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D. D. Hoagland:

Some Problems of Present Day Evangelism.

by

D. D. Hoagland.

That there are problems in this field is plain, indeed, not the least of them is a lack of agreement as to what these problems are. A good deal of discussion has been carried on emphasizing various points, often in a dogmatic spirit, by all parties. One ground of agreement however, is that the condition is a serious one, and one calling for careful and wise consideration. It is the purpose of this paper to try to set forth what seem to the writer to be some of the problems which the Christian worker of this generation must meet and attempt to solve. They confront him as a condition to be understood if success shall follow his efforts to extend the kingdom.

For the sake of pointed discussion this condition may be analyzed into two main divisions, those questions which center in the intellectual life and those in the activities of practical living.

I. Under the first we may consider, 1, the question of education as related to the subject of evangelism. The present generation does not take its knowledge and its thinking in any great degree from the church. Never was the desire for education more universal, or the means for gratifying that desire so easily obtainable. The average of general intelligence is rising every year. Common Schools, High Schools, Colleges, technical and professional schools are constantly adding to the number who constitute the intelligent classes. A High School course is almost a necessity for entrance into business life, and practically indispensable for the professions. Indeed, in law and medicine, at least, there is, a strong movement toward the requirement of a college degree for matriculation in these departments. The higher education of women is no longer, an experiment, a technical training is necessary for mechanical positions, as civil, or electrical engineering, schools for the teaching of diplomacy and statecraft are being established, and millions of dollars are pouring into the endowment funds for higher education, and for libraries. The teacher is come into his kingdom. The public reads the current books, magazines and newspapers, and through them questions of science politics

and religion are made familiar. Hence the material for evangelistic effort is of a much higher intelligence than ever before.

2. The philosophy of the people has a decided and direct relation to the evangelistic problem. Among the older workers the deistic notion still exerts a powerful influence but many of the younger generation are under the spell of the materialistic philosophy, and have not fought their way through to a logical and healthful theistic ground. The notions of Matter and Force seem to account for things in a way that the ordinary thinker can grasp. Nature is doing things according to law, and this inscrutable operation of Force in nature through law is very awe-inspiring. God Himself does not seem so great and terrible as He was. His place in the Universe does not clearly appear to the average common-sense mind. Our text-books on science, though in most cases not teaching ultimate notions, imply by their rigorous presentation of natural law that there is need of no Intelligence back of this law. The High School and College student is exposed to the danger of serious confusion here. It is at this point that the apparent break between a traditional faith and the facts of science begins to disturb. Among the very classes which it is most desirable to reach, because of their abilities and training, there is a serious obstacle because of this confusion.

3. Akin to this and as part of the mental equipment of all young minds is the doctrine of evolution in some form. In most cases it is interpreted from the standpoint of crass materialism, and what is at most but an explanation of method is presumed to be a cause of things. Accordingly, the geologist pushing back the beginning of things thousands of years seems to be pushing God far away, the biologist asserting the possibility of a scheme of existence without special creations or breaks seems to be making God unnecessary, and the nebular hypotheses to make Him impossible. Much of this crude thought has not yet been corrected. Intelligent and satisfactory explanation are not yet the property of the multitude. This is the latent philosophy which affects all thinking on questions of vital moment in religion. 4. The subject of evolution is an easy avenue of approach to the questions of so-called Higher Criticism. We are not here concerned with the correctness or error of the critic's

positions and conclusions, we simply note the presence of criticism as a factor in the problem of evangelism. As a factor it is here. Whether the church and the world shall be richer or poorer because of its presence it is certain that all future evangelism must reckon with this element. The newspapers and magazines have popularized the discussions of the scholars until everybody knows that many questions about the Bible are unsettled. Inspiration, authorships, chronology, errors of text, miracles, are written of and talked about pro and con. The Bible has lost its halo. The interpretation of the creation account, the point where story and history shade into each other, the interpretation and mission of Old Testament prophecy have all changed the point of view of most, and to many have been causes of confusion. The fires of hell have been put out and Heaven has become a present spiritual kingdom, so many believe. The opponents of critical study prophesy dire calamity, while its supporters see countless advantages as the result of critics' conclusions. But all the while the Soul that we wish to see brought into the Kingdom is having his attention directed to non-essentials, non-essentials so far as personal communion with God is concerned.

II. Turning now to the problems which arise from life itself we notice, 1, the rapid concentration of population in great centers. In the time of our grandfathers when revivals were the rule and hundreds were converted in country camp-meetings, less than one-fifth of the population lived in cities of over ten thousand, to-day over one-third of the population live in the city and the trend towards great centers is growing. The trolley car is making suburban residence easy and desirable, but it is also greatly complicating the church problem. And what touches the church problem as a whole affects the specific question of evangelism, which is the church's mission. Men are brought closer together in business but they may be farther apart socially than in less congested districts. Diversity of interest, such as libraries, museums, theaters, parks, claim and hold the attention. The social features of church life are displaced. The haste and excitement of city life easily turn the attention from the consideration of personal religious problems. Responsibility is easily avoided and appeals which were once effective do not even

find hearers. The unsaved of the cities do not come to revival meetings. Certainly the question of how to reach them is still an open one. 2, Closely allied with and a partial cause of the concentration of population is the stupendous development of the industries. Capital and labor, mutually dependent, are brought to the same point. The machine is the master of both and the link that binds them together. Capital is intent upon trade, labor must hold its job. The whirl of wheels tends to stifle the voice of conscience in each, and handling nothing but "things" deadens the spiritual sense. Night work, uncertain hours of labor, the heavy duties devolving upon all the work, Sunday labor, cannot help but influence men in their relation to the outward Christian life. The writer knows intimately two men, both excellent, honest Christian men employed by the same great corporation, members of the same official board in a church, regular in their attendance on the services, who during three years never spoke to each other, never saw each other. The simple reason was that they were on different "shifts" of work, one at night while the other worked by day, changing every week, in different sections of the plant. Every other Sunday each man worked all day, and since they alternated they were never at church the same day. They were by all other evidences except Sunday work the best of Christian men. Who shall say this is not a vital question brought upon us by the development of giant industries? 3, Along with this concentration of population and growth in industry has come an increase in wealth and consequent luxury. The people as a whole have more of the luxuries of life, in foods, clothing, music, art, literature, than formerly. Travel is common. Great conventions of all kinds, excursions bring people from great distances. The cosmopolitan character of cities, even of College life where students come from various widely separated localities helps to tolerance and breadth of sympathy. Ascetic notions are not popular. In some quarters this luxury and the lack of any stimulating purpose are tending toward effeminacy and making vice less hideous by robing it in purple and fine linen. Ease and pleasure are ends to be sought regardless of cost in character. When pleasure per se becomes the goal of living the willingness to bear responsibility, and the power

to make careful moral distinctions are gone. Material comforts become a large part of life and high motives yield to a greed for gain. There is however another side to the wealth question as it affects our theme. At no time has there been a stronger sense of stewardship in acquiring and using wealth. The "Gospel of wealth" is being practiced. Social settlement movements, fresh air funds, hospitals, all the philanthropic movements in which wealth is becoming interested help to accentuate the practical humanitarian side of the Gospel. Human lives rather than souls are being saved. To be "saved" means more than formerly. Now it is a continual process including material and spiritual interest. The use and abuse of wealth have brought about in considerable measure the need for this sort of "full salvation", salvation of body and spirit, now and hereafter, and the means of securing the satisfaction for that need.

4, Another factor is the development of sports. Recent years have seen a marvelous increase in interest in all sports, particularly in active out-of-doors games of contest, training and skill. Recreation is more than a fad, it is a fibre in the social fabric. Football, baseball, basketball, bicycling, golf and tennis are participated in by an increasing number of people. Sedate college professors, practical business men, college students- all classes are actively interested. In college life particularly the athletic feature is very pronounced. Occasionally we hear all games cried down as sinful and a waste of time and energy. But sports are here. The people are "Rising up to play" but the play is healthful and moral on the whole. It is permanent and, like Higher Criticism, must be reckoned with. Sports have taken the people out of doors and fixed attention upon physical development. "A healthy body for a healthy soul" is the cry. Paul's advice to "Keep under the body" has by the church been held to mean "Keep the body down", that "The flesh" is naturally sinful. Now we are taught to "Keep the body up", that education is of the whole man. Unconsciously to the church this trend has been working a revolution in the interpretation of religious life-

These are a few of the questions which render the problem complex and the solution difficult. There is much to discourage, but a sane optimism sees in all this complexity signs of growth and of

coming strength. A partial solution at least is being wrought out. It is the transference of emphasis. Where formerly abstract doctrine was emphasized now concrete living is insisted upon. Conversion is no less real, change of heart no less a fact, but the means of arriving at this are different, methods of work are required to fit the conditions. In this change of emphasis the church may seem to lose its power, but it is only seeming loss. She certainly will lose her life never to save it if the emphasis is not changed.

[This change is seen most prominently in the scientific study of adolescence and all religious phenomena. The normal religious life is the ideal. Where former methods were adapted in large part to awakening the hardened adult sinner through his emotions now the child and the youth are being approached by rational methods. A strong belief in human nature and in the sovereign grace of God is backed by intelligent methods of procedure. As, always, nay more than ever, the individual is to be reached by the individual. Hand picked fruit is the only safe sort henceforth. To this end everything that will give access to the needs and heart of the individual will be used. Drummond has well said :- "The study of the soul in health and disease ought to be as much an object of scientific study and training as the health and diseases of the body. What is required is to draw souls one by one, to button-hole them and steal from them the secret of their lives, to talk them clean out of themselves, to read them off like a page of print, to pervade them with your spiritual essence and make them transparent". This is the method which brings results and is successful whatever be the complexities of the problem. One must know the conditions well before success in this method will come.