

The Supreme Need of the Modern Church

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Something has gone wrong with our type of Christianity. The church possesses the greatest organizations in the world; controls, directly or indirectly, vast sums of money; has representatives in almost every country, and may draw on enormous reserves of youthful vigor, yet in some strange way remains partially paralyzed.

This statement may be devastating, but after much reflection I stress again what I have written. Christian enterprise on foreign fields seems to be progressing; new institutions in the homelands are on the increase. Even the shortest journey through the countryside supplies evidence that old church buildings are disappearing, and in their place ornate sanctuaries are lifting costly steeples toward the sky. There is a realm in which the church is advancing, but something seems to have gone wrong. Often the services are most attractive; the quality of the singing is better than ever before; the ministers are cultured men of eminence enjoying the respect of the community; the offerings, increasing year after year, run into millions of dollars. Certain people are filled with ecstasy, for the continuance of Christianity is assured; but it is probable that if an old prophet suddenly reappeared to investigate our spiritual assets, he would frown. Our ecclesiastical machinery is of the best quality, but the power to drive it is diminishing.

The church is suffering from an old complaint-Lockjaw. We denounce the activities and doctrines of various sects, but the fact remains that the untiring Jehovah's Witnesses put us to shame. We denounce their teachings, we criticize their endeavors; but how many of our nominal church members would be willing and anxious, week after week, to stand on a street corner offering Christianity to uninterested people? Evangelism, for the normal church, is something exclusively linked with the coming of a special missionary. In preparation for his meetings certain visits might be made, and various people asked to attend the forthcoming crusade. The interest might extend beyond the stipulated time of the evangelist's stay, but afterward the tendency is for all to slump back into complacent indifference. The greatest spiritual need of present times is for a resurgence of that spiritual passion which enables Christians to witness for the Master.

The best way to witness for Christ is to do it! In my travels around the world I have often been asked, "What is the best way to witness for Christ? How may I win my friends for the Saviour? I want to do this, but I'm no speaker." Let me confess that sometimes my patience has been strained when the questioner waxes eloquent in explaining his inability to speak! The statement, "I would not know what to say" provided a striking contrast to the rich smooth flow of breath-taking arguments which cascaded from resolute lips.

Let us face the fact instantly that the Lord Jesus Christ expects every Christian to be a witness, and unless we endeavor to become this, we disappoint Him. There can never be any line of demarcation in this matter. The influential business executive, the typist, the professor, the student, the doctor, the nurse, the husband, the housewife; from the oldest to the youngest; deacons, Sunday-school scholars-all who profess allegiance to Christ must be witnesses. The tragedy of the modern church is that a pseudo-dignity has given us lockjaw!

If certain church elders who are business managers stood

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up in the directors' meeting to say, "Gentlemen, I want you to listen while I tell you what Christ means to me," the audience would swoon, the Stock Exchange would stampede, the Government would be overthrown, and the top slide off Mount Everest! These things are just not done; no sir!

Drinkers mix soda water with their whiskey because they value the linings of their stomachs; some witnesses dilute their message because they value popularity with their friends. The ancient prophets began with, "Thus saith the Lord"; their modern counterparts often question how "this will go over with Mr. So-and-so." Consequently, empty pews have spread like an epidemic of measles. In numerous lands students have repeatedly asked, "How best can I witness for Christ?" My answer has always been, witness. When I have been asked, "How may I make my witnessing more effective?" I assumed the inquirer was already on the job. There are certain clearly defined laws in the art of soul-winning.

My life must be more eloquent than my tongue

A man may be a most accomplished orator, a born actor, an excellent exponent of rhetoric, but if his inconsistent life contradicts his words, he becomes a windbag whose exertions merely make nostrils quiver in disgust. Holiness is the handmaiden of all true preaching.

My speech must be simple, attractive, and direct

From time immemorial God has used "the foolishness of preaching," but that fact does not provide a licence for anything slipshod, ungracious, or unthoughtful. I have known speakers who failed to differentiate between brutal arrogance and forthright sincerity. Their atomic denunciations revealed they would have been ideal companions for a blacksmith's hammer. I have known others whose whispered apologies declared them to be excellent baby sitters! Whether I be a minister of a church, a manager in an office, a typist, or errand boy, my confession of Christ should be sincere, convincing, and completely attractive. Listeners should recognize that Christ means more than any tongue could possibly tell.

As far as possible, I should devote sufficient time to the preparation of my message

The man who has completely mastered the art of preaching should be playing a harp! The minister who knows everything should have a call to another world. Men who glibly say, "I have no need to prepare a sermon, for the moment I open my mouth, God fills it," have either too small a brain or too large a mouth! It is an indisputable fact that God honors preparation. Satan so fears real preaching that he will run a man off his feet doing all sorts of odd jobs, so that the Sunday sermons will be a few sandwiches hastily thrown together instead of a substantial meal for God's hungry children. No man has a right to stand in the pulpit until his own soul has been thrilled by the message to be delivered. And in similar fashion, even an office boy may intelligently plan his approach to friends.

I must beware of moments of success

At such times I shall be in real danger. If, on the other hand, I feel a failure, I can find consolation in the fact that that there will be another time! I must determine to succeed. My own experience has taught that oftentimes God has been able to accomplish far more when I felt a failure than when I felt I had been a great success. We must always remember

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that the less room we take in the picture, the more God can claim for Himself.

Reader, could you effectively witness for Christ? Certainly. Plan your campaign in your daily sphere of service; prepare the way by believing prayer, and then witness. If your blood pressure rises, if your knees seem to knock together, if your head swirls, if you feel like nothing on earth, find comfort in the fact that you belong to a great family. These are the initiation ceremonies to the ranks of the great.

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