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THE NEW THEOLOGY.

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PART I.

THIS modern phase of religious thought has succeeded in introducing itself to the Christian public, and in attracting to itself the general and interested attention of the Christian world. It has secured a measure of acceptance which imperils the prevalence of sound doctrine and threatens the future purity and efficiency of the church. Contemporary religious literature seems to indicate that it is much more popular in many quarters than the theology of the evangelical creeds. A brief outline sketch of it may not, therefore, be unseasonable or unacceptable.

The name of this theology—the *new* theology—seems, to a large extent, to be a misnomer. There is very little in it, if anything at all, which can correctly be called new. Almost every doctrine it inculcates is one with which theological discussion has long been familiar, and this is just what should be expected. The main heads of theology have for so many centuries been the themes of the study of multitudes of as able and learned men as the world has ever produced, that it may now very safely be said that human ingenuity has exhausted itself in its attempts to give them essentially new forms, or to invest them with essentially new significance. It is altogether probable that no one hereafter will ever be able to broach a radically new doctrine, or

DANGERS THREATENING THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH.¹

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"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"—1 COR. v. 6.

The church at Corinth was puffed up, and not without some show of reason. The apostle himself acknowledged, with thanksgiving to God, that they came behind in no gift. Some of the members of that church spoke in unknown tongues, some had the gift of prophecy, some understood mysteries, while others had the faith that could remove mountains. Had the graces of the Spirit been cultivated and developed to the same degree as the gifts of the Spirit, the Corinthian Church would have presented a model to her sister churches throughout the world.

But their graces were so marred by various corruptions that the apostle declares, "Your glorying is not good." While boasting of the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit's power among them, they had become blind to certain evil principles and practices that were corrupting the church's spiritual purity. This corruption was spreading as secretly and silently, but also as surely and pervasively as the little leaven in the dough that leaveneth the whole lump. The apostle exhorts them to cease their boasting and to give themselves to purging the church of its contaminating corruptions.

Never, perhaps, in the history of christendom has there been more need than now to sound with renewed emphasis the solemn warning of the text. The last quarter of a century has been marked by much ecclesiastical boasting, and not without some show of reason. If we are to judge by statistical tables, the

¹ The substance of this sermon was delivered as an address to the graduating class of the Seminary at the close of last session. Dr. Campbell afterwards preached it, with slight modification, to his congregation in Asheville, and it is published in the latter form as being suited to the general reader.

church in these years has abounded in everything, coming behind in no gift, save those miraculous manifestations of the Spirit's power that served a temporary purpose. Never since the gifts of healing, and of prophecy, and of tongues, ceased and vanished has there been so much sensational and spectacular activity as in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

As the twentieth century opens it behooves the church to feel her pulse and check her fever. She has been taking an inventory, and there are signs of a return to sounder and soberer methods.

Our glorying is not good. We need to remember that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Let us search for the old leaven, that we may cast it out.

From the beginning of her history the purity of the church has been threatened along three lines: Corruption of her constituent material; corruption of her worship; corruption of her doctrine. These three evils are inter-related and inter-dependent, like the links of a chain. Take hold of any one of the links and the other two are dragged with it. We cannot introduce into the church one of these corruptions without infusing into her veins the poison of them all.

I. Corruption of the church's constituent material or membership.

Our Lord likens "the kingdom of heaven unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way." And in the command to his servants, "Let both grow together until the harvest," he forewarns us that the bastard wheat and the true will continue to grow side by side until the time of reaping at the end of the world.

We are not, however, to draw from this the inference that all church discipline is to be relaxed, but only that the attempt to make a complete and final separation between genuine and spurious disciples in this world will end in injury and failure. Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture, and the passage in which the text occurs is a direct rebuke of laxness in ecclesiastical discipline.

A member of the church at Corinth had committed a grave offence, which had been allowed to pass without censure. "And ye are puffed up," writes the apostle, "and have not rather

mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you . . . Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? . . . I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." The failure to discipline offenders will inevitably be followed by a multiplication of the corresponding offences. Is not this one cause of the church's weakness to-day?

Another fruitful source of corruption in the church's constituent material is found in the inordinate desire for visible results, the tendency to measure strength and growth by mere numbers. Our Saviour never manifested this tendency. We might say that he seemed almost indifferent to visible results. Is not the parable of the seed growing secretly intended to warn the church against undue haste in gathering the harvest? "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe [*and not till then*], immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." Is not this the parable of the wise husbandman, who, after sowing the seed, has faith to wait patiently for the harvest? Has there not been too much reaping of unripe grain, the hasty thrusting in of the sickle while the crop is in the blade, instead of waiting for the full corn in the ear?

That the church at Corinth was in danger from the ingathering of unconverted people is evident from the warning sounded by the apostle in the third chapter of the first Epistle, "We (*i. e.*, Apollos and I and other ministers) are labourers together with God: ye are God's building." The church, then, is God's building, the members are the constituent material and ministers of the gospel are the builders. It is important to keep this in mind as the key to the passage. "As a wise master-builder," continues the apostle, "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's

work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." The wood, hay and stubble of spurious conversions cannot stand the test of the fire. The minister who builds with such material shall suffer loss of his full reward, and if he himself be saved, yet it shall be "so as by fire." The apostle closes the passage with the awful warning, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Interpreting this in the light of the context, it seems to teach nothing less than that the minister of the gospel who, for purposes of personal gain or advancement, deliberately builds into God's temple material that is unfit and destructible shall himself be destroyed along with his wood, hay and stubble. "Let every man take heed how he buildeth!"

The history of the church illustrates and enforces these warnings of God's word. In the time of Constantine, early in the fourth century, multitudes of unconverted heathen were baptized and hurried into the church, and along with them entered a host of abuses and corruptions that almost destroyed her spiritual life.

New England has not yet recovered from the pernicious effects of "the half-way covenant," against which Jonathan Edwards so vigorously protested. "Persons were admitted to full communion of the church on the ground of a blameless external deportment, without strict inquiry into their religious experience, or decisive evidence of renewing grace." The tone of spiritual life will always and inevitably be lowered by the admission of those who "have a name to live, but are dead."

Mr. Moody, when asked, "Would you put unconverted people on your church committees?" replied, "If you want to carry a corpse, put them on." "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

It is just as important to shut out wolves in sheep's clothing as it is to gather in God's true sheep.

II. The second danger threatening the purity of the church is *corruption of her worship*.

How naturally this form of corruption follows the last! "We are the circumcision," writes the apostle, "which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence

in the flesh." If worshipping God in the spirit is a distinctive mark of the true circumcision, how can it be expected that "the uncircumcised in the heart" will relish such worship?

Hence the ingathering of large numbers of spurious converts is followed by spectacular and ritualistic tendencies. The baptized pagans of Constantine's day brought with them into the church a baptized paganism, which still survives in many a feast-day and fast-day, in many a heathen rite under a Christian name. How shall we expect those who "have confidence in the flesh" to take pleasure in forms of worship which have no meretricious attractions? Many true Christians have been deceived by the glitter of a gorgeous ritual, and so the evil spreads, a little leaven leavening the whole lump. It was to genuine believers that Paul wrote, "I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." And lest by the charm of ornate rhetoric he might himself allure them from this simplicity, he determined that his "speech and his preaching should not be with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power."

In a recent address delivered in Philadelphia on the *Anti-thesis of Symbolism and Revelation* the great Dutch theologian, Dr. A. Kuyper, declares that we are now in the midst of a ritualistic movement that is world-wide in its influence. The signs of sympathy with this movement in countries in which it has hitherto made little headway on account of the counter-acting influence of Calvinism must not be treated as only a few drops from a passing cloud. These drops have undeniable affinity with that dark ritualistic cloud hanging over Great Britain. The storm must soon break upon us.

Dr. Kuyper clearly sets forth the antagonism between a worship based on revelation and a worship based on symbolic rites. "In conceiving the relation between the Infinite and the finite, two possibilities appear: either *the Infinite reveals itself to man*, and so unveils the actual relation, or *man must guess at this relation and represent it to himself by imagination, in an artificial way*. The former is the Christian way. But paganism, having no revelation, craves the symbol, and creates it in its idols. Symbol means a fictitious link between the invisible Infinite and the visible finite. It is grasping something outward

and material, and, by imagination, setting on it the stamp of the unseen and unutterable. . . . Thus Revelation and Symbolism are opposed in principle. In Revelation the Infinite himself unveils his relation to man, requiring the finite creature to accept it by faith; in Symbolism the finite man guesses at that relation and conventionally coins a symbol of it, to grasp it, not by faith, but by sensation. The current philosophy and art could not antagonize Revelation and side with Symbolism.

“Such is the bifurcation of the way of life as this century approaches its close. Two tracks cross each other; the old track of faith in a God-given Revelation excluding all will-worship, and the new road of Symbolism boldly displaying the word will-worship on every guide post to its end. Revelation reveals not only holy mysteries, but also proclaims immutable principles and ordinances. Under Symbolism all principles are men’s own contrivances, and all moral ordinances are self-made and conventional.”

We must choose between the two. We must either cling to the simplicity of New Testament worship or we must go back to “the weak and beggarly elements” of the Jewish ritual, to which have been added “the sensuous beauty and splendor of the heathen religions amidst which Christianity was developed.”

There are many things creeping into our own churches, especially in the large cities, whose tendency is towards Rome. There are several stages in the ritualistic movement. The first is imitation of the plainest Low-Church services. This trains our children for Low-Church Episcopacy. But in the Episcopal churches themselves there is a powerful trend towards the more elaborate High-Church ritual; and all who have studied this movement in Great Britain know that ritualism means a return to Rome.

The Romish church is watching with the greatest interest this world-wide movement towards Symbolism in worship, and laughs in her sleeve while silly Protestants play into her hands.

Akin to this ritualistic movement, and tributary to it, is the unregulated æstheticism that has of late years entered so largely into the services of the non-ritualistic churches. Like Symbolism, it appeals to the senses, but lacks the dignity of a well-ordered ritual. It manifests itself in rich and expensive floral decorations to catch the eye, and in musical programs, more or

less elaborate, executed by soloists, quartettes and choruses, for the delectation of the audience. The tendency of all this is to drive the gospel out, or to put it into a corner. In a Presbyterian Church not a thousand miles distant two visiting ministers were recently invited to preach; the one in the morning, the other in the evening. The morning service began at half-past ten o'clock and was followed by the Sunday-school at twelve. In addition to the service conducted by the minister, the choir of well-trained voices interjected so much voluntary singing (and it was music of a very high order from an æsthetic point of view) that the minister had just twenty minutes into which to crowd the sermon and the closing prayer, hymn and benediction. In the evening there was no time limit at the far end, and the minister in charge determined that the word of God should not be bound. He preached for forty minutes; but ten or fifteen minutes before he closed a rustling noise was heard in the choir loft, and looking around, he saw the soprano and the alto taking their departure.

This illustrates very well the issue that confronts us: Which is to win the day, these æsthetic innovations or the word of God? In the morning these things drove out the gospel; in the evening the gospel drove out these things. The two are uncongenial and mutually expulsive. The plea is that these things enrich the service. It is a costly enrichment that impoverishes the souls of the people!

The recent appeal of the bishops of the Methodist Church declares that "among the principal symptoms indicating the famine that enervates our Zion" are these: "The Bible loses its divine authority; sin loses its fatal sting; the law loses its sanction, and God's government is reduced to a few rules concerning æsthetics."

Let us beware lest God say of us, "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone."

III. The third danger threatening the purity of the church is corruption of her doctrine.

It has already been pointed out that these three forms of corruption are inter-related and inter-dependent. Any one of them may be the cause of the other two. The three are vitally one, like the trifurcate slip of a vine, any branch of which, if buried in the soil, will become the root that bears and nourishes the

other two. The reason of this is that the Holy Spirit is the source of life in the church, whether that life manifest itself in the gathering of living stones for the Lord's temple or in the offering of spiritual sacrifices, which is the worship of that temple, or in holding forth the word of life, which is the light and glory of that temple. If the Spirit of God be grieved in the discipline, worship, or doctrine of the church, enervation of the church's life is the result.

If the bars are thrown down and the unregenerated are led or driven into the church, these "will not endure sound doctrine; for the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Or if the corruption enters through the door of worship, the "itching ears," which have been tickled by æstheticism and ritualism, shall "turn away from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." As Dr. Kuyper well says, "Symbolism begins by instilling aversion to dogma, and so digs the bed for the flow of its glittering ritualistic stream."

Or if false teachers are allowed to disseminate pernicious doctrines in the name of the church, both the constituent material and the worship will be contaminated. "Their word will eat as doth a canker." The children of God are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." The teaching of false doctrine will fill the church with those who "are bastards and not sons."

And, of course, it follows that a church constituted of unregenerated members fed on false doctrine cannot worship God in spirit and in truth. "In vain do they worship me; teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Whilst it is true that the three forms of corruption are so inter-related that any one of them may become the root of the other two, it is also true that the primacy of evil among them belongs to the corruption of doctrine. The word of God covers both discipline and worship; and therefore where this word is held and preached in its purity and entirety, the worldly will be excluded from the church, and there will be a pure worship, not according to the carnality of æstheticism and ritualism, but in spirit and in truth.

The seriousness of the present crisis is its doctrinal char-

acter. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The doctrinal war is on in earnest; "swords shock upon swords and shields." "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one," and let him be sure that it is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Buy the truth, and sell it not!

The late Senator Vance was thrown by force of circumstances into intimate association with priests of the Roman Catholic Church. He told some of his friends that these priests declared that there was only one serious obstacle in the way of the final winning of Protestantism to Rome, and that this obstacle was the preaching of the Calvinistic clergy. Wise priests! Shall we be less wise than they?

Never since the Reformation has there been so urgent need of the aggressive proclamation of Calvinistic doctrines. This is no time for revision, but for re-affirmation. Let the old doctrines that center in God's sovereign grace be boldly proclaimed in dependence on the Spirit's power, and the church will be saved from the three forms of corruption that threaten her very life.