

**" . . . THESE OUGHT YE
TO HAVE DONE . . . "**

a commentary on the Church in the world today.

—G. Kennedy Tucker.

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"These things ye have left undone. What I really meant to say was—'you damned well all need to be converted.'" These are the words of the late Bishop Neville Gorton, that lovable but unpredictable Bishop of Coventry (1945-55). He was sometimes ill at ease in the pulpit. Once at Eton College he finished his sermon feeling that he had failed to "put it over". From his place in the Sanctuary, above the tones of the organ as the post-sermon hymn was about to be sung, the above words rang out.

I believe that the Bishop would say these same words to Australia and to the whole nominally Christian world. Convert—change from one thing to another or change one's point of view to another, change from looking in to looking out, adopting a wide vision in place of a narrow vision. It is conversion in the latter sense that I have in mind.

When men are ordained into the Ministry of the Church of England, they are charged to be, not only messengers and stewards, but also watchmen, but in answer to the question "watchman what of the night?" the answer seems to be "all's well". And this in the face of the fact that we live in daily peril of atomic warfare! We live in the age of two irreconcilable ideologies. Communism increases in numbers and power while Christianity decreases. To quote the words of Roger Schulz in his "This Day Belongs to God": "In the present century Christians are faced with the question of life or death. They number today eight hundred millions, divided into numerous denominations. They are faced with fifteen hundred million non-Christians. By the end of this century there will probably be four thousand millions. Christians are faced with a militant, atheistic ideology which also claims human universality."

Although the Church seems to ignore the signs of the times, others sound the note of warning and instead of "all's well", it is "all's far from well". Our hope and our prayer is that a halt will be made in the arms race. There are indications that the nations

involved realise the suicidal folly of such a policy and something in the nature of a compromise may be evolved. Little, however, is being done to span the gap between the nations that have and the nations that have not. This gap widens with the passing of each year. Professor Ritchie Calder, in his "Commonsense about a Starving World", states that unless this gap is lessened in 20 years time the children of today will be hungry. This modern prophet, although not speaking for the Church, says—"the writing is on the wall of the banqueting hall. Our kingdom has been numbered and woe upon us all if we are found wanting".

Those who believe that the affairs of the world were left in the hands of the Church might well ask what is her answer to this challenge to mankind. Here and now she is being called upon to give an account of her stewardship.

The Church reminds those seeking forgiveness that the first step is — **self-examination.**

Never perhaps has the Church been more busy than at present. It is the day of conferences, meetings, laboratories and the like. We have organisations for all age-groups and every department of Church life. But where is it all getting us? Church buildings, vicarages and halls are being erected at a pace never hitherto reached in this country.

But where are these all getting us? We most certainly are not holding our youth. It would seem that of the thousands confirmed each year only a small number become regular and devout communicants. Confirmation has been described as "the Leaving Certificate".

I am told of one parish which has had 500 Confirmation candidates in the past five years and yet the number of communicants last year is not any higher than five years ago. This tragic leakage constitutes the greatest problem before the Church. In our efforts to stop this leakage we utilise all kinds of modern methods. Many,

no doubt, are good, but is not the time ripe for us to revert to the method adopted by our Lord? Before He told His disciples how to do the job, before He taught them doctrinally, He taught them practically. In their company He healed the sick, turned sorrow into joy, fed those who were hungry, forgave sinners, and gave hope to the hopeless. "What I do you are called upon to do." He put before them an exciting and self-satisfying programme. He appealed to their youth and that desire to be doing things common to all youth. He made it quite clear that they could not do what had to be done by themselves. He gave them His own prayer, He took them aside to "rest awhile" and above all He instituted His own service. The men thus taught were the men who turned the world upside down and some of them readily and cheerfully died in the Faith which they embraced when in the full vigour of youth.

What a difference today! A few weeks of special classes with instruction in the catechism and other Church teaching. All this is of vital importance, of course, but not very exciting from the point of view of youth which craves excitement and will get it in some form. The fathers and grandfathers of the youth of the present time had the excitement of two world wars. Leaving aside the baser forms of excitement engaged in by many of our youth, the urge for excitement is looked for on the sports field and more often in the arena surrounding those fields. All to the good no doubt as are the Commonwealth Games and international sports programmes, but there is something that will give far more thrills than all the games ever designed.

The space race described by A. P. Herbert as "the most childish episode in the history of man" gives excitement, or the hope for excitement to many, but that is not the excitement necessary for those jobs in life which can make the world a place in which the children of God the Father, can frame and fashion their lives according to the plan laid down by His Son.

The youth of this land has proved in peace and in war that it can hold its own in all departments of human endeavour. If the Church were to give her youth a vision of the task to be done and how they can obtain the power to fulfil their task, they too and in their own way would "turn the world upside down".

It is felt by many that the greatest of all needs is a revival of religion and we have tried to bring that about, but with little apparent success. When the hearts of those who came in touch with our Lord were stirred He gave them something practical to do. The Sermon on the Mount is an example of this and in His dealings with many individuals He demonstrated His method.

All worthwhile revivals since those days have brought practical results, not only to the individual but to the nation and the world. John Wesley may be criticised for his hellfire teaching, but he did give his hearers a rule of life.

He did not leave them "in the air". The result of his teaching was the revival of the Church's missionary enterprise but the Church of England would have nothing to do with Wesley's revival. Nearly a hundred years had to pass before she too received new life and a new vision. While Wesley's preaching brought results, Whitfield, of the same period, failed in his endeavour. He too preached hellfire but he omitted to tell his hearers what to do about it. He gave them no rule of life nor did he instil into them their duty of passing on the good news to others.

"The Oxford Fathers" who came some 100 years after Wesley had similar results although the method of attack was entirely different. The seeds of the movement were sown by saints and scholars in Oxford, but the fruits of those seeds were reaped in the slums of the great cities. The social conscience of the Church was aroused and a new life was manifested in the Church. As a result of the Oxford Movement war was declared on slums and slums began to be cleared. "Go ye into all the world", took on a new meaning and

the Church of our fathers received the same impetus as did the Movement founded by Wesley. Outwardly there is much to be seen at the present time as a result of the Oxford Movement. With our vestments, our lights and our ritual we are becoming High Church. These things may be very good in themselves, but only if they inspire true worship, the worship which compels people to do the kind of things that Jesus Christ did. Who was that who said "You cannot worship God at the Altar unless you worship Him in the slums"? which, of course, means you cannot love God unless you love your neighbours also.

Since the end of the last war several efforts have been made in this country to bring about a spiritual revival. We have had a Call to the Nation and a National Mission. Billy Graham has inspired his tens of thousands and Bishop Bardsley of Coventry brought a new inspiration to many. The Bishop most certainly struck the note of warning when he said—"Man could go forward into all-time peace and security or else backward into the atomic age which would destroy mankind". But he did not give the nation a task to do. These various efforts were, no doubt, all for the good but they had little effect on the life of the nation as was the case of the Mission of Wesley and of the Oxford Fathers. They did not answer the question which all, consciously or unconsciously are asking, "what must we do to be saved?" — saved, here and now. If the Church has not an answer to that question we have indeed believed in vain and the Russians are right after all when they say that religion is but opium for the people. But, of course, the Church has the answer. This answer must be proclaimed while there is yet time.

It is during times of crisis that the individual's, the Church's, the nation's faith is revealed. As a nation and as a Church we have of recent years demonstrated that we have a very strange conception of The Faith. During the darkest days of the last war a certain

Sunday was set aside for special prayer. The Churches were thronged as never before, men gave up their morning's golf, the family did not take out the car until the afternoon. We all seemed very proud of ourselves. We seemed to fondly imagine that if we stormed the gates of Heaven in our numbers, the Almighty would save us from the danger with which we were faced. Of course, on the following Sunday to that referred to, the congregations were back to normal, the men at their golf and the families in the cars. During the recent Cuban Crisis another call to prayer was sounded but this time no one seemed to take much notice of it, for the danger seemed to be over before we had time to storm the gates of Heaven.

It would seem that these calls to prayer during times of special crisis are very limited and there is a danger of their giving the ordinary person a wrong conception of what prayer really is and what it entails.

In preparation for what was called the "Hickson Healing Mission" which took place in Australia some 30-odd years ago, parishes held weekly Intercession Services which in some cases were better attended than the usual Sunday Evensong. Before the services were begun instruction was given on prayer and the people were told that the success of the coming Mission depended on the prayers of the faithful. Those Intercession Services were in many cases even more successful in raising the spiritual level of the parish than ordinary Parish Missions. Many were healed of their infirmities and were conscious of a great spiritual uplift. A challenge was thrown out and it was accepted. Mighty things happened.

Should the people of all congregations be challenged as were the people of the time referred to, we could expect something even more remarkable for now it is not only a question of healing a few ailing people; it is a question of healing a very sick world.

It would seem that the present constitutes a challenge to our belief in prayer as it constitutes a challenge to the things we talk

about in the pulpit. We remind our people that our Lord has promised to be with the two or three that gather in His name and of His promise to answer their petitions.

Never has the world suffered or lived in such fear as it is suffering at the present, and never has He who identifies Himself with suffering mankind suffered as He suffers now. We give our thousands for the building of new churches, halls and the like but little or nothing to the millions who look to us for the wherewithal to live and yet "In as much as ye do it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me". We should, of course, build our churches but we should not leave the other undone. St. Paul tells us that we cannot love God unless we love our fellow man. We in Australia seem to show little love towards our Northern neighbours in their dire need. We portray the part of Dives as seldom portrayed before. Is it surprising that some say religion is humbug?

"Man's extremity is God's opportunity." We are at the extremity of our resources to save ourselves and mankind. The Church has an opportunity as never before vouchsafed to her. Given the grace to follow to its logical conclusion the Gospel we preach, we would be enabled to give the world a new hope and a new vision and those outside the Church whom we fail to attract would learn to know that the Plan laid down for the salvation of mankind, here and hereafter is the only plan that really counts. The whole future of the world depends on those who are alive today and above all on those who profess and call themselves Christians. This could be our "finest hour". It could be a second Pentecost.

Readers who would like to give further consideration to the ideas discussed in this booklet and their possible implementation in the Church and community, are invited to contact the author.