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## Miscellanea

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## Miscellanea

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### Preaching the Gospel to the Unchurched

#### Excerpts from a Chapter of Lutheran Pastoral Theology for India

In this brief paper, presented in fragmentary form, merely a few important considerations can be stressed. Without delay we proceed *medias in res*. The important thing is not the invitation to come to an established church. If those upon whom the pastor is calling belong to the same community as his congregation, such an invitation is in place; but it will be useless unless the pastor convinces them of the need and benefit of going to church; and persons who have never received Christian instruction can seldom be convinced in the course of one or two short calls of that need and benefit. The one essential thing, after all, is to win these lost souls for Christ; and this is done by convincing them of sin and its consequences and by telling them about the Savior, who has redeemed them.

Under no circumstances should the prospect of temporal advantages to be gained by joining the church, such as education and employment for their children or themselves, be held out to people as an inducement to come to church. Jesus never held out the prospect of earthly advantages to induce men to become His followers. On the contrary, He said: "If a man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me," Matt. 16:24. When the Jews were willing to follow Him because they hoped that He would supply their physical wants, He condemned their attitude in severe terms and told them to seek that spiritual Bread which is come from heaven and which endureth unto everlasting life. John 6:26-58. Christ's Church likewise has only spiritual blessings to offer; and it is the business of the Church to promise these blessings only, which are unspeakably greater than all temporal advantages. Moreover, if we try to induce people to come to church by awakening in them the hope of temporal gain, we become guilty of deceiving them and ourselves, and we destroy rather than build the Church of Christ. That some who have been persuaded by the promise of temporal benefits have eventually found the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:46) we do not deny. But these could have been gained for Christ without such a promise; and if the hope of earthly gain had not been held out to people, many would be better Christians than they are, and there would be fewer disappointed Christians and hypocrites in the visible Church. The pastor must seek to win souls for Christ by honestly convincing them of their spiritual need and presenting to them the Redeemer, who alone meets that need. 1 Cor. 2:2.

A Christian congregation should not confine its missionary efforts to its own community, but seek to win souls for Christ in all communities. To this work the same principles apply that apply



to the work of a church in its own town or village. There is but one way in which a sinner (irrespective of his color, race, nationality, country, environment, education, habits, etc.) can be brought to a knowledge of his sins and to faith in Christ, to wit, by the Law and the Gospel; *the methods, however, which are used in winning sinners for Christ may be varied in accordance with the circumstances.* In seeking to win souls for Christ in other communities, a Christian congregation and its pastor may have to adopt methods of approach different from those which they use in doing missionary work in their own locality. They must do so when the work in the other neighborhood presents its own particular outward obstacles and difficulties (religious customs, the caste system, the social status of women, aversion to other communities or to foreigners, etc.).

While the pastor and the members of his congregation will not win souls for Christ even in their own community by merely inviting the people to come to their church, inviting the people of other communities to their church may become a serious obstacle to winning them for Christ. It may become a real obstacle when such people, owing to established custom or to certain wrong ideas on their part or to the fear of persecution by their own community, can only with difficulty, or perhaps not at all, be persuaded to come to that church. In these circumstances inviting them to come to that church would be a wrong missionary method. The Word of God nowhere says that a person must become a member of a certain congregation if he would be a true Christian; the only stipulation that the Word of God makes is that he affiliate with a church (even though it be a church of only two or three members, including himself, Matt. 18:20) where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. (See the last paragraph under "Parochial Rights and Restrictions" in Chapter Six of Dr. Fritz's *Pastoral Theology*; compare also Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50; and Stoeckhardt, *Die Biblische Geschichte des Neuen Testaments*, under Matt. 18:15-35.) The one purpose of all Christian missionary work is to bring souls to Christ. We can never bring souls to Christ by insisting that they must become members of a certain church. When the pastor and his members know that by coming to a certain church (especially by becoming a member of that church and bringing his family with him) one of another community would cause a disturbance in his community (or in the congregation's own community), or when it seems likely that from fear of persecution by his own community or from communal prejudice such a person himself would be disinclined to come to that church, then inviting him to come to that church is certainly not a method suited to winning him for Christ, and the pastor and his members should not use this method.

Similarly it would be a mistake for a pastor or missionary to attempt to call at the homes of another community where the custom denying him and the members of his congregation access



to those homes still prevails. Thereby he would unnecessarily arouse the enmity and opposition of that and other communities against himself, against his congregation, and against the Gospel. This does not mean, however, that the pastor and his congregation should make no attempt to win souls for Christ in such communities. Being sinners, the people there likewise need the salvation procured for them by Christ, and Jesus wants us to do all we can to bring this salvation to them. As sincere Christians the pastor and his members should desire the salvation of these people and pray for them. So much they can do in any case, and such sincere prayers in the name of Jesus will not remain unheard by God. In most cases they can do more. Opportunities to speak to such people about their soul's need without offending against social custom can often be found. The pastor himself will in the course of time gain acquaintances in the other community. Opportunities will present themselves especially to the members of his congregation. 2 Kings 5:2-3. The pastor should therefore take great pains to remind his members of their Christian duty toward such lost souls, to instruct them how they may make use of such opportunities, and frequently to encourage them in their efforts to win such souls for Christ. The members of the congregation will on occasion be asked about their religion; and they should "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear," 1 Pet. 3:15.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the pastor and his members, in their efforts to win souls for Christ, must keep clearly in mind that their purpose is just that, namely, to win souls for Christ. They must avoid everything that, far from removing sinful notions about caste and sinful caste pride from the hearts of men, would only arouse their enmity and opposition. They will not win men for Christ by referring to their wrong notions about caste or to their caste pride. Some may even have discarded or never have entertained such wrong notions and themselves condemn caste pride and would be offended by the suggestion that since they outwardly conform to caste custom, they also share the sinful notions and sinful pride often connected with the custom. It would be a wrong method, for instance, if the pastor or his members, on the basis of the story of the Good Samaritan, would address them on the matter of caste. Even if those to whom you are speaking of their own accord condemn caste and its injustices, show no elation; their purpose may be merely to see how you will react, and your elation might indicate to them that, after all, you are more concerned about wiping out caste differences than about winning souls for Christ. Nor should you show resentment if such people undertake to defend caste. Show no interest in the question of caste, but remind them that all men are sinners and need the Redeemer from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Improve the opportunity to remove the apprehension of such



people that it is intended to constrain them to join the church of another community. In short, show by word and action that your only concern is that they shall escape eternal damnation and obtain eternal life by faith in the Savior Jesus Christ. Just that sentiment must dominate any method of approach, and everything that might indicate selfish motives must be avoided.

Christians should seek to win souls for Christ not only by speaking in person to the unchurched about their salvation, but also, and first of all, by the example of their own Christian lives. Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Pet. 2:12. A pastor and his members may be prevented by outward obstacles, not only from inviting people of other communities to their church, but also from speaking to them about their soul's needs either in their homes or at any other place. But a far greater obstacle to winning souls for Christ are the unholy lives of so many who profess to be Christians. Rom. 2:24. (See also 1 Tim. 6:1.) Unless Christians live as Christians should, men will not be impressed by what they say about the Christian religion. On the other hand, they may without words win people for Christ by the example of their holy lives. 1 Pet. 3:2; 2:12. Such holy living itself makes the Christians lights holding forth the Word of Life. Phil. 2:14-15; Matt. 5:16. Many an unchurched person has been first moved to examine the Christian religion, not so much by the preaching of the Gospel as by what he saw of the effect of the Gospel in the lives of sincere Christians. When encouraging his members to be real missionaries, the pastor should also remind them how important for their success as missionaries it is that they lead truly Christian lives and that therefore his members should, in accord with Matt. 18, help each other to establish and maintain a high standard of Christian living in the congregation.

A congregation should not be hurriedly organized. In some cases it will not be wise even to urge the people to gather publicly for congregational worship. If such public gathering for congregational worship would be likely to arouse opposition in the community, it should not be urged at all before those concerned have attained a fairly good knowledge of the Gospel and by word and action show that they are willing, with the help of the Lord, to take up their cross and to follow Him. Do not even attempt to bring a number of people together for a regular instruction class if this would arouse opposition in the community. Do not expect to reap before you have sown and watered and given the seed time to sprout and bear fruit. You cannot build until you have laid the foundation. Be content with the opportunity to speak again and again about sin and grace to the *individual* rather than do anything that would deprive you of even this opportunity by arousing opposition or causing the individual to stay away from you. It may be unwise even to suggest a formal course of instruction to the individual. Instead, the pastor or missionary, or with his help the member of his congregation, must aim



in his conversations with the individual systematically to increase his knowledge of God's Word and the Gospel of salvation. He should not merely repeat the same things each time, but proceed from one point to another, gradually covering the fundamental doctrines of the Catechism, and doing so without using the book if this should seem advisable until he has in a measure gained the confidence of the individual. In short, in a systematic way the pastor should try, under the Holy Spirit, to lead the individual into all truth. Until this aim has in a measure been attained, such things as Baptism, congregational worship, etc., need not at all be referred to. If the individual himself, realizing that eventually he will be expected to receive Baptism, refers to it, assure him that the decision will rest entirely with him. If he refers to his fear of persecution, do not assure him that he will not have to suffer for the sake of his faith, but warn him not to sell his soul for at best a few years of temporal peace, and assure him on the basis of the Bible that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be ours in the world to come if we remain faithful to the end. Meantime he should cry to God in behalf of such souls and leave it to Him to give the increase.

A. J. LUTZ

### A Call to Evangelism

Our "Each One Reach One" program justly calls upon the laymen in our congregations to recognize their obligation as members of the body of Christ and give of their time and talents to win souls for Christ. This obligation cannot be emphasized too strongly. In an article published by the *Lutheran Standard* (July 30, 1947) Thomas W. Wersell, assistant regional director, Minnesota-Red River Valley area, stresses the part the layman must play in the work of the Church by saying: "A new awareness of the church's duty to evangelize through the use of her lay members is also manifesting itself in American Lutheranism. Various Lutheran bodies are promoting individual programs for enrolling the laity in the work of witnessing. The American Lutheran Church carries on its emphasis through its Committee on Evangelism. The United Lutheran Church's Board of Social Missions is actively engaged in fostering evangelism in that body. The Evangelical Lutheran Church has made 1947 the "Year of Evangelism" in a church-wide effort to use laymen for witness work. The Augustana Synod's Board of Home Missions is charged with the responsibility of carrying forward a Parish Evangelism Program that perpetually seeks to enlist the congregations in a program of soul-winning.

"A new day for American Lutheranism may be dawning with this renewed stress of employing church members in the work of harvesting a huge and heavy field of souls that is already white and waiting. This day *must* dawn! It *must* come! Every believer in Christ *must* be used to tell others the Glad Tidings of great



joy! Church members *must* be enlisted for soul-winning! The making of disciples *must* become the burden of the church's life, else the tares will be more thickly sown by the adversary and will eventually choke out the wheat. Then not only will the white harvest be lost, but the church will tragically learn what Jesus meant when He said, 'Because thou art lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of My mouth.' Christ is confronting His church today with the divine dictum to **EVANGELIZE OR DIE!**

"What the cause is for the failure to challenge laymen to fulfill their holy calling to be witnesses is not for us to say. But this can be said with emphatic boldness to pastors and lay leaders: Use the lay members! Give them tasks! Send them out, informed and equipped, into the harvest! Tell them of Christ's call to every believer to 'be My witness.' Then help them to be His witnesses and to fulfill their calling!"

A. W. C. G.

