

# Selling Salvation!

"The Minister is a Salesman, the Gospel his Goods and the World his Territory," says this Canadian Billy Sunday

Gordon V. Thompson Explains his Methods



EVER since I have been engaged in business and have been, as well, a local preacher, I have been struck with the parallel existing between getting people to buy goods, and getting them to accept the pearl of great price. I believe a crying need of the church to-day is greater practical efficiency and more direct business methods from pulpit to janitor.

No doubt the words "Selling Salvation" have raised a question in every mind. Are not the words mutually repugnant? What have selling and salvation in common? Are they not entirely divergent? Salvation is a gift; the free gift of God's grace, not to be bought—no, not for a world of gold. Isaiah's "without money and without price," Paul's "free gift of God," and many other phrases seem entirely at variance with the idea of barter and trade. Why then "Selling Salvation"?

When we emphasize the fact that salvation is free, are we not looking at it too much from one side? Does it not cost something to be a Christian? Jesus gives His "blessed" to the persecuted and reviled and reminds would-be followers that the "Son of Man" hath not where to lay His head. A little further reflection will impress the fact that salvation has a price and the shallow evangelism that overlooks this is largely responsible for the flabby, weak-kneed Christians that result.

When I was in the Canadian West, I went down to the Government Land Office, and after paying ten dollars filing fee, the Government gave me 160 acres of land conditionally upon my using it to a certain extent for three years. The land was a free gift of the Canadian Government provided I worked it. The ten dollars was in no sense a purchase price, but simply covered expenses incidental to the transfer.

But while the land was a gift, it cost me something. I remember going out there one afternoon when the thermometer was 40 below zero and having to put up stove pipes. That is no job for a preacher at any time, much less when it is 40 below. I slept alone out there from the 15th of December until the 1st of February. I spent money one way and another, so that when I gave the place up I had lost some \$400 on the deal. The land was a gift—a conditional gift if you please—but all things considered, I found it very costly.

The great blessings of life all have their cost—we must give up the thing of lesser value in order to gain that which is worth more to us. The rich young ruler would not pay the price and went away sorrowful. Agrippa was "almost persuaded" but could not bring himself to surrender his selfish ambitions and become a follower of the Nazarene. We must bear the cross if we would wear the crown—that is very important—no cross, no crown.

You will now admit, I believe, that there is a price to be paid by the followers of Christ in order to obtain the first and great Christmas present of the ages. God gives us a free title to a great estate, but we must go in and possess the land, subduing the giants and thus working out our own salvation.

The object of the salesman is to make his prospective customer feel that the money is of less value to him than the goods the salesman has to offer. He argues, demonstrates, convinces, coaxes and persuades—he appeals to his customer's intellect and to his emotions. The salesman's object is to get him to hand over his money and take the goods. The psychological process involved is interest, conviction, desire, action.

Now, is not the minister or evangelist doing much the same thing when he asks a man or woman to pay out those ideals, to pay out established conceptions of say "a good time," in order to buy that which is best for this life as well as the life hereafter—the pearl of great price? He has his goods which I perhaps rather indefinitely call salvation, and he endeavors to persuade his hearers to give up certain habits, ideals, ambitions, in order to gain these goods. His stock in trade is not only conversion, but also confession and consecration to a great leader and a great cause.

So that essentially the minister is a salesman, the gospel his goods, and the world his territory.

What then are the essential factors that make a salesman a success? I shall allow you to infer how many of my suggestions may apply to the minister or evangelist.

He should believe in his wares. The faker's way is to try to "do" the public, but the honest tradesman sells an article because he knows its value. The day is past when the slickest man is the most successful. Honesty has proven the best policy. The Ad Clubs of the world have adopted the word "Truth" as their motto. "Money back if dissatisfied," is almost axiomatic with the merchants of to-day.

Belief in his goods should be such that it creates enthusiasm. One live coal can set a city on fire. One man who is a storage battery of energy and enthusiasm can charge others and set a lot of human machinery at work. Enthusiasm is contagious.

The good news too soon becomes the old story, and many a preacher gets into a rut in this way. He loses his enthusiasm. Let him think of his goods, let him consider the value of that golden thing—Conversion—let him read Begbie's "Twice Born Men"—let him

watch others making sales, let him best of all, talk it all over with the Great General Manager.

## Know Your People

THE salesman should study his customer or prospective buyers and know them as well as he knows his goods. Often one makes a sale where another has failed because he has a better knowledge of the characteristics of the one whom he is canvassing. The star agent of a real estate office in Calgary was a man who looked more like a day laborer than a real estate man. But he knew the laboring man, and succeeded in getting him interested where smoother dressed men had failed. Not one of you but knows more of theology than does Billy Sunday, but who knows the average American better than he?

Do you complain that you cannot interest the men in the church? I ask you, do you know your men? Do you visit their factory, do you know the conditions under which they labor. Do you illustrate your sermons from something that is of especial interest to them. Have you the right kind of bait on your hook?

I have visited a great many preacher's libraries up and down the country, but I don't remember having seen a trade paper in any of them. Can you show them how your proposition is going to be an advantage to them in their particular job? Oh, you must know the needs of the people if you would cater to them properly.

A salesman must be interesting and attractive. He must not weary his prospect. A long face will make few sales and add few converts to your church. Where can you find a more jovial company than a group of ministers? The minister is often the life of a social function with his bright stories and clever repartee. How many a preacher crawls into a shell of formalism when he gets behind his pulpit and sheathes the sword that God had made for him alone to wield—his personality! Life insurance agents excepted, how many salesmen ever tried to make you cry? How many tried to make you laugh? Billy Sunday has discovered that a laugh and lots of laughs help to sell salvation too. There is a danger of going to the extreme in this regard and losing the more vital impression of sincerity; the best rule is just to be natural.

Finally, a salesman must clinch the deal. He must get the order. Results are what count. All right to talk about the way you handled your prospect, but did you get the order? There comes a time when you must say, "sign here." I had noticed a man trying to sell a lot to an Easterner one night in that Calgary real estate office. The agent talked, and talked and talked, and then repeated it all over. What he said was good, but he did not know when to quit. So I interrupted him: "Mr. So and So knows perfectly well the good points of those lots, all that he wants now is a chance to pay out ten dollars to clinch the bargain. Simply sign there, Mr. Smith, and hand the gentleman ten dollars, and the lots are reserved for you." And he smiled and did sign there.

Most preachers get an evangelist because they can't say "Sign here." They can talk the case well and have

**BILLY SUNDAY'S** evangelistic methods are known from one end of the continent to the other, but the effects of his work are felt only in the country to the south. Yet very few of us know we have had a Billy Sunday in our midst for the past couple of years.

Gordon V. Thompson, the song-writer evangelist, puts as much "pep" into his revival meetings as friend Billy does. He carries his little organ with him and sings souls to salvation. It's his own method of treating a serious subject in an attractive way.

In this article he is talking principally to all ministers of the gospel. He is asking them if they know how to "Sell Salvation." His message, however, is directed at YOU. See if he convinces you!

—THE EDITORS.

many a sale almost effected, but they think it necessary to call in another man who is a special "sign here" man that will close the deal for him and put a new customer on his books.

From what I have said it may seem that I am giving too much advice. As I said at the beginning, I was only trying to show how similar the work of a representative of a business concern, is to that of the special agent of the Almighty in the locality in which he labors, though of course the latter is of vastly greater importance. The same advice applies to the Christian worker as well as the minister.

But merchandising to-day is a much more complex thing than merely making a sale from man to man. Railroads and newspapers have created conditions that



Gordon V. Thompson, the Song-writer Evangelist, "In Action," with his Collapsible Organ

have vastly complicated exchange of goods. There is the manufacturer, the jobber, the wholesaler, the retailer, the mail order house. Newspapers, magazines, letters, billboards, and other publicity devices are used to supplement or eliminate the personal salesman. Sir John Eaton sees very few of the millions who buy his goods. This leads to the consideration of organized selling, where the work is done by hundreds or thousands of men instead of by one.

Here too we can see a parallel between selling salvation and selling merchandise. The church is the chain store system of salvation. Instead of working as individuals, as the disciples did, we now are an organized body and seek to multiply our efficiency in this way. Moody meant organization spelled success when he said "I had rather have ten men do my work than that I should do the work of ten men."

So I want to say something about this system of selling on a larger scale and see what lessons we can learn from it.

One must be careful in speaking of organization and methods not to convey the impression that these are ends in themselves or that these can accomplish anything of themselves. Christ sets forth our relationship to Him in the fifteenth of John, where He tells of the vine and the branches. While the branches, which represent a high degree of organization, are exceedingly valuable, yet apart from the main vine they are useless. "Without me ye can do nothing."

Perhaps we might further illustrate this point by likening the work of the church organizer to an electrical engineer who has to wire a town for power purpose. He may plan and scheme and work out a most beautiful system of wiring that is neat and compact, but if his whole system is not connected with the generating dynamo, it is only an encumbrance. Our Hydro power and lighting system is a wonder, and great praise is due that far-seeing and indefatigable citizen, Sir Adam Beck, for conceiving and carrying out that gigantic undertaking; but brethren, if Niagara ceased to flow or when the circuit is broken off near the source of power, what use are all the wires, transformers, street cars, motors and electric lights which are operated by its current. We must certainly remember that it is electricity that is the all-important thing.

So in a revival effort, final reliance must be put in God. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." Souls are born into the kingdom—they are not manufactured. Life must come from life—we cannot create it. Did I say souls were born—yes, and amid the agony of prevailing prayer are they conceived and brought into the new spiritual realm.

Supposing I were to discuss with you the marketing of a new breakfast food. First thing we would want to do, would be to taste it and see that it was all right, that it would satisfy our hunger, that it had a tempting flavor. Then an analyst and a physician would be consulted to see what its food constituents were. When we were assured that the food was healthful and could be sold with a fair return on our investment we should proceed to consider plans for putting our bread on the market.

We should seek a name for our product, one that would tell perhaps it's best selling point, one that is easily advertised and has a hook for the memory. Suppose we call it "Sawdusto." That may not have all these requirements, but it will serve our purpose. Shakespeare says "what's in a name?" While roses may smell as sweet by other names, they might not sell so sweetly.

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