



**LIFESTYLE EVANGELISM: A CLARION CALL THROUGH THE
INTERPRETATION OF THE HYMN
“LET OTHERS SEE JESUS IN YOU”**

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ABSTRACT

One of the reasons Christian evangelism suffers setback today is the disappointment that marvels people of the world when they encounter professing Christians with characters that are evil or to lightly say is immoral. This makes some would be converts see the person witnessing as not better than they in anyway. It is known that many have be drawn to Christ through a life that conforms to Biblical injunctions. Besides Paul the apostles urges the believers to be imitators of him as He imitates Christ. (1 Cor. 11:1) In this paper, this researcher through a hymnological analysis and interpretation of the Hymn “Let Others See Jesus in You” by B.B McKinney (1886-1952) draws the attention of the contemporary Christian to the importance of living a Christ-like life with evangelistic intentions. He explored the mind of the lyricist as implied through the hymn text descriptively and theologically to come up with the expectation of the Lyricist and consequently of God about the life of a believer as a Christian witness. He concludes with a four-point expected responses from the believer which are need to abhor evil as good representatives of Christ, to be Witnesses of Christ, be joyful in hope of salvation and to display boldness and consistency in gospel proclamation.

INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges that has confronted the spread of Christianity in contemporary time is the disappointing references which Christians are equally guilty of in the work place, market place and even the home. In the society, there is hardly any kind of societal ill or even crime, which unbelievers are guilty of in which Christians are not equally numbered. Worse still is that some pastors are even guilty. This has contributed a lot of hindrances to the gospel work which the savior has committed unto us when he said:

“¹⁹therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20).

The Lifestyle of the christian is one of the several effective methods of evangelism. A very critical issue with this method is that its failure has negative effects on the other methods as prospective converts may simply remain adamant due to unpleasant attitudes of professing Christians they know. This paper considers this mode of evangelism in light of the message of B.B.McKinney to Christians to be light in the world and be witnesses by making their Christ-like attitudes visible to everyone they come in contact with. The hymn text used as a tool is B.B. McKinney's "Let Others See Jesus in You" as found in the 1991 edition of the Baptist Hymnal.

KEYWORDS AND DEFINITIONS

Evangelism: within the context of this paper, is "the confrontation of the individual with the proclamation of God's love, our sin and estrangement from God and salvation provided through Christ" (Hustad, 1993, 378)

Lifestyle Evangelism: is the process through which a person bears effective testimony in the normal context of everyday life, through the normal and casual relationships in which they are involved, and in a manner and at a level that conforms to the needs and interests of the hearers (Moore, 1987, 132).

Hymn: Miller (1969,13) quoting the Hymn Society of America defines Christian Hymn as a lyric poem reverently and devotionally conceived, which is designed to be sung and which expresses the worshiper's attitude towards God, or God's purposes in human life.

Hymn Interpretation: is an exegesis of the texts of a hymn

THE CALL TO BE WITNESSES

In the Nigerian context like in many African cultures, the last words of a man to his friends and children before his last breath are held in high esteem. It is also believed that a person repeats a word or statement because of its importance (Green, 1992, 18). According to this viewpoint, that Jesus Christ began his ministry with instructions to his followers to be willing to become fishers of men in Mark 1:17 “Come, follow me, Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’” and finally at the ascension, his last words were: “⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This underscores the importance of this instruction to the savior. Further is the fact that a large part of Jesus’ ministry was spent on training and equipping the disciples for the spread of the gospel until the sending forth after the Pentecost. In the words of Kennedy (1987, 97), Jesus’ reiteration of the call to be fishers of men to his disciples throughout his earthly ministry implies that “the Church is a body under orders by Christ to share the gospel with the whole world.”

The command of Jesus to the disciples, and implicitly the church, is to preach the gospel. The only people who can make Christ known are those who have known Him. For this cause God relies on us for the onerous task. Christians are called ambassadors for Christ as evidenced through Paul’s call on Christians to be Christ’s ambassadors in 2 Cor. 5:20. ²⁰“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God.” Therefore the onus is on every Christian to be witness of Christ. Michael Green captures witnessing as the responsibility of the Church (Green, 1992, 20).

LIFESTYLE WITNESSING

Various authors have described many methods of evangelism among which are Hospitality Evangelism, Interpersonal Witnessing and Lifestyle Witnessing. The last two are closely related. Lifestyle evangelism which is the focus of this paper describes a process whereby a believer is able to bear effective testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ through formal and informal relationship in which they are involved (Moore, 1987, 130-139). The believer in Christ is expected to be able to positively influence his community, neighbors and peers in the context of normal day life by living consistently in conformity with the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Witnessing is the act of bearing testimony about what one knows, has seen and has experienced to another. John the disciple in his first epistle described himself as a witness when he said : ¹“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the word of life”(1John 1:1). However effective, witnessing cannot be limited to what we do alone but is also who we are. Our lives as Christians must be personal witnesses of Christ as Paul the apostle pointed out in 1Cor. 9 when he declared that he did everything with the hope of winning men to Christ (Schrock, 2016).

HYMNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Biography of the Author

Baylus Benjamin McKinney was born in Heflin, Louisiana on July 22, 1886. His parents were James Calvin McKinney and Martha Annis Heflin McKinney. His early education was in Louisiana where he attended Mt. Lebanon Academy before proceeding to Louisiana College, Pineville, Louisiana. He thereafter received theological training at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fortworth, Texas. In addition to theological training, he had professional training in Music at Siegel-Myers School of Music before proceeding to the Bush Music

Conservatory, both in Chicago. He served for a brief period in the Army before returning to his former theological school as a tutor in 1919. He was married to Leila Irene Routh. After a 22-year career as a tutor in Southwestern seminary, he moved to the pastorate of Travis Avenue Baptist Church, Fortworth, Texas for four years in 1931. He died from injuries sustained in an automobile accident in 1952 (www.sbhla.org/bio_bbmckinneyhtm).

Background to the Hymn

“Let Others See Jesus in You” was written by Baylus Benjamin McKinney in 1924, though records show that the chorus appeared earlier in 1922 in Coleman’s pilot. It was first published as a complete hymn with the chorus in the 1924 edition of the Harvest Hymns. Subsequently, it found its way into the Modern Hymnal published in 1926 and several editions of the Baptist Hymnal (McElrath, 1992, 276). It is not exactly clear why Baylor wrote this hymn but it is certain that he could have been inspired by his mother’s teaching to live out a life directed by the teachings of the Bible. He was also known to be an encourager of Christian faithfuls to be sure they understood and meant every word sung by them (Matthews, 2018). This hymn depicts the conviction of the composer that Christians ought to be faithful to what they sing and witness to the world through their lives. Having served as assistant pastor and on the board of the Baptist Sunday school, he might have been challenged to write many hymns to teach doctrinal truths and that a Christian’s life must depict what he professes might have been a source of inspiration for this hymn

Poetic Analysis:

“Let Others See Jesus in You” by B.B McKinney is found as hymn number 571 in the 1991 edition of Baptist Hymnal. It is presented as a four-stanza hymn with refrain. It consists of four lines per stanza with a four-line refrain. The stanzas are rhymed after a consistent rhyming

pattern of the 'abab' form of alternating final sounds. The hymn is iambic hexameter. It begins on the unaccented upbeat followed by accented downbeat and has six of such foot. The accents are on the first beat being the strong and the fourth beat is a weak accent. The tune meter is irregular and is named after Coleman a contemporary of McKinney with whom he served for many years (McElrath 1992, 276). The time signature is six-four and it is written in the key of A flat major.

The lyric is simple and points the believer to the Biblical instruction that the Christian life has to mirror Jesus Christ. It employs day to day language that is easy for any contemporary singer to understand. The tune is simple and smoothly flowing to allow for thoughtful reflections and is homophonic or chordal texturally. It employs repetition as a poetic tool for emphasis as depicted by repetition of the phrase "Let others see Jesus in You" in all stanzas and three times in the four-line refrain. This underscores the main theme which is "let others see Jesus in you".

INTERPRETATION OF THE HYMN

Stanza 1:

While pass-ing through this world of sin,

And oth-ers your life shall view,

Be clean and pure with-out with-in,

Let oth-ers see Je-sus in you

Refrain:

Let oth-ers see Je-sus in you,

Let oth-ers see Je-sus in you,

Keep tell-ing the story,

Be faith-ful and true

Let oth-ers see Je-sus in you,

In the first stanza, B.B Mc Kinney exhorts the believer to be a good representative of Jesus in everyday living. It begins by reiterating the Biblical truth about the sinful state of the world and encourages them to be light as Jesus challenged believers in Matthew 5:14 saying “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hidden”. Jesus made a categorical statement here that a man’s way of life cannot be hidden and that it is seen by all and impressions are obtained through it. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Church at Ephesus referred to them as light in the Lord and children of the Light (Eph. 5:8). This is an encouragement to the believer to walk as Children of light. Light connotes purity and abhorrence of that which is evil. The scripture in Jn. 3:20-21 says: “²⁰for everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God”. This is a declaration that everyone who claims to be a Christian must detest evil and be found to be involved in deeds worthy of his profession and blameless. Little wonder then that McKinney charges the believer to be clean without and within, referring to a sanctified life without blames in thoughts and in deeds.

Stanza 2

Your life’s a book be-fore their eyes,

They’re reading through and through;

Say does it point them to the skies,

Do others see Jesus in you?

Refrain:

In the second stanza McKinney continues his description of the importance of the life of the believer by likening it to a book to which a reader devotes due time to study. Studying is

important because it is a process through which one gains knowledge and understanding about a thing. If the believer's life mirrors Christ, the world can learn more or gain knowledge about Christ and the God whom we serve though they care not to read the Bible. This could be instrumental to bring them to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus.

McKinney further points out that much attention is devoted to the believer's way of life when he said, "they're reading it through and through". In the third phrase of the stanza, he directs the reader of the poem or singer to the importance of their life pointing men to God when he asked the question : *Say does it point them to the skies?* This simply means the believer's life must witness Christ to the sinful world and that it is not about himself. This injunction is in agreement with the charge of the Lord Jesus Christ to the believers to be his witnesses to the all parts of the world in Acts of the Apostles chapter 1:8, wherein Jesus charged his disciples to be His witnesses all over the world. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Stanza 3

What joy 'twill be at set of sun,

In mansions beyond the blue

To find some soul that you have won

Let others see Jesus in You

Refrain:

The third stanza speaks of happiness that awaits the soul winner when he's confronted with joy of the salvation of his own soul and many which have experienced saving grace through his evangelistic activities. The scripture describes so much joy at the salvation of a single soul in

heaven beyond human comprehension. “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk. 15:10). McKinney further reminds the believer of the promised mansion for every saved believer in heaven as he makes reference to mansions beyond the blue in the second phrase. This declaration is in conformity with the words of Jesus to his disciples as recorded by John: “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.³ I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (Jn. 14: 2-3).

Stanza 4

Then live for Christ both day and night,

Be faithful be brave and true,

And lead the lost to life and light;

Let oth-ers see Jesus in you.

Refrain:

Let oth-ers see Jesus in you

Let oth-ers see Jesus in you

Keep tell-ing the story, be faithful and true

Let Oth-ers see Jesus in You

In stanza four the Hymnist impresses on the believer the importance of living consistently a life that extols the Christian virtues without wavering. Such life of faithfulness requires doggedness as he is often faced with opposition and sometimes persecution. Such life calls for self-denial and demands courage from the believer to remain true to his convictions. The third phrase focuses on the purpose of such exemplary life of the believer to be focused on the lost in order to lead them to salvation through Christ.

The refrain uses the power of repetition to ingrain in the believer the importance of living the exemplary Christian life by repeating the phrase “Let others see Jesus in you” three times. Since salvation story must be shared also in speech, the hymnist stresses the importance of telling the salvation story in the refrain which is expected to be sung after every stanza. Though the believer’s exemplary life is a strong influence, in most cases, this witness can only be completed through sharing with the unsaved the encounter that brings about such transformation to the believer. The great commandment is for the believers to go and preach the word. The work is completed by the telling of the story.

BELIEVER’S RESPONSE AND CONCLUSION

Abhor Evil and Be Good Representatives of Christ

In a world that is evil and sinful, the believer must live an exemplary life that conforms with dictates of the scripture and walk blamelessly as his deeds are not and cannot be hidden from the observant public eyes.

Witnessing is About Christ, Not Self

The believer must avoid the pitfall of pride which living an upright life may bring and be conscious to point men to Christ through his lifestyle. Everything done must be in humility and direct men to Christ, not to self.

Be Joyful in Hope Of Salvation

The believer may respond in joy without any discouragement due to antagonism from the world and set his eyes on the heavenly reward of the salvation of his soul and others and of God’s promises to the redeemed.

Be Consistent and Bold to Declare the Gospel

The believer is charged to a consistently faithful live of boldness as a witness and to proclaim the gospel story.

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