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Evangelicals and Evangelism.

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF ROCHESTER.

THOUGH the title of this year's Oxford Conference, *The Church and the People*, is wide and general in character, the purpose of our gathering is extremely practical and definite—namely, how to implement the Report on Evangelism, *Towards the Conversion of England*. The time for theorising and academic thinking is past. The hour has struck for creative action. Overworked parish priests have come here to ask: "What can I do?"; which involves, of course, the previous question: "How can I fit myself for this task of evangelism?" I hope very much, therefore, that our discussions will centre on concrete facts, concentrate on definite issues, and lead to practical proposals.

For this purpose, the subjects for each session must be invested with that urgency and reality they are bound to assume in days of crisis that are epoch-making, and in the actual situation that now confronts the Church and every one of its ordained ministers—terrifying as it is in the immensity of its responsibility and opportunity.

This opening address, in its presentation of evangelism to-day, must likewise fulfil the paramount requirement of facing facts and of relevance to the present position. I propose, therefore, first to review the importance of the Report on Evangelism with regard both to the Evangelical school of thought in the Church, and also to the national situation; and then, in conclusion, to ask what is thereby demanded of each one of us.

I.

First, what has the Report to say to Evangelicals? In the general shaking of war, superstructures tend to disappear, and foundations to be exposed. In the sphere of religion this means that war forces attention on the basic verities of our faith, and gives rise to a mood that is somewhat impatient of secondary matters of Church order and observance.

Thus, after the 1914-18 war, the Swiss prophet, Karl Barth, emerged into world-wide prominence with his religion of crisis, and his message of an intervening God who speaks. During this 1939-45 war, when the late Archbishop William Temple was discussing the need for that Commission on Evangelism which he afterwards appointed, he confessed that although the Fourth Gospel was the country in which he found himself most at home (even as is gloriously evident from his *Readings in St. John's Gospel*), yet undoubtedly St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans was the Scripture for days of crisis such as our own. Here then is the reason why, at the end of this war, as also of the last, eyes of expectation are naturally turned towards the Evangelical school in the Church. For the Evangelical emphasis, both in its prophetic and pastoral ministry, concerns the very essence of Christianity—namely, the personal relationship of each individual soul with God in Christ. In 1946 (as in 1919) men look to Evangelicals for a message,

for guidance, and for a lead. I pray God that Evangelicals to-day will have learned wisdom from the bitter failure of their elder brothers, and their tragic betrayal of trust during the wretched years of disillusionment between the two wars.

At the conclusion of the 1914-18 war, that great missionary, Canon W. E. S. Holland, travelled throughout England to recruit younger clergy for missions overseas. Wherever he went, he reported, Bishops affirmed that the future lay with Evangelicals; so expectantly did the country look to them; so markedly did the people resort to their Churches, save where the boasted "soundness" of certain of their number consisted merely in "sound": *vox et praeterea nihil*, and "clerical" into the bargain!

Ten years later, Canon Holland returned to this country on furlough from India, to find that while Anglo-Catholics had staged a "come-back" with their impressive annual Congresses, Evangelicals had gone into the wilderness a discredited body. What had happened? The Evangelical school had split over the Inspiration of the Bible, and also over the Proposed Prayer Book of 1928. Their energies had thereby been diverted from united action in spreading the Gospel and extending the Kingdom, to firing doctrinal broadsides at each other, and in mutual recrimination. For the next ten years, up to the outbreak of war, they ceased to count in the leadership of the Church, or in the estimation of the nation, which has always been favourably disposed towards them.

Because the iron of these fettering years of frustration had entered into my soul, I tried to take action in the early part of the war. In 1942 I called together a truly representative committee of leading Evangelicals and, with them, approached such different bodies as the Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen and the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement. We hoped that some means might thereby be discovered of re-uniting the Evangelical school, so that we should not again "cast away our crown," nor lose the opportunity that would certainly present itself with the close of hostilities.

The Report of the Commission on Evangelism, *Towards the Conversion of England*, has a striking definition of fellowship (par. 276), which also explains the means thereto. Fellowship, it asserts, is the result of sharing in a common experience and devotion to a common cause. With Evangelicals, their *common experience* is restored personal relationship with God in Christ. The conviction that such religious experience, or "conversion" (speaking as it does of an intervening God) is for all, constitutes the one doctrinal essential that unites Evangelicals. The *common cause* to which Evangelicals are devoted is to communicate this personal and living experience. This is evangelism; and it is significant that the only institutional bond that has held Evangelicals together, since their emergence in the Church, has been their great evangelising Societies. Evangelicals have discovered their unity by engaging in active evangelism, and in no other way.

My little Committee for Unity, therefore, put forward the policy that the doctrinal basis of evangelical unity should be as short and simple as possible, and that evangelical unity would come through united action in evangelism.

I shall add as an appendix to this paper the short statement on "Evangelical Unity" which formed the basis of our discussions. It may be found helpful in the fostering of diocesan fellowships of Evangelicals.

It is sad to report that our advances were rewarded with no immediate result. Seeing that St. Peter's Hall, in which we are gathered, was founded as my father's memorial, and as the centenary of his birth falls on September 27th of this year, I am reminded of his indignant grief at Evangelical divisions. As he once burst out, on this very spot—"The two devils that must be cast out of the Evangelical school are the devils of suspicion and scorn. Conservatives are suspicious of Liberals, and Liberals scorn Conservatives." You will find that St. Paul has anticipated his sentiments in Romans xiv—a chapter that well repays study on our knees. My father's words explain the apparent fruitlessness of our negotiations for unity in 1942 and 1943. As a matter of fact, the more Conservative Evangelicals surprised us by their seeming willingness for wider comprehension. It was the more Liberal Evangelicals who closed the door by their antipathy to any doctrinal basis whatsoever. It is odd, but true to experience, that the narrowest sect of all are the Broad Churchmen; for they refuse to allow anyone to have convictions of their own.

I was not, however, too cast down, for three new factors were arising, which I believed might vastly improve the position.

1. First, Canon A. St. John Thorpe (the new Chairman of the National Church League, and a member of our little Committee for Unity) was going about the country encouraging the formation of diocesan, or area, Evangelical Fellowships, upon an inclusive, not exclusive, basis. Need I remind you how I had worked towards the same end during the eleven years I was Chairman of this Oxford Conference? From the first it had been my hope that the Oxford Conference might increasingly become the annual rallying ground of such inclusive Fellowships. It almost seems that what some of us here have worked and prayed for so long, may actually come to pass. Certainly the Fellowships which have sprung up have already effected a marked increase of Evangelical strength in the new Church Assembly. More than this, Evangelicals elected to the Assembly are vociferously unwilling to meet for conference before the Sessions in separatist groups, because of the fellowship together they have already enjoyed in the dioceses which they represent.

2. Secondly, I was meeting all the time young Evangelical Chaplains to the Forces, whose war experience was opening their eyes and enlarging their hearts. I knew that such men when they returned to their parochial ministries would be intolerant of intolerance, impatient of shibboleths, whether verbal or ritual, and eager enough to beckon to their partners in the other boat to help them get on with the job.

3. Thirdly, the Church Assembly had called for a Commission on Evangelism, and I saw here an issue that must either make or break the Evangelical School. It was plain that if Evangelicals could not give the lead in evangelism, they would, thereby, be shown up as simply moribund Low Churchmen. But it was equally plain that

they could not give the required lead unless they made a real and determined effort to work together ; when they would find their unity. Shall we then, the Gospellers of the Church, work together towards the conversion of England? Can we hesitate about the answer when the need is so urgent, the opportunity so immense, the responsibility so tremendous?

II.

This brings me to the Importance of the Report on Evangelism as it concerns the National Situation. It is very difficult to appraise the present attitude of the People in general towards Christianity.

As *Towards the Conversion of England* states (par. 4): "Conditions vary surprisingly from area to area." Generally speaking, however, those areas which have suffered bombardment throughout the war do not seem to exhibit that insensibility to religion which obtains in areas where there has been no (or little) danger, and the population have profited by the war through the huge wages they have received.

At the same time, there have been not a few occasions of crisis, during the past six years, which have moved the whole nation. Witness, for example, those vast congregations that thronged Cathedrals and Churches on great National days of Prayer or Thanksgiving. In 1944, the late Archbishop William Temple, as also the Chaplain General, believed that they discerned a movement of the people back to God. Their contention, however, was disputed by many who were in closer personal touch with men and women in the services (more particularly those in this country), and with those employed in munition factories. Those who were doubtful agreed that there was a *seeking* on the part of people in general. But, they insisted, most of them hungered for they knew not what ; seeing that (to quote Professor Julian Huxley): "The modern man has a God-shaped blank in his consciousness" (par. 54).

Then the first atomic bomb exploded on August 6th, 1945. Mr. Kenneth de Courcy, in his October *News-Letter on Foreign Affairs*, well summarised the added seriousness that came, thereby, upon the Nation. "In the confused world situation," he wrote, "mention the need for spiritual revival at almost any dinner table in Great Britain and you have immediate interest. . . This interest has increased at least a hundred-fold since the dropping of those two atomic bombs. It only takes a few minutes at any dinner table to get general agreement that the human race faces a cataclysmic crisis." He added, however, that "in Britain two small rays have appeared in the sky. The first was Mr. Tom Rees's mission to young people of the previous month, which had crowded out the Central Hall, Westminster. The other was the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Evangelism.

With regard to the former, Mr. Rees's Central Hall Mission was followed, early this year, with a further and even more successful series of meetings which actually filled the Albert Hall to overflowing with young people. When we recall that a *Faith for the Times* Campaign of sixteen days duration in April, 1944, drew such crowds to the Albert Hall (despite air raids and a bus strike) that "on the final

Saturday the doors had to be closed and people turned away," we are bound to accept the judgment of that veteran missionary, Mr. A. Lindsay Glegg, that not even Moody and Sankey drew such large audiences as will flock to-day to hear the Gospel, and that "this is the age of empty Churches but of mass evangelism."

"When Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they fainted and were scattered as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. ix. 36). The nation calls to Evangelicals to evangelise.

With regard to the other ray in the sky, Mr. Kenneth de Courcy recommended *Towards the Conversion of England* for universal study as being "a most remarkable document" which "represents one of the most important developments in the world situation."

Early in January of this year the British Council of Churches convened a conference at Cambridge on Evangelism. In general, the conference tore its hair to discover what was the Word of God for the Nation in the new era of atomic power; and it dispersed without discovering it. But the Word of God is not something for which we have to seek. The Word of God *comes* to His prophets, who wait on Him. Now, no one knows better than I do the faults and shortcomings of the Report on Evangelism. And yet I am bold to suggest that in it you have the Word of God for the Church and Nation in our present changing order. Despite all its human failings, God is manifestly using the Report to speak through it to the whole English speaking world. In our life time the Church has never produced a document which has already been so widely studied and read, and that in every section of society. Is it, therefore, too much to claim that in the Report Evangelicals will find their marching orders? If so, then all these Evangelical Fellowships in dioceses (for the growing establishment of which we so thank God) must become Councils of Action, and lead the way in their respective dioceses in the planning and promoting of evangelism.

From all this it follows that there is no need to work specifically for Evangelical Unity. True fellowship, as we have seen, is the by-product of sharing in a common experience, and devotion to a common cause. Our common experience to-day must be the actual winning of men and women, boys and girls, for Christ. Our common cause must be to present Him to the people of England for acceptance as their Saviour and their King. The opportunity and responsibility entrusted to us are as overwhelming as they are most glorious.

III.

I come, therefore, to my final question. *How are Evangelicals to implement the Report on Evangelism?* The people look to Evangelicals to give them the Gospel. By the very act of co-operating in evangelism, Evangelicals will forge themselves into a fellowship indwelt and empowered by the Holy Ghost. But how are they to become evangelists?

The more I have considered this question of actual and personal evangelism, and the more I have discussed the matter with others, the more I have become convinced that the first and essential

requirement (from which all else will follow) is a quite new and higher quality of spiritual life, among both clergy and laity alike. This new quality of spiritual life and power is what St. Paul terms "transfiguration." It results when we, "reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed (or transfigured) into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. iii. 18).

Increasingly, in our ministry, we have to learn that spiritual life and power do not consist in man directing and applying the almighty power of God to reinforce human plans and efforts. Spiritual life and power are the result of man surrendering himself to be the tool in the hand of God, and so of allowing His Almighty Love to operate in the world through human personality. As the late Bishop E. A. Burroughs of Ripon never wearied of pointing out to undergraduates here at Oxford, the secret of spiritual life and power is revealed in the marginal reading of Judges vi. 34: "The Spirit of the Lord *clothed itself* with (not 'came upon') Gideon." That is to say, we do not need *great* faith in God, but faith, no more than a grain of mustard seed (Matt. xvii. 20), in a *great* God. It is not our great faith that removes mountains. It is God who removes them, when we lend Him ourselves as the fulcrum whereby His Omnipotence can be brought to bear upon the world.

Only the love of God itself, working in us and through us, not we ourselves inspired by the love of God, can work His miracles of grace upon the ugly, intractable, and unpredictable material of human nature. It is God, alone, Who can change people through us; not we ourselves with the help of God. There, indeed, you have the reason why so few Christians continue to attempt the daunting task of dealing personally with their fellows.

The transfigured life, then, is one which reflects to others the glory of the Lord. As St. Chrysostom put it: "Just as if pure silver be turned towards the sun's rays, it will itself also shoot forth rays, not only from its own natural property merely, but also from the solar lustre; so also doth the soul, being cleansed and made brighter than silver, receive a ray from the glory of the Spirit, and glance it back."

For such transfiguration, to reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord, there are two requirements.

1. First, there is the requirement of *complete* surrender. The mirror must not only be turned towards the light, but there must be no portion of its surface which does not reflect the light. Conversion has been defined as "surrendering as much as I know of myself to as much as I know of Christ." Seeing that we are continually learning more about ourselves, and discovering more about Christ, conversion thus becomes a transfiguring process—"from glory to glory." But at each stage the surrender must be whole and entire; no area or realm of life, no interest, pursuit, or social relationship, that is not yielded to Christ for His direction and control. We have to be constantly putting to ourselves the searching question: "What is it in my life which prevents me from being a more effective conductor of the glory of God to my fellows?"

2. Secondly, there is the requirement of practising what I would term *receptive prayer*. So many of us do not get much further than petition and intercession in prayer. In our prayers, so to speak, we do not do more than project ourselves and our affairs upon the Providence of God. But "transfiguring" prayer reverses the process. Instead, it draws down God into our very beings, and into all the events of our daily life.

Receptive prayer is practised by meditating on the attributes of God; more particularly as He has revealed Himself and His nature in the Holy Scriptures. It can be compared to sun-bathing; the opening of every pore of our being to be vitalised by the glory of the Lord God. So, indeed, do we ourselves become transfigured. Receptive prayer also consists in thinking out the events of the coming day with God, and thereby drawing Him into our life and bringing His glory to bear upon whatever we encounter and whomsoever we meet. So, indeed, does our whole ministry become transfigured.

I believe, therefore, that the first step "towards the conversion of England" must be for the clergy themselves to meet together regularly in small local groups for prayer and study, "to provoke into love and good works," to hold each other up in disciplined habits of devotion, and to plan as far as possible concerted action in evangelism.

We need cells of clergy in each Rural Deanery, as well as cells of laity in each parish. Thereby, untold reinforcement would transfigure the evangelistic ministry of each parish priest, and the whole spiritual condition of England would be revolutionised.

The fact that the *Times' Literary Supplement* article in "Menander's Mirror" for October 7th, 1944, had to be reprinted in pamphlet form which ran into edition after edition, shows that Mr. Charles Morgan spoke to the Church on behalf of the People, when he summed up his conclusion on *The Empty Pews* in the following words: "Certainly it is spiritual exercise that a hesitant layman requires of a priest, for from spiritual exercise springs that singleness of mind, that vision and urgency and passion, for which the contemporary world, sick of the compromises of policy, is hungry and athirst."

I need say no more. Once we can attain this new quality of spiritual life which reflects to men the glory of the Lord, then the Holy Spirit Himself is the promised Teacher to show us those practical measures whereby we may bridge the gulf that now exists between the Church and the People.

AN APPENDIX ON EVANGELICAL UNITY.

(Not read at the Conference.)

THE WAY TO UNITY.

Evangelical Unity is not an objective that can be achieved by organization or definition.

It is an experience that is the by-product of common effort in evangelism.

The Evangelical Fathers possessed no special doctrinal basis, but combined in an "enthusiasm" for preaching the Gospel.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF EVANGELICALISM.

For true Evangelism there must be an Evangelical Content which :—

- (1) In its positive aspect, creates and fosters the evangelistic urge ; and
- (2) In its negative aspect, safeguards doctrine and practice from what would cut at the root of evangelism.

(It was necessary for Evangelicals a hundred years ago to oppose Tractarian subversion of Reformation Doctrine ; though by such controversy the Evangelical School hardened into the Evangelical Party.)

This Evangelical Content is the doctrine set out in the formularies of the Church of England ; but with an *emphasis*, in our Ministry, on the Gospel of our Saviour (as set forth in the Epistle to the Romans) which colours the whole of Evangelical teaching and worship.

The Fundamentals of Evangelicalism, therefore, are :—

- (1) The Supremacy of Holy Scripture in matters of faith, doctrine and practice ; and as the living Word of God to the human soul.
God's revelation in Scripture proclaims, and human experience acknowledges :—
- (2) The Universal Need of man for salvation. His own merits cannot gain for him Eternal Life, which consists in our relationship with God.
- (3) That Christ, by the virtue of a finished, redemptive act, the full, perfect, and sufficient satisfaction of the Cross, mediates to man Atonement, or restored relationship with God. This "*Justification by Faith*" offers to man direct personal access to God. It is a free gift to be accepted by an act of the will : it cannot be merited.
- (4) From union with God, thus given and accepted, there ensues a life and character that changes and grows into the likeness of God. This is called "*Sanctification*."
 - (a) Sanctification is the work of God the Holy Spirit, Who ever moves in the human heart ; and that independently of the Means of Grace ordained by Christ for His more effectual working.
 - (b) These "*sanctifying*" Means of Grace include :—
 - i. The fellowship and worship of the Church.
 - ii. The conveyance of the Life of God to the worthy recipient of the Gospel Sacraments and of Confirmation.
 - iii. Communion with God in Prayer and Bible Reading.

THE EVANGELICAL "WAY."

From this it follows that Evangelicalism stresses personal religion, and insists upon :—

- (1) Conversion—that is the necessity of a conscious personal relationship with God through Christ. This often involves a deliberate act, or a series of acts, of surrender and acceptance.
- (2) Witness—that is the personal testimony of the believer to others by lip and life, in the power of the Holy Spirit.