

# A NEW KIND OF RELIGIOUS ADVERTISING

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IN the last few years millions of words have been written by clergymen, laymen, and advertising men on the subject of church advertising. The importance of the matter has been fairly well established in the minds of multitudes of clergymen and church organizations under the impact of continued propaganda on the part of "experts." The idea seems to have been "sold" as a result of much talk in advertising and church conventions and through the medium of the printed word. But when one sits down to study the results as they appear in the "copy" placed by churches one is amazed at the paucity of the practical application of the idea. It is true that more churches and church organizations are advertising than ever before, and some churches are doing their advertising with skill and good taste, and are getting results. Looked at, however, from the point of view of what the churches have to sell and the vastness of the Church as an enterprise, both the quantity and quality of the advertising seem distressingly inadequate.

If the last statement is true, as I believe it is, one may be pardoned, perhaps, for adding more words to the discussion to which so much has been already contributed. It has long been my belief that ultimately the paid space of both newspapers and magazines will be used to advertise religion as freely as it is now used to advertise breakfast foods or automobiles. I grant that there has been little indication that this faith would be justified, unless one takes account of the National publicity of such groups as the Inter-Church World Movement and certain denominational campaigns during the last two or three years. But these drives have been largely for money, and drives for money, however worthy the end in view, are not, to my mind, essentially drives to advertise religion.

Even if one considers the increased and increasing space used by individual churches to advertise their services, one still has little basis on which to predict any really extensive and convincing advertising campaigns. I know of no National advertising agency which at present has faith enough in the potentiality of the church field to devote any very real study to the problem. In spite of all this, I still believe that the field will some day be developed to amazing proportions. But I am just as firmly convinced that it will never be developed along the lines of go-to-church copy. What I have in mind is something quite different.

What the Church is trying to do through such advertising as it uses is to get the man who doesn't go to church to go. I am not at all sure that this effort is true to the highest ideal of the

Church. But, whether it is or not, it obviously fails in its purpose. No matter how attractive the copy may be, the appeal will go over the head of the average non-churchgoer, and the facts in the case prove the truth of the statement. Even the announcement of a startling sermon subject will fail to lure such a man away from something much more startling that he may read in his Sunday newspaper in the comfort of his own fireside.

The churches seem to take it for granted that the non-churchgoer knows full well what the Church of to-day stands for. It seems to me the most obvious thing in the world that the non-churchgoer doesn't know any more about what the Church of to-day stands for than he knows about the kind of clothes worn by the inhabitants of Mars. He probably went to Sunday school when he was a boy, and learned a good many things about hell-fire and the "queer" people in the Bible—things which to-day haven't even a remote place in the teaching of the Church. He didn't like what he heard in Sunday school, or, if he did like it, he discovered when he grew older that his mind couldn't accept the warped teaching he received there. If that's the sort of thing the Church stands for—and he most decidedly thinks it is—then he had better stay away. Any number of skillfully worded appeals through paid advertising space to "go to church tomorrow" will, if he reads them at all, amuse or disgust him. The Church which has taught him that to say "damn" is a primary sin may go its way, for all he cares.

Since this man isn't interested enough to go into a church to find out whether he is right or wrong, because he is so sure he is right, some method must be devised to tell him in what way he is wrong. I know of no method save the large use of paid space in newspapers and magazines. If he won't come to church to get the truth, he can be made to get it when he least expects to be "preached at;" he must be caught at the breakfast table, in the train, or on the porch of a summer hotel. Department stores do not expect customers to flock into their doors unless the customers are told what they may find when they get there. Automobile-makers do not expect people to buy their products merely through the announcement that at such and such hours their salesrooms will be open for business. But this is precisely the method that is being used by the Church—and the copy doesn't "pull."

It is therefore my conviction that the Church must show in its copy what it has to sell. And what it has to sell is not good music, which is now advertised frequently, nor a brilliant oration by a

skilled preacher. What it has to sell to the non-churchgoer is precisely what the preacher has to sell to the churchgoer. He can reach the churchgoer through the medium of his voice; he can reach the non-churchgoer only through the medium of the printed word. In short, the Church must show its goods to the man outside, since it can gain no opportunity of showing the goods merely by an appeal to come and see them and the assurance that the goods will be found satisfactory if one only will have the degree of faith and energy required to come and look at them.

This kind of advertising will require a much closer adherence to the finest ideals of unselfishness in the Church than the Church has yet displayed in this field. The average clergyman is bent on filling his pews, and the average layman on a governing board of a church is not ready to pour money into advertising which does not carry a direct appeal to come to church. But even from the practical pew-filling point of view, I believe that the psychology of the situation is all against this short-sightedness. If these men believe what they profess, they ought to be willing to spend money to tell the whole world what it is that means so much to them, and require nothing more. If they believe in the power of their religion to straighten out the tangles and maladjustments of our social life, due to greed and other of the baser sides of human nature, why not spend their money to carry the propaganda, not only to the limited few who hear the clergyman on Sunday, but to those millions of people who never go to church? But if they want to fill their churches, this method, it seems to me, is the logical one to pursue. If the average non-churchgoer is staying away from church because of his misconception of what the Church to-day is teaching, what would be his reaction to a page of copy carrying one of the inspiring messages which the intelligent modern church has to offer him? Would he not be likely to say, once that type of message had crossed his vision often enough, "Well, if that's the sort of thing the Church is teaching these days, it's worthy of my support?"

It may be argued that I am overdraw-ing the ignorance of the non-churchgoer as to what the Church is teaching. Naturally there are exceptions, but, as a clergyman, my experience with non-churchgoers has amply borne out what I have said.

On the day before Christmas, 1917, there appeared in the New York "Times" an example of the kind of advertising of which I have been writing. In an address before the New York Churchman's Association, made up of

the clergy of the Episcopal Church, I had outlined this type of advertising and had said that it would be an interesting experiment in good will to carry a half-page or full-page advertisement in the "Times" the day before Christmas. I suggested that, since the year was one when the average person was a good bit depressed over war conditions, and the Christmas spirit was lagging somewhat, it would be a heartening thing for some church or group of churchmen to pay for this space, and in it to write a message from the Christian point of view on the subject: "The Meaning of This Christmas." There should be not only no appeal to come to church, but the advertising copy should be free from any designation of any particular parish, bearing simply a line, "Inserted by an Episcopal Parish in the City of New York." Dr. Stires, rector of St. Thomas's Church, said that he would pay for the half-page as an unselfish venture in Christian good will.

The day before Christmas fell on Monday, and the half-page was the largest copy carried by the "Times" that day. The message was short but inspiring; it spoke the essential teaching of the Child born in Bethlehem applied to some of the darkest days of the war. There was an attractive layout, with wide margins and an Old English "catch-line" reading, "What Does This Christmas Mean?" In small type in the lower left-hand corner was the mystifying phrase: "Inserted by a Parish of the Episcopal Church in the City of New York."

Since the venture marked a departure in religious advertising, I spent some time that morning watching the crowds on trains and cars as the people read their copies of the "Times." It was an interesting experience. The advertisement was studied by all sorts and conditions of people, from business men and parsons to office boys and stenographers. By eleven o'clock that morning the "Times" had received fifty telephone calls from various sorts of people who wanted to know "who did it and why." Among the inquirers, of course, were representatives of other publications who wanted to "go after the copy" but who didn't know where to go.

I do not contend that this single insertion of that kind of advertising did much toward filling the churches of New York. But I do venture the opinion that if that kind of advertising were consistently done by some central agency of the Christian Church, like the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, the whole point of view of the typical non-churchgoer could be so changed that the good will resulting would in turn have a direct result in bringing thousands of people in contact with the churches. Even without such results, looking at the problem from the point of view of the real purpose of the Church, the money invested would be well expended. For,

## What Does This Christmas Mean?

**T**HIS is the most beautiful and the saddest Christmas that the world has ever known—beautiful because never before in the history of mankind have such multitudes of men been willing to fight for some of the things for which Christ died—sad because so many helpless and innocent are paying the penalty of others' sins.

Bethlehem is the symbol that God's struggle for the Kingdom of Kindness has begun. There never has been an hour in history when Christians were not willing to die if the heart of the world could be made kind. The joy of that struggle is the joy of honor. Its burden of suffering is the measure of men's need. Happy is America that she, too, is willing to do her Christmas deed for God!

This Christmas has in it the same element of triumph that shone through the darkest hours of the Master's life. While God's children are struggling bravely for the things that are just and pure and lovely upon earth, life is no mean and tragic thing. It is sublime!

The race in its most tender moments of love for the Christ has called Him the Man of Sorrows. We feel nearest to Him when we think of His anguish. We have come nearest to Him in the dark hours of our own suffering. It truly is a sad Christmas for hundreds of millions of human beings.

But is it as sad for us here in America as was last Christmas Day, when we stood hesitating to offer our sacrifice? Is it as

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sad as the Christmas Days of the last decade and more, when militarism, unopposed, was gathering unto itself all the dark forces of human genius to spring upon the helpless?

The race to-day is under the surgeon's knife.

The darkest moment in the sick man's life is not the hour that he is stretched upon the operating-table that promises relief and restoration to health; it is when nothing is being done to check and cure the disease.

While five-sixths of humankind is chivalrously fighting to abolish war, that militarism may no longer hold the poor and helpless in its iron grip of hate and greed, it is certainly a Christlike hour for men. It has in it the same Divine promise that lay over the manger-cradle and the Cross.

The loving God who came among His piteously ignorant children that they might be saved from their sins is to-day, we know, watching with unspeakable pity and love those who are far from their homes, willing to die in France and Italy and throughout the world for the things Christ loved.

Wherever cruelty, injustice and dishonor stalk through the land, Bethlehem and Calvary bid the high-hearted cry: "You shall not pass this way!"

Whenever the soul of a nation is stirred to do a deed of honor the world moves forward with Christ.

after all, the Church is a propaganda agency interested primarily in presenting to the rank and file of folk a way of life. If the advertising agencies, or some one agency with vision, would work with the Federal Council, for example, in planning a campaign of this sort on a big scale, I believe that laymen who are engaged in selling their own products through good-will advertising could be persuaded to underwrite the campaign. And this is the sort of thing that must be done by laymen. Slowly the clergy are being converted to the value and necessity of advertising. But when they attempt to plan campaigns and write copy they show, on the whole, a woeful lack of training. In spite of the fact that on many occasions recently it has been pointed out to them that St. Paul, in his masterful sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill, showed a keen understanding of advertising psychology in his opening phrase: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are very religious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, 'To the Unknown God.' Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." In spite of this, most parsons miss the significance of this point of contact and arresting of attention as applied to newspaper and magazine advertising to-day.

Those of us who have been watching copy prepared by some of the new

National publicity departments of certain denominations have been in turn amused, amazed, and disheartened. Most of the departments have shown a positive genius for violating every first principle of display advertising, though the chief offense has been in bad arrangement of copy, with crowded space and nothing to arrest attention. In some cases men have been employed who knew the Church well, but who did not know advertising technique; in other cases men who knew the technique, but who knew little of what they had to sell. One must grant that the combination of the two capacities is difficult to find. But such advertising as I have been writing about can never be successful unless the combination is found. I do not believe that any advertising "expert" who has not grown up with a pretty intimate knowledge of the mind and spirit of the Church can ever succeed in doing the task. Nor do I think that it can be done by any man who knows the mind and spirit of the Church well who does not also know the technique from long training. I cannot help believing, however, that the future holds in store great things in the realm of the right kind of religious advertising. The printed word is the modern method of reaching people who cannot be reached by personal contact. It has been successful in all other fields. Why should it not be successful, once it is properly used, in the Church?

# CHINESE FRIENDSHIP FOR AMERICA

A PICTURE FROM AN OUTLOOK READER



## AN ARCH ERECTED IN CHINA IN HONOR OF AMERICAN CITIZENS

This granite arch, at the entrance to a school in process of erection near Chefoo, China, has just been erected by a wealthy Chinese merchant, Liu Dze Heng. He was at one time helped by an American Consul and has since been eager to honor Americans. During the Peace Conference he planned to set up a bronze statue of Woodrow Wilson, but later decided to erect this arch to the American People instead. The inscription reads:

DEDICATED TO AND ERECTED IN HONOR OF  
THE CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
OUR FRIENDS ACROSS THE SEA  
MAY THERE BE ETERNAL PEACE BETWEEN THE TWO PEOPLES  
LIU DZE HENG SEPTEMBER, 1921

From an Outlook subscriber in Chefoo, China