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## Missions : Parochial and General.

BY THE RIGHT REV. J. DENTON THOMPSON, D.D.,

*Lord Bishop of Sodor and Man.*

IF I rightly discern the signs of the times, we are emerging from a period during which parochial missions have failed to retain the position in the life and work of the Church they formerly held. A generation ago they were a prominent, if not a dominant, force. For some years they have been decadent in power, if not also in number. To-day their adoption and influence are undoubtedly increasing. The history of the Church proves that such spiritual movements show a tendency to rise and fall owing to the action of laws we only imperfectly understand. They appear to be a Divine response to a conscious need, itself the work of the Holy Spirit, and, having to some extent fulfilled their purpose, they decline or cease to be. At the same time, as expressions of spiritual life they are conditioned in part by certain known laws, which, if ignored or disobeyed, issue in their decadence and death. If the history of missions be judged by this latter principle, it would not be difficult to indicate some of the causes which may account for their decline in recent years. Happily, however, for the Church, we are rejoicing in their revival, and it is therefore not so necessary to dwell on the reasons of their decadence. It must suffice to say that once a spiritual movement degenerates into mechanical action, and mission preachers drift, all unconsciously, into something akin to professionalism, the end of power draws nigh. So also methods become ineffective if they are not adjusted to the needs of the age, while sensational sermons or emotional appeals exercise less and less influence at a time when reason is more dominant and inquiry is abroad. But of the causes of past failure I do not propose, save incidentally, to speak. My object is simply to suggest some principles and methods which experience has taught me are of value in

organizing and conducting missions chiefly in urban and latterly also in rural districts.

#### A MISSION DEFINED.

For the most part the term mission needs no definition. It is generally understood. And yet it may be well so to explain the sense in which it is used here that no misconception may remain, and that all prejudices may be removed. A mission is a special or exceptional effort to reinforce and reinterpret the normal or permanent mission of the Church. Such an effort involves special and exceptional methods, and perhaps preachers of special and exceptional gifts; but the message of the mission is the unchanging message of the Church's unceasing mission. This definition will clear away certain misconceptions which prevail in some quarters. A mission, *e.g.*, is not an additional responsibility, accepted and discharged by occasional outbursts of zeal; neither is it a work of evangelistic supererogation, which, however expedient or beneficial, is not essential and necessary; much less is it a spasmodic attempt to recover by sensational methods what has been lost by unspiritual ministries. It is simply a combined effort by prayer and work to realize the Church's abiding ideal of aggressive service. In other words, the Church has only one mission—*viz.*, to "witness" for the Redeeming Lord and the fact of redemption "to the uttermost parts of the earth," to "preach the Gospel to the whole creation," or, in other words, to rescue the world from the grasp of the great anarchist, and to restore it to the unity of the Kingdom of God. The power to fulfil this permanent mission was bestowed at Pentecost, and the mission itself began when, "filled with the Holy Ghost," the Apostles proclaimed the message of redeeming love, and 3,000 souls were converted to God. But comparing the condition of the primitive Church—its power and progress—with that of the Church to-day, are we not convinced that something is lacking? The terms of the mission have not changed. The message is the same. The power has not been withdrawn. The human heart continues

as it was. Sin is still sin. Why, then, we are compelled to ask, is the Church not more efficient and therefore effective? Why is it that, instead of going forth conquering and to conquer, the army of Christ is so frequently found standing still, arrested, or even defeated? I sometimes wonder whether certain of the clergy have not missed their vocation, or, if the message they preach is really the Gospel of Christ, or why, if the witness be faithfully given, the power is so frequently wanting? The tendency of permanent work is, as we all know, to become mechanical. Our sustained efforts may easily become routine. The besetting sin of all of us is to drift into a mere professional discharge of our duties. Congregations become self-centred, selfish, and satisfied. Churches fall asleep, do nothing, and die. Hence the need—urgent and pressing—to reinforce from time to time the unchanging mission of the Church by periods consecrated by prayer and effort to this end, or, in other words, for a parochial, general, or diocesan mission.

Secondly. In addition to the need for missions in reinforcing the one mission and reinterpreting the one message of the Church, we may surely discern in the diversities of gifts the call for more definite co-operation by this means. "He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers," and why? That the "apostles" should do the work of "prophets," and "prophets" the work of "evangelists," and so on? Yes and no. Yes, if the "apostles" were without "prophets" or the "prophets" without "evangelists." No, if the local Church possessed these varieties of gifts. The great end of such diversities is stated to be that by the consecration of each and the co-operation of all, the benefit of the whole Church might be secured—"for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ." As in the body each member has its own function, that it may serve not itself but the body, and so contribute to the vigour and power of the whole organic life, so in the Church "unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ"; not that one may claim to

monopolize the gifts of others, but that each may co-operate with the rest according to the nature and measure of the gift. The function is necessarily conditioned by the organ. The purpose is naturally determined by the office. The "gifts" differ according to the "grace." The service we are able to render is due to the favour of Christ, but the favour or "grace" indicates the service or "gift." We cannot, of course, believe that because the "apostles" were not "prophets," they never prophesied; or because the "prophets" were not "evangelists," they never evangelized; or because the "evangelists" were not "pastors and teachers," they never shepherded or instructed the flock. In the ordinary activities of the Church the same man was frequently called to fulfil as best he could many functions, even as it is with us. He was also called, even as we are, to "covet earnestly the best gifts," and to develop by exercise latent powers. But as the body increased and the distinctive gifts disclosed themselves, it became the duty of the Church to utilize them to the full in the common service. So is it now. There are in a very real sense "prophets and evangelists" as there are "pastors and teachers" in the Church to-day—men, *i.e.*, of singular gifts or gifts highly developed, in one direction or the other. Some are "prophets," with exceptional powers of inspiration and illumination. Others are "evangelists," with special gifts for effecting the conversion of men. Others, again, are "pastors and teachers," whose chief functions lie in pastoral oversight and instruction. To the need and duty of using these gifted men according to the nature and the power of their gifts, the Church of England is very slowly awakening, and one way in which this may be most profitably accomplished is by parochial and general missions. By this method we not only secure fitting opportunities for the exercise of these special gifts to the great gain of the Church, but by distributing their influence we develop like gifts amongst those clergy who do not possess them in the same degree. By association with each other the "prophets" cultivate the gifts of the "evangelists," and the "evangelists" the power of the "prophets," while the

“pastors and teachers” both teach and learn from the “prophets and evangelists.”

Thirdly. There is a further justification for the need and scope of missions in the movements of the Holy Spirit, conditioned as such movements are, in part at least, by powers with which we are entrusted. The wind bloweth where it listeth. The Spirit quickeneth whom He will. The laws which control the air in the physical world are not fully known to us. Neither in the moral sphere can we always understand the action of the Holy Ghost. And yet man is endowed with certain powers, the right use of which undoubtedly influences the operation of the Divine Spirit. Prayer, faith, consecrated gifts, concentrated efforts, are, *e.g.*, means by which He operates through us and we co-operate with Him. (1) By the conscious need of a revived life the Church is called to definite and united prayer. Believing that “God willeth not the death of a sinner,” that Christ died for “the whole world,” that the Holy Ghost is “the Lord and Life-giver,” faith grasps afresh the mystery of the Gospel, and claims anew the victory of its message. (2) By a renewed and exceptional consecration of time, powers of organization, and preaching gifts, the prayers of the Church are answered, and its faith finds fuller exercise. (3) By the concentration of personal and mutual service for a given time and with a defined object, the conditions required for the manifestation of the Spirit’s power are still further fulfilled. Under such circumstances, who can deny the Church’s right to reverently expect and definitely look for the results for which, by prayer and faith, by consecrated gifts and concentrated efforts, it has prepared itself, as the means through which the Holy Ghost as a rule accomplishes His work in the world? There is a great need to cultivate in the consciousness of the Church the practice of personal and united prayer and intercession. We ought to believe more—far more than we do—in the faith we confess. We are much too conservative and restrained in our methods of work. We do not utilize as we might and ought the prophets and evangelists with their exceptional gifts of teaching and preaching. A mission

supplies the incentive to such prayer inspiring work and such work expressing prayer, together with the opportunity of bringing into our churches and parishes the men who can best help us in the extension of the Kingdom of God.

#### BEFORE THE MISSION—PREPARATION.

No words can exaggerate the importance of early, careful, and thorough preparation for a mission. The preparation must begin early. For the great diocesan mission in Birmingham, 1909-10—to which I will constantly refer for illustration—we began to prepare two years before the mission; and that parish must be very exceptional in which twelve months' preparation is not needed. Again, the preparation must be careful. Every part of the organization must be thought out in itself and as a section of the larger whole. The strength of a chain is in its weakest link, and a failure in one department of the preparation may easily hinder the success of the rest. Further, the preparation must be thorough. It must be so complete that no section of the parish is untouched. Only the whole-hearted and capable should be selected for the headship of the various departments, and after selection the confidence, as far as possible, should be perfect and entire. In not a few parishes the weakness of the organization is due to the incumbent undertaking more than he can do, and not entrusting definite portions of the preparation to wisely chosen colleagues and workers. Nothing kindles enthusiasm like responsibility, while the greater the number engaged the wider will be the interest created.

The first step in the preparation is to awaken in the Church the consciousness of a need for the mission. If the area be a diocese (as in Birmingham, where we divided it into two sections, urban and rural), or a deanery, district or town, the work is more difficult; but even if it be a parish, it is not always easy. There exists a widespread prejudice against missions, sometimes expressed in open opposition, but more generally in complete indifference. Prejudice may be wisely, if gradually, dispersed. Opposition may be gently, if graciously,

allayed. But it is the appalling apathy in the Church regarding both its own spiritual state and the moral condition of the world which is the greatest hindrance to a mission. The sleeping Church must be awakened; and who that loves sleep appreciates, especially at the time, the call, the knock, the shake, which restores consciousness? That there are many—both clergy and laity—who are either wholly asleep or only partially awake to the responsibilities of the Church I firmly but sadly believe. “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins . . . and they all slumbered and slept.” The solemn and even startling words of our Lord are, I know, parabolic. They may rightly have different interpretations, and certainly cannot be construed by strict literalism. But to me they denote that the period of indeterminate duration between the Ascension and the Return will be marked by a certain slackening of expectation, during which the right attitude of the waiting Church will be imperilled to such an extent that, *speaking generally and comparatively*, slumber or sleep will prevail. At any rate, without yielding to the subtle pessimism which surrounds us, I can only express my own belief that, thinking of the Church *as a whole* and in *relative terms*, I am convinced the deferred hope of the Parousia in glory is developing a sad and distressing state of spiritual unreality and inactivity akin to physical slumber and sleep. In any case, the best amongst us will admit that we are not as permanently alert and alive to the solemnities of life and opportunities for work in this lower world as our professed faith demands or our conscious love requires. If, then, there is this periodic nodding (slumbering) or persistent sleeping on the part of the Church in general “knowing the time, it is high time to awake,” and one method by which the arousing process can be hastened is to prepare for a mission.

In this preparation our first attention must be given to ourselves. If the sleeping Church is to be awakened, the dormant clergy must be first aroused. We must see to it that we ourselves are really wide awake—fully conscious—to the tremendous responsibilities of our vocation, and keenly alive—



devotedly active—to the wonderful opportunities by which we are surrounded. With this object in view, we organized in Birmingham two diocesan “retreats” at different times in the year, conducted by the Bishop,<sup>1</sup> to which nearly all the clergy came. It is, of course, impossible to say what these three days, spent in self-examination, prayer, and instruction, meant to the spiritual life of those privileged to be present. There can, however, be no doubt that they were a time of great and solemn preparation. The vital importance of such gatherings, free from the distraction of work, for quiet meditation, united intercession, and spiritual development, cannot be overestimated. We all feel that our personal life and ministerial work are so inter-related that they cannot really be separated. The one is very largely dependent on the other. The rule still stands that what the clergy are the people become. During that blessed time of retreat what sins were confessed and vows renewed, God only knows. But some of us know what differences were harmonized, what divisions were healed, what love was quickened, and what faith was strengthened as day by day we were unified in God’s presence and helped by our Bishop’s teaching. Of course, the principle of preparation will vary in its application according to the area of the mission; but even where this is the parish, the clergy will be well advised to hear the Lord saying, before a mission is held in their parishes: “Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile;” “Tarry ye until ye be endued with power from on high;” “Wait for the promise of the Father.”

The second stage in the preparation passes to the communicants of the Church. They must be inspired with the same breath and enthused by the same zeal with which we have been inspired and enthused of God. By frequent meetings and constant pleadings they must be taught, until they firmly grasp, their individual and corporate responsibility. Thus will evolve the conscious need for more prayer—personal, family, and congregational. It is in the reality and sincerity of united intercession that the best preparation for a mission begins.

<sup>1</sup> Now Bishop of Oxford.

Faith is strengthened, hope is quickened, zeal begins to burn, and love to work. In Birmingham we developed this process by "quiet days" or "quiet evenings" for communicants, leading up to the great "convention," which was attended for three whole days by thousands, and closed with three central thanksgiving services. In other places and parishes the methods will, of course, vary, although the principle remains, and it is on the principle rather than on its application that I would venture to lay the greatest stress—viz., that after the clergy the communicants must be first and definitely prepared for a mission.

The third stage in the preparation for a mission must have regard to the general congregation. It is a common experience that to some, perhaps to many, in our Churches the notice of a mission awakens in their minds prejudice or even opposition. This may be due to the memory recalling a former mission in which extravagant sensationalism or immoderate emotionalism prevailed, or to the conscience suggesting the probability of increased demands on personal character and conduct, or to the heart desiring to be undisturbed in the possession of a mere professional religion or to other causes not always definable. But due to whatever cause, the prejudices must be dispersed and the opposition disarmed with the utmost patience and wisdom. A letter from the Bishop, one or more visits from the missionary, a full and careful explanation by the clergy, and not least the leavening influence of prepared communicants, are all methods which will do much to remove misconception and evoke co-operation on the part of the general congregation. In this connection I need scarcely suggest that care should be taken at the outset to secure the active sympathy of the officials—the churchwardens and sidesmen, the organist and choir, all of whom should be personally and definitely invited to loyally assist even if they do not heartily support the effort. In Birmingham, *e.g.*, a conference of wardens and organists was convened, to which the Bishop and I alone of the clergy were privileged to be present. Here, in the Isle of Man, I observe the same rule—*i.e.*, before beginning a mission to hold a meeting with

the Church officials and other prominent laymen to elicit and encourage their intelligent sympathy and practical support.

The final stage in the preparation work lies outside the communicants and congregation, with the parish, district, deanery, or diocese. In a materialistic age, when commercialism is rampant, amusement is dominant, and indifference prevails, the task of making a moral impression on the masses of our great towns is increasingly difficult. The atrophy of the religious instincts is appalling. The developing craze for pleasure is diverting the mind, especially of the rising generation, from serious thought. The great fact of the eternal issues of moral conduct is simply ignored by a vast proportion of the population. The difficulty of stimulating atrophied instincts, of awakening indifferent minds, and of arousing sleeping consciences, is correspondingly great. The first impression must be attempted by a regular house to house visitation, and, better still, a man to man visitation, by trained visitors—in the latter case consisting of men—who should be appointed after the Apostolic model, and be sent two and two. A systematic canvass is made in a political election, and why not also for a spiritual mission? Personal influence is the strongest factor in the problem of arousing interest. The visitors should be supplied at regular intervals with a letter, first from the Bishop, then from the vicar, and afterwards from the missionary, all of which should be placed in envelopes, and, where possible, addressed. For the visitor to be able to say, "I have brought a letter from the Bishop or from the vicar," and for the person to see his or her name on the envelope, is to give a personal touch and added power to the visit. These should be supplemented by the excellent series of tracts or pamphlets issued by the S.P.C.K., R.T.S., and other agencies, together with the authorized prayer. The week before the mission begins, the official list of services, well and clearly printed, with provision made for hanging it up in the house, should be distributed. Conferences of the visitors should be held from time to time to report progress and to intimate to the clergy cases of special

use should be made of the local press or other advertising media. In Birmingham we posted thousands of large posters announcing the date of the mission, with a red cross in the centre, across which we printed the words, "Christ died for all." Above the cross appeared the words, "God is love," and under it, "Sin is death." This striking appeal was posted not only on the church boards, but throughout the various posting stations. Everywhere by this means the people were reminded of the coming and purpose of the mission. In addition to these methods, about a month before the mission began we organized meetings for men and for women in the Town Hall, attended on each occasion by 2,500 to 3,000 persons. These great gatherings, together with the reports in the daily press, contributed, in a very large degree, to stir the public interest and create a general expectancy, thus proving a most important stage in the preparation. In recording these methods, I must reiterate what has been said before—that while in their application they may be regarded as unnecessary or unsuitable in smaller areas, yet I am convinced that the principles they express are really essential to an adequate preparation of the public mind, especially in these days. Some, I know, shrink from all such methods of advertising a spiritual effort. There are men who advertise themselves more than is salutary either for themselves or for others, but to advertise a mission is another thing, and, in my judgment, it is both an art and a science which cannot be neglected without serious loss. "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." At least, so far as arousing interest in, and concentrating attention on, a mission, we may easily learn many valuable lessons from the worlds of sport, pleasure, and business.

To some, these successive stages, working from the centre outwards to the circumference, may savour of over-organization, and therefore as an unnecessary and exhausting expenditure of parochial energy. I may be allowed to say that my experience leads to a different conclusion. I cannot remember a single instance of a parish over-organized for a mission, or its workers exhausted before it began; but I can easily recall many illustra-

tions of imperfect organization with a dearth of workers. I could recount mission after mission which might be written down a failure, due not to the lack of experience, capacity, or zeal of the missionary, but to the want of preparation, organization, and work of the parish. If the parochial clergy invite busy, and frequently overworked, men to conduct a mission in their churches, the very least that may be reasonably expected of them is that nothing will be wanting on their part to make adequate preparation with a duly equipped organization. Most of all, if the mission is to be what it ought to be—a time of special manifestation of the Spirit's power in the conversion of souls and the building up of the faithful—we may be quite sure that only as we do our part will God do His. We have no right to expect His blessing if we fail in fulfilling the conditions He requires. Consecration, inspiration, organization—or, in other words, a full and complete preparation—are indispensable prerequisites for a parochial or general mission if it is to realize its purpose.

*(To be continued.)*



## Studies in Texts:

### SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMONS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

#### VI.—THE ACCUSER OF ST. PAUL.

*Text*:—"Alexander the smith did me much evil."—2 Tim. iv. 14.

[Book of the Month: "SYNTHETIC STUDIES IN SCRIPTURE"<sup>1</sup>=SS. Other references: Hastings' Dictionary=HDB.; Expositor's Greek Testament=EGT.; Deissmann's "St. Paul"=D.; Lewin's "St. Paul"=L.; Conybeare and Howson's "St. Paul"=CH.; Ramsay's "Roman Antiquities"=R.; Liddell and Scott's Lexicon=LS.]

Who virtually slew St. Paul? SS. says Alexander the smith: word "used of workers in any metal" (EGT. iv. 181). "*May*

<sup>1</sup> "Synthetic Studies in Scripture." By Rev. W. Shaw Caldecott. Published by Robert Scott. 2s. 6d. "Varied and suggestive," Bishop of Durham in Introduction.