

Evangelism in the Sunday School

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WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

The Church has accepted her commission and has gone out to make disciples of all nations. We, as a Methodist Church, are among the Evangelical denominations. Our programme contains more than the mere making of nominal members for the Christian Church. Disciples or true followers of Jesus Christ are what we have undertaken to produce; not just the securing of an experience of religion, but the production of a true, strong, Christian character, and a life that is marked by sacrifice, service, and love; this is the task we have set for ourselves.

The call for the Evangelist and for the evangelistic method and meeting the demand for an experience of a conversion of a certain type, and the emphasis on our watch-word "To Save Souls" as the business of the Christian Church, have to some extent at least caused us to regard the securing of religious experience, the leading of people to commence the Christian life, and qualifying them to enter heaven, as the be-all and end-all of the Church's work. The evangelistic effort which stops here falls far short of being true evangelism.

The religious experience is the foundation, the consistent Christian life is the superstructure. The coming back to God on the part of the wanderer is "The right-about-face," the development of the Christian character is "The forward march." The qualification to enter Heaven is the starting point; true Christian citizenship in this life is the desired result. Evangelism then is, mightily, a bigger business than securing so many decisions for Christ. The achievement of a warm and habitual spiritual fervor, strong moral fibre, well grounded faith in God, and a permanent Christian character; this is true evangelism; this is the Church's work.

THE PLACE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL IN THIS WORK.

The Sunday School is called the great right arm of the Church; it is the institution or organization through which the Church can work out the solution of almost all her problems.

It was stated by one of the most prominent speakers at the last International Sunday School Convention, that the sowing of tolerance seed in the Sunday School for the past twenty years is now resulting in the great prohibition harvest that is so rapidly driving the liquor traffic out of the United States. "In two decades," says Lawrance, "the Church can solve the great missionary problem, but she must start it through the Sunday School." "If the Church," says another, "would reduce her difficulties of finance to a minimum, let her teach the principles, and train in the practice of Christian stewardship and giving in the Sunday School." If the Sunday School is the field where the solution of these important questions is to be worked out, surely it is the very organization where the problem of evangelism is to find its solution.

OUR STARTING POINT AND SACRED TRUST.

We boast our British maxim "What we have we hold." "Keep that which is committed to thy trust," said Paul to Timothy. The great majority of those who pass through our Sunday Schools came to us when they were members of the Kingdom of God. Our

first and perhaps our greatest work of evangelism in the Sunday School is to keep these children of God from ever going away from Him, and to bring them, as one has said, "to a sense of oneness with the Father before they have realized a sense of separation from Him."

We have taken the privilege while visiting a number of the Sunday School and League Conventions in the West, of making some tests as to the early religious experience of the workers present. Here is a result of three of these tests, the others reveal similar proportions. Out of a total of one hundred and eight workers, eighteen, or one-sixth of the total number, have no recollection of conversion; that is, they do not remember the day when they did not love God and realize, more or less definitely, that Jesus was their Saviour. Thirty-six, or one-third of the number



"WHY DON'T THEY LET US IN?"

have a distinct memory of enjoying a child's religion until after ten years of age, and then, or in their early teens, they went away from God. Some of these have very significant stories to tell as to the cause of their discouragement in the Christian life and losing their conscious relationship to Christ. Thus in a total of one hundred and eight, fifty-four, or one-half, were awakened to a sense of membership in God's family in very tender years. The other half were not. Two-thirds of the awakened ones broke faith with God in early adolescence. But where is the Sunday School that has had in its programme a clearly defined plan or purpose to keep their children in the Kingdom of God? Our methods, and even to some extent our Decision Day, the adoption of which was a great step in advance, presupposes that we must lose them first and win them later; that we must give Satan

his innings with them for a while, and then seek their conversion. If our vision, our love, our faith, our teaching, our prayers, and our untiring efforts, had been centered upon keeping them might not the great majority of our children have been led into a bright and strong Christian experience, and life, without passing through the experience of conscious separation from their Saviour? Construction is easier than reconstruction, and formation is better than reformation.

WINNING THEM BACK.

But the work of winning back to Jesus Christ those who have wandered from him is pressing upon us. We know a number of schools where wonderful success is being achieved in this. And after seeing the success and studying the methods which have secured it, we offer the following suggestions:

First: Let every teacher realize that the responsibility for the spiritual welfare rests upon them. They are pastors as well as teachers.

Second: It is, then, the teacher's first business to become acquainted, in the most tactful way possible, and as thoroughly as it is possible for one soul to know another, with the religious and spiritual condition of every boy and girl, or man and woman in the class.

Third: The teachers who have succeeded in winning their classes for Christ are those who have entered into a ministry of intercessory prayer on behalf of each member of their class. This method brings success. One young man, a teacher of a very large class of boys, ranging in age from thirteen to eighteen, saw the conversion of over seventy of them in one year; but he spent fifteen minutes three times a day in pleading "in God, and laying each name and life before Him. Another of these devoted teachers who had won every member of her large class of girls to Christ and Christian service, was called away by sudden death. In her Bible was found what she called "My Rosary." It was a sheet of paper, bedusted with many tear drops, upon which was the name of every member of her class, which she took daily before God in prayer. One of the greatest Sunday School superintendents in the United States is reported as having a prayer list containing over five thousand individual names, which he regularly presented before the throne of God. Jesus gave us the method and it succeeds.

Fourth: When the teacher realizes this responsibility and knows the spiritual condition and prays daily for each person by name, frank and loving dealing in religious matters with the individual is sure to follow. This method also is essential to the best success.

Fifth: Then let every school and every teacher prepare for and make the best use of, what we call, for want of a better term, "Decision Day." The above suggestions outline the preparation for that day. Most of the decisions have been reached before the day comes, and to them it is a day of "confession" or "acknowledgment," rather than "decision," but the others whom the teacher has not been able to win by personal dealing and effort, may then be led to surrender their lives to Christ by this public means.

To the teachers and officers who have in this way kept the lambs in the fold, and have won back the wandering ones, the work of building up the Christian life and leading the boys and girls, and others, to active Christian service, will follow as the day and the night. And true evangelism will be a continuous work in the School.