

THE PROPER EVANGELISTIC METHODS OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH. S. P. Long.

In a private letter of May twenty-fourth, 1915, Dr. G. H. Gerberding wrote to one of his friends, saying: "Oh, how I wish that the Lord would open the way for you to spend 1917 in the greatest Lutheran city in the world! and of the largest number of unchurched Lutherans in the world! If the Church could win Chicago, it would mean the West; and that would mean the winning of America!"

"I have long felt that both for the quickening of the spiritual life of our own members and for the evangelization of the great mass of the unchurched about us, methods considerably more vigorous and energetic than any we are in the habit of employing ought to be set into operation. Surely there is nothing against the spirit and genius of our church, surely nothing unevangelical, in arranging for special missions in our respective communities, in which at services continued during the week, and perhaps for weeks at a time, the fundamental doctrines of God's plan of salvation shall be set forth with simplicity and power. Such missions are actually being held during the Lenten season in some of our larger cities with the cooperation of all the churches of our faith in the immediate vicinity. They should be held wherever at all practicable, and at frequent intervals. They should be made as attractive as can be to the general public, they should encourage inquirers, who seek further instruction. Their existence and purpose should be made known in every possible way to the general public, by personal invitation and public advertisement. A way should be found to secure our strongest, most attractive preachers, to conduct them, and the day may yet come, and I for one would welcome it, when our Church will train and call men for this specific work, who shall be evangelists pure and simple, rather than pastors, fishers of men rather than shepherds of gathered flocks, just as it now does, train and call men for the work of inner missions and for italice among the men in our colleges and universities. In the same sense in which St. Paul proclaimed and practiced: 'I am become all things to all men if by any manner I might save some,' we too ought to be willing, and eager to become all things to all men that we may bring the true Evangel to all. This would be a consistent attitude as well as a convincing answer to Modern Evangelism."

The General Convocation of the Episcopal Church appointed a commission to send out a call for a "Nation-Wide Preaching Mission." There is no use denying the fact that there has been some wrong with all three branches of the Church on earth. The Roman Catholic Church has done very little for those parts of the world in which she has had her greatest sway except to keep her people in ignorance. The Reformed division has so split itself up into splinters of sectarianism and has so revived itself to death that the catechism has been lost and the mourner's bench set back, and the storms, external and internal, have met and produced such a cyclone that there is not much of the saw-dust trail left. And with all our boasting of "Die reine Lehre" and "The true Lutheran Church" and "God's true visible Church on earth," let us be honest enough to ask the question and answer it: "What would be the condition of this world to-day, if there were no other church on earth than any one self-righteous Lutheran synod, or all the Lutheran synods united?" With all our boasting of numbers, what would become of this poor lost world, if we Lutherans had all the preaching to do, and did not work harder at it in the future than we have in the past? What are we doing to gather up our unchurched Lutherans in our large cities? What is to become of the whole world which is increasing faster in numbers than the whole Christian Church, if we do not wake up soon and put to practice what we believe and teach with an everwidening power the wonderful Gospel of Christ? It may be humiliating, but it is true, that there is something wrong with us. We have the truth which the world needs, but we have not done our duty to reach the masses. Men like Gerberding and Spaeth feel the truth of this.

In view of these facts, let us proceed to consider:

The Proper Evangelistic Methods of the Lutheran Church.

I shall lay down the following three propositions for consideration:

- I. The Lutheran Church cannot work harmoniously with professional evangelism.
II. The Lutheran Church has a perfect right to make use of the best of the evangelists.
III. The Lutheran Church has the best soul-winning method in the world, if she will only use it.

1. The Lutheran Church cannot work harmoniously with professional evangelism. When I was a boy we used to go to the Albright

church to see the big meeting. My memory takes me back about fifty years, and I have no better way of explaining professional evangelism than to give the impression of the things I have seen and the results during the past half century. The first big meeting I ever attended made a wonderful impression on my mind. It was winter and the sleighing was good and the older boys and girls hitched up the horses to a big sled and tied a cow-bell to the harness and I went along for the first time to see the Albrights shout. They said before we started that it was about time for Phil Houser and Henry Rush to get religion. Up to that time I was used to reverence in the house of God, but that night I saw boys and girls have fun in the rear of the church and in the front the boys and the girls were kneeling at the mourners' bench weeping and crying and Orange Lake was praying louder and louder and soon Henry Allger began to jump and shout and Henry Rush jumped over the backs of the pews and how he did jump! I never saw anything like it. Phil Hauser did not get through that night, and it was understood that all must go every night till he gets religion; for, said they, he beats them all. I shall not take the time to tell all about those meetings that winter, but the night came finally when Phil got religion, and such hopping and shouting I never saw before. That winter nearly one hundred were converted in the old Albright church only one mile from our old St. John's Lutheran church where we were glad to see a class of fifteen to twenty confirmed in the spring on Palm Sunday. As I grew older I noticed that the Albright church did not seem to grow any larger and nearly every winter the old backsliders had to be warmed over by the some old process of shouting, and some of the boys with whom I went to school never could find religion at the anxious' bench.

Nearly half a century has passed and the old Lutheran Church claims nearly all the members of that neighborhood and the Albright church, now called the Evangelical, has only a few members and has entirely changed its methods of getting converts. Time passed on and I became a pastor of a church in Columbus, Ohio, and while there I saw two great revivals. One was conducted by a certain Rev. Van Dike in the so-called Christian Church, better known then as the Campbellite church, and the other by B. Fay Mills. The first converted about three hundred people in a few weeks under a tent near the corner of Fifth Avenue and High and the other was a real professional evangelist preaching for all denominations. Van Dike's converts were added to a little mission church on East Fifth Avenue and in a short time they were not to be found; and when B. Fay Mills preached in Columbus his followers by the thousands were so full of love that they hated everybody who did not agree with his methods and they followed him to the depot when he went away like worshippers in a crowd so large that the coming of a great king could not have stirred the people any more. What was the result? B. Fay Mills has left the Christian faith and his followers lost all the religion they ever had, and that was not much. He appealed to their emotions and they mistook their feelings for the new birth and as soon as they lost their emotional feelings they lost as they supposed their religion.

Twice since I am pastor of the First Lutheran church, I have been tested by union revival meetings. In the first one several churches united to convert this city and a great preacher was called here, from Chicago, but the final results showed that the First church by the catechetical method added more members than all the other churches combined. The last attempt was the Billy Sunday movement a few years ago. There was a self-appointed Billy Sunday committee which took the liberty of appointing other members of other churches to go to Erie, Pa., to see and hear the celebrated modern evangelist and to arrange for his coming to this city. He had written before that he would come providing all the protestant churches except the Lutheran and the Episcopalians would unite and close all their week day and Sunday evening services for six weeks. This self-appointed committee also appointed one member of my congregation to go along to Erie, Pa., to see and hear Billy. While at Erie, Billy discovered that Mansfield had five Lutheran churches and that over fifteen hundred members were in the First Church. Just as soon as Billy discovered this fact he was immediately converted. He now insisted that the First Lutheran church must fall into line with all the other Protestant denominations and cooperate with them, or he would not come to Mansfield. You can imagine the pressure that was brought now on the members of this one church and finally on the pastor to yield to the Emperor of Modern Evangelism. The matter was first brought to the attention of the Council and the Council asked the congregation to decide the matter. The time had now come for the pastor of the First Lutheran Church to take a stand, or let an outsider come in and dictate what he could do, or not do, in the congregation where God had called him to preach and take care of the flock over which He had placed him. It was a trying hour, but I had seen so much of the evil result of the high pressure methods that I did not intend to be identified with such unscriptural methods, no differ-

ence what the result would be. So I politely informed my congregation that I would not hold a club over them, but that they were trying to hold one over me, and that I wanted it understood that if they voted to close my services here Sunday morning or evening, that they were voting on my resignation at the same time. The result was that the congregation unanimously decided to do nothing to hinder the Billy Sunday movement, but we would continue our own services as we had before. The result was that Billy Sunday never came to Mansfield. Here is the place for a very good question: If Billy Sunday was in his campaign solely to save souls, would he have refused to come just because one Lutheran church, as he desired, did not yield to his demand? Honestly, does it not look as if he wanted the fifteen hundred members at his tabernacle meeting the last night to swell the pocketbook? The Literary Digest of April third, 1915 has a photograph of the following check:

"The Land Title and Trust Company, Philadelphia, No. 4317, March 20, 1915. \$51,136.85. Pay to the order of William A. Sunday Fifty-one Thousand One Hundred and Thirty-six Dollars and Eighty-five Cents. The Seaboard National Bank, New York. L. A. Davis, Secretary."

The same magazine shows that he took from twenty-one cities \$346,665.91. Does this look like the follower of the humble Nazarene? At the present time arrangements are made with Bob Jones to come to Mansfield this fall, but the Lutheran churches will not join the movement. Why can we not work harmoniously with professional evangelism? Here is the whole trouble. If the evangelist represents no denomination, then he must leave out the very things the people need, for fear he offends the churches. The result is that he does not preach a full Gospel. The same is true, if he does represent another denomination. How can two denominations opposed in their doctrines honestly work together and play the hypocrite either by ignoring the doctrines or by seeming to agree when they do not? To represent all the denominations is just as negative as to represent none. You may examine the whole evangelistic school of preachers in this country from the religious vaudeville-actor Billy Sunday to the reverential, devoted, humble, earnest, God-fearing Moody; and you will find that there is no right conception of the means of grace in their theology. There is a woeful confusion in their minds as to the work of the Holy Spirit and they seem to have no conception of the real meaning of the Holy Sacraments.

II. This leads me to speak of the great fact that the Lutheran Church has a perfect right to make use of the very best of the best evangelists. It would be folly to say that we cannot learn anything of the professional evangelist. He is a trained man and does things which we should not ignore. As a rule, the trained evangelist is very earnest in his preaching and is fearless in his exposition of the Divine law and knows how to press home the invitation to the sinners to come to Christ. When a Lutheran goes to Northfield, Mass., he is deeply impressed with two things: first, the good it would do all Lutheran pastors and preachers to go to Northfield to learn how to develop the practical side of Christianity; secondly, the good it would do the Moody school of preachers to attend a good Lutheran Conference or school of theology. We Lutherans would do well to learn of the average evangelist how to preach earnestly. I do not refer to the clownish act of tearing off collars, smashing chairs and jumping upon the pulpit, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is too great a theme to present in a sleepy careless way. We should preach as a dying man to dying men. Let us not be afraid to expound the law. The Sermon on the Mount shows us how fearless Christ was in showing the real meaning of the Commandments. We cannot picture sin too sinful. The thunders of Sinai must precede the peace of Calvary. Let me make an honest confession right here. I was ready to go into the ministry before I heard a real invitation given from the pulpit of my dear Lutheran church to outside sinners to come to Christ. I do not mean to say that there were not things that could thus have been interpreted, but I do mean to say that I never heard a real direct, strong, persuasive invitation given for sinners to come to Christ as it should have been given. Having the truth as we have, we should not let any evangelist surpass us in giving the invitation to the lost to come to Christ.

Some one will say: "If we can learn some lessons from the professional evangelist, why not join in with the movement for the good of the city, or the community in which we live?" Others will say: "If only one soul is saved, is it not worth the price of the tabernacle and the effort?" The questions cannot honestly be settled that way. There is some good in Roman Catholicism and in Christian Science and in many human organizations, but does that justify one to identify himself with such organizations without considering the evil in them? What if a revival does save a few souls, and others are forever driven into a mental state where they cannot be reached any more? Let us not forget that the emotional revival has driven more people into infidelity than any other religious movement in the world. Let a man think that feeling is the new birth, and the moment that feeling leaves him—and it sure-

ly will—then he thinks he has lost his religion and will be harder to reach than ever. I gave my observation of revivalism for nearly fifty years for a purpose. It shows that the system has been constantly changing. One custom after the other has failed till now the tabernacle-show is on one, and seldom more than once, with Billy Sunday as the star-actor, receiving over \$346,000 for twenty-one short engagements. Others are trying to imitate him, but it is the death struggle of a dying system. The good will live, and that is the very earnest preaching, the fearless denunciation of sin, and the pressing invitation; but so much is left out that we Lutherans cannot join in the movement without sacrificing the very things for which we stand, and the time is not far off when some churches must change to the practice which I shall next mention, or die.

III. I refer to the fact that the Lutheran Church has the best soul-winning method in the world, if she will only use it. In the first place, we have the most perfect Gospel the world has ever heard. Can there be a difference between Gospel and Gospel? Certainly there can! The final command of Jesus was so plain that any child ought to understand what it meant. When Jesus said: "Go ye into all the world," He certainly did not mean for us to sit down and let 800,000,000 heathen perish without even telling them who Jesus is. When He said: "And make disciples of all nations," He certainly did not mean only the adults, but humanity. When He said, "baptizing them into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost," He did not mean that a man should preach in twenty-one cities for two years for \$346,000 and never mention baptism. If I told a little child to fatten a hen, feeding her corn, I certainly should not expect the hen to be fattened first and then fed, or not fed at all. When Jesus said that we should make disciples, baptizing them, He meant it, and it is a poor Gospel which ignores baptism, or the baptism of little infants and children. When Jesus said, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," He certainly wanted the teaching to continue after baptism. The Lutheran Church has the fullest, most complete, most perfect Gospel, the world has ever heard from the lips of the ministry since the days of the apostles. We have just what the world needs. We have the soul-satisfying bread of life. What the world needs and does not know, we have. I am not saying it boastfully, but thankfully, that it is easier to preach in the Lutheran church than in any other denomination in the world. Our theology has a "Thus saith the Lord" back of it that makes the Lutheran pulpit and school a power and feeds the souls which come to hear. Then why let down the bars to the level of the dying system of the churches which have neglected the plain command of the Lord Jesus Christ to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them all things which He commanded?

We have not only the most perfect Gospel to preach to the people, but the most persuasive invitation to extend to them. The strong invitation of the evangelist to a sinner to accept Christ seems very simple and plain, but the fact is that the sinner does not know what he means. Who has not looked with pity on an earnest sinner kneeling on one side of a mourner's bench seeking Christ and some ignorant professed Christian on the other side of the bench not knowing what to do or say? How much better it would have been for that sinner, if he had been invited into a good catechetical class where step by step he could have learned God's plan of salvation and then he would have had no trouble to accept Christ intelligently. There is no comparison between the hazy invitation of an evangelistic campaign and the reasonable appeal to a man to join a catechetical class to investigate the plain doctrines of salvation. We are living in an age when men want to know what they are doing. They want to investigate. Every Lutheran pastor should have three catechetical classes at least ten months of the year during his whole ministry; one for the little children above six years of age and one for the regular catechumens from twelve to fifteen years old, and one for adults of any age. Every member of the church should have a card in his pocket all the time reading something like this:

I am now ready to learn more fully the way of salvation and to join the next catechetical class of the \_\_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Then he should use his influence on the man who works by his side, on any man with whom he comes in contact, that needs the instruction, to persuade him to join the next class and get him to sign the card—it means more than a verbal promise—and promise him to start to the class with him and do it. Going after the individual man where he works, or lives, beats building tabernacles a thousand times. The whole church should watch the open doors as God opens them. God's true revivals are planned by Him. If we will watch carefully, we will see the open doors into which He would have us enter. Let me give one example. Our plan is to receive new members about Palm Sunday, or Easter Sunday, but this year, after preaching a funeral sermon during holy week, three

railroad men called me up and wanted me to start a new catechetical class for them. Here God opened a door. We followed up God's plan and had ten prayer services in ten districts in one evening; and, by the use of an automobile, I visited all ten meetings, and offered one short prayer at each meeting and asked all present, if they knew anyone who should be a Christian and join a new class. I received the names of fifty-nine people that night. The next week I visited the fifty-nine personally and got the promise of fifty-two to join the class. What was the result? I explained the catechism briefly and on Pentecost I baptized and confirmed fifty-eight adults, mostly heads of families, and baptized fourteen of their children. These people are now workers in the church and are inviting others. Every Lutheran in this country should be taught to extend the invitation to something definite, to a class to study the Scriptures. This is the most effective invitation in the world. Let the worldling understand that he is asked only to investigate and then decide for himself after he understands; and the invitation appeals to him. There is no reason why the Lutheran church should not hold a series of meetings in the fall of the year just before starting the catechetical classes, and make as strong a plea as any evangelist for catechumens. As the months of July and August are vacation months and the public schools are closed it is not a good time to carry on the catechetical work. At this point I wish to state that there is no better system in the world to win souls for Christ than good catechisation. "Train a child in the way he shall go and when he is old he will not depart from it." Catechized Christians may stray from the straight and narrow way for a while, but like the prodigal, they will come back home. They know the truth and know the way back. They have something to hold to; and like the disciples of Christ, hear and learn God's Word in and through which the Holy Spirit operates on their hearts day and night. It is an easy matter to ridicule head-religion, but God gave us heads to reach the heart; and His command is to search the Scriptures.

From all that has been said let us draw a few conclusions:

I. Let Lutheran pastors literally "eat" the little book as John did according to the tenth chapter of Revelation and taste the bitterness of the law which condemns us and the sweetness of the Gospel which saves us and "prophecy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."

II. Let us preach as dying men to dying men and make a strong plea in every sermon for souls to join the catechetical class and learn the will of God more fully and become intelligent Christians.

III. Let us not at this late hour, when all other methods have been reduced to the last struggle of a dying system, let down the high standard of the best method God ever gave to reach the world. The New Testament has only one Sermon on the Mount, but many catechisations by our Lord, and the first when He was only twelve years old, asking and answering questions.

IV. Let one of the great movements of the year 1917 be Lutheran evangelism!

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