

COME ON IN -- GO ON OUT

Dr. John Allan Lavender

2 Cor.3:15; 2 Tim.2:15

I pondered a long time over the message of the morning searching for the best way to deal with so important a subject as the place of Sunday School in the lives of Christians today. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced my major emphasis should be directed toward the adults in our congregation. No one seems to question the value of Sunday School training for children. As a matter of fact, some of the most religiously calloused parents, those who feel the church has absolutely nothing to offer them personally, are often the ones who are most deeply dedicated to the task of seeing that their children are in Sunday School. Apparently, no one wants to raise a religious illiterate. A domesticated heathen. And so, for the most part, parents see to it that during their early years at least their children are given the benefit of whatever religious training the Sunday School can impart in the one hour a week allotted to it.

Therefore, because the value of Sunday School training for children is an accepted fact, I speak this morning to adults with the hope and prayer that through this simple presentation you may be stimulated to make the educational facilities of our church a vital part of your life as well as the lives of your children.

Now, when Jesus was on earth dealing with people, He used two words to sum up the Christian experience. The first of these was ACome.@ On the lips of Jesus, this word expressed the urgent desire, the initial longing, the primary concern of His soul that all people might come to that abundant life He was prepared to give.

ACome unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden..@(Matt.11:28).

AHim that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out..@(John 6:37).

The second word He used to sum up the Christian experience was Ago.@ Here was a divine

command to get busy at the job of spreading the gospel to the four corners of the earth.

Here was an imperative. It carried with it all the urgency and authority of an Imperial Directive, which in reality it was. For when we become Christians we are enlisted in a great fighting team whose task it is to wage ceaseless, unending war upon the forces of evil which are trying to overcome the world.

A Go into all the world@ (Mark 16:15).

A Go make disciples@ (Matt. 28:19).

A Go and sin no more@ (John 8:11).

Thus, two words sum up the Christian experience. The first is the Savior's invitation: A come.@ The second is the saint's obligation: A go.@ And, as the representative of Christ on earth, the church comes to the world of this day with the same two words. First of all it says --

Come On In

Come On In To a Source of Intellectual Stimulation.

When Christ redeems you, He wants to redeem all of you. Not just your soul, but your brain as well. That may come as a shock to some of you. Apparently, it is the general impression of people who know nothing about the Christian experience that when you become a member of the church, you are expected to park your brain outside, stop thinking for yourself, and turn into a kind of intellectual parakeet who simply parrots the ecclesiastical mumbo-jumbo you are taught to say.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Oh, there are groups scattered here and there who practice that kind of A closed shop@ religion. They consider themselves to hold a monopoly on the knowledge of God and refuse to dispense even the slightest hope of heaven to anyone who doesn't happen to match their particular denominational blood type.

If you had been so unfortunate as to associate yourself with one of them, you would have

forfeited your right to think. You would have been added to the row upon row of neatly uniform intellectual automatons who already belong and who dutifully go through the motions prescribed for them.

But this kind of legalistic religion is not to be found in the New Testament. Nor, is it taught in this church. It is a human invention and, as such, should be shunned like a plague. The gospel of Jesus Christ not only encourages investigation, it demands it! You cannot be a successful Christian unless you are willing to give God your total self. You must be committed intellectually as well as physically and spiritually. And it's your church's job to help you.

One of the most recent developments being advocated by many churches today is the A study cell@ movement. Three or four couples, or in the case of single, six or eight individuals meet in private for an evening of digging into the bible on their own. As they progress, they tackle such things as systematic theology or some other course of study which seems challenging to them. This is something your leaders and I have been discussing and working toward. In the not too distant future we hope to have a number of these study cells in our church.

In the meantime, there is the ready-made source of intellectual stimulation provided by our Sunday School. Here, under the guidance of consecrated and competent teachers, you can learn more about this text book of Christianity, the Bible. Here too, you can discuss such things as life, death, heaven, hell. You can begin to build a A faith in long trousers@ in which you lay aside the A knee britches@ of prejudice, opinion and vague generalities to put on the adult apparel of firm conviction based upon an informed understanding of God's word. Your church also says to you today B

Come On In and Face The Challenge of Ethical Development

The other day I came across this mind-stopping statement: A The worst thing that could happen to our world would be for our children to grow up to be just like us!@

This arresting statement was not spoken by an impatient parent or a cranky preacher. It came from the lips of a North Carolina supervisor of public school teachers to a conference of public school teachers held last year in Virginia. There is logic to his statement. If the children of today are the same tomorrow as we are today, what hope is there for a better world? The same hatreds, prejudices, and intolerances will produce the same kind of society we have today with its wars, political corruption and moral breakdown.

Dr. G. Brock Chrisholm, director of the World Health Organization, likewise has said: AIf the next generation grows up with the same values we have, they will destroy the human race.@

Chuck Templeton, the famous Evangelist, put it this way: AWe will never have a better world unless we have better people in it.@

I think you heard me in this very pulpit accentuate the almost universal conviction that there will never be a new generation tomorrow unless we have a regeneration today.

All of these statements coming from people with widely differing backgrounds and vocations are simply pressing home the fact that the only hope for tomorrow's world is better children today. And that is only accomplished by following the advice of a very wise man who said:

ATrain up a child in a way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it@ (Proverbs 22:6).

Supplying the ethical fabric with which to build better people and thus a better world is the Sunday School's job. But it does not stop with children. The Sunday Church School does not subscribe to the philosophy that AYou can't teach old dogs new tricks.@ And neither do I.

I have seen too many adults changed for the better to have any doubt about what Christ can do with any life which is turned over to Him. And one of the reasons every adult Christian should be a member of, and active in, the Sunday Church School is that through intellectual stimulation

we are challenged to grow ethically and morally so we may be used of God to lay foundation stones upon which the future generation may build that better world of which we all dream. And then the Sunday School says to the people it wishes to serve --

Come On In and Get Encouragement to Make Spiritual Advancement

Last Wednesday evening we had, as our book of the week, Paul's letter to the Philippians. Those of you who were here will remember its primary message is a loving warning to avoid static spirituality. We defined static spirituality as that state in which having become a Christian, one makes some degree of spiritual growth and then, after reaching a plateau, remains static, unchanging, and thus never realizes his or her full potential as a Christian.

This is a dangerous state. As someone has said, "The good is often the enemy of the best." This was never more true than in the realm of Christian growth. And the great delight of every pastor's heart is to see people put off the temptation to be satisfied with giving anything less than their utmost for His highest.

Intellectual stimulation, ethical development and spiritual advancement are sisters. They are inter-related and it's the function of the Sunday School to see that the new babes in Christ, as well as the more mature Christians, advance in all three of these areas of life: Mentally, morally and spiritually. To that end, it says to the world about it, A Come On In. But The church has a second word for our present generation. It is --

Go On Out

Because you have Come On In to a source of intellectual stimulation, you are able to

Go On Out With a Fresh and Vital Understanding of Your Faith.

That is to say, you are equipped with a reason for the hope which is within you. Last week I picked up a copy of the Saturday Review, a weekly magazine digest of the latest books to which I subscribe because it helps me to stay abreast of current literature. In this particular issue, the

editorial by Norman Cousins was titled School for Sadists. It's about a new Air Force training program which is being carried out at Fort Stead, Nevada. Here the trainees are not merely instructed about brain washing, they are brain washed. They are not merely told they can expect brutal treatment, they are given brutal treatment in almost unbelievable measure.

The idea is to prove to them that life can be cheap. So they are subjected to death marches, electric shock treatments and rotten food. The Air Force is operating under the monstrous fallacy that by conditioning their people in the art of brain washing, they will be able to withstand any treatment an unscrupulous enemy might devise. This is about as stupid a program as I have ever heard of. It makes about as much sense as if they were to line every recruit up before a firing squad to be shot just so they would be in condition to handle the bullets some enemy would aim at them.

If our boys are going to be asked to fight and, perhaps even die for their country, what they want and need is a clear understanding of what they are fighting and dying for. The common complaint of those who had been captured in the Korean conflict was that they did not know enough about their own country to answer the Communist critics of it.

Our warriors must be saturated with knowledge of America and what she stands for. Only then will they have the moral fiber to withstand the pain of conflict and the torture of the enemy.

If that be true, and with all my soul I believe it is, how much more is it true in the life of a Christian. Every day you, as a Christian, are confronted with the brain washing techniques of a materialistic, secularistic, God-less society. You will be unable to withstand its blandishments unless you know what you believe and why. You must be ready with a reason for the hope which is within you. And through intellectual stimulation, the Sunday School is able to help you understand your faith and thus equip you to Go On Out victoriously into the world. Again, the Sunday School says

Go On Out to Translate Your Christian Ethic into Daily Activity

In other words, as James 1:23 declares, you are challenged to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only. This is the only way we will finally win the world. For those who are outside the church will never be reached by preaching. They are immune to that. But they will be won by the example of your life. When they see a practical application of Christ's teachings and principles in your daily dealings Christianity begins to become real to them. And so, as you Come On In to face the challenge of ethical development, the Sunday School encourages you to Go On Out and translate that Christian ethic into daily activity. And then finally, if you will make Sunday School a vital and regular part of your life, you will --

Go On Out With a Continuous Determination to Go Deeper with Your God.

And may I emphasize the word Acontinuous@ as over against Acontinual.@ Something continual is like a series of dashes. Something continuous is like an unbroken line. Many of us make whatever progress we make in the Christian life by fits and starts. It is spasmodic. Sometimes there are long intervals between strides. One reason is that the stimuli which serves to prod us onward and upward is not administered regularly enough. That, again, is a reason for making the Sunday School a weekly habit. It provides stimuli necessary to make spiritual advancement and thus you are given continuous--unbroken--determination to go deeper with your God.

These, then, are some of the reasons why we are engaging in a Year of Baptist Achievement. A year of concentrated effort to make our Sunday School the very best. This is also why approximately 140 of our people are dedicating a week of their time to go out into the homes of our constituency with the message of what the church school can mean to them. This will not be a calling program for money, but it is every bit as important. We want the people of Morgan Park to know we have something worth sharing and, if they will let us, we are willing and anxious to share it with them. Therefore, we covet your prayers and we ask your cooperation. We plead your acceptance of our Sunday School's invitation Come On In to Go On Out. And tell me, is there any one of us, no matter how mature, who ever outgrows the need for that?