

NOT DONE IN A CORNER

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"For this thing was not done in a corner."—Acts 26: 26.

THE scene, I need scarcely remind you, is St. Paul's defence—his *apologia pro vita sua*, before Agrippa and Festus. Herod Agrippa the Second, a Roman vassal, King of Chalois and Trachonitis, with Bernice, his sister, a notorious woman, afterwards mistress of Vespasian and of Titus, had come to Cesarea to pay respects to the new Procurator, Porcius Festus, who, after two years, had come in Felix's room. Festus was ignorant of these matters, and being a just man and well learned in the law, he would not send to Augustus, as a prisoner, a Roman citizen who had appealed to Caesar, unless he understood something of the accusation.

Agrippa, who was professionally and politically a Jew, and was even then superintendent of the Temple, with power of appointing the High Priest, might be presumed to understand about such matters. He would have been a boy at the time of St. Paul's conversion, and must have known something of the new religion, the person of its founder, Jesus Christ, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Pentecost, and the other facts upon which it was based. Agrippa, indeed, expressed himself as strongly desirous to hear Paul, and Paul acknowledged that the king was "expert in all customs and questions among the Jews."

When the assembly had come together it was to form a notable scene.

"And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth."

In the presence, therefore, of the Roman Governor, the two royalties, the heads of the Jewish hierarchy, the officers of the army and of the State and the populace of Cesarea, the prisoner pleaded His cause. It was the most significant and the most influential hearing which Christianity had as yet obtained. It was an incident thoroughly in line with both the past and the future of Christianity, and St. Paul's appeal to history and to publicity was characteristic of the Christian method. This thing was not done in a corner. He could confidently appeal to Agrippa's acquaintance with the facts. He was not book-mad or dream-crazed. He was reciting history of which he could say, "*magna pars quorum sui*." He was referring to facts known alike to enemies and friends. His very judge was himself a witness.

"For the king knoweth of these things before whom also I speak freely: for this thing was not done in a corner."

And from this famous episode in the early Apostolic history of the first Christian century, down to this eighth session of the General Synod of the Church of England in Canada, in the twentieth Christian century, the appeal and the method have always been the same. The *apologia* of the Church is its appeal to history and to publicity. The things which it has done have not been done in a corner.

I may remind you, as a basis and a background for our thinking, that this was true of our Lord's own life and teaching. His public ministry was indeed a ministry in public to the public. It was heralded by the famous religious revival and revolution of John the Baptist. It moved along, through miracles and multitudes, to a tragic culmination of

spectacular publicity. From the Manger to the Cross all the events and the episodes were in the open. There was of necessity an intimacy, a reticence, a privacy; but for all purposes of approach and of appeal, the life and the teaching were to be known and read of all men. So, too, with the records and memorials. The essential literature of Christianity does not sleep in dusty corners of neglected bookshelves. The life and words of Christ have been microscopically examined by friend and by foe alike from every possible angle, through generation to generation of champions and of critics. Among all books, the Bible is still far and away the best seller. While we are meeting here to-day, millions of soldiers overseas from all the corners of the earth, carry the Gospels in their kits and near their hearts. The only kind of a corner associated with the life of our Lord is furnished by the fact that in modern religion and civilization and in the whole structure of modern history, the stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone in the corner.

This is equally true of the Apostolic method. It stands out in the earliest Christian appeals and arguments, like those of St. Stephen and St. Peter. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by Him in the midst of you, even as ye, yourselves, also know." They claimed that everyone in Jerusalem was familiar with the career of Christ, and in identifying Him with the Messiah they appealed fearlessly to Jewish literature and tradition and claimed the prophets as their witnesses. The gifts of the Holy Ghost were undeniable. The conversions were unmistakable. Their own history was a book of acts. Saul of Tarsus, become Paul the Apostle, went with his fellow-workers through continents and islands, and it was said, "These men who have turned the world upside down are come hither also."

It is true, also, of all subsequent Christian history. "An institution," Emerson said, "is the lengthened shadow of one man." Institutional Christianity, objectifying Christ, has not been a side-issue or a side-show. It has held the centre of the stage. Its history simply carries on the acts of Christ and the acts of the Apostles. Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Constantinople, the West, and then back from West to East again—persecutions and martyrdoms; exploits and heroisms; revivals, reformations, revolutions; great names, great deeds, great books, great buildings, great music, and great art; lives of saints, labours of missionaries, achievements of statesmen; glorious works of charity and mercy; hospitals, orphanages, schools; propaganda and controversy—all the manifold activities of the living, loving Church—the pangs and penetrations of the Kingdom of God on earth as it claims and captures all kingdoms for its own—this matchless story belongs not to any crypt or corner, but to the open highway, the main-travelled road of human history. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Whitsunday, are the world's holidays and Holy-days. The Christian Church is easily the most outstanding fact in the life of man on earth. The spirit of the age may change, but the Spirit of Christ is the unchanging Spirit of the ages. Even a world war does not thrust Christianity into a corner. Everywhere men are asking what bearing has the war upon Christianity and

what bearing has Christianity upon the war? What is to become of the Church?

We see, then, that Christianity as a life fact of the world, and the Church as an institution must count upon and be prepared for an inevitable publicity. Christianity was never really at home in the catacombs. It was driven to cover for a time. It is really the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the life of men. It is at home in the arena and in the forum—in the street and in the press. Its mysteries are not heathenishly esoteric. Its adherents must be ready to go on record openly before the Church and, whenever necessary, openly before the world. It believes in public worship and in common prayer. Its Sacraments and its means of grace are open and free. That was a true instinct which prompted the cathedral builders to make the Church fabric the unavoidable centre and the unquestioned crown of the public life of the community. As one visits now the war-worn lands in France and Belgium one beholds the glorious churches dominating the landscape even in their ruins. Rheims, destroyed, receives the sympathetic attention of an indignant world. The wayside calvaries and shrines remind our Western soldiers of the days when Christians, unashamed and unafraid, worshipped God in the open, and claimed every acre as God's acre, and every road as God's road. The revival of cathedral building in our own day in America, in Canada, and in even newer lands, is but the recovery of a primitive Christian instinct, and a renewed demonstration of the publicity and objectivity of the Christian faith. Little churches around the corner have their dear and hallowed places. But there must also be the minster and the cathedral to claim and to hold the centres and the summits of our busy life. St. Paul, following the example of his Lord, did not shirk publicity. He spoke boldly before kings and governors, and he realized that he was making history and that he must play his part on a world-wide stage. We see, therefore, that this Christian method is bound up, as in St. Paul's case, with personal experience and with personal appeal. St. Paul recites his own history,—tells his own story. He, himself, the best witness in his own defence. Whereas he had been blind, he now saw. From a persecutor of the Church he had become its paladin. From a critic of the faith he had become its champion. The continuous history of the Church has been the history of personal experience. Beings have been its credential, as well as buildings. Characters have spoken even more eloquently than Cathedrals. The torch has passed from living hand to living hand. There have never failed us men to stand and say, "We speak that we do know, we testify that we have seen; ye, yourselves, are witness of our transformed lives. Ye, yourselves, are witness of marvellous acts. We have nothing to conceal; we speak as men to men, and we appeal to experience, to observation, and to history. The things of which we speak to you were not done in a corner."

It is evident that as propaganda, this Christian method has been pragmatically justified. We have been able to say, "Come and see, come and hear, come and search." And men have come and have seen and have been conquered. Agrippa and Festus were both impressed with St. Paul's sincerity, and even Agrippa, like Felix before him, feels the spell of the new religion. Put on its mettle and on its trial, challenging examination, courting investigation, the Church makes good. In the phrase of the day, "publicity wins."

You will, I am sure, see the bearing of this argument upon the present occasion and the present conditions. An American Bishop

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