

USE OF EVANGELISTS

Vital godliness is not revived in Christians by mere excitement, by crowded meetings, by the stamping of the foot, or the knocking of the pulpit cushion, or the delirious bawlings of ignorant zeal; these are the stock in trade of revivals among dead souls, but to revive living saints other means are needed. ... This, then leads us to the conclusion that if we are to obtain a revival, we must go directly to the Holy Ghost for it, and not resort to the machinery of the professional revival-maker.¹

To call in another brother every now and then to take the lead in evangelistic services will be found very wise and useful; for there are some fish that never will be taken in your net, but will surely fall to the lot of another fisherman. ... Sound and prudent evangelists may lend help even to the most efficient pastor; and gather fruit which he has failed to reach.²

Zeal for Souls and Zeal for Truth

As necessary concomitants to his love for the person and work of Christ, Spurgeon consistently worked to integrate the twin passions of love for truth and love for souls. The cold presentation of truth unaccompanied by a desire for the manifestation of its power under the Spirit of God in the capturing of souls made him nauseous. How could any so-called gospel minister preach without burning of heart for the universal acceptance of Christ in his perfect redemption? Surely a preacher would want all to submit to Christ as Lord. The Spirit, however, is still the Spirit of truth, and Christ is the truth, and only as such is he the way and the life. An effort, therefore, to pound out external response and decision by minimizing truth, par-

ticularly those hard truths of human depravity and absolute dependence on God's will and efficacious work, would do nothing to accomplish the actual work of conversion. Spurgeon loathed such chicanery and blasted forth against it, for it dishonored all the redemptive offices of each person of the triune God, corrupted the church, and deceived souls.

How, then, to effect an ongoing ministry of zeal for souls with an accompanying harvest without resorting to the manipulative technique that had flooded the ranks of the professional evangelist presented an ongoing dilemma for Spurgeon and often a case of conscience. While he longed for souls he would say quite frankly, "That experience which is feigned, and not really wrought in the soul, will prove to be nothing better than the painted pageantry of a dead soul—a disguise to go to hell in." While pressing for conversion, therefore, Spurgeon would say,

1. S&T, December 1866, 532. The article was entitled "What Is a Revival?"

2. C. H. Spurgeon, "On Conversion as our Aim," in *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 192.

“Pretend to no feeling which is not real. Profess no emotion which is not deeply and truly felt. In all things be sincere, and most of all be accurate when describing your inner condition before the heart-searching Jehovah.”³ In lamenting that many were church members and expressing pain for their perhaps fatal delusion, he would warn, “The fact of your being in the church may be very much to your spiritual injury; therefore do not confess with the mouth what you have not believed with the heart.”⁴ He committed himself to maintain the unity of zeal and truth, but where could he find others of like mind? He would have to train them, encourage them, caution them, and promote them. Even then, he would be on edge.

Train Them, Call Them, Send Them

The 1891 report for the Pastors' College included a report by W. Y. Fullerton from “The Pastors' College Society of Evangelists.” Largely given over to his work throughout the country with a musician called Manton Smith, Fullerton reported on twenty-three places that had been visited. Though great variety in geography and social status characterized the number, “the gospel we have preached has varied not at all, and we have found, as of yore, that the old truth is suited to all men, whether they be subtle or simple.”⁵

Fullerton presented an *apologia* for the effectiveness of itinerant evangelism and its usefulness for the church. The advance of the kingdom of God through conversion is the main goal, Fullerton insisted. While many attending the meeting probably already were converted and only needed assurance, and others already were under deep impressions of sin, “a considerable number of others have been drawn to the services, per-

haps by curiosity, or by the extra effort put forth by some earnest friend, or to listen to Mr. Smith's singing or cornet, or even as during the past awful winter, to get shelter—who have been met with by the Spirit of God, and led to the feet of Jesus.” Fullerton recognized that some disapproved of evangelism through protracted meetings. He was convinced, however, that such concentrated attention to salvation intensified the sense of the importance of an “instant decision and every excuse for importunate pleading with the unsaved.” If brethren approve of preaching the gospel three times a week, how could they object to it being preached ten times a week.⁶

Following this article were lists of places visited by evangelists supported by a Tabernacle fund. In addition to Fullerton and Smith, this included a Mr. Burnham, about whom Spurgeon wrote, “We give in *The Sword and the Trowel* monthly testimonies to the success of this earnest brother's visitations.” After Mr. Harmer's schedule, Spurgeon commented, “To all of these the Holy Spirit has set his seal by ‘signs following.’ Our magazine is made bright with records of revivals under Mr. Harmer.” Though Mr. Harrison had been “invalided” for part of the year, he nevertheless had been able to make some missions. He is a true ‘son of thunder,’” Spurgeon added, “and of consolation also.” The year of intense evangelistic work done by Thomas Spurgeon in New Zealand was reported. “He continues his fruitful service, and is far on in his year of incessant labor. May the Spirit of God cause those broad fields to blossom as the rose!”⁷

That an 1891 report of the work of evangelists was included in *The Sword and the Trowel* is due to a carefully arranged beginning for the enterprise. First of all, undoubtedly due to the influ-

3. SEE, 5:370.

4. SEE, 5:166.

5. S&T, June 1891, 270.

6. Ibid., 272.

7. Ibid., 273.

ence of a friendship with D. L. Moody, Spurgeon had become persuaded “of the great value of the office and work of evangelists.” Accordingly, he determined to sponsor evangelists through the College in 1877. He personally engaged to find them maintenance that “they may go through the length and breadth of the land and preach Christ.”⁸ Though he gladly took the responsibility and pledged cheerfully to “practice self-denial to pay the amount which is needed,” at the same time he “would not deny any friend the pleasure of assisting.”⁹ The first two were A. J. Clarke and Manton Smith. He sent them on their first assignment in August of 1877.

Clarke displayed engaging natural gifts as well as those of a humble Christian. One observer described him as “every inch a man” with no “puerilities or babyisms about his style,” who neither “whines nor bawls,” and was by no means a dilettante.¹⁰ Smith was the singer and also played a cornet, “by which means he not only fetches in the people to the service, but interests them when they are gathered together.” Spurgeon had personally given him a “new silver trumpet, upon which is engraved a verse from the Psalms, “With trumpet and sound of cornet, make a joyful noise before the Lord and King.” Both evangelists had been useful in conversion work and they were sent forth in the name of the Lord “with high hopes of blessing.”¹¹

The August *Sword and Trowel* carried a lengthy report of the evangelists’ work in a squalid part of Dublin. Preaching and singing brought good crowds but also inflamed the Catholics and initiated a “tug of war” for the soul of the city.¹²

8. S&T, July 1877, 334.

9. S&T, December 1877, 560.

10. Ibid.

11. S&T, July 1877, 334.

12. S&T, August 1877, 394.

From Ireland to Bristol for meetings over the span of three weeks, the evangelists went. This would provide scrutiny under the eyes of seasoned and conservative Baptists extremely wary of the notorious tricks of the evangelists’ trade. Spurgeon needed an evaluation from doctrinally minded, hard-to-please, Bible-centered advocates of the regulative principle for Christian worship and ministry. Should thumbs down be the judgment here, it would be difficult to make the effort successful. When G. D. Evans from Bristol wrote, the orientation of the article and his observations exactly suited Spurgeon’s hope for the new ministry. Evans’ first paragraph described well what was at stake.

Amongst the more staid and sober Christians of this ancient city there are many who have looked with some suspicion upon men who have assumed the name of Evangelists. Nor can this be wondered at, for our ears have been grossly offended and our hearts much saddened by the absurdities and vulgarities of some who, by their coarse manipulation of the gospel message, have spoiled its beauty and marred its glorious simplicity. It was therefore with considerable anxiety in the minds of many, and not without gloomy forebodings on the part of a few, that the visit of Messrs. Clarke and Smith to this city was anticipated. And even before the cornet was heard in our chapels, the thought of it was a source of disquietude. With well trained choirs and costly organs, what possible advantage could it be to introduce such an instrument into our midst? Besides, it was certainly a sensational means of reaching the people. And that word *sensational* is a dreadful one to ears polite. Well, the brethren have come and gone. They have preached and sung and played in several of our chapels. Crowds have gathered to listen to them. The services have been neither sensational nor vulgar. The prejudices of the most particular have not been offended. Hostile criticism has been disarmed. Our

friends have left us with the goodwill of many hundreds of sincere, old-fashioned Christians, as well as with the blessing of many anxious souls, and the earnest prayers of our churches that they may have a long and useful career before them. Should they return to our midst at some future time, they will receive a hearty Bristol welcome.¹³

Clarke preached with great boldness without the offense of unwarranted dogmatism or insolent egotism but as a manifestation of intense faith in the verities of the gospel. The more he preached, the more favor he gained with the people. Suspicions against evangelists were ill-placed when viewing Clarke. Evans gave close observation to Smith and the effect of his trumpet. People, especially children, are naturally drawn to his genial manner. His singing, though not scientific, is of a popular character. His voice does not penetrate so far nor thrill so deeply as that of Sankey, but the rendering of some of the solos is deeply affecting and impressive. When not singing he used his cornet to lead both congregation and choir. The instrument, so suspect in principle, proved to be of immense usefulness in keeping the entire congregation on pitch and up to rhythm in the singing. He noticed this especially at George Muller's orphanage where the children lagged and became flat without the cornet but responded immediately and in a lively manner when it came to their aid. Evans saw particular advantage to the instrument in outdoor meetings in the summer, helping the farthest reaches of an outdoor crowd hear the music.¹⁴

The article closed with a strong affirmation of the office of evangelist as a biblical expedient for reaching "the untouched people who are in our congregations, and the vast multitudes outside who are not reached by our various ministries." Evans was convinced that the work must be en-

larged and those adapted for evangelistic ministry must be sought out. The work is "as noble as the pastorate," Evans surmised, particularly when measuring "by the necessity that exists for it and the difficulties connected with it." This important note he added, a note for which Spurgeon specifically thanked Evans, for they "exactly state our feelings upon the matter." The italicized words emphasized: "*But it must be taken up as the business of the churches. It must not be left to unorganized Christianity*" He urged leading men in Baptist churches to become "its patrons and its helpers" if England is to be won for Christ.¹⁵

Early in 1878, as Spurgeon reported on the work of Clarke and Smith, he reiterated the need for evangelists *in connection with the churches* as the great need of the hour. It had been left to "unattached amateurs with serious results to church work." The slumbering churches and the frowns of officialism had hindered any innovation on this point. Spurgeon wanted "evangelists in full harmony with the churches" to "prevent the disorder which arises out of the present disorganized mode of doing or pretending to do the work."¹⁶

W. Y. Fullerton had received his initial encouragement as a full-time evangelist from Spurgeon. Recognizing his zeal and effectiveness, Spurgeon had asked Fullerton to preach the special February meetings at the Tabernacle in 1879, even when Spurgeon was away at Mentone. After Spurgeon returned from his health Sabbatical, he asked Fullerton to join Manton Smith at Bacup when the scheduled evangelist, A. J. Clarke, became ill. Spurgeon sent the note to Fullerton by the hand of Thomas. "Now I was to be launched on my life's work," Fullerton remarked in evaluating the significance of that invitation.¹⁷

13. S&T, December 1877, 560.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. S&T, February 1878, 91.

17. W. Y. Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 86.

The life of the evangelist had been too intense for Clarke. In July 1879 Spurgeon reported, “During the past month a complete change has been made with respect to our esteemed evangelist, Mr. A. J. Clarke. We felt that the failure of his health indicated that for the present the Lord did not intend him longer to endure the excitement of evangelistic work.” Under Spurgeon’s guidance, Clarke accepted a pastorate in Australia at West Melbourne where Spurgeon prayed “this dear servant of the Lord may be the means of winning even more souls for Christ than he has won in the United Kingdom.” He assured the Aussies that “a better man never visited your shores.”¹⁸

Meanwhile Fullerton and Smith melded their evangelistic campaigns as an enduring duo moving from place to place seeming to thrive on the “excitement” that drove Clarke away. Spurgeon received the following correspondence from one of their earliest meetings together, in the West Ridings of Yorkshire. T. E. Cozens Cooke wrote from York.

Dear Mr. Spurgeon,
We have lately been favoured with the presence of your two excellent evangelists, “Smith and Fullerton.” The moral atmosphere of an old cathedral city is anything but favourable to these special efforts, and we were not surprised that some of our “cultured” friends manifested their opposition by a warm newspaper correspondence. This, however, did us no harm, but almost daily advertised our services free of charge. Mr. Smith’s attractive singing, and his colleague’s heart-stirring addresses, were much appreciated, and the interest evidently increased. The meetings were largely attended every night, and considerably over one thousand copies of the hymn book were sold at the doors. Several persons professed to receive food, and we are trying to follow up the work. We parted

18. S&T, July 1879, 345.

with our dear brethren with much regret, some of our friends gathering at the railway station, and singing their “Farewell” as the train glided away. Their affectionate, genial society, and above all, their unwearied devotion to the Master’s work quite won our hearts, and we shall hope ere long to welcome them again. Our local expenses were heavy, but we are so glad to be able to send you (through Mr. Hillman) £10 for your “Society of Evangelists,” with the earnest prayer that the richest blessing may continue to rest upon this and every other agency associated with your noble work at the Tabernacle.¹⁹

The evangelists moved on to Leeds for a protracted time of work from June 7 to June 25. There was a great stir, much good was sure to follow, and Spurgeon received a “glowing account” that he would share at a future date. Spurgeon also narrated a description of the work done by Mr. Burnham at Wootton, where great crowds came each evening and special liberty was experienced by the evangelist in giving attention to the children of ministers.²⁰

The Leeds event of Fullerton and Smith received coverage in the August 1879 edition of *The Sword and the Trowel*. After the first week of services, the meeting moved to the center of town, giving a magnitude to the work that made “their visit an event long to be remembered by multitudes of our townfolk.” By Tuesday the South Parade Chapel was crowded and on Wednesday extra seats were provided. On Thursday the meeting adjourned to “the Circus,” a large unoccupied building near the chapel and for a whole week “dense crowds, estimated at from three to five thousand, came together every night to listen to the preaching of the gospel.” The evangelists stayed an extra three days, preaching

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

to an overflow crowd each evening, and began holding noon-day prayer meetings at the Young Men's Christian Association and afternoon Bible-reading sessions led by Fullerton. Scores of enquirers were conversed with, "many of whom are now seeking admission to Christian churches; backsliders were reclaimed and the gospel was preached not only to regular church and chapel goers, but to a large number from the class of those who habitually neglect houses of prayer, and who, by the ordinary agencies on which we rely, are almost untouched." The writer regretted that the evangelists had to leave when the enthusiasm for the meeting was still at its height, and looked forward to seeing them return. He commended the evangelists themselves remarking of their apt gifts for the work to which they were devoted. He felt compelled to mention one other matter.

It seems almost incredible that the great hindrance in the way of carrying on and extending the work of the Society in connection with which Messrs. Smith and Fullerton labour is *want of funds*. I understand that Mr. Spurgeon has considerable difficulty in supporting the men already engaged while he is anxious to send forth other brethren whose gifts qualify them to render efficient service in this vast harvest field. Will not those who have it in their power to do so help a society which is in every way so worthy of confidence and sympathy, and give twice by giving quickly?²¹

Spurgeon never seemed hesitant to report the details of the work of Fullerton and Smith. In Halifax, in 1881, the church experienced a great blessing, took up a love offering that paid for the expenses of the entire week and £100 remaining to send to Mr. Spurgeon's Evangelistic Fund. The last evening of the meeting proved to be the crowning

of the work as many enquirers sought the aid of Christian workers at the close. The total number of inquirers that made a public attempt to speak with someone was 200, but "even this only represents a small portion of the good accomplished." The churches in the town would be numerically strengthened and many Christians revived. Spurgeon closed the report for May 1881 with enthusiasm for the prospects of another meeting with the same evangelists.

The evangelists have during the past month commenced at Sheffield a series of services which promise to be the most successful they have ever held. The town has been divided into five districts, in each of which a fortnight is to be spent, and the closing meetings are to be held in some large central spot. The ministers have heartily welcomed our brethren, who find that their visit has been preceded by a week of prayer all over the town, which has already witnessed the earnest of a great blessing.²²

The July Issue carried a report of the Sheffield meeting by a "Visitor." The report noted the cooperative spirit in the churches, but also observed, "For ministers and representatives of existing churches to look askance at special services by well-chosen evangelists, is a policy difficult to explain, for they lose a splendid opportunity of quickening their own spiritual life, and of augmenting their usefulness." The writer, a bit nonplussed by the hesitance of some brethren, sought to present the evangelists as sterling church men that have "always desired and sought the earnest co-operation of their ministerial brethren, in order to consolidate their work, and to secure the pastoral oversight of those who are brought to a knowledge of the truth at their services." They are

21. S&T, August 1879, 389.

22. S&T, May 1881, 243.

auxiliaries of the churches, not rivals of honored brethren. The meetings seemed lively indeed, as the song service at the children's meetings was "led and sustained by Mr. Smith's silver cornet." An evening song service included solos by Smith and Mr. Chamberlain from London and anthems and choruses by an "efficient choir." On top of that, Fullerton himself gave song services each Saturday night during the campaign in order to secure the attendance of the working men and keep them from the public houses and the street. The "Song Service" was a sermon broken up by songs that carried the theme of the message and illustrated its points. In addition, the addresses of Fullerton "were in the racy style which he has made his own, and which gives point to his appeals, and makes the truths he advances both strike and stick." Overall, so the writer observed, "as an entertainment it is sufficiently attractive to be popular, and we commend the expedient to those who are anxious to reach people."²³ At Abbey Road Chapel in November, the reporter narrated the gripping nature of the impact of the evangelistic duo by recording, "Once more the singer and the preacher were up to their work; the latter with power and skill wielding the two-edged sword of the truth right and left, unflinching and without pause, until women wept and strong men seemed spell-bound, and beyond a doubt the slain of the Lord were many."²⁴

The zeal of Fullerton and Smith did not wane and Spurgeon's support of them and attraction to them did not wear thin. Smith had an exuberant personality and an ability to tell stories. He used this gift often with the children in a crusade and displayed it in a book of anecdotes about his own life. *Stray Leaves from my Life Story* contained a fascinating narrative about Cricksea Ferry that

Spurgeon considered "about as odd a narrative as will ever be likely to come under the observation of a student within fifty miles of London." Smith had the grace of being merry, even jolly, while being "earnest up to the eyes" and a picture of tenderness itself. In these stories, though, "from quite unexpected corners of his nature humour wells up, and floods the rest of his being." While the individual anecdotes were filled with fun, "the spirit and object are deeply serious."²⁵

Spurgeon printed a letter from Fullerton as sufficiently indicative of the Spring work of the evangelists. He and Manton Smith distributed Spurgeon's sermons as a part of their evangelistic work and Fullerton narrated an unusual conversion connected with Spurgeon's written sermons. Fullerton had arranged with Passmore and Alabaster for 100,000 bound sermons to be laid aside for their use in evangelistic campaigns. In asking for Spurgeon's readers to contribute toward the ministry, he added, "No surer way could be conceived of sending a clear statement of the gospel into thousands of homes where it would otherwise be unknown."²⁶

Spurgeon devoted hundreds of columns in *The Sword and the Trowel* to descriptions of the work of Fullerton and Smith, including letters from them and an abundance of letters from the churches in which they ministered. The depth of his trust in Fullerton may be seen from his reliance on him during the days of the Downgrade Controversy when he had him preach for him on several occasions when he was away. From Mentone he wrote, "I felt sure that the Lord would bless you at the Tabernacle, & now I feel grateful that he has done so." Though the weather was horrible all felt that "warmth and power were abundant in your testimony." Spurgeon told Ful-

23. S&T, August 1881, 409.

24. S&T, December 1881, 628.

25. S&T, February 1885, 82.

26. S&T, July 1882, 381.

lerton that to him it was “joy unspeakable to be associated with a brother so sound in the faith & earnest for souls. The blend is one only a divine hand can make.” Spurgeon expressed hopes that the evangelists would have the best year ever but also warned Fullerton not to take too many meetings since his was “killing work.” He advised him to “die at great length.” Spurgeon also wanted Fullerton to provide some narratives for “S & Trowel” and gave an impetus beyond his personal invitation by saying, “This must be kept up or funds will go down.”²⁷

The positive reports that followed the evangelistic teams surely encouraged Spurgeon, for he believed that the gift of evangelist still operated in the church as one of the constituted means for the ingathering of the elect. One observer stated that Fullerton and Smith had the faculty for the “precipitation of decision.” Spurgeon’s interpretation was that “the Lord blessed them in bringing men to decision for Christ.”²⁸ In early 1883 a pastor reported that Fullerton “preaches the gospel with a clearness and power I have never heard surpassed; and Mr. Smith has the happy gift of throwing over the audience such a mellowing influence that minds unconsciously open, like the flower to the sun, to receive without prejudice the solemn things they listen to.” The services, night after night, were overflowing with “enquiring souls.”²⁹

Spurgeon knew that he must be careful in these reports, however, and worked hard to ascertain the truth of what was said, for Christians often feel that it is their duty and an evidence of true faith to use superlatives when speaking of the

effects of religious efforts. Though he maintained optimism about the success of gospel preaching in evangelistic settings, he did not like conflated reports or overzealous language. He likened it to sensationalist papers reporting of gooseberries “which are twice as large as possible.” To speak of a “great work” where serious people have no knowledge of any “work” at all was “mischievous” and tended to damage the true work. “When Christian people,” he observed, “find things overstated they lose confidence, and in the case of men of the world it is worse, for they use the exaggeration as material for jests.” Better under the mark than over it, particularly when describing a work in which one is personally involved. “We must not put into print those sanguine ideas of things which our hopeful minds create in our excited brains. The cause of truth can never be aided by a deviation from truth.” Exaggeration must be put aside and discouraging facts must not be suppressed. “Brethren who are apt to puff, let us whisper in your ears—leave the monstrous gooseberries to the newspapers, and speak every man truth with his neighbour.”³⁰

Zealous for Access

Though “puff” was forbidden, creativity in finding ways to get gospel proclamation to those untouched by the ordinary agencies on which the churches relied offended him in no way. “How to Get at Inquirers” by F. White proposed several ways, “in these days of revival and awakening,” to get at inquirers and “drive men from one false refuge and another, until they are safely hidden in the cleft of the Rock of Ages.”³¹ Spurgeon would be offended by, and would oppose forcefully, any dilution of the gospel or of the distinguishing doctrines of grace, but unconventionality in get-

27. Spurgeon to Fullerton, handwritten copy on file in Archives at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This letter is in “Charles Haddon Spurgeon correspondence with F. T. Snell,” January 12, 1889. The letter begins, “Dear Friend.”

28. Spurgeon, *Soul Winner*, 133.

29. S&T, February 1883, 97.

30. S&T, June 1881, 270f.

31. F. White, “How to Get at Inquirers,” S&T, January 1865, 41.

ting to people posed no difficulty in his mind, but was the way of Christ himself.

In pursuit of that necessity, Spurgeon frequently included articles in *The Sword and the Trowel* concerning the work of full-time evangelists. Edward Leach contributed such titles as “Evangelistic work in London” in which he outlined several ideas about how to get a hearing from people on the street for the gospel. “The Earnest Evangelist” by Leach speaks of the spiritual qualifications for doing personal work in soul winning.³² “William Carter and His Converts” talks about a man who had been able to get crowds of the lowest level of society to gather for gospel preaching. Though he endured much rowdiness, and had drunks and prostitutes, thieves and vagabonds all together, the interest level was high and remarkable conversions had occurred.³³ “Spurgeon Among the Costermongers” showed the consummate skill and passion of Spurgeon in his dealing with this element of English society and his personal desire to encourage those that had given themselves to full time evangelistic work.³⁴

Spurgeon greatly encouraged his students to become church planters through evangelism in difficult places with the use of aggressive and creative means. Edward Leach recorded his observations about this. With some aggravating experience of the sorts of objections raised against innovative evangelism, Leach composed one side of an interaction with a staid and stolid opponent of daring attempts at gospel penetration. The characters generically were youth and old age, each with their doubts about the other. “Youth forms the occasion of many a solemn shake of the head: old age is the butt for the bitterest sarcasms

of youth.” The aged accuse the young of “Inexperience” and the young look with disdain on the prudence of age as “old-fogyness.” Prudence walks in silver slippers, fears the rough way, and indulges itself in “sugar-plums, compliments, card-baskets, ice-creams, tissue-like refinements, and lackadaisical joys of life.” Heroism, a trait of youth, “walks trippingly over dangerous ruts, wears heavy buckram, cumbrous armour, and bears severe discipline.” Prudence, friendly to sloth, has smothered many virtues at birth while so-called rashness has “nipped many vices in the bud.” Other comparisons, to the detriment of the cautious aged, encouraged patience and tolerance for the rashness of youth, for it might reprimand an apostolic model and “plant it in the midst of opposition in a bolder, more chivalric manner, where you with timidity would fear to tread.” So away with reticence that produces a nostalgia for “the return of gilt coat-buttons, knee-breeches, swallow-tails, and pigtails, ... frill-shirts, and pleated tucks, and silk stockings (peach-coloured or otherwise).” Listen instead to a voice ready to risk all, not only the esteem of the aged but one’s own life, that Christ may be heard where his voice has not come.³⁵

Where does Spurgeon find examples of this exemplary apostolic boldness but in descriptions of what students from the Pastors’ College were doing? A chapel in Wandsworth arose from the efforts of a young man who “had actually broken the rules of respectability and soberness by commencing to preach in the assembly rooms of a tavern, much to the disgust, doubtless, of my sage friend whom I had so weakly jostled with in argument.” On another page we find the commodious chapel in Bromley necessitated by “out-door preaching of students,” “Out-door preaching!” the

32. S&T, June 1867, 269.

33. S&T, January–February 1866, 12, 61.

34. S&T, April 1867, 176.

35. S&T, September 1867, 389-95. Article by Edward Leach entitled “Young Men and Evangelistic Work in London.”

exuberant youth exclaimed. “What sayest thou to that, my old type-faced friend? But stop—do not smile, was not Christianity mainly propagated by out-door preaching?” Even as he launched into the defence of outdoor preaching he found another unorthodox example of gospel-success. A good-sized chapel grew from preaching in the “large room of an inn in Ealing,” “I must have a little of Mr. Revivalist’s disposition in my nature,” Leach admitted, “for I involuntarily, yet I hope devoutly, ejaculated, ‘Bless the Lord’ for the chapel built by a congregation gathered together in an inn! Christ was born in an inn: why should not a church be born there likewise?” Pages that followed revealed many such examples to Leach, and led him to pray for “more young men of the same heroic temperament, for London sadly wants them.” He did not disparage the old-fashioned ways of planting churches, but longed for the “old apostolic earnestness of purpose, the spirit of which it seemed to be had been caught by these evangelizing pastors.”

Many more chapels, sixty needed immediately in East London, could not accommodate the number of people who have no means of attending public worship. “If prudence does not approve of every method of Christian service, necessity will do so. Respectability shirks what faith and works perform.” The use, therefore, of “lodging-house preaching, open-air effort, and teaching in taverns and casinos may appear strange to the world,” but God has blessed these “rash enterprises.” When the god of the world stakes out a ground from which to extend his kingdom, there Christians must meet him. “All mutterings respecting the injudiciousness of men who evangelise among the masses is beside the mark: if it be not cowardly, it is unchristian.” All Christians should rejoice wherever and by whomever “Christ crucified” is preached.

The steadiness of the attempts to penetrate London with established places for gospel preaching was in evidence at the yearly meeting of the “Metropolitan Tabernacle Evangelists’ Association” on May 30, 1881. The members of the Association held over 3,650 meetings annually in which the direct object was “evangelizing some part of London.”³⁶ They wanted more money and more men because recently they had had to turn down an opportunity to take charge of a mission hall in Brompton Hospital for lack of funds. On hearing the news several of the men began to pray in earnest for God’s provision for this strategic opportunity and punctuated the prayers with short addresses “in such an excellent manner that we could see how well fitted they were for the work to which they had given themselves.” The secretary of the Association, Mr. Elvin, required testimony to the usefulness of the evangelists sent out under his direction. One of these recommendations had come to Spurgeon’s attention from a church where a week of services under their direction had been the means of the conversion of some twenty people. The letter shows how Spurgeon’s sympathetic contemporaries viewed his efforts along this line.

Would that other large and influential churches, besides that at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, would organize bands of evangelists to mission our great and sin-stricken cities. Are there not churches with many hundreds of members that are doing scarcely anything in this direction for the godless crowds among whom they are located? And are there not thousands of the Lord’s people in those churches with gifts and leisure who might be induced to enter upon such a mission? We believe there are members, not only of young converts with their warm, fresh, yearning first-love, but of Christians

36. S&T, July 1881, 353.

of matured experience, whose talents now lie buried, who are ready to throw themselves into this work, if only the organizations existed. May God stir up his church to care more for the perishing; and may he lay upon his beloved believing ones the burden of souls so greatly that they shall be led to "travail" for them.³⁷

Spurgeon felt deep satisfaction in the evangelistic success of the College graduates and shared with his readers, "who have helped us to train pastors and evangelists," the letters that described these efforts. A letter from John Downing in Australia, a graduate of the College is full of interest. The frequency of the meetings, the description of inquirers, the confidence exhibited in the operations of the Holy Spirit, and the pleasing references to Thomas Spurgeon would all be a sweet cordial to Spurgeon's mind.

Dear Mr. Spurgeon,

I feel impelled to let you know how the Lord has been working in Brisbane of late. In March last I had a run down to Tasmania, and came back to Victoria with Harrison, who was in College at the same time as myself, and who was then on the way to join Isaac for Evangelistic work. I asked Harrison to come on up to Queensland, and after working down south, i.e. in Victoria and N. S. Wales, he and Isaac arrived here in August. The first meetings were under severe disadvantage; the evangelists were unknown. It was the annual exhibition week, and people were mad after the young princes just arrived in the "*Bacchante*," but souls were saved, and the news spread so that at the next place between one hundred and fifty and two hundred went forward for personal conversation, and, as a consequence, the Christian enthusiasm steadily rose. The third church could not hold the throngs, and when anxious souls were asked to come into the vestries, they did at such a rate as to fill them

37. *Ibid.*, 354.

to overflowing, and this continued for nearly three months. Harrison's last meeting in any church was held in mine, and never before has such a crowd gathered there; every seat was more than full, every available inch of standing-room was occupied, and the overflow contented themselves with listening outside the open windows. When the preaching was over we could not get the people away, they wanted eternal life, and would not go without it. To my knowledge, there are scores upon scores professedly saved. Many have received assurance of faith; churches have been roused; pastors and other workers have been cheered, and the whole tone of religious life heightened. Harrison's Sunday-afternoon meetings in the Theatre Royal, too, were, numerically, a big success, though, through the lack of accommodation for personal dealing, very many slipped through our fingers. Except when your son Thomas was here, I have never seen such packed meetings. I might say that when *he* was here, fifteen months, ago, we took advantage of his presence and preaching to begin theatre-meetings in the only place we then could get, a little pokey, cockroachy hole, holding about four hundred. Through his instrumentality, and in the teeth of much prejudice, the place was filled, and from that has sprung a regular Sunday-evening theatre-service in a new theatre, holding over fifteen hundred, and which, when Harrison preached there last, was so packed that hundreds could not get in. Jesus of Nazareth has been passing by, and eyes once blind now see him, while the communion of souls granted to his people has been blessedly close and choice. The manifestations of the Spirit's power which have come under my own notice have been remarkable, this is one—We had finished a meeting, and the enquirers had gone into the vestries. I felt happy, and commenced to sing while the people were going away. Many stopped, and joined in the verse, "Glory, honour, etc." One fine-looking young fellow stood laughing while we were singing, but before we had finished, his stiff neck bent, and he broke down, fairly making

a dash for the vestry in which were the anxious souls. At another meeting, several young Christians were in the church, praying for the anxious, who had filled the vestry. An ungodly young man did not want to leave his companion, and remained. While someone was praying, suddenly there burst over the solemnity of the meeting great sobs as if one were dying of grief. The Holy Spirit had come in convicting energy upon him; he has since shown by his consistent life that he is a new creature. He has applied for baptism; and there have been many cases somewhat similar. The work is still going on, and fresh cases of conversion are coming to light. ... Wherever your son Thomas goes he carries a blessing, and is received very heartily, first for his father's sake, and then next time none the less so for his own. I wish he might be the flying angel of the everlasting gospel for the Colonies. Whichever way his Master will use him will be wisest and best.³⁸

In October *The Sword and the Trowel* carried an appeal to its readers to contribute to the construction of the meeting house in Auckland for son Thomas' church. It also printed an extended letter of praise written by the church's secretary about the preaching and evangelistic work of Thomas. "The young man wears well," the secretary wrote; "The people like him for he is personal, spares not to tell of God's anger as well as his love; he does not mince matters, yet is so earnest in his appeals to heart and mind." He preached on strong texts and important themes with power, clarity, and passion, and the people crowded in to hear for they were not tired of hearing the gospel of Christ.³⁹ A son, so useful for gospel truth in such a distant part of the world, winning not only souls to Christ but respect and love from the people of God, certainly had a warming impact on Spurgeon's weary mind while he missed him the more.

38. S&T, March 1882, 151.

39. S&T, October 1882, 547.

Overcoming Complaint by Commendation

Other contemporaries complained, however, about Spurgeon's evangelists. When a Baptist newspaper was the source, Spurgeon could hardly believe it. That men of the world would have good reason to object to an effort to draw the masses to Christ Spurgeon could expect, but that brethren of the same denomination would carp seemed a betrayal of the most chilling kind. He found encouragement in this alone, that the gravamen of the criticism was that "their preaching has a decidedly Calvinistic tone." Evidently neither character nor zeal gave rise to the criticism but doctrine. Spurgeon hoped they would remain liable always to the same condemnation. He had not complained about brethren zealous for Arminianism, for he considered it a "frequent infirmity of noble minds."⁴⁰ The central truths held in common by Calvinists and Arminians composed the stuff of evangelism and Spurgeon found no reason to belittle those among the Arminians zealous for souls who preached about sin, condemnation, substitution, and faith alone.

Spurgeon sought to help his men by encouragement, personal appearances on their behalf, financial support, and personal recommendation, if he conscientiously could do so. The Tabernacle provided £100 per year for the Association and other expenses were met by the offerings taken in the churches where the men appeared and by donations from readers of *The Sword and the Trowel*. This organization produced "more preaching of the gospel than by any other means," Spurgeon believed. "And it is the gospel," for him, "There's the joy of it."⁴¹

A commendation of the work from his own son Charles surely pleased Spurgeon. Fullerton and Smith had come to Greenwich on Janu-

40. S&T, January 1882, 43.

41. S&T, July 1881, 354.

ary 15 following a week of prayer, 500 attending the Thursday meeting, and distribution of 15,000 handbills. On Sunday afternoon, "Brother Smith, with his usual tact, held over 1,500 little ones, collected from four Sunday-schools, spell-bound by song and speech." Not only children, but some "old boys and girls" were helped by these meetings and conversions already had occurred. Attendance increased each evening with the work "growing in interest and blessing." As he closed, "Charlie" thanked God for the arrival of the two brethren "especially as they are labouring at South Street as their head quarters." His report glowed with news of the children's meetings, meetings for women only and men only, "Song Services" on Saturdays, massive crowd on Sunday, and much converting work of the Spirit. He sent a "*bona fide* thankoffering of £55."⁴²

One of his men, F. T. Snell, Spurgeon recommended in July 1887 to the "love and confidence of any Christian friends among whom he may sojourn." He recommended him as one who "by speaking and writing ... endeavors to evangelize." Snell supported Spurgeon and encouraged him during the Downgrade Controversy, for which Spurgeon expressed sincere appreciation. He requested that Snell pray for him "for I have need of guidance and help." In a series of letters, Spurgeon spoke of some of the financial difficulties that Snell encountered. Spurgeon had lent money, could not lend any more, but proposed to make a gift of the money that he already had lent Snell. Spurgeon made arrangements for Snell to establish a work on the Isle of Guernsey, with the aid of some contributors to his support. Spurgeon himself went to Guernsey, Snell arranged for the hotel and other accommodations, Spurgeon promised to preach

once a day, and made use of offerings given on the occasion for Snell's benefit. Snell's loan was thus repaid and Spurgeon remitted to Snell any excess "for work done." Snell soon fell into disfavor with the church, apparently, for Spurgeon wrote later that same year, "I do not see that you can do anything. You need bear what is in store for you with patience of soul. You can surely claim some sort of personal compensation for loss of prospective livelihood but perhaps they will meet that by offering you the place at [as?] a [illegible]. Your strength is to sit still." One year later, October 1890, Spurgeon wrote a recommendation for Snell to Baptists in America, where he eventually settled, apparently in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. "This is to certify that Mr. Snell has been an evangelist under my direction & has done good service as a Baptist Evangelist. He has founded and built up a church in the island of Guernsey, & has proved himself 'a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.' If a hard-working zealous minister is needed, who can initiate work, & carry it forward well, Mr. Snell is the man. I can recommend him without reserve. He is the man to succeed among a living enterprising people like our American brethren. The Lord be with him. C. H. Spurgeon."⁴³

When Spurgeon was asked the difference between the Evangelists' Association and the Metropolitan Tabernacle Country Mission, he stated frankly, "We are not very clear about this; except that this Society sends the same men to fixed stations to raise churches, and the other is more of an evangelistic order, assisting churches already in existence. They are equally excellent, and might wisely be united."

42. S&T, March 1882, 152.

43. Handwritten letter in Archives at James P. Boyce Memorial Library at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon correspondence with F. T. Snell," October 2, 1890. All of the letters mentioned in this paragraph are in the same folder.

Spurgeon included the work of the colporteurs as straightforward evangelistic work. They could penetrate places that no other evangelical witness could go. In 1879 he reported that an army of colporteurs “covers our country.” They went into dark hamlets and to the sick beds of neglected people bringing truth, light, and hope. Priestcraft was thus invaded in places formerly seen as impenetrable and where a non-conformist ministry could hardly be maintained. Through these book-spreaders, however, “a testimony has been kept alive which has sufficed to fetch out the chosen of the Lord from amid the gloom of superstition, and lead the Lord’s elect away from priests and sacraments to Christ and the one great sacrifice for sin.”⁴⁴ His commitment to evangelism soared on the wings of divine sovereignty and utter dependence on covenantal grace.

Moody and Sankey

During the 1873 Moody Crusade in Scotland, Spurgeon expressed his approval of the impact that Moody and Sankey had on congregations, writing, “It is delightful to hear of the Lord’s work in Newcastle and in Edinburgh. May the Lord prosper our brethren Moody and Sankey more and more.”⁴⁵

In April 1874, Spurgeon gave eight full pages of *The Sword and the Trowel* to an eyewitness report of “Awakening in the North,” the Moody–Sankey crusade in Scotland. The writer described the desire and expectation that permeated the Christian community prior to the arrival of the American evangelists. He repudiated the “irreverent fanaticism” of spasmodic and spurious concoctions of religious fervor, but pointed to the merging of a growing common desire for religious awakening with the spiritual gifts of the

44. S&T, January 1879, 5.

45. S&T, February 1874, 93.

evangelists. The revival did not arise from the mere mesmerizing influence of the revival atmosphere, but the evidence pointed to a true working of the Spirit. The author formerly had little faith in revival work, but “with nets breaking and ships sinking from the freight of inquiring souls,” he confessed to be in the presence of the Lord himself. This observer gave vivid illustrations of the unity of ministers of all denominations, their uncharacteristic humility before each other, the stirring of people from every level of society, the earnest and almost palpable sense of the presence of Christ in the meetings and continuing in the lives of the penitents, the salvation of entire families, the remolding of social circles. He witnessed a “divine blessing and leavening with grace of all classes and spheres of life and labour.”⁴⁶

But set aside the obvious operations of the divine hand, and look to the men through whom the blessing came. He judged Moody to be a good preacher with a masterly knowledge of human nature who possessed the precision and practical wisdom of a business man. He exhibited a father’s affection, a scholarly grasp of Scripture truth, and had a burning zeal without being one-sided. The writer gave examples of Moody’s massive appeal and attributed it to the highly developed polarities of his personality, his true tenderness and compassion on the one hand and his stern and uncompromising application of truth on the other. The attractiveness of the man was in some ways mysterious, the writer seemingly felt, and gave rise to an intricately conceived explanation of his appeal.

Taking a chief place in the Christian mission to the army during the American war, it was there that Mr. Moody acquired those rare gifts of sympathy, sagacity, and simplicity which characterise his

46. S&T, April 1874, 155.

preaching, and without which its style would be barely tolerable to correct ears. From want of grammar and for colloquial abruptness, as well as from its Americanisms, it is not in itself prepossessing; but it exercises the most perfect control over an audience, however great, and by means of an infinity of striking illustrations, it rises at times to heights of natural impassioned eloquence. Mr. Moody's *forte* confessedly consists in a certain kingly authority, by which every man about him is made to do his duty, and is set to work; a sovereignty which every one under its sway admits could only have been acquired by sitting long at the feet of divine wisdom.⁴⁷

After pointing to the impact of the revival on the intellectual and educational centers of Scotland the writer observed, "It was a witness to the power of vital truth when so plain a man could command so learned an audience."⁴⁸ The article closed by narrating some details of conversions of a variety of persons from a school of blind children to a company of skeptics.

In April 1875, Spurgeon followed up by printing the opinion of a friend who was "one of the last men to be carried away by popular enthusiasm." Spurgeon had posed the oft-implied question about whether or not the "work of Messrs. Moody and Sankey would stand the test of time." This friend answered in a very positive way without endorsing every method or every convert. The churches were better and quicker and bolder to plan and execute programs of usefulness. The converts were as sound as those that would come in other times. "The men are worthy of all confidence and love," the trusted writer testified, "and their work leaves a real blessing behind, especially to those who go in for hearty co-operation with them."⁴⁹

47. *Ibid.*, 156.

48. *Ibid.* 157.

49. S&T, April 1875, 190.

Spurgeon so thoroughly approved of the efforts of Moody and Sankey, "those two consecrated evangelists," with "revivals breaking out right and left," that he convinced Passmore and Alabaster to arrange for the rights of printing in Britain a book called *Handbook of Revivals* by Henry Clay Fish, published in Boston in 1874. "The book," Spurgeon related, "gives a great deal of information, meets many objections, and suggests many useful methods." Spurgeon personally supported an evangelist and commended the practice to wealthy Christians that they might "feel great joy in serving the Lord and his church by supporting a picked man." Due to the great success of Moody and Sankey he wanted "to bring both the book and the matter of evangelists under the notice of our readers."⁵⁰

Later in 1875, Spurgeon preached at Bow Hall in London for Moody to an immense crowd and would have done so oftener had the effort not been so exhausting. He expressed his strong approval of the blessed work "which our American brethren have been privileged to carry on." He wished they would stay in one place, rather than trying to be two or three places at once, for he believed that the schedule would weary them and consequently they would lose power, and the schedule also would confuse the public.⁵¹ He did not want to seem disapproving of them however, in any sense, and so again appeared with Moody in Camberwell Hall and testified publicly that "it has given us much pleasure to assist our brethren Messrs. Moody and Sankey at Camberwell Hall, and we would have done far more, only our own enterprises demand our constant attention." Spurgeon said that his heart was very warm toward them for their work's sake. He lamented, and was genuinely embarrassed by, the bigotry

50. S&T, March 1875, 115.

51. S&T, June 1875, 283.

shown by the National Establishment in casting the indignity toward the true-hearted Americans of the epithets of schismatics and ranters. “Was there any need,” he asked, “to grow [*sic*: throw] wrath at two Americans whose teachings are perfectly colourless as to any point in which mere Churchism is involved?” He was certain that true Christians in the establishment felt ashamed at this “wretched bigotry” of the worldlings of the Episcopal body.⁵²

In June, Spurgeon, on the approach of the time when Moody and Sankey would come to London, encouraged his people to do all they could “to make this movement a success.” They should pray, attend, take their friends, neighbors, and children, and do all they could to win souls “as the Holy Spirit shall enable you.” Spurgeon recognized that some might have conscientious objections to aspects of the movement, and he would not ask a person to violate conscience, but he posed the question, “Do you not think that at the bottom of almost all objections raised against this work there is unbelief?” Excitement is present!—why not? The brothers have no remarkable talent! “I am sure,” Spurgeon responded, “the Brothers do not pretend to have any talent whatever, for more unassuming men I never saw in my life, and that is one reason why God blesses them so much!” To the good people that maintained reservation and aloofness, Spurgeon pointed to the testimony of “well-instructed brethren” in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Newcastle “that souls were saved in large numbers, that the Churches were edified and the tone of religious feeling improved.” If we hold back, it will be because “we do not believe in God’s working just now upon a large scale by simple instrumentality.”⁵³ Spurgeon reinforced his views with stronger exhortations:

For my part, I would like to put it to myself thus— Could I justify myself in standing back when I come to my dying bed? Here are two men who have, for months, consecrated themselves to the preaching of the Gospel with no object in the world but the winning of souls for Christ. Baser calumny than to assert that they have a selfish motive never fell from the lip of Satan himself! They have no design nor object to gain but the sole Glory of God! They seek conversions, conversions to Christ, only! And, Brethren, if there were a thousand faults in them, who am I, or who are *you* to judge them and to say we will not help them in such a work and with such motives?⁵⁴

Spurgeon’s evangelical catholicity came to the front in pointing to his agreement with the evangelist in a desire for God’s glory, the salvation of souls, a focus on the atoning blood, regeneration by the power of the Spirit, and the instrumentality of faith. “If we are agreed in this,” he continued to ply his point, “for my part I cannot conceive any excuse for any man’s holding back unless he has so much work of his own to do that he has no time to spare, in which case let him at least bid them God speed!” Failure to help now, could well result in a divinely imposed penalty for unbelief, a look at the Holy Land from afar with no taste of its fruit. Spurgeon did not want his people to think him superstitious, but experience and Scripture convinced him: “If you will not help and will hinder, you will be put aside and, perhaps, your own usefulness will be cut short” and you might live the rest of your life as a “doubting, miserable, carping, critical, faultfinding Christian.”⁵⁵

As the meetings progressed, some ministers raised protest against the possible damage that a simple belief in the message Moody preached

52. S&T, July 1875, 344.

53. MTP, 1875, 334-35.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

would do to England. How would this gospel of faith and conversion affect the influence of Christianity for the higher virtues that it was the duty of the Christian minister to inculcate? Spurgeon was ready with an exposition of “Justification by Faith” and the power for holiness intrinsic to that doctrine. He did not forget to point out the incongruity of a Protestant objecting to the content of Moody’s message. The criticisms implied that “it cannot really do any good to tell men that simply by believing in Jesus Christ they will be saved,” and it may very easily do them serious injury “to imagine that they have undergone a process called *conversion* and are now safe for life.”⁵⁶ In other words, so Spurgeon summarized the objections, “the doctrine of immediate salvation through faith in Christ Jesus is a very dangerous one” that will lead to the deterioration of public morality.

Spurgeon approached the defense from two fronts: first, the messengers that were under such an irrational attack and, second, the holy and virtuous tendency of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. For the messengers, Spurgeon announced, “We are not so dastardly as to allow our friends to stand alone in the front of the battle, to be looked upon as peculiar persons holding strange notions from which the rest of us dissent.”⁵⁷ Like Moody, Spurgeon preached the atoning blood, and had done so all his ministry and considered this as a teaching that had “the general consent of Protestant Christendom.” This was an attack not only on Moody but on the Protestant faith and the Bible itself. “Deny inspiration,” Spurgeon proposed, “and you have ground to stand on; but while you believe the Bible you must believe in justification by faith.”⁵⁸ The objec-

tion to Moody and Sankey, in Spurgeon’s mind, on these grounds amounted to a contest “between the Popish doctrine of *merit* and the Protestant doctrine of *Grace*!”⁵⁹

Spurgeon did not, however, throw all caution to the winds on account of his affection for Moody. One of Spurgeon’s hesitations about the Moody revival efforts was the evidence of genuine conversion through increase of church membership. In the beginning of 1876, Spurgeon was pensive about what seemed to be “a mere surface motion, and not a deep ground-swell of grace.” Crowds were large, professed converts were many, but churches only slightly increased, and the tone of religious feeling had fallen rather than risen (seemingly confirming the demur of some). “The year which has just gone is disappointing: a year of revival which did not revive the churches, and of mass meetings which have left the masses very much as they were.” If a hundredth of what was proclaimed “with a flourish of trumpets” had actually been accomplished, he would have begun the year in a far different frame of mind. Almost peevish, he complained about the great fanfare that had accompanied the revival effort [had he forgotten that he provided some of this fanfare and even some threatening to those that hesitated?] and he warned that “nations are not to be enlightened with a flash, nor cities sensationalized into religion in a month.”⁶⁰

Instead, Spurgeon reminded “those enthusiastic brethren who have had their gas pipes arranged for a general illumination to celebrate the instantaneous victory of the gospel,” that they should regroup, rethink, defer the jubilation and “strip to their shirt-sleeves, and take their places among those who bear the burden and heat of the day.” Their confidence, their condescending con-

56. MTR, 1875, 337.

57. *Ibid.*, 338.

58. *Ibid.*, 338, 339.

59. *Ibid.*, 338.

60. S&T, January 1876, 2.

fidence, had made them ignore the men that labored from Sabbath to Sabbath casting often and just as often bringing back empty nets in preference for “a passing evangelist or two” quite sure that they could accomplish in a few days more than persevering laborers might ever hope for. Spurgeon warned that divine chastisement might follow this deprecation of “tearful sowers” by permitting a “large proportion of tares which certain reapers bring into the garner.”⁶¹

Given a few more months to observe, Spurgeon’s evaluation improved. In November 1876, Spurgeon mentioned that “during the last few months we have met with more converts from Messrs. Moody and Sankey’s meetings than in all the time before.” He concluded that many held back until they felt more secure in such a move, an idea Spurgeon commended. He had expressed disappointment with so few decided conversions at an earlier time and was now happy to be able to report otherwise. “We could not believe,” Spurgeon indicated in defense of Moody, “that such earnest gospel preaching could be without saving result, but we feared that the converts would remain separate, and not unite with the churches.”⁶² Probably, this feared outcome prompted Spurgeon to carry the article by Vernon Charlesworth, “On Objections to Joining the Church,” in April 1876.

Spurgeon did not turn sour toward Moody. During Spurgeon’s trip to Mentone at the close of 1881, Moody and Sankey took the services at the Tabernacle for a Sunday. More than 12,000 people sought to gain entrance to a building whose maximum capacity was 6,000. Spurgeon’s seat-holders left their tickets to others for the evening service, but that did nothing to relieve the pressure of people. “We see clear evidence,”

Spurgeon observed, “that if Messrs. Moody and Sankey again visit London no building will be sufficiently capacious to hold the crowds who will gather to hear them.” Without regret or envy, he added, “May the Lord send a great blessing upon their efforts, and may London, on this occasion, have a double portion of the resulting benefit.”⁶³

Theological Reflection on the Necessity of Caution

Even when Spurgeon gave his most extended defense of Moody and his revival effort, he inserted cautions against the growing phenomenon of quickly transacted decisions apart from the rich matrix of gospel truth, spiritual conviction, repentance, and conscious dependence on divine grace. Spurgeon knew that “there has been a good deal of injudicious and misleading talk, at times, by uninstructed advocates of Free Grace.” Some might have thought that they believed in Christ when they had done nothing of the sort. “I am afraid that some imagine,” Spurgeon cautioned, “that they have only to believe something or other,” or that “they have only to feel a certain singular emotion” and they will go to heaven when they die. Not every faith, however, is saving faith, but “only the faith of God’s elect.” Not every emotion denotes a changed heart, but only “the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁴

One must be wary, therefore, of the possible ease with which deceit might infiltrate the inquiry room. “It is a small matter to go into an inquiry-room,” Spurgeon warned, “and say, ‘I believe.’” That avowal proves nothing, could easily be false, and will be demonstrated as true only if “you will become, from that time forward, a different man from what you were.” A change in heart, soul, conduct, and conversation will provide that un-

61. Ibid.

62. S&T, November 1876, 530.

63. S&T, January 1882, 42.

64. S&T, July 1875, 339.

deniable foundation of fact when objectors look for evidence that justification by faith is a morally justifiable doctrine.

The Sword and the Trowel announced in October 1889 an evangelistic mission at the Tabernacle from Monday November 18 to Sunday November 24, conducted by Fullerton and Smith. It made special note of several special services and requested “the earnest help of all our friends in gathering in the non-church and chapel-goers, and in pointing souls to the Saviour.”⁶⁵ The next few issues of the magazine contained ambivalent signals on the questions of the mass meeting and the employment of the inquiry room. The attendance, singing, kinds of addresses, and sermon texts for each evening were described along with the judgments of observers as to the spiritual impressions. One reported that “Some few held up their hands in token that they desired the prayers of God’s people.” Another spoke of a “flock of enquirers” and gave anecdotes of special impressions made on young children. A large inquirers’ meeting saw many rise in different parts of the building to express a desire to be Christ’s and “in response to the question, whether they would be Christ’s, coupled with many admonitions to avoid rashness, saying, ‘I will, I will.’” A reporter mentioned the special labors of several workers, but Spurgeon did not record his words explaining, “He is unaware of their modesty if he expects us to print what he has written.” One earnest worker noted that many under deep impressions quietly slipped away rather than go into an enquiry room, shared many statements of conviction and hopeful conversion she heard from several that had attended the meetings, and, though she had few cards with specific information, was per-

65. S&T, October 1889, 580.

sueded “that a genuine work of grace was done.” Evidence of weeping on the part of many more convinced this sister, that this would “cheer the heart of our pastor and Mr. Fullerton.”⁶⁶

Other descriptions seem reluctant to highlight the inquiry room. “We are persuaded that only a small proportion of those who were impressed entered the enquiry rooms. Our Tabernacle enquirers have not the ways of others.”⁶⁷ Some become deeply impressed after meditating upon what they have heard, rather than coming under the call to immediate decision. “Very few of them,” Spurgeon noted, are “the hasty sort.” Some who professed Christ had come to clear convictions as much as two years prior to the meeting, but “wished to test their conversion before avowing it.” Spurgeon did not encourage this waiting; to some, such delay might seem wrong, but the overall effect is, Spurgeon observed, “Our members stand the trial of years.” It is better to err on the side of purposeful delay than heedless profession. He knew that the quest for numbers as a standard of success could drive good people to covet a closed and energized environment to elicit apparent conversions. He therefore made it a point to emphasize, “Enquiry-rooms are not much used by us,” but those instructed in the way of the gospel either find gracious friends to lead them to a fuller and purer state of mind or else they “come again to hear the gospel, and the Lord meets with them and removes their difficulties.”⁶⁸

Coincidentally perhaps, but most likely with direct purpose, Spurgeon published in the *Sword* a series of articles on successful evangelism that dwelt on a right combination of urgency and patience, duty and dependence. Robert Shindler, the author of the initial *Downgrade* articles, pub-

66. S&T, January 1890, 44.

67. Ibid., 43.

68. Ibid., 45.

lished pointed discussions on Asahel Nettleton, his methods, impact, and the kind of evangelism he opposed. He contrasted Nettleton to Finney whom he characterized, like Charlesworth years earlier, as one that went “a long way in the direction of” Pelagianism.⁶⁹ Charlesworth’s articles had appeared in 1876, the year after the Moody work in London. Shindler wrote, “The subject of revivals which we have so very briefly referred to, is one that demands consideration; and while we rejoice that in such preachers as Mr. D. L. Moody, and others we could name, there is a more decided prominence given to the person and work of Christ than can be found in Dr. Nettleton’s sermons, we are distinctly of opinion that certain other evangelists would be more useful, and their work more permanent, if they gave a due prominence to ‘repentance towards God,’ and more constantly and thoroughly laid the axe to the root of false hopes, and all those subterfuges which the deceitful heart of man is so full of ingenuity to invent, and so unwilling to renounce.” Present work needs deeper foundations for more sure building.⁷⁰ Six other fascicles of *The Sword and the Trowel* carried anecdotes concerning Nettleton and his discussions of theological issues, including election, duty and special grace, universalism, the need for immediate repentance, the certainty of future punishment, the absolute dependence of sinful man on the mercy of God.

Jonathan Edwards, whom Spurgeon admired immensely, provided another example of doctrine and earnestness in the promotion of revival. Edwards was “the soundest of divines,” Spurgeon averred, even “a standard of theology.” At the same time no one ever sought to bring a congregation to higher intensity of feeling than did Edwards, without forsaking all he knew of the

gospel. “Brethren,” Spurgeon deduced, “we may not trifle with truth under any circumstances.”⁷¹

Near the close of his ministry, Spurgeon saw this thoroughness of understanding, both the way and content of faith omnipresent in the ministries of Whitefield, Edwards, and Nettleton, slipping away in modern evangelistic techniques. The irony of this concern was its practical similarity with the rise of theological liberalism. The danger of these parallel phenomena resided in the converging of two apparently contrasting streams of thought. Infidelity—in its doctrinal criticism of depravity, effectual call, substitutionary atonement, imputation, and the necessity of Spirit-wrought repentance and faith—stood on one hand. On the other stood a reductionistic evangelism in which both techniques and message ignored the biblical content of *the* faith as a necessary precursor to a person’s coming to personal faith in Christ. At his address in 1890 at the Annual Conference of the Pastors’ College (reorganized in 1888 to exclude graduates that had compromised on issues of the Downgrade Controversy), Spurgeon addressed, in conjunction with other threats to genuine conversion, both these movements, a “wide range of matters” as he put it, in their destructive minimization of doctrine. The meetings at the Tabernacle that had employed the inquirer’s room to such a large extent had recently ended, and he was still involved in the depressing struggle of the Downgrade. Spurgeon was obviously thinking through the totality of his lifetime of warfare for the truth, in light of his immediate experiences.

Theological latitudinarians deny the expiatory sacrifice of Christ and consider a substitutionary atonement “immoral.” One cannot do this without at the same time murdering the doctrine of

69. *Ibid.*, 24.

70. *Ibid.*, 25.

71. S&T, July 1886, 401.

justification by faith. Spurgeon, therefore, insisted that evangelistic preaching must be filled with the theology of substitution. He could preach such an atonement *con amore* and did not feel constricted at all in his commitment to old Puritan thought and the powerful influence of John Calvin. Others that speak of “harsh dogmas” and seek to avoid the “tyranny of a certain iron system,” see Spurgeon and his kind as “cribbed, cabined, and confined” by their theology—they suppose that John Calvin rides him “like a night-mare, and we lead dogs’ lives under his lash.” Such accusers know little of the joy that Spurgeon found in preaching such wonderful truths, and while regarding themselves as free, were true slaves and had never experienced the true joy and freedom of redemption. They also set aside the words of Christ as an infallible teacher. “I do not understand,” Spurgeon confessed, “that loyalty to Christ which is accompanied by indifference to his words.” One cannot respect Christ’s person if he cares not for his words, nor can one have Christ’s life without his truth. The source of modern thought, Spurgeon contended, is an unregenerate heart, and they are “downgrade” in doctrine because “they were never put on the up-grade by the renewal of their minds.”⁷²

The effects of true theology fail not only by the direct denial of its veracity, but may just as easily be harmed by substituting human contrivances for biblical truth in a misguided effort to do good. “Things are allowed to be said and done at revivals which nobody could defend.” Spurgeon lamented. “Do you notice,” apparently pointing to recent experience, “at the present moment the way the gospel is put?” While avoiding a criticism of anyone in particular, he characterized the method as employing the exhortation, “Give your

heart to Christ.” While some good may reside in the exhortation, it should not substitute for the gospel admonition, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”⁷³

If we think that our substitutes do more good or reap larger results than the gospel way, we will create serious difficulties and engender a destructive enmity within the church. “I have known brethren tell sinners a great many falsehoods with the view of saving them.”⁷⁴ He did not want one creed for the ministers’ meeting and another for the enquiry room. Salvation is not promoted by the suppression of truth. “I can be a revivalist,” Spurgeon affirmed, “and believe in election, the substitutionary sacrifice, and the work of the Holy Ghost.” Spurgeon urged his preacher boys to let their zeal for conversions “be directed by a clear knowledge of the truth of God, for so it will work to the surest purpose.”⁷⁵

The same outlook rang through Spurgeon’s admonitions in *The Soul Winner*. “I hold that I have no right to state false doctrines, even if I knew it would save a soul. The supposition is, of course, absurd; but it makes you see what I mean.” His duty made him press truth, not falsehood, upon men, and he could not be excused, under any pretence, in palming a lie upon the people. To keep back any part of the gospel is neither right nor “the true method for saving men.” All doctrine is saving truth. “If you hold Calvinistic doctrine, as I hope you do, do not stutter about it, nor stammer over it, but speak it out.” The lack of a full-orbed gospel is behind the evanescence of many so-called revivals.⁷⁶

Our tampering produces false theology, false ideas of Christianity, tolerates disobedience to

72. S&T, June 1890, 263.

73. *Ibid.*, 263-64.

74. S&T, August 1886, 400. “Alexander and Bucephalus.”

75. *Ibid.*, 401.

76. *The Soul Winner*, 264.

the ordinances, and makes supposed believers impatient with calls to holiness. One may be sure, however, that Christ will not be trifled with, will not have “his words shuffled like a deck of cards,” will be “Lord as well as Saviour” or will not be Savior. A supposed assurance of forensic justification “apart from a spiritual work within the soul—a change of heart, and a renewal of mind” does not yield a future of heaven.⁷⁷

A Cautious Conclusion

The dangers he had always warned against in the resurgence of sacramentalism among Anglicans, as well as their ever-present doctrine of infant baptismal regeneration, were now complicated by insidious developments among evangelicals. His observations on modern revival technique hovered around a fear that the gospel might be in danger in the house of its ostensible friends from an incipient sacramentalism.

Let me say very softly and whisperingly, that there are little things among ourselves which must be carefully looked after, or we shall have a leaven of ritualism and priesthood working in our measures of meal. In our revival services, it might be as well to vary our procedure. Sometimes shut up that inquiry room. I have my fears about that institution if it be used in permanence, and as an inevitable part of the procedure. It may be a very wise thing to invite persons who are under concern of soul to come apart from the rest, and have conversation with godly people; but if you should

ever see that a notion is fashioning itself that there is something to be got in the private room which is not to be had at once in the assembly, or that God is more at that penitent form than elsewhere, aim a blow at that notion at once. We must not come back by a rapid march to the old way of altars and confessionals, and have Romish trumpery restored in a coarser form. If we make men think that conversation with ourselves or with our helpers is essential to their faith in Christ, we are taking the direct line for priestcraft.⁷⁸

Reflecting on the regularity of conversions in his preaching services, combined with the care to avoid such “priestcraft,” Spurgeon observed with cautious satisfaction, “Those converted under our ministry are seldom of the ‘after-meeting kind,’ excited, and over-persuaded.” Instead, they would go their way, think the matter over, and if the true work of the Spirit was present, profess their faith when “they have tried themselves, and tested their conversion.”⁷⁹ Spurgeon’s evangelism was a natural outgrowth of his biblical theology. His expressions of the freeness of salvation for all that desired it and would believe, his exhortations of the urgent and universal necessity of repentance toward God and faith in Christ, his enforcement of the full panel of his theological commitments in making these appeals, and his warnings against false doctrine, humanly-contrived faith, and potentially deceitful measures were all natural manifestations of a pastor committed to living by revealed truth.

77. S&T, June 1890, 265.

78. *Ibid.*, 262.

79. S&T, October 1883, 562.