the dockers; he is a skilled worker, proud of his job and quite happy when his son gets a "book". But these differences, interesting as they are, are only important insofar as they affect the local approach to the problem.

It is important to emphasize that this question of the Church and the Docker is only part of a much wider problem—the problem of Industrial Evangelism—which ought to be the concern of the whole Church. The vast majority of wage-earners are employed in factories and industrial establishments and it is said that only seven per cent of them have any real connection with the Church. If this is true then the problem cannot be left to parochial efforts however enthusiastic and inspired they may be. The parishes will have to do the hard work, but if they are to achieve any success they will need the full co-operation and support of the whole Church. To quote from the report of a conference on "Factory Evangelism" held at High Leigh in 1954—"The factory presents a missionary opportunity of the first magnitude and no greater single challenge faces the Church in this land than the evangelization of the masses in industry". What then should the Church do to grasp this opportunity and accept this challenge?

I have not encountered antagonism or bitterness towards the Church. The docker, apparently in company with ninety-three per cent of factory and industrial workers ignores the Church, simply because he feels that the Church has no place for him. He remembers the hard days when the Church would not or could not help him. That he now enjoys a status in society is entirely due to the combined efforts of the workers through trade unionism. This accounts for the distressing indifference to the Church. But formidable as this problem is it is not so dangerous and serious as the widespread lack of knowledge concerning Christian faith and practice. It is a common experience to meet men of sound intelligence, reasonably well informed on a

variety of subjects, without the least idea of what the Church stands for, of its purpose, or its mission; with no knowledge of the Bible and who indeed consider it to have lost its significance since its teaching has been disproved by science. Adoration at the shrine of science is the most perplexing symptom in modern man; everything delivered under this heading is accepted as authoritative, final and irrefutable. Despite this ignorance, religion is a regular subject of discussion among the men, usually the same old subjects with the usual large supply of red-herring and false premises. There is a genuine hunger for information but it can only be assimilated in a specially and carefully prepared form. And this is where the Church has failed. General Sir John Glubb recently spoke of diminishing British prestige abroad because we are losing the "war of words". The Anglican Church should take this as a grim warning.

We have long recognized the need to educate the nation in religious matters, but little has been done to implement our pious resolutions. What attempts have been made have followed the well-worn paths of "classes", "religious syllabuses" and "adult education committees", sure and certain ways of frightening off the very people they were intended to help. The "class-room" system holds no attraction—only direct and popular methods will succeed. As long ago as 1945 in *Towards the Conversion of England*, it was recognized that the newspaper, the radio and the TV. were vitally important vehicles of evangelization, but in eleven years the Church cannot claim to have made the fullest and best possible use of them. The main reason for this failure is a lack of vision and appreciation of the seriousness of the problem and of a vigorous co-ordinated policy.

It is rightly claimed that the newspaper enters every home and constitutes the only printed matter read by the average man. How much of it he reads is a matter of conjecture but its possibility as a means of spreading information remains. If care were taken to present the information in an attractive and provocative manner the article on religion would probably be read. Church affairs can be "news", as can be illustrated in the case of Father Huddleston, but much of what is happening and what the Church is doing is lost because there is no central agency to distribute such news. The Church desperately needs organization. We need not be alarmed by the accusation of seeking publicity—after all we believe we have something worth while to publicize. Such an agency is needed not only for the news but for the preparation of articles on religious topics for the press. This would ensure a uniformly high standard of articles. There is also need for similar action on a local level—why not a press officer for each rural deanery? Local newspapers would welcome and support this office. This is not to advocate an increase in the volume of reports on bazaars and jumble sales, but is a challenge to tell the locality what the Churches are doing and what they stand for. Articles of this kind would most certainly serve as starting points for discussion among the men at work and would offer opportunities of witness to the clergy and the faithful laity.

It can be said with all confidence that the presentation of religious programmes on the wireless and TV. have greatly improved. The

“ Jesus of Nazareth ” series has shown what can be achieved and the impact of this programme on the public has been most rewarding. This high standard must be maintained at all costs. Care must also be taken in the choice of speakers to represent the Church and clergy should be encouraged to specialize in the technique of sound and vision broadcasting.

By an intelligent and vigorous use of these three powerful media for spreading information and knowledge about our faith and the work of the Church the task of the evangelist will be made easier and the ground will have been prepared for personal contact.

The second way in which the Church can help is by encouraging the appointment of factory and docks chaplains. Something has been done in this direction but mainly as experiments. The factory chaplain needs to be officially recognized as part of the Church's policy of evangelization. Local clergy are often able to arrange periodical visits to industrial concerns in their parishes, but these visits would become more frequent and more fruitful if the clergy went in an official capacity. It is also probable that the management would be more ready to co-operate with an official scheme receiving the full support of the Church. Because of the present shortage of clergy it might not be possible to appoint full-time chaplains ; part-time chaplains however could do the work, but they must be officially appointed for official status would help them in their duties, in the same way that it helped the O.C.F. in war-time. For instance the dock area is forbidden territory to unauthorized persons and it is only through the kindness of the docks police that the parson is allowed to go through the dock gate ; at any moment he can be asked to leave. An official pass would give greater freedom of movement and make him one of the dockyard personnel. And finally it would be good for the docker to know that the Church was sufficiently interested in him to appoint an official chaplain to work with him.

On the local level the great need is for every encouragement to be given to the docker who belongs to the Church. He has the vital task of witnessing to his faith in very difficult circumstances. In the last resort the ultimate success of the mission depends on him. His example will be more powerful than any argument, and because he is on the inside, in close contact with his fellow-workers he will be able to exert the greatest influence for good. It is the clergy's duty to see that he is well equipped to face the daily challenge to his faith. The clergy must show that they appreciate his difficult situation and the docker must be encouraged to bring his problems of how best to witness to his faith to the clergy. Through him the clergy can get to know the questions that perplex his fellow-workers and it may be possible for him to persuade his mates to meet the parson to discuss these questions. Where this has been done the results have been most hopeful. It is impossible to over emphasize the importance of the layman in Industrial Evangelism, but we must not forget that the layman needs the prayerful support and guidance of the clergy.