

The King's Highway

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EVANGELISM — A PROMOTION OR A PASSION

By Evangelist C. William Fisher, in "Herald of Holiness"

One of the most prominent bishops in America said recently of his church: "We have lost the evangelistic mood and we do not have the evangelistic expectancy." And that gradual loss of the "mood" — the spirit — of evangelism can happen to any church.

Instead of asking the easy question, "What is wrong with our evangelism?" we should ask, rather, "What is wrong with our hearts? Where is the passion, the burden — the urgent 'mood,' the 'evangelistic expectancy' that made our evangelism joyous, spontaneous, and effective — not only in our revivals, but in our regular services?"

And that "mood" of evangelism cannot be manufactured. That "evangelistic expectancy" cannot be organized into a people. Compassion can never be compelled. Passion is never a matter of pressure or promotion or program — regardless of how sincere the pressure, or smooth the promotion, or slick the program.

Is our renewed emphasis on evangelism an expression of a more intense passion—a more urgent mood, or is it merely a promotional method for the achievement of denominational goals?

And what's the difference?

When evangelism is a passion, it is concerned primarily with souls. When evangelism is a promotion, it is concerned chiefly with statistics.

When evangelism is a passion, it is used of God to advance the Kingdom. When evangelism is a promotion, it is used by men to enlarge an institution.

When evangelism is a passion, there are joy and exhilaration in the performance of its privileges. When evangelism is a promotion, there are pressure and strain in the performance of its duties.

When evangelism is a passion, there are spontaneity and urgency in witnessing. When evangelism is a promotion, witnessing must be coaxed and coached.

When evangelism is a passion, it is a spiritual exercise of the caring heart. When evangelism is a promotion, it is a religious "gimmick" to achieve ecclesiastical success.

A DEVICE—OR A DYNAMIC?

It is so easy for a spiritual exercise to be prostituted on the altar of "success." Prayer, to many today, has become just a psychological "gimmick," and so we hear admonitions to "pray and get rich," "pray and be successful," "pray and lose weight." What a cheap, sacrilegious, God-dishonoring attitude—to use prayer as a trick, as a rabbit's foot, to insure "success"!

The goal of the church is not to be big, or to be rich, or to be respected. The goal of the church is to be redemptive. And may we make sure that as a church called to holiness evangelism, we never get so desperate for denominational "success" that we will operate under the slogan "Evangelize and Get Big"—thus using evangelism as a mere promotional device to achieve secondary goals.

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Evangelism doesn't exist for any secondary objective—regardless of how religious or worthwhile. Evangelism exists for and by and of itself! Evangelism itself is the passion. And its goal is not "success"; its goal is souls! As Phillips Brooks said, "Evangelism is one loving heart setting another heart aflame." Not a soul won to make a preacher famous, or a church big, or a crusade successful—but an immortal soul snatched from the burning—a soul for whom Christ died won, changed, transformed, and enabled to live a Christlike life in this world and to gain heaven in the end.

THAT is evangelism — and it is not a "gimmick," it is not a promotion, it is a passion!

When evangelism becomes nothing more than a promotion, and that promotion grows a little stale, there are those who insist that what is needed is a "new" approach, a "new" method.

But the question to be asked is this: Has the method grown stale or have WE grown stale? Is the method less effective or are WE less effective? Has the method lost its dynamic or have WE lost our dynamic?

A FRESH APPROACH— OR A FRESH ANOINTING?

Let those who are afraid that revivalism is nearing extinction remember that it is never revivalism that becomes extinct; it is churches. From the time sin entered the world, God has had those who were willing to be His instrument in calling men to repent, to return, to get right with God before judgment came upon them. And He has them today—and He will continue to have them just as long as there are sinners in the world.

It is not so much a new method we need; it is a new touch of God's Spirit upon our hearts until the old methods are effective again. But that requires agony of soul! It is so much easier to organize than to agonize! It is so much easier to think up a new promotion than to tarry in anguished desire until God renews the passion. But it is the passion we need. It is the passion we must have!

And how do we get it?

Not by reading about it. Not by hearing about it. Not by thinking about it. Not even by the realization that we must have it.

We get it on our knees! We get it as we tarry before God until the coldness of our hearts is thawed, and our lukewarmness is dissolved, and our hearts once again feel the fervent heat of that love to Christ which simply must find expression and outlet in love and witnessing to those who are lost.

In this day of increased talk about evangelism, then, may God help us to be willing to pay the price for an evangelism that is more than a promotion, but is, in actuality, a genuine passion of the heart.