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[*Cheltenham Conference Paper.*]

METHODS OF EVANGELISM.

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“ **B**EFORE the Church to-day lies an unparalleled opportunity.” “England is ready for evangelistic effort”—these are the words of the Archbishops’ Committee. Most of us will agree with the opinion these words express ; and would say not only that England is ready, but that the world also is ready—ready for that evangelization which is rightly defined as the “Presentation of Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men may come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.”

If England and the world are ready for the effort, the Church ought to be ready to make it. Is she? Does Divine fire for the conversion of England and the world to a conscious devotion to Christ burn within the soul of every communicant? Does the Church as a whole realize any corporate responsibility to evangelize? The souls of certain individuals burn with zeal ; and here and there are to be found groups of individuals filled with enthusiasm to proclaim the good news of Christ. Thanks be to God that it is so ; but unfortunately it is also true that the mass of individual Christians have little or no desire to propagate the Faith that is in them ; and the Church, as a whole, is asleep—or at least only rubbing her eyes from slumber—at the very moment when she ought to be most awake.

What can be done to rouse the Church to a full consciousness of her responsibility? What are the methods that we can adopt in order to wake each soul to give a living witness, both by lip and life, to the power of Christ, and to stir the whole body to a better daring for the sake of the Kingdom of God?

I. INTENSIVE WORK.—Intensive methods are required before extensive work can effectively be done.

(1) *Concentration* of the mind of the Church upon her evangelistic purpose is what is first required. The power that gathers in a process of concentration is always a power that causes things to be done.

It is so in the natural order. "Concentration precedes expansion, and is the condition of dynamic energy." And in the order of spiritual phenomena the same principle prevails. Distraction dissipates zeal. The Church had dissipated her zeal by the multiplicity of the objects of her work. She must surely return to a greater degree of concentration upon her first duty and primary purpose of existence. Evangelization must, somehow or other, be brought to the forefront of her thought. How can this be done?

A special call given by the Archbishops, summoning the Church by the all powerful aid of the Divine Spirit to focus its attention upon the evangelization of England and the English people, for a whole year at least, is one suggestion that has been made—and there is a great deal to be said for it. The time may not be ripe for such a call to be given at this moment, but there can be little doubt that should the call be made with impressiveness, there would be no inconsiderable response. It would be well worth while if, for a period, the Church's effort could be mainly directed to that which certainly is the greatest need. A good deal is already being done to stimulate attention to the matter. During recent months, as we know, the various Diocesan Evangelistic Councils have been at work. Here and there things have happened, and campaigns, with the single purpose of proclaiming the Evangel, have been organized. Not only has this been done, but in unobtrusive, yet effective ways, these diocesan councils have been promoting more definiteness of thought upon the spiritual opportunities that to-day are presenting themselves. In certain Rural Deaneries also, and in particular parishes since the publication of the Archbishops' Report, some special efforts have also been made. The pulpit possibly, on the whole, has been giving a more direct call to the necessity of Christian witness; but, when all has been said, the fact doubtless still remains that there is comparatively little concentration of the Church's mind upon the biggest and best thing that it has been created to do. What more can be done?

(2) *Education.* The education of all ranks of our workers and communicants must clearly be taken in hand. Speaking generally there can be little doubt but that the clergy are anxious to receive all the help they can, in order that their spiritual efficiency may be increased. There is, in many directions it would seem, no inconsiderable perplexity in the minds of the clergy as to the way that

the opportunities presented to-day in the nation and the world may be faced and dealt with. There is—who can doubt it?—a very widespread feeling among the clergy, of honest inability of themselves and in their own power to rise to the height of what is required of them. “Who is sufficient for these things?” is their constant question to themselves.

More conferences, retreats, and similar gatherings of clergy, on natural and wise lines, would surely be helpful. Good has already come from many such gatherings. The clergy are wanting opportunities in an atmosphere of freer spiritual fellowship to talk together, under the best leadership that can be discovered, about the things that matter most in their ministry to-day. How can the Christian message be best presented to the minds of different sections of the community to-day? What are the best avenues of approach to the people? What are the best methods of organizing evangelistic work? These are some questions the clergy are waiting to discuss.

Many men and women of the laity are also seeking similar opportunities to assist them in giving their Christian witness more faithfully. They are not wanting so much to be addressed and talked to, as to exchange thought with one another, and take counsel with those from whom they rightly expect they may get wise suggestions. The great mass of our Churchpeople, without doubt, want to be brought to see, by clearer Bible study and in united prayer, what is their first privilege as Christians, what may be done for the Kingdom of Heaven by united work, and what are to-day's conditions of the world's thought and life.

Many people who cannot come together to confer are willing to *read*. Are we seeing to-day that our people are being guided as to the literature that should be in their hands? Many are ready to study the problems which are associated with the propagation of the Christian gospel. Are we helping them? Are we providing them with the right books?

Big thoughts are to-day filling the minds of our people, and big endeavour will follow if only they receive big inspiration from those who are their appointed leaders. Big visions of a better England and a better world are in the minds of most people, and if only it can be shown by the Christian Church that all these can be realized only in the coming of the Kingdom of God amongst men, and

through the acceptance of Christianity as the great philosophy of life, the coming days may see such changes as will make them almost a new dispensation in the history of the world. The coming of the Kingdom of God upon earth must not be regarded as a far-off dream, but as a present possibility. The Church must see this and it will again live, and live abundantly, in the life of the nation and the world.

II. EXTENSIVE WORK.—It is not sufficient, however, that the Church should see. It must arise and do ; it must get out much more than it has done in the open, and go out amongst men. There is the necessity for *extensive* work as well as for intensive operations.

I. *Visiting*.—First, what about extensive work being done through visiting the homes of the people to deliver the evangelistic message? By the clergy? By lay people? Is visiting by clergy or by laity the more effective for evangelistic purposes? Should there not be more definite and thoughtful preparation for visiting? Should it not be more systematic—more frequent? Could there not be suitable literature provided for those who visit? Could not more be done to encourage each rank and class of person to visit those of their own rank and class? All with a definite evangelistic purpose. Somehow or other there must be, whether by visiting or otherwise, more definite contact of those who profess Christ, with those who profess Him not, and who, on the whole, stand outside the Christian Church.

2. *Outdoor Efforts*.—Then again, surely fresh efforts must be made by means of *open-air* speaking to deliver the great message. Doubtless it is true to say that many of the old methods of open-air work have become discredited. There is at least widespread scepticism prevailing as to the value of the method ; but should the effort to make known our Christian Gospel by means of open-air speaking be given up in consequence of all this? Lesser causes find the open-air the best place for their advocacy. Our Lord and Master, both in town and country, followed the method. It may be that we shall have to do things differently to the way in which we have done them in the past. We shall have to get our very best, intellectually and spiritually, to advocate the cause of Christ to the multitude. We may have to give up, and possibly with wisdom, our hymn singing and praying in the open air ; but that we should go on with it seems clear. It should be a way of giving our very best laity the opportunity of

service; it should be an especial opportunity of using our women as well as our men; it can be made the means of strengthening the courage and conviction of our people; and without doubt it can be, to a greater extent than it has ever been, an opportunity of securing real conversion of those outside the Christian Church to a full and enthusiastic devotion of life to Christ.

Those who had anything to do with pilgrimages of prayer in connexion with the National Mission, had quite a new idea given to them as to the value of the work that can be done in the open-air in the villages of England. Real new life has been given to many a village through the visit of a few prepared and devoted Christian women. This at least has been an experience in one particular Diocese. What has been done in the villages may well be attempted in the smaller towns, if only suitable organization is made, the right people chosen, and adequate preparation of each worker provided for. Extensive work for the Kingdom of God by means of speaking in the open-air must not be given up. Surely to this we all agree. We will say it must be done better—much better—but it still must be done. God, by His Spirit, is clearly owning it as of His own purpose.

3. *Special Campaigns.*—And what about evangelistic effort in our big towns? Is the Salvation Army to be the sole expression to the public mind of enthusiasm for the Christian Gospel? We have frequent evidence that many outside our churches are thinking deeply, and often very ideally. Surely our Church of England must come to their aid—and can, if it so chooses. *Special campaigns* to emphasize this purpose and desire have, in the experience of some of us, proved helpful in centres where the population is large and where various types of people congregate. Of course great preparation is needed for such campaigns. Regular visitation of every house within the area and over a period of several weeks is necessary. A well-chosen band of leaders, supported by hosts of campaigners, is of the utmost importance. The men and women who are chosen must be those with a message that is robust, thoughtful, and, above all, spiritual. They must be men and women not ashamed to own their Lord, and who are daring enough to face any audience and stand any heckling for their Master's sake. They must be those who are prepared to speak in church, or hall, or in the open-air, or to large bodies of men and girls in public works.

They must be filled with the zeal for the Kingdom of God. By such people inspired of the Spirit great things can be done. Mass meetings in picture palaces and theatres are worth while, for such meetings give the opportunity for some of the biggest in our Christian ranks to speak on the biggest problems of to-day. The experience of some of us goes to prove that there is no difficulty if proper steps are taken to secure large audiences at such gatherings. In big towns campaigns organized on these lines and enlisting the help of all the churches are well worth while. They seem to bring the "Parochial Mission" of the older order up-to-date. An impression is given through them that the Church is going out from itself to win the world, that it is really "seeking to save," and daring to do.

4. *The Press*.—Another method of evangelism which suggests itself is the method of *journalism*. The Press, as an organ of evangelistic propaganda, has almost entirely been overlooked. *The Times* during the last year or two has shown that the public Press can be used as a means of supplying the demand in the public mind for religious truth. The religious articles that have appeared week by week for some time have, without doubt, been greatly valued; otherwise they would not have been continued. The Church ought to be supremely thankful that so great a newspaper has given so good a lead. Could not the lead be followed up and further efforts made—efforts more directly towards evangelism? Those who use the monthly Prayer Paper of the C.M.S. will recall facts that were there recently related as to the results of newspaper evangelism in Japan. For instance, an American missionary is said to have heard from nearly 7,000 people in his country district during the five years of the journalistic campaign, and through it ninety-seven persons were baptized by the various missions in the particular area. Of course England is not Japan; but the thought does suggest itself that if the work of newspaper evangelism were really taken in hand with thoroughness and by some central and really strong committee, representative of all the Christian Churches, great things might be done. The work would require the best brains that could be found amongst the most devoted Christians—the work would require, of course, much money—but are we to say that neither the brains nor the money could be forthcoming? Should we fail to attempt such an enterprise because of the difficulties involved in it? Is not the pen of a ready writer to be used in the service of evangelism as much

as the lip of the fluent speaker? The pen is for witness as much as the platform.

5. *The Pulpit*.—And what about the pulpit? The service of the pulpit in the cause of evangelism requires an attention that cannot be given to it merely as a portion of a general paper upon the subject of methods generally. “Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel,” said the prophet of old; and every prophet worthy of the name is saying the same to-day. And yet who does not find it difficult to preach the Gospel? The most eloquent and able approach the task with diffidence, and those of us of the ordinary rank and file are ever conscious of the stupendous character of the responsibility cast upon us. “Ambassadors of Christ”—yes, yet how unworthy, how unskilled, how impotent in ourselves. To present Christ to men, and to men as they are and as they think to-day—this is our duty. Could any duty be greater, or with larger privilege?—and yet could any duty be more delicate and difficult? And yet it *can* be done. Men have done it—are doing it. The infirmities of the ambassadors must always be, but the infinite power of the Eternal Spirit always is. What cannot be by might or by power that is human, can be by God’s Spirit. From pulpit of Cathedral and Parish Church, God’s Prophets can speak, and can, and will, be heard. If, however, the pulpit is adequately to fulfil its evangelistic function, the Church must find it possible to do two things:—

- (i.) It must prepare men better for their prophetic work, and
- (ii.) It must give them greater liberty to do it.

How inadequate has been the training of most men for their pulpit work—many a man has entered upon it without any study of the teaching art, and without any experience of addressing others. The taking of a degree and securing a smattering of elementary theology are not sufficient preparation for ordination. The days are over for men to be given prophetic work to do without that training which will equip them for it. And no less important is it that the prophet, when he is given his work to do, should be free to do it. The pulpit will never be a power for evangelism until those who are called to occupy the pulpit are freed from many of those duties which now absorb them. The laity of the Church of England must come to understand that their clergy must be freed to a far greater extent than they are from a mass of occupations that hinder them

from having that time for thought and reading and prayer that are paramount necessities for the accomplishment of that high task of proclaiming the gospel for which they were set apart. Times of special retreat and conferences and conventions can never take the place of that which should be done daily in the study, and in the inner sanctuary of the prophet's life. The pulpit method of evangelism is a primary method, and the Church as a whole must see that the primary method is made possible.

I conclude by recalling the fact as stated in the Archbishop's Report that 90 per cent. of the people of England are out of touch with organized Christianity, and this in spite of the fact that there is much inarticulate religion and a real searching after God. England and the world are in great religious need, and deep down in the hearts of men there never was a greater consciousness of this need than to-day. For the Evangel of Christ the multitudes are waiting and longing. When the Church concentrates on its first duty—the proclamation of the good news of Christ and the Establishment of the Kingdom of Christ ; when the Church educates itself through all its members to understand its task—the task of witness, and adequately trains its leaders and its rank and file for service ; when, depending on the Divine Spirit, it daringly, and in a spirit of selfless service for the nation, for the world, and for God, makes up its mind to go forth with a new enthusiasm, methods will be devised suitable to the new age, and the Kingdom of God will come. But to-day the Church as a whole must pray, as each individual must pray, “Renew a right spirit within me.” When that prayer is truly offered it will be answered, and we who call ourselves Christians will give ourselves, as our Master gave Himself, for the life of the world.

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