

THE CAMPAIGN AND THE CONGREGATION.

By "Ralph Connor"—Dr. C. W. Gordon.

The congregation is the first consideration of the Church, and its interests first and last must at all costs be preserved. It is from the standpoint of the congregation that I, a pastor, wish to estimate the permanent value of the Simultaneous Evangelistic Movement. My observation of the workings and effects of this movement has not been as widely extended as I should have liked, but it has been as close and careful as I could make it, and the results of this observation I venture to offer to my brethren the pastors, and to the congregations under their charge.

At the outset let me say very frankly that I have no confidence in the Simultaneous Movement as a substitute for the congregation and the minister. Considered as such, it is at once a delusion and a peril. The minister who hopes to build up his congregation by a series of evangelistic campaigns, simultaneous or other, is doomed to disappointment and heartbreak. The building up and the extending of the Kingdom of Heaven in this world of ours by any such means is much too easy and too cheap a business. Upon the congregation and its steady influence in the life of a people, upon the minister and his unflinching and unwearied fidelity day in and day out, backed up by the loyal cooperation of his people, it is that the Church has learned to rely for permanent and vitalizing power.

A few obvious considerations may serve to emphasize this fundamental position.

The congregation is organized out of the people of the community for the promotion of godliness among its members for their edification in the faith, and for the upbuilding of character.

The congregation is the religious home of the people, the center of their social life, the place of their recreating, the spiritual nursery of their children and growing youth.

The congregation is the training-ground for service in the extension of the Kingdom of Heaven; the ground where men are disciplined, instructed, outfitted for the enterprise of world conquest.

The congregation, in short, is the permanent, the vital and vitalizing unit in the grand army of the church militant. For these and other reasons it is that I say that the test of value for any institution, association, scheme, or movement never, is its final effect upon the congregation.

As a minister of the congregation it is my God-given charge to guard against anything that tends to impair the efficiency, lower the vitality, or disintegrate the spiritual fiber of my congregation.

The question for us ministers therefore to answer is reduced to this: "How will the Simultaneous Evangelistic movement affect my people and myself? Shall we together be left fitter for the fight when the campaign is over, or not?"

Let us look at this Simultaneous Movement as a method of evangelism. Its differentiating features are mainly these three: first, decentralization, many centers being occupied instead of one; second, federation of existing organisms as integral units; third, the variety of appeal, all classes and conditions being reached.

The value of the campaign must be determined by the effect of these three features upon a congregation's life. First, decentralization. The special advantage of this method is at once apparent. The evangelism is carried

on by districts in which the individual congregations are co-operating units. Hence the immediate effect here is the stimulation of these congregations.

Second, the federation of existing organizations. This is the strongest feature of the movement. The congregation with its organization intact under the leadership of its minister and its subordinate officers goes into the campaign, passes through it, and emerges with its cohesion unimpaired and its organic unity unbroken, vastly fitter for its work. Incidentally it has learned the great lesson that for the best results enthusiasm and consecration must be organized.

Third, the variety of appeal. The immediate effect of this feature upon the congregation is not at once apparent, but a little thought and this will appear. By the many-sidedness of its approach to the life of the community the campaign suggests to the congregation at once the possibility and the scope of its work.

Looking at the Simultaneous Evangelistic Movement broadly, we discover certain very important and far-reaching effects. The very magnitude of the movement, its powers to unify the various denominations, its impact upon the life of the people at so many different points,—these, with other features, arrest attention, shatter the settled indifference into which the unchurched have been allowed to fall, remove the preoccupation in the cares of this life which has proved so deadly a foe to the spirituality of church members, and concentrate the minds of people of all classes steadily upon the great facts of our holy religion. The marvelous effect of this steady, continuous concentration we can hardly estimate. The primary fact in our religion is God. From the dim obscurity of forgetfulness as the mind is turned fixedly in his direction God begins to emerge, his infinite spiritual resources of the church are discovered anew, and men are moved to prayer.

Further, under the impulse of this movement the attention of the church is turned upon the field of its great enterprise, and with wide open eyes she stares upon a whole new world lying round about. The searchlight is flashed upon the enemy and the startling discovery is made that all unawares he has made entrance to fortresses and within lines of defense hitherto considered impregnable. Into the social life, into the business life, ye, and into the very home life of the people, he is discovered to have made his deadly way. Then, too, in the new and clearer atmosphere that gathers about the Simultaneous Movement the church discovers fields of conquest vaster and more magnificent than she has ever imagined.

Thus by the vision of God and the vision of the world needing God, the church stands better equipped and more eager to essay her great attempt.

As the movement progresses, also the church becomes aware that before her very eyes there is going on a demonstration of the possibilities of achievement hitherto forgotten or never known. Sinners are actually being saved, the lost sinner of the slum and the saloon, and the respectable sinner of the select circles of an unsmelted society. Homes that have been broken and hearts that have been impaired by sin are made whole and sweet again. This demonstration of achievement stirs like a bugle call minister and people to heroic endeavor. At this point may be suggested a result of almost infinite importance. The congregation, led into this fight by its minister and office-bearers, realize, the

rank and file of them, that this business of evangelism belongs to the congregation equally with its leaders. Men and women line up in the front rank who formerly were content to follow far and safe in the rear. The new joy of doing thrills their hearts and calls them out into the open.

But now the question is being asked by very earnest ministers and church members: Do these results in any large degree actually follow the Simultaneous Movement? The answer is assuredly in the affirmative, provided two conditions are fulfilled. First, the congregation must go into the campaign thoroughly prepared and thoroughly organized for the business of life saving under the direct leadership of minister and officers; and second, when evangelists have left the field the same organized body under the same leaders must follow up till results are conserved. These two conditions being fulfilled, the Simultaneous Evangelistic campaign will undoubtedly leave the congregation organized, disciplined, invigorated, and eager to advance under the banner of the Son of God as he goes forth to war.

GIVE GOD HIS DUE.

By C. H. Wetherbe.

There is not a person in all of our land at does not constantly owe something to God. In a great sense all people are His debtors, and yet there are but comparatively few of them who recognize their obligation to Him. Very many, who are very particular to render their dues to their fellow-men, are letting their debts to God go unpaid and unheeded. They are far more just to human beings than they are to God, the superlatively greatest of all beings. The late Dr. Horace Bushnell, a mighty minister and notable author, said:

"All that can be said for the moralist, all that he will say for himself, is that he has had it for his law to speak the truth, fulfil his promises and deal fairly by his fellow-men. Still it is not, and has never been, his aim or object to do what is right to God; and that is a matter of much higher consequence and more necessary to his real integrity. God is a person, as truly as men are, more closely related to us than they, a better friend, one who has more feeling to be injured than they all, claims of right more sacred. What, then, does it signify that a man gives up their due, and will not give God His?"

It signifies that a mere moralist is far away from God. It signifies that such a person has no just appreciation of the fact that if there were no true God he himself would have no morals; of any worth, either to himself or to society. The moralist, in our land, owes all of his best qualities to the fact and force of Christianity. The man who despises Christianity and Christian churches shows contempt for the very things which make him respectable in the best society. All property in Christian communities is worth more to its possessors than the same amount would be worth in a country where there is no Christianity.

Unconverted, reader, you are largely in debt to God. Why do you withhold from Him His dues? You say that you are honest, and that you pay all of your debts; but the truth is, you make no effort to pay God His dues.

Next meeting of Barrie Presbytery will be held at Barrie on 15th September, 1908.

Barrie Presbytery has agreed to establish a fund for the payment of the expenses of the commissioners to the General Assembly, and appointed a committee consisting of Rev. Dr. McLeod, Rev. G. I. Crow, Rev. A. A. Amos and Mr. J. J. Brown to work out the details and to report at the September meeting of the Presbytery.