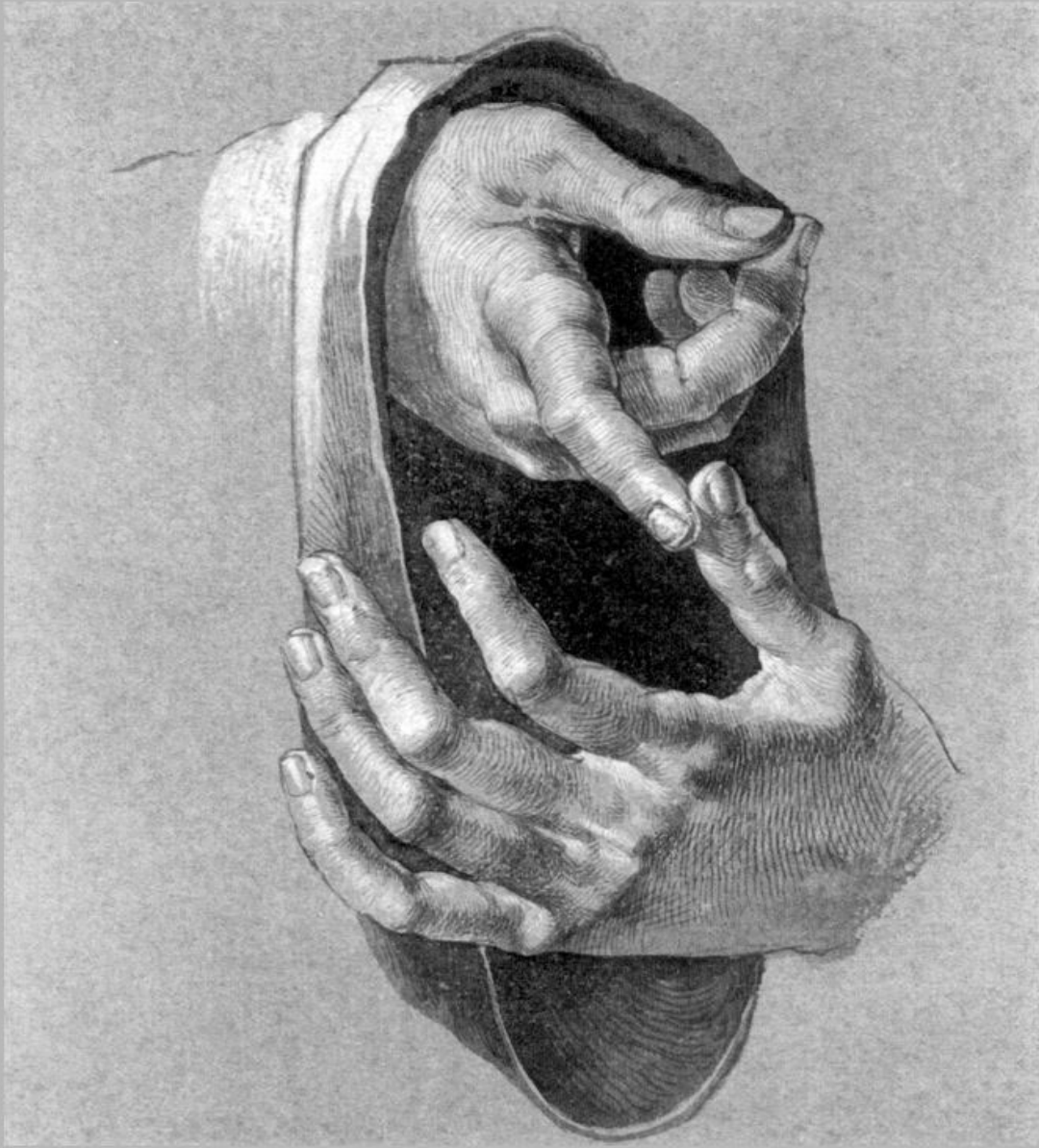


HENRY DRUMMOND



**THE NEW
EVANGELISM**

The New Evangelism

... and other papers

Henry Drummond

Contents:

The New Evangelism

The New Evangelism: and its Relation to Cardinal Doctrines

The Method of the New Theology, and some of its Applications

Survival of the Fittest

The Third Kingdom

The Problem of Foreign Missions

The Contribution of Science to Christianity

Spiritual Diagnosis

*The New Evangelism, H. Drummond
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Germany*

ISBN: 9783849644178

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The New Evangelism

The New Evangelism: and its Relation to Cardinal Doctrines

Paper read to Free Church Theological Society, Glasgow.

IT is no small heroism in these times to deal with anything new. But this is a theological society; and I do not need to ask the protection of that name while I move for a little among lines of thought which may seem to verge on danger. One does not need to apologize for any inquiry made in a formative school of theology such as this; for in this atmosphere a seeker after truth is compelled to take up another than that provincial standpoint which elsewhere he is committed to.

The question you will naturally ask at the outset is, What is the new Evangelism? Now that is a question that I cannot answer. I do not know what the new Evangelism is, and it is because I do not know that I write this paper. I write because I ought to know, and am trying to know. Many here, and all the most earnest minds of our Church, are anxiously asking this question, and each who has once

asked it feels it to be one of the chief objects of his life to answer it.

Preachers, finding that the things which stirred men's minds two centuries ago fail to do so now are compelled to ask themselves what this means. Do we need a new Evangelism, and if so, what? By the word Evangelism I do not mean to include merely, or even particularly, evangelistic work, evangelistic meetings, or what is comprehended under the general head of revivalism. I mean the methods of presenting Christian truth to men's minds in any form. By the new Evangelism, so far as mere definition is concerned, is meant the particular substance and form of evangel which is adapted to the present state of men's minds. The new Evangelism, in a word, is the Gospel for the Age. To notice the outcry against the mere mention of a Gospel for the Age is unnecessary here. What do we want with a new Gospel? Can the Gospel ever be old? might be asked elsewhere, for this is always cast in one's teeth when he raises those questions, as if by speaking of a new Evangelism he was depreciating the old Gospel. Of course we do not want a new evangel, we state that out at once; but an Evangelism is a different thing, and we do want that; we want that at the present hour, almost above any reform of our time.

I. The need of a new Evangelism.

There are two general considerations which seem to me to prove the need of a new Evangelism.

The first is the threatened decline of vital religion under present methods of preaching. If the Gospel be the power of God unto salvation, we are entitled to believe that wherever it is presented to men's minds it will influence and impress them. If men are not influenced or impressed

under preaching, the only alternatives are, either that the Gospel in substance is not the power of God unto salvation, or that the Gospel in form is not presented to them so as to reach them. Either the Gospel cannot save them, or the Gospel does not reach them. We, as Christians, are shut up to the latter. The Gospel is not reaching men. There are hundreds of churches where the Gospel is not reaching men. Every third minister one meets confesses that. The Church, as a whole, admits, for instance, that she is rapidly losing hold of young men as a class. What does that mean? It really means that the Gospel, as presented to them, has ceased to be a gospel; it is neither good nor new. It means that the active thinkers of a congregation, the most hopeful and eager, are failing to find anything there to meet their case. It is not simply that many of them object to religion naturally, which will always be the case, but that those who are looking for a religion do not find it. Many of ourselves know this by our own experience. How long did we not search; on what diverse ministries did we not wait; to what endless volumes did we not turn; before finding a message which our faith could grasp or conscience rest on, and at the same time our intelligence respect? "I like Christianity," said Hallam, the subject of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," "because it fits into all the folds of one's nature." How long was it before we found a form of Christianity which fitted into any of the folds of our nature? From the time they were Sabbath-school scholars onwards, it is the experience of thousands of young men that they find only misfit after misfit in the theological clothes in which they were asked to disguise themselves. If this has been the experience of men who were not simply passive (men who were not simply waiting until religion would, some day or somehow, seize hold of them), but who were searching for religion, what substance is there in the present form of it to captivate the ordinary run of men? Our present Evangelism, as mere matter of fact, is not meeting the wants of the age.

In 1847 Dr. Chalmers found--and the statistics almost paralyzed him--that there were 30,000 people in Glasgow who did not go to church. Since then the Free Church has risen; Baptists, Independents, Morisonians, and Wesleyans, have poured their new life into the city. The most complete evangelistic organization in the kingdom, the Christian Union, has been at work. Have Chalmers' 30,000 been sensibly reduced? They have been increased exactly fivefold--out of all proportion to the increase of the population. Excluding 100,000 Roman Catholics, there are at present 150,000 non-church-goers in the city. The aspect of affairs in the English towns is notoriously worse. To take a single case. The population of Sheffield is 240,000. It has 60 churches. Allowing 1,000 sitters to each church there would only be accommodation for 60,000 people; not only, therefore, do 180,000 not go to church, but there is no accommodation for them if they were willing. What is the cause of this decline in vital religion? Why is the Gospel not reaching the Age? Because it is not the Gospel for the Age. It is the Gospel for a former Age. Because, in the form of it as used, the Gospel is neither good nor new. It does not fit into all the folds of men's being. It is not in itself bad--but it is a bad fit.

The second general consideration is based, not on the effects of Evangelism, but on its nature. The very nature of truth demands from time to time a new Evangelism. At the opening of this college, we heard (Prof. Bruce's introductory lecture) that a Scotch divine at the Presbyterian Council in Philadelphia found himself rebuked for using the phrase, "Progress in Theology." Theology, he was eloquently reminded, was behind us. He was pointed to the Standards of his Church. There is no more unfortunate word in our Church's vocabulary than "Standard." A standard is a thing that stands. Theology is a thing that

moves. There must be progress in everything, and more in theology than in anything, for the content of theology is larger and more expansive than the content of anything else. I do not say we are to give up the idea involved in the word Standard. We certainly never can. But standards must move. The sole condition of having them with us at any particular place or time is that they should move with us according to place or time. The word Standard, as applied to theology, is in some respects an unfortunate term. Buffon's Natural History was a standard. Linnaeus' Vegetable System was a standard. But they are not standards now. They were places for the mind of Science to rest on in its onward sweep through the centuries; but the perches are not needed there now, and they are vacant. These books stand like deserted inns on the roadside which gave hearty meals and shelter in their day, but which the race (with no disrespect to Linnaeus and Buffon) has long since passed. When the English fought Waterloo, they did not leave their standard at Bannockburn--they brought it up to Quatre Bras; and if our standard was made for Holland, or Rome, or Geneva, we must bring it up to Germany, and Paris, and the Highlands. But there is something deeper than progress in theology; there is progress in truth itself. "Truth is the daughter of Time." It is surely unnecessary to insist on this, for it is true of all kinds of truth, in the natural as well as the spiritual sphere. Nature is all before our eyes, as truth in the Bible is all before our eyes. But we do not see it all; every day we are seeing more. The firmament was not all mapped by astronomers at once. Since Calvin's time many a new star has been discovered. The stars were there before. Space was there before, but a new order is seen in it, new material for thought, new systems, especially a new perspective. To take another illustration: when we were children we could not understand how, if God made the world, He had made it so ugly; why everything in nature was brown, or dun, or

green, and grey. Why was the sky not scarlet like the inside of our trumpet, or a good hearty blue, with unicorns on it like our drum? We thought, as we looked at the lichens and washed-out azure, that, by some oversight, God had forgotten to put the colour in. We know now why God did not put the colour in. We know that Nature wears the colour of the future. It is painted for the highest art. Vermilion is for the savage, blue with unicorns for the child, the neutral tints for the world's maturity--the developed taste. The colour was in Nature all along, but the world's eye was not full grown. The Greeks had almost no colour-sense at all; and if Mr. Ruskin sees what Homer did not see, it is not because it was not to be seen, but that the faculty was not developed.

The higher art has grown; it sees in the colouring of Nature a beauty which must increase till the evolution of mind and eye pronounces and sees all perfect. It is so with Truth; the truth-sense, like the colour-sense, grows. Truth has her vermilion, and her high art olives and sage-greens. "When Solon was asked," says Plutarch, "if he had given the Athenians the best possible laws, he answered that they were as good as the people could then receive." When we were given our system of truth, it was as good as the people could receive--perhaps as good as their teachers could give. But we can receive more now; our taste demands sage-green, and we cannot live on vermilion. If it be objected that this argument renders the Bible itself effete, the answer is that the Bible is not a system. It is the firmament; its truth is without form, therefore without limit. It is a book of such boundless elasticity that the furthest growth of the truth-sense can never find its response outgrown. And it is in this elasticity that one finds a sanction for a new theology to be the basis of a new Evangelism. It encourages a new theology; the prospect and possibility of that is written in every epigram and

paradox, in the absence of anything propositional or bound. The view we are to take, therefore, of the old theologies is not that they are false, but simply that they are old. Those who framed them did in their time just what we want to do in ours. The Reformation did not profess to create new truth; it was not a re-formation, but simply a restoration--a restoration of the first theology of the New Testament, as much of it as could then be seen. At the time, probably, it was a restoration, and had all the strength and grandeur of the first theology, with all its vividness and life. Probably it was suited to the wants of the time, and moved the hearts of preacher and people.

We, too, can still preach it, but to some of us it has a hollow sound. If we would confess the honest truth, our words for it are rather those of respect than enthusiasm; we read it, hear it, study it, and preach it, but cannot honestly say that it kindles or moves us. When we wish to be kindled or moved, driven perhaps to prove whether we are capable of being kindled or moved, we leave the restoration and go back to that which was restored.

Restoration can only retain its hold vitally and powerfully for a limited time. It is essentially an accommodation for a certain age. If that age has changed, it no longer accommodates me, it incommodes me. What was the new theology of the seventeenth century is the theology of the nineteenth century only on one condition--that the age has not grown. If it has, in the nature of things it no longer accommodates me. It is not bad, simply a bad fit. The then new theology, the very adaptation possibly that was needed, becomes now old doctrine, a mere old skull, an old skull with the juices dry. This is the source of what is called dry preaching. It is a once glorious truth disenchanting by time into a faded, juiceless form.

Such then is the general effect of Time on Truth. As the serpent periodically casts its skin, so Truth. The number of times it has cast its skin marks the number of stages in its forward growth. Many of the shelves of our theological libraries are simply museums of the cast skin of Truth. The living organism has glided out of them to seek a roomier vestment. This is no disrespect, I repeat again, to the old theology. For the present vestiture in turn must take its place on the shelf. Nor does it imply that no beauty exists there, nor that to many some of the old doctrines may not prove even to-day a fountain of life. They do do so. Many volumes of theology have never been outgrown; many of the Puritans, for instance, have not only never been outgrown, but it is difficult to conceive how they can be. To take again the analogy from colour. The sage-green does not necessarily *destroy* the vermilion, though it renders many of its combinations old-fashioned. Some forms of truth in like manner *may* have reached their ultimate expression, certainly they may, though this is not so clear as that some have not. To sum up, the demand for a new theology, therefore, as the basis of a new Evangelism is founded upon the nature of Truth. It is not caprice, nor love of what is new. It is the necessity for what is new. It is in the nature of things.

I have next to bring some more specific charges against the old theology--the old theology, that is to say, as represented in the ordinary preaching of the day. And lest I should be accused of caricaturing the doctrines in question, let me say that the rendering which follows represents the impression made as matter of fact by these doctrines upon myself. I do not implicate the whole Evangelism, nor do I speak directly for any one else; but I cannot more honestly illustrate the teaching of what was to me the current Evangelism--the pabulum, namely, supplied by the ordinary country pulpit, by the evangelist's address, by the Sabbath-

school teacher, and in a limited sense by religious books and tracts--than by stating the sort of religious ideas which these fostered in myself. For convenience I select three as samples, taking them in theological order. I limit myself likewise to a very few sentences with regard to each, more particularly (1) as to the theological conception and (2) as to the ethical effect.

(1) THE CONCEPTION OF GOD as fostered by the old Evangelism.

The chief characteristic of the conception of God to me was its want of characteristic. The figure was too vague for any practical purpose. It was not a character. One could form no intelligent figure of God, for so far as it could be formed it was the God of the Old Testament. The Incarnation, *i.e.*, contributed nothing. The Old Testament believer, I need not remind you, was very helpless as to a personal God. Each man, practically, had to make an image of God for himself. He was given a name, and a set of qualities--Holiness, Justice, Wisdom, and others, and out of this he had to make God. The consequence was that the great majority made it wrong, and worshipped they knew not what. One great purpose of the Incarnation was to change all this. It is to give us a new, defined, intelligible Figure of God. "The Son of God is come." said John, who saw most fully the meaning of the Word made Flesh--"The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding *that we may know him.*"

The old Evangelism had little benefit here from the incarnation in this respect. It never got this understanding. God remained unchristianized in it. The Figure came no nearer. God remained Jehovah, the I AM that I AM. He was not God in Christ, God made intelligible by Christ, God made lovable by Christ, but God Eternal, Unchangeable, Invisible, therefore Unknowable; and in the nature of this

cloud-God, the outstanding element was Vengeance -- Anger, the ethical effect of which is obvious. A man's whole religion depends on his conception of God, so much so that to give a man religion in many cases is simply to correct his conception of God. But if man's natural conception of God, which is of a Being or of a Force opposed to him, a Being to be appeased, be not corrected, his religion will be a religion of Fear. God therefore was a God to be feared, an uncomfortable presence about one's life. He was always in court, either actually sitting in judgment or collecting material for the next case. He was the haunting presence of a great Recorder,

"Who was writing now the story

Of what little children do."

The reiteration that God was Love did nothing to dispel this terrible illusion. We cannot love God because we are told, for Love is not made to order. We can *believe* God's love, but believing love is like *looking at* heat. We cannot respond to it. To excite love, we need a person, not a doctrine--a Father, not a deity. To be changed into the same image we must look at the glory of God, not *in se*, but in the face of Jesus. The old Evangelism was defective in not exhibiting God in the face of Jesus. It exhibited God in the nailed hands of Jesus; this is an aspect of God, an essential aspect, but not *God*. Next--

(2) THE CONCEPTION OF CHRIST.

If the conception of God was vague, the conception of Christ was worse. He was a theological person. His function was to adjust matters between the hostile kingdoms of heaven and earth.

I do not acquit myself of blame here, and I hope no one else has an experience so shocking, but until well on in my college course, and after hearing hundreds of sermons and addresses on the Person and Work of Christ, the ruling idea left in my mind was that Christ was a mere convenience. He was the second person in the Trinity, existing for the sake of some logical or theological necessity, a doctrinal convenience. He was the creation of theology, and His function was purely utilitarian. This might have been theological, but it was not religious. Religion said, "*Christ our Life.*" Theology said, "*Christ our Logic.*"

This is a painful confession, but it is far more painful to think of its basis. It is impossible to believe that in these sermons I was not presented with the true aspects of Christ's life and character. But it is also almost impossible to believe that these were insisted on with anything like the same frequency or reality as the aspect I have named. What moves an attentive mind in a sermon is its residual truth, not the complementary passages, not the squarings with other doctrines, but that truth on which the whole theme is strung, the vertebral column which, though hid, is the true pillar of the rest. Now the residuum to me--and it is surprising how unerringly this betrays itself and stands nakedly out from all mere words--was always this. Whatever other points were thrown in, whatever devout expressions were mixed with it, whatever appeals to the affections, this was the prominent half-truth, and therefore whole error.

This is the explanation, I think, of the fact, now pretty well acknowledged, that the old theology made almost nothing of the humanity of Christ. In such a body of divinity clearly there was little room for so mundane a thing as humanity. The arrangements in which Christ played a part were looked at almost exclusively from the Divine and cosmical

standpoint. The question was, how God could forgive sin, and yet justify the sinner; how God could do this and that, as if we had anything to do with it. Such a divinity necessarily wanted humanity, the humanity of man as well as the humanity of Christ. Man was a cypher, the mere theological unit, the x of doctrine (his character, his aims, his achievements, his influence, were neither here nor there) and an unknown quantity, one of the parties in the proposition. And it was not necessary for this theological unit to have a humanitarian Christ, except as to the mere identity of flesh, and this was requisite only to complete the theological proposition.

The emphasis on the humanity of Christ, which, happily, has now crept into our best teaching, marks more distinctly perhaps than anything else the dawn of the new Evangelism. Still, it must be confessed that in influential quarters the revival of this doctrine is viewed even yet with no inconsiderable alarm. The newer Lives of Christ, for instance, in which the humanity is conspicuously developed, are constantly assailed as Unitarian, and within the last fortnight a Life of Christ has been given to the world, from the preface to which one can almost gather that the author's object is to provide an antidote to the erroneous tendencies of these works.

Men fail to see that it was God Himself who conceived this wonderful idea of a humanitarian Christ. When God does anything, He never does it by halves. When He made the Word flesh, when He made Jesus a Man, He made a *Man*, and it is just because He carried out His idea so perfectly that Unitarianism is possible. When we say Man, then let us mean Man. It is a mistaken scruple even to minimize His Humanity. In our zeal for the doctrines of the Atonement we are really robbing God of His doctrine of the Incarnation.