

THE EVANGELIST AND HIS TASK
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Whenever a young man tells me that he would like to become an evangelist, my reactions always confound him. I strongly urge that if he can possibly avoid the calling, to do so. No one should ever contemplate the full-time ministry in the Kingdom of God, unless the urge is inescapable. If the call becomes unbearable; if it becomes a case of responding to God's call or losing interest in life, then the candidate will have some chance of succeeding amid the difficulties of the field of service. Therefore my advice always runs true to type. Avoid by every possible means the way that leads to full-time service for God. If the call cannot be avoided, a man may be sure that God has chosen him.

A thrilling evangelistic meeting can be exceedingly inspiring, and every student may become unbalanced in his judgments just because glorious enthusiasm has thrilled his soul. After one such meeting, a man said to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." His fiery zeal was overshadowed by the Master's answer: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." There is no further record of the man's activity, and it would seem that he returned to his home. To imagine that an evangelistic career brings unclouded skies and unending experiences of joyful activities, is a great mistake. Yet, if the Lord leads one into such realms of service, the compensations outnumber any sacrifices which might be demanded. The world needs Spirit-filled evangelists; special men, specially equipped to do a special task. Whenever revival has enriched the Church, this unique ministry has been well to the fore. Sometimes the graduate of the university has been in the place of eminence; sometimes the ordained cleric has been brought to the forefront; but within the last fifty years, the Principality of Wales had evidence that an ordinary young fellow could be used by God to do the impossible.

It is true that the young pastor Timothy was told to do the work of an evangelist, but that did not alter the fact that the New Testament Church encouraged itinerant evangelists. There are those who say that according to Pauline doctrines the task of evangelising was entrusted to the local minister; but every student of the Bible will know that in reality the teaching of Paul is opposed to the modern idea. Without the pioneer missionary, the cause of Christ might have stayed in Jerusalem and its environs. The evangelist was a man who went into the unknown, to seek souls for Christ. It would appear that Paul urged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist because he realized that unless some of the same holy fire filled the pastor's heart, the Church under his care would never play its part in extending the Kingdom of God. To suggest that the itinerant, pioneer evangelist is no longer needed, borders on the ludicrous. One might be justified in suggesting that he was never more needed than he is today. The customs and the peoples of the world may be changing, and undoubtedly God's servant will need to be aware of the varying circumstances of his far-flung parish. He will need to be very versatile; but there can never be any doubt that God gave evangelists to the Church because He deemed it was necessary so to do. These men were easily recognized. They were brought into the work, sometimes against their will, and yet as they

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went forth in the name of Christ, divine strength was made perfect in their weakness. The Church of the present day urgently needs men of this calibre, for no one could deny that in many parts of the so-called Christian world, the majority of the population never enter a church, and have no respect for those who do. It would seem that the days are gone when the voice of the pulpit counted in the decisions of the nations.

The churches of all denominations have recognized these evil tendencies, and many of the world's greatest thinkers declare that unless supernatural forces can again be introduced into human affairs, anarchy will become irresistible. Theological circles agree, but seem unable to produce a remedy. We have many ministers and some travelling evangelists, but our greatest need is for a race of prophets - men who fear God and fear nobody else. If such men can be found quickly, our world will be saved from disaster.

Yet the greatest opponents of this view would probably be found within the Church itself. It is an indisputable fact that at the present time evangelism has been brought into disrepute, and many clergymen refuse to participate in special campaigning. A great amount of criticism has been spoken against the itinerant preacher, and perhaps some of this has been fully deserved. Certain things have been done in the name of evangelism that make many Christians shudder. Nevertheless, we must see things in a true perspective. It is a staggering thought that many of the ministers who decry the evangelist themselves preach to dying Churches. When the local Church is two-thirds empty; when the prayer meetings are non-existent; when the saints are yearning for a breath of heaven; and when souls are very seldom if ever won for Christ in his meetings, the minister of that Church should be the last man to criticize another. Every true evangelist welcomes criticism from a man whom God is honouring; a man whose Church radiates divine life to the community; a man whose efforts are continually pointing souls to Christ. Yet when the custodian of a religious refrigerator tries to tell an evangelist how to win souls, and at the same time has never reached one himself, his actions betray a shallowness of spirituality, an overwhelming sense of egoism, and to say the least, the presence of a super-abundance of arrogant cheek. It is a sad fact that the people who know best how to bring revival to the Churches, generally preach to empty pews.

On the other hand, thank God, there are many, many fine men in our Churches, and the evangelist should be careful to help these servants of God at every opportunity. All campaign meetings should be noteworthy for the absence of appeals for money. The man who constantly advertises his poverty succeeds in revealing his pitiable lack of faith. The old slogan, "Pray and tell God's people." may be workable in some instances, but it should always be obnoxious in evangelistic crusades. I shall always be thankful for the example set before the Pilgrim Preachers - the itinerant band to which I once belonged. Old Mr. Ernest Luff often lectured his "boys" on the subject of prayer and personal needs. He asked us never to pray for money if strangers were present in our prayer meetings. He insisted that, if we did so, we were not speaking to the Lord but to the man kneeling next to us. If local friends were absent, we could pray as often and as long as we desired. We had neither committee nor collections, but our needs were always fully met. Indeed, had we depended upon appeals to

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people, we should have lost the greatest of all our experiences. If prayer is answered, then let every evangelist depend upon the Lord for finance, and not constantly beg from all and sundry. An evangelistic beggar is not a good advertisement of God's faithfulness.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that many people declare that the converts of evangelistic missions disappear too quickly. The special meetings are said to be an unsettling tidal wave, which leaves behind a nasty and dirty backwash. Many ministers fear this, and on the assumption that prevention is better than cure, they refuse to permit evangelistic meetings in their Churches. This is a great problem, but there are two ways of looking at it. First, every minister should be aware of the fact that post-campaign days will bring to his own heart a great challenge. The evangelist is a doctor brought in to assist with the birth of the spiritual child. The Church and the minister must be the mother of the child during its entire life-time. If the mother starves her baby to death, it will be criminal to charge the doctor with incompetency. No minister must take things for granted, for each new day will present a new challenge. The man who is too old to learn has outlived his usefulness. But having said that, we need to consider another issue. There may be many people who will disagree with my statement, but I firmly believe that every evangelist should deal with his own converts. I would never entrust the control of my enquiry room to a band of workers. There are many fine Christians who excel in personal work, but sometimes the most enthusiastic of the workers are the least capable of handling seeking souls. When I decided for the Lord Jesus, the minister of the local Church asked three questions. What is your name? How old are you? Have you ever done this before? Then with a final "God bless you," he walked away. I was only a youth, but it took nine months of patient searching the Scriptures to discover what he might have told me that night. I vowed then that if ever I had the opportunity of leading a soul to Christ, I would endeavour to do the job well. Thus I have made it my practice to take charge personally of my enquiry room; and I commend this to others.

Concerning methods of conducting a mission, I have little to say. Every man must be himself, for if ever he succumbs to the temptation of aping another, the death-knell will have sounded on his career. God made me to be myself; I must not disappoint my Creator. I am constantly asked about the advisability of using films, organizing quiz programmes, and other unusual items to attract people into the services. There, again, the young evangelist must be careful. In this modern age, films draw great crowds; yet some of the older Christians would be shocked - as they express it - if their Church became a picture house. Every man doing this special work will need to look constantly to Christ for guidance in these matters. I think I would use or do anything which would bring souls to the Saviour. Perhaps I am fortunate, for I have never had to resort to anything but the straightforward preaching of the grand old Gospel. I belong to Wales, where the sermon still occupies the vital place in the meeting. As a son of that favoured land, I have followed in the footsteps of my forebears; and I trust I shall never deem it necessary to change my style. I still believe that the old Bible scenes, attractively presented, will fascinate and grip the people of any

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age. My meetings invariably end in 80 minutes, and more often than not, 45-50 minutes of that time are devoted to the presentation of the message. There is no need to elaborate on the doctrines preached, for they are found in every Bible sketch included in this and my other books.

Finally, I would mention another important matter. It is my opinion that unless the Church members become soul seekers, the task of the evangelist will be impossible. It is a cause for regret that in these days of high pressure organization, many Christians have degenerated into sermon tasters. The evangelistic meeting has become a spiritual picnic ground, where the relative values of various speakers are compared and contrasted. I have often seen hundreds of people patiently queueing to gain admittance to my service, and I have sighed, wishing they had spent the time inviting passers-by to the meeting. Over and over again, when I have whispered to a fellow minister, "How many unconverted people are present tonight?" I have heard his answer, "I don't really know, but I think we have a few." The entire purpose of the evangelistic crusade will be frustrated unless we can attract into the meetings those who so urgently need Christ. I am quite sure that there will never be an effective substitute for the warm-hearted interest displayed in the affectionate invitation given by one man to his friend. If the work of seeking outsiders be left to the evangelist, the effort will fail, for he cannot enter offices, workshops, dockyards, and homes, as freely as the people who live and work in these places.

There are preachers who believe and teach the imminence of the return of the Lord Jesus. If their message be true, the Church of today is being presented with her greatest opportunity. She is surrounded by millions of people who do not know Christ. Each sermon might be the last to reach the ears of the needy; today or tomorrow might conclude our ministry. Let us, then, be equal to the need of the hour, and gathering all our talents, place them at the Saviour's feet.

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