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MONCTON CLERGYMAN TALKS ON EVANGELISM

An Able Address by Rev. D. MacOdrum
Before the Toronto Presbyterian Congress—The Home and the Sabbath School the Choice Fields for Evangelism

Following is the full text of an address delivered before the Presbyterian Congress at Toronto by Rev. D. MacOdrum of Moncton:

"I once had the pleasure of assisting at the capture of a 22 foot long boa constrictor—the pleasure of assisting at a distance, you understand; much as certain church members assist the church. The captors told me though I am not vouching for their knowledge of natural history—that the boa constrictor eats a sheep, a goat a deer or some other tid bit once in six months and laufs the rest of the year. It is a long time between meals for the boa constrictor, but it suits him. Human souls cannot thrive so. A New Brunswick bear puts on enough fat in the summer to last him through the winter; but he comes out in the spring lean and wicked—the only safe way to address him is thru a rifle barrel. I have known communities where the people feasted on special services all winter and fasted all summer. They too, were lean."

These observations lead me to remark that the Evangelism that counts is not spasmodic. Do not accuse me of crying down special efforts, God knows we need them; but the special effort must be regarded as an emergency contribution and not a permanent policy. Much trouble has arisen from confounding the two. For myself, I am somewhat broad and believe in both; but I want to be sure that the policy of Evangelism to which the church commits herself is sufficient not only to turn the flashlight on, but also sufficient to keep the light burning steadily and brightly and strongly that there shall not be an uninhabited corner in the land, however remote, nor any slum in our cities however deep and foul into which the light of the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ the Lord does not shine. That I regard as the first requisite in any scheme or policy of evangelism worthy of our Canadian Presbyterian church.

Now, sir, the subject of Evangelism is of absorbing importance; sufficiently important by itself to occupy the whole time of this great conference, and I should like to speak of many things. I should like to speak of the necessity and the possibilities of Evangelism in the great west with its polygot population, its wheat and its town lots, resting in sweet seclusion far from the busy city's crowded streets; and I should like to speak in like manner of the east with its rising industrial centres already attracting a considerable foreign population. In Sydney alone, thirteen languages were spoken last fall, not counting the original Gaelic. I should like to speak of all this, but my time is limited. You see I am in a strait between Dr. Johnson on one side and John MacNeil on the other, and in this theological sandwich I scarcely know whether I am the meat or the mustard. Therefore, I shall content myself with emphasizing two or three phases of evangelism which I conceive to be practicable in the east and west.

(1). And first, I wish to emphasize the importance of Lay Evangelism. Somehow by the grace of God the whole church must be got to work. The membership must understand that the church is not merely a rock to be shepherded and coddled, but a force to subdue the world for God and righteousness. Today, a few elders, a few Christian men, and a larger number of Christian women are working; but the great majority are sitting in the carriage lustily trying "gee! haw! get up! whoa!" while the minister is straining his heart out in the traces. But the preceding sessions of this conference have made it clear that we have reached a grade up which the minister alone, tho he sweat blood cannot pull the carriage. For humanity's sake, let them get out and pull or push. If they can't or won't do either, get them out anyway. A minister once came to a brother minister, saying: "We had a glorious revival in our church." "Indeed so glad to hear it, brother. How many did you take in?" "Oh! we did not take any in, but we put a big crowd out." That kind of a revival is needed sometimes.

Our ministers would accomplish more if they attempted less. I once knew a minister who had fourteen regular preaching appointments each week—he is dead now, poor man, so is the congregation—it pre-deceased him. Do our Christian people understand that effective evangelism is impossible without a strong ministry, and do they not know that a strong

ministry is impossible unless they get off the wagon and into the traces and give the minister an opportunity to refresh his soul in communion with God and the study of His word. Until the men and women of the churches awake to the duty and the privilege of service, the wheels of the chariot of God must drag men and women who might be saved will be lost.

Every Sabbath in the year there are many closed churches in the land. In winter time, especially, a silence of death pervades many a community. Not a few of these churches are within easy reach. Their shut doors and silent pulpits are a standing reproach to the Christian men and women of our churches. Why should not gifted elders and men, yes, and women, give service in these churches every Lord's Day? Their faces would be as the face of an angel of God to men and women hungering for Christian fellowship. Must we call the Korean Christians to be our instructors. There, men and women give days and weeks to go through the country proclaiming the Evangel. Why should not our Christian men and women do likewise?

Do they plead lack of talent? Note the loosening of tongues during a political campaign. Attend one of the many women's meetings and behold the gifts of God. Why can't some of this talent be utilized in our destitute communities and in our silent churches appealing in mute helplessness to heaven for a morsel of the Bread of Life?

One difficulty in the way of such effort is that many of our churches and more of our church members are hamstrung with regularity and spurious religious respectability. We must do things just so and things must only be done by men who are just so. Unless men and women can talk of their Alma Mater, they will not speak of their Father in heaven. Some are afraid of mixing the order of service. Why does not the Grace of God pull us out of some of our ruts? In many churches even the order of service has not been changed for a dozen years. "Decently and in order" has become a fetish. If I could do nothing else I would pronounce the benediction in the middle of the service, or at the beginning, rather than tramp in the same treadmill Sabbath after Sabbath and year after year. Anything to suggest that we are alive. Oh, that the energies of our church were set free, then we should have a force that would win the world! Our church is a sleeping giant.

(2) I want to put in a word for conversational evangelism. What new fad is that? It is not new, and it is not a fad—it is only a remembrance of the Day of Pentecost. Those tongues as of fire indicated the instrument by means of which God meant the gospel to reach the world. By conversational evangelism, I mean talking to a friend or neighbor about the goodness which one knows to be good and true is one's own experience. It is that kindly invitation to share a blessing that is natural between friend and friend.

Go back to the early days. Was it not true thru conversational evangelism that Christianity spread at the first? There were not many great preachers then; large audiences were rare. Peter in Jerusalem and Paul in several cities had an opportunity or two to speak to great crowds. But the preaching of the gospel that is recorded so often in the Book of Acts was far more generally the personal word of glad announcement in the market place, from house to house, or in occasional conversation than such public exposition of truth as we mean by the expression "preaching" today.

There is nothing mechanical in what I plead for, no impertinent button-holding; it is simply giving expression in conversation with friends and acquaintances to that which we are most deeply interested in. The simplest cannot go astray. It is the most natural thing in life to speak of what is really interesting us. If you have met a Prince Edward Islander here, a 1000 to 1 he talked "foxes." Yesterday a western

man enlightened me on "real estate." The men of the east talk of factories. At the present time it is the correct thing for every village down there to boost its industry. We speak of the things we are most interested in. Why should we not? They are tugging at our heart strings; and I am only following the natural law of human interest when I plead for a larger use of conversational evangelism.

This kind of evangelism can be carried on wherever there is one Christian to initiate it. I would rather have a few men and women in my congregation so full of the love of God, so surrendered to Christ that He spoke thru their every act and word as they came in contact with their associates than many professors of evangelism. I speak from experience. I remember a series of services in my congregation conducted by one of the world's renowned specialists. I am not going to utter a word in disparagement of these services or their results. We took many in, and many of them took us in. But I have a young girl in my Sabbath school who took a class of little children out of the infant room. She kept with them and today every single member of that class is teaching in our Sabbath school. It was not so much her teaching; but Rithout knowing it, she was a conversational evangelist. Someone has wisely said: "When you save a man, you save a unit; but when you save a boy or girl you save a whole multiplication table." That's the kind of evangelism that yields choice fruit—hand-picked fruit. It is the kind of evangelism that makes for congregational efficiency, for often every one so secured is a worker. Judging by the common practice of the church at the time when the Master called for laborers He wanted mainly men and women who were willing to engage in conversational evangelism. And such evangelism will tell today. When men and women are saturated with the love of God when the marvels of redemption thrill them; when the life is dominated by Jesus the Lord; when every thought is brought into captivity to Christ—then the problem of evangelism will be solved, for all the Lord's people will be what He wants them to be—His messengers.

It may be that even the minister can do his best work along this line. We want to know how to garner the harvest for which we naturally look after seeding. Without disparaging other methods, conversational evangelism suggests a method. Here it is. Let the minister from communion to communion keep a list of those whom God has laid on His heart. Then let him watch for conversational opportunities. They may not come every time you meet your man, but they will come, on the street, in the office in the shop, in the home. When God points to the opportunity seize it. This may be harder than preaching, but the rewards are in proportion.

(3) If I have another moment, I want to devote it to educational evangelism. That suggests the public school. Why should not the public school be made an instrument of evangelism? I know at least some of the difficulties but is it not possible that we have surrendered our opportunity in the public school too easily? Can it be won back? Are we satisfied with an education that ignores character or do we regard character as the highest product of education? If we do, are we content to eliminate the truths of Christianity—the most potent force of all in the making of modern character—from the curriculum? I am more and more firmly convinced that we cannot afford to ignore the public school from any statesmanlike policy of evangelism. At least one branch of the Christian church is awake to its importance and, if I am not mistaken, we have reached the point where strong and persistent action is demanded of us.

The home and the Sabbath school, however, are the choice fields for educational evangelism. Of all the delusions launched by the devil, none has been more potent for evil, none more disastrous in its fruits, than the delusion that children cannot, or should not, be brought to decision for Christ in the early years. We speak of allowing them to choose for themselves but we are only screening our own faithlessness, which we further excuse with a colorless expectation that they later on may be lassoed in a revival. It is the devil's doctrine and has drugged thousands of parents into religious insensibility to the loss of their children's souls. Catherine Booth vowed that she would never bear a Godless child and God honored her faith, as He waits to honor like faith in every parent. But we must begin with our children where Catherine Booth began. Such faith and such effort are in line with God's purpose—that the children of a Christian parent should be His from the first. Let Christian parents so live before their children as to convince them that they regard their religious interests as of overwhelming and superlative importance—immeasurably more important than getting an education, or securing wealth, or owning an automobile, or any temporal advantage or position whatsoever. Let parents stamp this conviction indelibly upon their offspring while they have the opportunity to impressable childhood. Then let the Sunday school, under

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CANADIAN PRESS ASSOCIATION MEET

Toronto, June 3—The Canadian Press Association opened its fifty-fifth annual convention here today. Newspaper editors and publishers from all parts of the Dominion are in attendance. During the two days' sessions papers will be read and there will be discussions on all phases of editorial and news writing, and the relations of newspapers to the public. Of special interest will be the report of the special investigation made by the association into the second class postal situation. An extensive programme of entertainment has been arranged. At the conclusion of the convention tomorrow night many of the members will start on an excursion to the mining camp of Cobalt, South Porcupine and Timmins and to Algonquin Park.

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consecrated, intelligent leadership, guide and supplement—not supplant—the home in teaching the eternal verities of our holy religion; and so shall we have in the sons and daughters of our Christian homes, a disciplined force that shall evangelize this our land and carry the light to the utmost ends of the earth. The church that carries the Evangel into all the world will begin with the home.

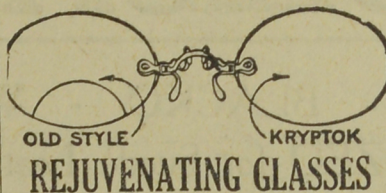
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