

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

# The Report of the Commission on Evangelism.

BY THE RT. REV. LORD BISHOP OF ROCHESTER.  
*Chairman of the Commission.*

## I.

February 1st, 1944.

### The Chairman's Introductory Letter to the Commission.

My dear Fellow-Member,

Our terms of reference are as follows :

" The Assembly, recognising the urgent necessity for definite action, requests the Archbishops to appoint a Commission . . . to survey the whole problem of modern evangelism, with special reference to the spiritual needs and prevailing intellectual outlook of the non-worshipping members of the community, and to report on the organization and methods by which such needs can most effectively be met."

Our first task must be to agree upon

#### A DEFINITION OF EVANGELISM.

The Resolution, quoted above, pre-supposes that the Church has a clear-cut idea as to the meaning of Evangelism. This is far from being the case. Much time will be saved, much loose speculation prevented, and much futility avoided, if first we can arrive at a true understanding of Evangelism, and then allow that knowledge to shape our discussions and to test the relevance of our proposals.

The Archbishops' Committee of Inquiry on " The Evangelistic Work of the Church " (which reported in similar circumstances, at the conclusion of the last war, in 1918) framed the following definition of Evangelism :

" To evangelise is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of the Church."

The definition could hardly be bettered. But it requires to be understood, and then to be implemented. After the last war, the " Inquiry " (quoted above) and all subsequent " Calls " and " Re-calls " to Renewal and Religion, manifestly failed in their *primary* purpose of Evangelism. Otherwise, we should not now find ourselves the members of yet another Commission on Evangelism, called into existence with a note of urgency that sounds like an S.O.S. The reason for the failure of the Church to evangelise is equally obvious. Post-war theological thinking was saturated with Christian humanism. Jesus Christ was presented as the Example and Teacher, following Whom men were exhorted to trust in the love of God, to save themselves, and to serve the world in the fellowship of the Church.

Evangelism, therefore, was largely interpreted as making people interested in religion; and as a call to social reconstruction—as is shown by the prevalence of the nonsensical phrase, “The Social Gospel.”

It is true that the arousing of the nation to a consciousness of God, and the bringing in of a better Christian order of Society, both fall within the scope of our Commission.

The former is the necessary preparation for Evangelism. The latter is the equally necessary result of Evangelism. But neither of them is Evangelism itself.

Now that a second war upon the heels of the last has utterly discredited the dreams and doctrines of Christian humanism, we are in a better position (than in 1918) to realise this salient truth.

#### EVANGELISM, THE PROCLAMATION OF GOOD NEWS.

Evangelism, according to Scripture, is the Proclamation of Good News.

The very term “Gospel” was coined to describe the heralding of the Good News of restoration, to captives in exile (see Isaiah xl, 9, and lxi, 1.)

Professor C. H. Dodd has shown conclusively in his lectures, “The Apostolic Teaching,” that *preaching* (or heralding) the Gospel has, in the New Testament, a meaning distinct from *teaching* the Faith, or *instruction* in the good life. GOOD NEWS must connote the announcement of something beneficial to us that has happened *apart from ourselves*. The Good News of the Gospel is the proclamation of what God has wrought on our behalf—apart from man, and impossible for man to achieve himself.

Good news can only be accepted by man, and then passed on to others. Good News for man cannot be anything manufactured by man. Hence, the purpose of Evangelism in our definition, “that men shall come to put their *trust* in God *through Christ*.”

Incidentally, Good News pre-supposes bad news if the Gospel is refused. This “fearful” truth has been largely forgotten or ignored, with a consequent loss of urgency and appeal in our modern presentation of the Gospel.

#### THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION.

The grand Scripture word for the content of the Evangel is SALVATION.

It would be folly to change the word because it may sound strangely in the ears of a generation that does not read the Bible. All that is required is to explain its meaning, more particularly in the light thrown upon it by the study of psychology.

Salvation is to possess the assurance of restored relationship with God by actively trusting in the At-one-ment accomplished for us by the death of our Saviour.

Thus “to accept Christ as Saviour” is an act of the whole man. It is an act of the will as well as of the mind; which explains St. Paul’s oft-repeated phrase of “believing *onto* Christ” (*eis* with the accusative—movement towards).

As such, Salvation includes the three-fold saving (past, present, and future) of Bishop Westcott's teaching.

We are saved from the guilt of sin which haunts us (*Past*).

We are saved from the power of sin which frustrates us (*Present*).

We are saved from the death of sin which makes life futile by divorcing it from eternity (*Future*).

#### SALVATION FROM SIN.

SIN, or that which separates from God, can be termed self-centredness.

CONVERSION is (by an act of the whole man) to become, either by gradual growth or by a sudden change, God-centred through Christ.

The result is the Salvation of personal wholeness.

United to God in Christ, man becomes himself a unity, instead of remaining a disintegrated personality. "Mr. Polly was not a man. Mr. Polly was a civil war."

United to God in Christ, man becomes adjusted to, and one with, his environment and his fellows.

United to God in Christ, man gains a purpose in life that is one with Eternity itself.

In recent years the popular mood has swung back from ethical to dogmatic Christianity.

Moreover, the disillusionment of the peace years leading to another war, and the general disquiet occasioned by widespread moral degeneration of every kind, has shattered that complacency characteristic of the past quarter of a century which boasted its immunity from a sense of sin. People, even now, may not call it sin; but they are terribly aware of frustration or futility or moral defeat, which is the same thing.

But even if there was to-day little sense of sin, the years between the wars have exposed the betrayal of immortal souls for whom Christ died, when the Church acquiesces in such a disposition, and suggests, instead, that other aspects of the Eternal Gospel should be emphasised such as the call to social service.

Salvation from Sin is the Gospel of Our Lord and Saviour, and there is no other.

Our inquiry, therefore, must very largely concern itself with the question how to bring home to the consciences of our countrymen the fact and the meaning of sin, from which Christ saves.

In Apostolic times the urgency of the Gospel appeal was the expectancy of the immediate return of our Lord. In the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century the urgency of the Gospel appeal was the fear of Hell fire. In both cases the presentation of the Gospel met with astonishing success.

After the last war, the Report of the Archbishops' Committee of Inquiry on "The Evangelistic Work of the Church" declared that "the strongest appeal to-day, certainly to the younger generation, is the appeal to service, to adventure."

The worse than barren result of the attempt thus to short-circuit the doctrine of original sin (in which we have been forced to believe once more) should save us from making the same fatal mistake.

We may not proclaim the immediacy of the Second Advent, nor believe in literal flames of eternal torment. But that in no way alters the basic facts of a God to Whom we are accountable, of Judgment, and of Hell. The issue before humanity is still, literally, one of Life or Death; and the Evangel is the Good News of Life—abundance of Life, both here and hereafter. The appeal to service, however fine, requires to be deepened into a passionate concern for the welfare of immortal souls, if *it is to possess converting power*.

Before our Commission can confront its task, it is essential that we should, first, discover what is Evangelism according to the words and ministry of Christ and His Apostles. When we are agreed upon this fundamental, we shall then insist that the same Gospel is the one required for our times, and for all time; and we shall pray that God will show us how it can be brought home to the minds and consciences of our generation. In doing so, we shall find that all the other manifold and important aspects of Evangelism will fall into their proper place.

#### CHRIST'S EVANGELISTIC INQUIRY.

In order that we may get back to the Gospel itself, can we do better than adopt for our inquiry the plan which Christ Himself has given us in the Parable of the Sower, as the explanation, of His own Evangelistic ministry.

Following out the thought of the Parable we discover the true pattern of Evangelism, as follows:—

1. THE SOWER, representing the human agents of Evangelism, those "who present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit". These are :
  - (1) *The Clergy*, requiring Preaching Power and Spirituality. There is also the need for Ordinands to have had actual experience in Evangelism.
  - (2) *The Laity*, requiring Instruction in doctrine, and also Training in the technique of Evangelism.
2. THE SOIL, representing the hearts of men. The soil needs preparation if a generation that has lost its sense of God-consciousness is to "put their trust in God through Christ". Such preparation involves :
  - (1) *A General Campaign to* :
    - (a) Reinstatement of Christianity in home-life, national education, industrial and social relationships.
    - (b) Restore confidence in the Bible as the revealed truth of God, and to encourage its reading and study.
    - (c) Revive Church worship and Sunday observance.
  - (2) *Special Propaganda*, utilising the great modern agencies of propaganda—the Press, the Films, the Drama, the B.B.C.; and setting up publicity centres.
3. THE SOWING OF THE SEED, Evangelism proper; *i.e.*, appealing to men "to accept Christ as their Saviour". This involves :

- (1) *Evangelism in the Parish.* Evangelism is not so much a specialised ministry as an attitude of expectance towards the whole of a parochial ministry.
- (a) As regards the clergy, it introduces an Evangelistic concern into the handling of the Occasional Offices, into preaching, teaching, Confirmation preparation, into the purpose of parochial organisations, and into visiting and personal contacts. Speaking generally, the urgent need is for a revival of the Ministry of the Word.
- (b) As regards the laity, their recruitment, training and use is essential. The experiment of Evangelistic "Companies" or Bands.
- (2) *Central Organised Efforts.* Camps, House Parties, and At Homes; School, University, and Parochial Missions; Chaplains for Youth Organisations and Factories; the Church Army and Preaching Communities; Central Evangelistic Councils.
4. GARNERING THE FRUITS into the *Fellowship of the Church*—so that men may "serve Christ as their King in the fellowship of the Church". To fulfil this essential :

- (1) The Worship of the Church must be seen to offer a true reality of communion with God and with fellow-Christians.
- (2) The Church must build up Christians well instructed in faith and morals, and such as will attract by the testimony of their lips and of their lives.
- (3) The Church must provide worth-while opportunities of Christian service.
- (4) The Church must be missionary hearted, giving corporate testimony to its Christianity by—

- (a) A zeal for Missions Overseas.
- (b) A deep concern for the application of Christian principles in politics, industry, and social life.

N.B.—This raises the important question as to the co-operation of the Churches in Evangelism.

On the one hand, the nation can only be re-converted by a united national effort.

On the other hand, it is essential for each Church to offer converts the Fellowship of its particular Communion.

Is the solution—(a) Parallel Evangelistic Campaigns?

(b) An Evangelistic Committee of the British Council of Churches?

It will be seen that by thus following out our Lord's presentation of Evangelism, under the analogy of Sowing the Seed, all the multifold aspects of Evangelism find a place—and their right place.

## II.

November 14th, 1945.

**The Chairman's Presentation of the Commission's Report to the Church Assembly.**

In presenting the Report of the Commission on Evangelism, I am handicapped, not only by my own obvious inadequacy, but by a heavy sense of responsibility. The very subject of the Report "the modern problem of Evangelism," makes it quite the most important document this Assembly has yet been called upon to consider.

Therefore, though no one is more conscious than I of its many shortcomings; I would plead that the Assembly should concentrate on its main issues, and not on what I would ask you indulgently to regard as its relatively small blemishes. Moreover, the Report has already received a publicity and aroused an interest that is quite remarkable. Many eyes, even beyond this country, are turned upon this Assembly to-day, and by this debate they will judge the Church whose representatives we are. It is not so much the Report that is being judged to-day, but this Assembly, by our handling of the Report, and the action (or no action) we take upon it.

Some secular (not Church) leaders of our national life have indeed surprised me by regarding what is in this Report as "the Church's last chance." Though I would not go as far as that myself, it remains true that after all the expectation the Report has already aroused, it would be a disaster if it were pigeonholed, and went the way of so many of its predecessors.

We should be the more encouraged to take action from the fact that "Towards the Conversion of England" has received an impressive and unsolicited testimonial from "The Thinker's Forum," which has actually considered it worthy of an attack of eighteen pages, called "Anglican Shipwreck" (price 6d.). This means that, despite any faults and weaknesses which may call for discussion, the Report has already led off with a blow that has made the Devil put up his fists. And if I may for a moment copy St. Paul and descend to the language of the ring, it remains for this debate to follow up with a swing to the jaw, and with the full weight of the Assembly behind it.

## WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

*Towards the Conversion of England* has also received severe, if in my judgment somewhat muddled, criticism from the *Christian News Letter*. I take comfort from the thought that, on the same grounds, the *Christian News Letter* would have quarrelled violently with St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans; seeing that of the twenty-seven names to whom the Apostle sends greetings in the last chapter, over half of them were those of slaves. If I now attempt a short answer to the criticism, it is that thereby our minds may be cleared as to what Evangelism really means, and what exactly was the task with which the Commission on Evangelism was entrusted. The real point at issue between the *Christian News Letter* and *Towards the Conversion of England* is contained in the challenge which the Letter flings down. I will quote it in full to show that I am dragging nothing out of its context: "There are those who maintain that in our

present society, or at least in large areas of it, a man *cannot* [note the italics. C.R.] find his human fulfilment, nor discharge his responsibility to God, in his daily work. That is an assertion so decisive in its consequences that it must either be successfully refuted or be allowed to govern our whole outlook on Evangelism. What is the good of converting a man if, when he is converted, he cannot live as a Christian? The Gospel is addressed to human persons, and in so far as a man ceases to be a free and responsible person [e.g., a slave? C.R.] the Gospel loses its meaning."

I accept the challenge. I would declare my unfaltering conviction that the very essence of the Christian Gospel is that the power of Christ in human life is adequate to meet the contemporary situation, *whatever it may be*. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Further, I would assert with confidence that the adequacy of the power of Christ has been abundantly attested from the first days of Christianity, with its Christian slaves in Caesar's household, and its Christian soldiers in the Praetorian Guard, right down the centuries, yes and in our own days, in those shining Christian lives which have shone out from darkest circumstances, such as many of us here have known and revered. St. Paul did not wait till slaves were emancipated, before he converted slaves in Caesar's household. Either the assertion of the *Christian News Letter* is rank heresy; or else the Christian Faith is a lie, I have no Gospel to preach, and I resign my orders to-morrow. Mind you, though I am getting old, I have knocked about in my time and I have seen life in the raw more than most. It does not take the *Christian News Letter* to inform me of the urgent necessity and duty of the Church resolutely tackling the problem of what Dr. Reinhold Neibuhr calls "moral man in immoral society," or what the *Christian News Letter* describes as the "divided mind," and the "tension of living simultaneously in two different worlds."

But as the Commission made clear by its quotation from Archbishop Temple's Penguin Special, "*Christianity and the Social Order*," which introduces our whole Report, there is a difference of function between "making men Christian," and "making the social order more Christian." Let me give you the quotation: "If we have to choose between making men Christian [*that is one thing*. C.R.], and making the social order more Christian [*that is something else*. C.R.], we must choose the former [*it comes first*. C.R.]. But there is no such antithesis." No there is not! We must do both. "Making the social order more Christian," is a duty laid on the Church, and it is to work towards the Kingdom of God. "To make men Christian" is also a duty laid on the Church, and it is *Evangelism*, and it comes first in order of importance. Our Commission, therefore, while it thoroughly apprehended the importance of Christianising Society, did not consider this impersonal task could be rightly understood as Evangelism, any more than Religious Instruction is necessarily Evangelism, however essential for Christianity. Evangelism, according to the definition we adopted, is the *personal task* of presenting Christ Jesus to men, women, and children, as their Saviour and King. It is "to make men Christian."

Some of you may have read the lecture on *Religious Experience*



delivered last June on his 80th birthday by Professor C. C. J. Webb, the former Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford. He asserts that the very essence of the Christian religion is the believer's personal experience of the Presence of the Ever-Living Christ. Such religious experience, he insists, is no mere subjective activity of the human Spirit; it is the impact upon our consciousness of Objective Reality, God Himself, Who is always revealing Himself, and cannot be known or experienced except through His own act and initiative. There you have set forth with authority the purpose of Evangelism. It is the Good News of God, Who reveals to us His Nature and His work. It is, moreover, the Good News of how God has intervened, and is intervening, to save and empower men and women, who can only accept (but never merit) that wholeness of personality unified in Christ, which has been wrought for us, and apart from us. This, then, is this Gospel which the Church seems to have mislaid for a time, and which our Commission were unanimous in declaring must again be preached in the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### THE PROBLEM OF MODERN EVANGELISM.

From what I have tried to say about the meaning of Evangelism, we should begin to realise what it is exactly that constitutes the "problem of modern evangelism."

1. There is of course the magnitude of the task before the Church. It is impossible to exaggerate the gulf that divides the Church to-day from the life and thinking of ordinary English people; so that our first finding had to be that "the situation calls for no less than the conversion of England to the Christian Faith." *But that is not the real problem.*

2. There is, also, the difficulty of the task. It is more formidable than that which confronted the Early Church, or confronts the Church in missionary lands to-day. For though all down the ages the heathen may have ignorantly worshipped an Unknown God; they have yet been acutely conscious of a Power higher than themselves. To-day, we confront a new phenomenon: a generation that has lost God, and a whole dimension of life—the spiritual dimension. Half our countrymen are "worse than heathen," in that they believe in nothing, not even in themselves after a second world war in thirty years. *But that, again, is not the real problem.*

3. The real problem concerns the Church, as Christ's Agency for Evangelism. There are two questions that must be asked in this connection.

- (a) How far is the Church implicated in the situation? The *Christian News Letter* states: "The Churches are part of the civilisation which is collapsing, and must acknowledge that their own secularisation, supineness and unfaithfulness have largely contributed to the collapse." Do you endorse this judgement.
- (b) Then, also, does the Church possess the spiritual resources that will enable it to rise to the magnitude and difficulty of the task? This issue was raised by Lord Elton (a valued member of the Commission) at a mass meeting of the C. E. M. S. November 1944. "Can anyone (he asked) imagine such a commission in the early

days of Christianity—those days of confidence and conquest.”? There were Commissions, of course, both at Antioch and Jerusalem to plan Evangelism among the Gentiles. But such Commissions to plan the strategy of conquest, were vastly different from ours which faced in the Church itself both a manifest lack of evangelistic zeal, and also a widespread ignorance of the content of the Gospel.

Our days are *not* days of spiritual confidence and conquest. *And that is the real problem.* For remember, in the eternal counsel of Almighty God, the preaching of the Gospel by the Church is as necessary for His purpose of the redemption of the whole creation, as was the Cross of Christ itself.

Look then at our days :

1. *There are the clergy.* From a variety of causes (most of which demand our intense and understanding sympathy, and also our help) great numbers of them are suffering from an acute sense of frustration. Their condition could not possibly be described as confidence for conquest. Rather it approximates to the fourth Mortal Sin of the Middle Ages—Accidie. Chaucer calls Accidie the “Rotten-hearted sin” (the heart taken out of you). According to the Septuagint translation of Isaiah lxi : 3, it is the “spirit of heaviness.” The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* sums it up as follows : “Briefly it was the state of mind of a monk who had mistaken his vocation.”

2. *There are our Church Congregations.* With conspicuous exceptions, the majority of them seem to be so lacking in warmth and vitality that their neighbourhood is not aware of them, and simply counts them out in the ordinary life of the community.

3. *As for the Worshipping Community in general,* the clergy and laity rub shoulders daily with non-worshippers. But they display so little real belief in the supernatural, that they possess no Gospel to proclaim.

No ! the problem is not the 90% outside the Churches. These grand English people who have come victoriously, and at so great cost, through two world wars in a generation ! St. Paul would have regarded them as fields white already unto harvest, and as the most promising sphere in the world for the operation of the Gospel. The problem of modern Evangelism is the 10% inside the Churches, who are half-converted and ill-instructed Christians. As our Report says, they “present a *field* rather than a *force* for Evangelism.”

#### THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE.

What then ails the Church? What is the cause of its spiritual anaemia? It has succumbed to the malady that has always threatened the Church from the days of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia. It has become infected with the Spirit of the Age, and so has lost its vision, its vitality, and its spiritual authority.

The *Christian News Letter* describes the spirit of the age as the belief in “salvation through knowledge” both of the individual and of society ; and then (with great respect to the writer, whom I honour) the letter, by several loud sneezes, shows that it has itself caught the prevailing influenza of “salvation through knowledge”.

Your commission termed the spirit of the age : “the original sin

of Humanism": "that view of life which sees in man (not God) the source of all meaning and value". May I say quite frankly how much I wish that, to avoid all possible misunderstanding, we had adopted the phrase suggested in the News Letter—the original sin of "self-sufficient Humanism". Thereby we should have shown that we were not referring to the "God-regarding" humanism of such Renaissance humanists as Colet, Erasmus, and More, and its doctrine of: "Man the measure of all things", or "People matter", as the B.B.C. would say. At the same time I am bound to claim that our use of the word was accurate and correct. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term *Humanism* (as also its cognate *Humanitarian*) seems to have been first coined and originally used in the early years of the 19th Century, to denote "belief in the mere humanity of Christ". Thenceforth, it seems generally to carry with it the implication of God being left out, and to signify "thought or action concerned with merely human interests (as distinguished from Divine)".

However that may be, few, I think, will dispute the fact that the Church has lately become disastrously infected with the spirit of this self-sufficient Humanism, or dispute the assertion of Mr. C. S. Lewis that "For the last fifty years, theology has concentrated on this life, rather than on the next, and on man, rather than on God". In a word the Church recently has become increasingly Pelagian—that heresy, which the late Dr. N. P. Williams (formerly an honoured member of this Assembly) described as having "originated in our island and may be said to be endemic in it".

Pelagianism teaches that "human nature is capable of working out its own salvation unassisted". Such a rational morality obviously makes a strong appeal to the common-sense, self-reliance and self-respect of the English. But equally obviously there is no need for the Gospel, when Everyman is not only his own Adam, but his own Redeemer.

It is Pelagianism that has encouraged the comfortable belief in the automatic progress of man towards perfection; to which history gives the lie.

It is Pelagianism that has given rise to the preaching of the so-called "Social Gospel", whereby a more Christian Social order was to make men Christian. We certainly have to-day a vastly more Christian social order than we possessed a century ago. Yet historians, such as Mr. R. C. K. Ensor, can speak of "Christian England" a hundred years ago, while to-day we "recognise the urgent necessity for definite action" towards the conversion of England.

Most tragic of all, it is Pelagianism that has evoked into being the remarkable number of substitute religions which have sprung up in recent years. The outstanding characteristic of them all is their promise of immediate contact between individuals and the Unseen. They have come into existence because of the failure of the Church to preach and communicate the Gospel it was expressly founded to mediate.

#### THE FIRST REQUISITE FOR EVANGELISM.

From all this it follows that the first requisite for evangelism, is for the Church to recover its vision of God, and its sense of the reality of

the Unseen. Only so can it regain the confidence for conquest of the Early Church. We need, not so much *great* faith in God, as faith in a *great* God.

The ordinary man's conception of God has been described as "a blank with a question-mark in the middle." The conception of God of the ordinary Christian is largely anthropomorphic. Man to-day makes God in his own image. God is what we think He is, and what we believe God ought to be. But to quote once more Professor C. C. J. Webb: "It is inconceivable that God should be known or experienced, except through His own act". God is a God of Revelation; and Christianity is God revealed in Christ. Now a God of Revelation is a God who takes the initiative and intervenes—even as He has proved by the Incarnation and Atonement.

Therefore it is (as the Conclusion of the Report emphasises) that Evangelism begins with a downward movement of God to men. All through the war we have been asking the wrong question: "Is there a movement of people back to God?" The question should rather be: "Are there signs that God is moving?" But once we believe in a God Who moves, then at last confidence and conquest are ours; and all our planning for Evangelism must start here. There can be no hope of successful action "towards the conversion of England", until England has become a network of Parish Prayer Meetings, and of Prayer Circles of every description, to "move the Hand, that moves the world, to bring salvation down". But once we believe with all our heart in a God Who moves towards men, then we have a Gospel! then we have Good News to proclaim!

#### TWO STAGES IN EVANGELISM.

This will explain why all through our Report your Commission has distinguished between two stages in Evangelism.

The first and prior stage is that of *Preparing for the Gospel*. It is often called "indirect Evangelism", and it can be impersonal in its operation. It consists in preparing the soil for the reception of the seed; and its purpose is to create that sense of need which shall respond to the Good News of how God can satisfy every need.

The second stage is the actual *Presentation of the Gospel*. It is direct evangelism. It is the *personal* appeal by one to another to accept Christ as Saviour and King; and it consists both in sowing the seed, and in reaping a harvest.

As we have already seen, this prior stage of preparation is required before the Church can become evangelistic. Only when the Church renews its vision of God, can it preach the Gospel with confidence for conquest.

This prior stage of making men aware of God, is also one which a missionary Church must undertake if it would evangelise. Your Commission has dealt at some length with all that is involved in preparing the soil of human hearts for the reception of the seed. The reason is because the materialistic outlook, and the mechanised thinking of our machine age, presents the Sower with something like a concrete pavement to break up, rather than the merely trodden earth of the pathway in the Parable.

## PREPARATION BY PREACHING.

The normal preparation of the Gospel, round which all other necessary processes gather and take their shape, is Prophetic Preaching, namely, the authoritative declaration of "the great and everlasting things that matter"—God, Judgment to come, and Eternal Life.

Prophetic Preaching has been defined as "relating the mind of God to the will of the hearer, through the heart of the preacher". A Prophet, therefore, is one who has a first-hand knowledge of God, and a first-hand knowledge of man. There are, thus, two notes in his preaching, one Divine and the other human—(1) the message comes with the authority from God, and (2) it applies the truths of God to contemporary life.

Are the truths of God proclaimed to-day with an authority that can declare: "Thus saith the Lord"?

Dr. L. P. Jacks in his "Confessions of an Octogenarian" (published during the war) describing how he has been the Editor of the *Hibbert Journal* since 1900, makes the following observation: "Among the thousands of articles that have been offered me on the fundamentals of religion and the essentials of Christianity, I could only count on my hands those that have dealt with immortality". Listening to sermons confirmed his impression that "the practice seems to be not indeed to disavow immortality, but to keep it in cold storage for funeral occasions". "And yet," he continues, "the central theme of the New Testament is immortality—not of everybody and anybody, but of believers in Christ as risen from the Dead". Hard upon the heels of these reflections of an unorthodox Christian thinker, there appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* of October 7th, 1944, that Article in "Menanders Mirror", entitled "Empty Pews". The fact that it had to be reprinted in pamphlet form, and ran into edition after edition, entitled it to be called the laymen's verdict on the present-day pulpit. The verdict was that one chief reason for sparse congregations is that they get nothing when they come to Church, no Eternal Message, but only little homilies on current topics.

The other note in prophetic preaching is its understanding of human need. The Message of God must be relevant to contemporary life. It has been said that the business of the theologian is not to prove the faith apart from life, but to show how the faith interprets contemporary life. This is still more true of preaching. Perhaps the outstanding contribution to religious thought of Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, is his teaching that all our modern "secular" problems are at heart theological, and can only be solved as such. And in his *Beyond Tragedy*, he has a sentence which gives, graphically, one essential for the preparation of the soil for the reception of the seed: "One of the most fatal sources of self-deception in the ministry is the proclamation of great ideals and principles, without any clue to their relation to the controversial issues of the day".

There will be a response to the Gospel, in proportion as we convince men of their need for the Gospel.

## MODERN MEDIA OF PROPAGANDA.

But in these days when 90% of the population are outside our Churches, and when their thinking and living is entirely secularised,

something more is required, to bring home spiritual and Eternal truths, than Prophetic Preaching, whether by the spoken or the written word.

Modern minds are mass-produced. And the chief educators which mould thinking and behaviour, are the great modern agencies of publicity—the cinema, radio, drama, the Press and organised advertising.

Not unnaturally, the newspapers have given great prominence to the assertion of our Report that all these modern agencies should be employed for Christian “propaganda”—to use the word in its right sense of the “dissemination of truth”. Not unnaturally, also, great misunderstanding has been caused thereby. It is objected that it would be very wrong for the Church thus to “condition” people’s minds. It would not attempt to do so. It would, however, try to put the other side to the materialism which now holds the entire field. Thereby, it might be a little easier for men and women in Great Society to make a free choice, instead of being the passive products of a uniform and secular mould.

Also, it must be understood that the purposed use of such agencies would be to prepare men’s minds for Evangelism. We never regarded them as being evangelism itself, or taking the place of the direct and personal appeal for man’s acceptance of Christ. The stark fact is that these modern agencies of propaganda are, to an extent that is gravely disturbing, the sole educators of masses of people to-day. Are we to surrender them to the forces of secularism and often of evil, or are we to “baptise” them into the service of Christ, as Gregory bade Augustine when asked what was to be done with the heathen temples of Kent.

Of course, we should all agree that it would be ridiculous to ask the Church to spend a million pounds during the next five years in advertising the Gospel in every way possible. But why ridiculous? Only ridiculous because the Church with all its commitments could never dream of such an expenditure for such a purpose. Not ridiculous from the assured results that would thereby be achieved. Why, even from the lowest and financial point of view, the adventure would reap a harvest. For the Church will never get the funds it needs so sorely simply by tapping people’s pockets, or even by educating them in the duty of giving; but only by touching their springs of action and changing their hearts. It is the converted Churchman alone who knows the gladness, as well as the duty, of sacrificial giving.

#### THE MOBILIZATION OF THE LAITY.

There is no need to delay you on the second stage of Evangelism, evangelism proper, or the actual presentation of the Gospel for decision. The Report can speak for itself on this matter. There is, however, one warning that I would utter. The main contention of our Report is that “without the participation of the laity, the conversion of England is impossible”; and that before the Church can evangelise, there must be the recovery of the Apostolate of the Laity. Lay Evangelism is undoubtedly our Lord’s plan for spreading the Gospel. Indeed, He commands it. The reason is not far to seek. The laity permeate every section of society. Moreover, their testimony is more readily listened to by their fellows, than that of professionals. Thus

your Commission is convinced that: "England will never be converted until the laity use the opportunities for evangelism daily afforded by their various professions, crafts, and occupations". That is to say, we have not to send forth labourers into the harvest. The labourers are already there, all over the field; but they are not labouring. Why? There are two reasons.

For the past century, an increasing sacerdotalism has tended to magnify the priestly office by inhibiting the laity from exercising their inalienable right of Apostleship, as the royal priesthood.

For the past century also, an increasing self-indulgence, which has grown with the growth of facilities for luxury, has inclined the laity to be only too ready to be warned off the course of exacting Christian endeavour.

The result has not only been that breach between lay and clerical Christianity which so weakens and paralyses contemporary religion; but the laity are now either disinclined to answer the call to fulfil their duty, or else, when they do, they find themselves wretchedly equipped for the task.

My warning, therefore, is that it will take immense effort, and a long time, before the evangelising of England by the laity can become really effective. I was impressed, for example, by something Field-Marshal Montgomery said to me the other day. He declared that England will always have to fight long wars, as long as she remains unprepared for war. In the last two wars, he pointed out, it has taken three years before our armies could be mobilised, trained and equipped, really to begin fighting. We cannot, therefore, begin too soon to mobilise the laity, to equip them by Schools of Evangelism, and to train them in "Cells", for the work of evangelism. It is not long before converted men and women can give, with effect, their simple testimony to the revolution Christ has wrought in their lives, their homes, and their social relationships. But it must be some time before they are competent to lead "Cells" or conduct discussion groups.

We are bound to face the fact that there are years and years of lost opportunity to make good, when the finest material possible was allowed to go to waste.

#### BEGINNING WITH ME.

There I must leave the matter in the hands of Assembly. But in so doing, I would venture to impress upon all members the personal responsibility they cannot evade, in accepting the Report and recommending it to the Church at large for study and action; or would it be better described as "study *in* action"? Quite undoubtedly, the conversion of England can only be attempted by a revived Church. But the Church is not something separate from the individuals who compose its Body. Moreover, the spiritual temperature of the evangelistic zeal of ordinary Church people cannot be expected to rise higher than that of the members of their Assembly, their accredited representative. What is your reaction to the call of the Report for the recovery of the Apostolate of the whole Church, clergy and laity alike? If you yourselves are not prepared to evangelise, who else will, and why should they? I wonder, for example, if all members of the House of Clergy know what it is to have been used by God to bring a soul to that

new birth of which our Lord spoke to Nicodemus. I feel bound to ask the question, for I have known so many parish priests who, throughout their whole ministry, have never knelt by the side of a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, as they accepted Christ Jesus as their Saviour and King, and then witnessed the miracle of a changed life which conversion effects.

In the same way, I wonder if every member of the House of Laity is prepared, quite naturally and simply, to tell their friends "what Jesus Christ means to me, personally."

As, therefore, we receive this Report, "Towards the Conversion of England", we need to make our own the prayer of the United Church of China in their five years campaign, 1930-1935, "O Lord, revive Thy Church, beginning with *me*". "Take *my* lips and speak through them, take *my* mind and speak through it, take *my* heart and set it on fire, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."