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Is Evangelical Christianity Declining?

This is the question now being pressed in New York City as the result of a divergence of opinion among evangelists as to methods of work and of personal interviews with some of the leading professors in Union Theological Seminary. It has been mooted before in various circles of religious thought, but it appears to possess special significance because of the outgivings of prominent theological professors and divergencies among evangelistic workers. These are, however, merely surface indications and do not point to underlying and dominating currents. They may be worthy of some notice, but one must widen his horizon before drawing his conclusions respecting the question, Is Evangelical Christianity declining?

It is no new thing for ministers and evangelists to differ in judgment as to agents and methods in prosecuting the work in which they are interested. No general inference on the subject can be drawn from the fact that in the revival movement in Brooklyn, N. Y., there has been considerable difference of judgment, and even some personal altercations among the ministerial brethren having the matter in charge. It appears that some difficulty grew out of the sayings and doings of the leading evangelist, Rev. Dr. Broughton. Rev. Dr. Parker, an Episcopalian, could not see his way clear to work with him on this account, and resigned from the managing committee. The Rev. Dr. Pierson, who was assisting in the revival, seems to have felt that he should be more recognized and that if he and Dr. Broughton could not have daily conferences together, he had better retire and give place to some one more in harmony with the management. But it is said a proper understanding has been reached and that all are now seeing eye to eye and working in agreement. Much also is being made of the sensational statement of one of the prime movers in the Brooklyn movement, the Rev. Dr. A. C. Dixon, pastor of the Hansom Place Baptist church, to the effect that it "is a fight against Unitarianism," and that "it will be fought all the year and end in victory." He sides with Dr. Broughton, who says, "all Unitarians are sinners, and all sinners are Unitarians." From all accounts the evangelists generally are united in upholding a pure Gospel, and the little incident of which so much is being made in certain quarters, does not disconcert them. They declare that they are working along true lines, and will fight the battle out in the full recognition of a divine Saviour for sinners of all classes, or of salvation by grace in Christ alone. It is to be regretted that there has been any differences among them at a time when all should be working in harmony for the salvation of men, but we judge that a sensational press is making the worst it can out of the affair, and that the work of evangelization will go on energetically and successfully all winter in the City of Churches.

But more attention will be given to the reported utterances in the "New York Herald" of the Union Seminary professors than to the slight disagreements among the Brooklyn evangelists. Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Hall is rep-

resented as saying that "evangelism is declining;" that its "weakness is apparent, and must yield to a new evangel, with a higher and broader message—a message to the community—to humanity—not to the individual;" that "there is only one salvation—the salvation to the community;" and that "the extrication of individual souls, while good, is not salvation in its true and deeper sense."

Rev. Dr. Charles A. Briggs comes to the front with the information that the movement of the day is to throw off "the bondage of scholastic dogma;" that "the Church is readjusting herself to new conditions;" that "the pulpit has lost its attractive power;" that "the daily and weekly press have been a greater influence in public instruction;" and that "the people have learned that they can get what they want cheaper and easier by reading at home."

All such talk comes with a poor grace from those who are set for the defence of the Gospel and for making evangelical preachers. Under it their students have very little encouragement and stimulus to go out and devote their lives to saving men personally. Such teachers enunciate a different doctrine from that which Christ and his Apostles taught, as they insisted upon a Gospel for the individual sinner and bade the Church go into all the world and preach it to every creature. She will heed the voice of her ascended Lord. She will not give up individual salvation under the plea of social or community-salvation. She will hold on to the pulpit as her great redemptive instrument. The press has its place and power, but it is no substitute for the ambassador of Christ with the entire Word of God back of him for instruction and authority. Wisdom is not centered solely in our modern wise-acres, nor will it die with them. The Bible is still our guide-book. Its teachings in respect to life and death, man and destiny, time and eternity, or the Gospel in all its adaptations to man now and hereafter, will stand forever. It needs no rationalistic interpretations or socialistic appendages. It has its own sweet message. It speaks to the heart and conscience and life of the individual as he mingles among men, and as he lives with and for God. It has its bearings upon all phases of existence, and he who lives it out will be blest himself and bless others.

Nor is the evangelical Christianity which the Bible inculcates on the decline, notwithstanding the taunts of a bold rationalism, of a cultured Unitarianism, of a pretentious liberalism and of a boastful infidelity. It expects to contend with these and other forms of opposition, and has held its own against all the forces that have sought to neutralize, modify and destroy it.

In testing its staying and widening power we must rise above the isolated instances of divided counsel or of particular phases of religious activity and consider its vast and increasing agencies at home and abroad. It is evangelical Christianity that is the great missionary, reformatory, uplifting and redeeming instrumentality in this and other lands. The nineteenth century attests its mighty transformations in the individual and collective

Prof. Bruce vs. Prof. Shedd.

By Rev. Dr. E. B. Hodge.

It is one of the surprising, and by no means pleasing, experiences of the student to find esteemed authors, who hold essentially the same views, showing, apparently through prejudice, an inability to understand each other, and casting reflections on each other's writings which appear to be quite undeserved. Thus we read in Dr. Bruce's book, "The Training of the Twelve," as follows: "There is a tendency among theologians of an ultra-scholastic habit of mind to treat all that is said of love in connection with the atonement as sentimental, or at most, only available for popular purposes, and to represent the judicial aspect of the atonement as alone of scientific validity."

The author, having made this general statement, proceeds to illustrate it by giving the names of Anselm, of Canterbury, the famous scholastic divine of the eleventh century, and our own Dr. Shedd, whose theological treatises have won him deserved fame, as conspicuous examples of this tendency. If, however, Prof. Bruce has correctly defined his own position, it is plain that he does not differ from the men whom he somewhat severely criticises. "Christ's death," he tells us, "satisfied both divine justice and divine love, and the glory of the Gospel is that the same event satisfied both." But this is precisely the view advocated both by Anselm and by Prof. Shedd, and it seems like a cruel perversion of fact to represent them as of a different mind. Dr. Shedd, in his "History of Christian Doctrine," calls attention to the fact that Baur, the theologian of Tübingen, brought the same charge against Anselm when he remarked that "this exact and absolute satisfaction of all the claims of legal justice" (as taught by Anselm) "though imparting great compactness and self-consistence to the theory, yet denudes it of all its tender and merciful aspects." Dr. Shedd makes perfectly clear what his own views are on this subject by the way in which he repels this charge. "Baur forgets," (he says,) "that, in Anselm's view, there are two ways in which sin can be punished." One way is "to leave the guilty transgressor to the natural and ordinary course of justice." The other way is "to deliver him from it by satisfying its claim for him and in his stead." "The fact that God chooses the one that spares man and tasks God—the fact that he satisfies his own justice for the sinner instead of leaving the sinner to satisfy it by an endless misery in his own person—shows in the most conclusive and affecting manner that redemption has man's welfare in view, as well as the best interests of the universe and the majestic glory of the divine nature."

And Anselm himself, as though anticipating the misrepresentations which would be made of his teachings, says, at the close of his investigation: "The compassion of God, which appeared to be lost entirely when we were considering the justice of God and the sin of man, we have now found to be so great, and so consistent with justice, that nothing greater or more just can be conceived of. For what compassion can equal the words of God the Father addressed to the sinner condemned to eternal punishment, and having no means of redeeming himself: 'Take my only begotten Son and make him an offering for thyself;' or the words of the Son: 'Take me and ransom thy soul?' For this is what both say when they invite and draw us to faith in the Gospel. And can

anything be more just than for God to remit all debt when in this way he receives a satisfaction greater than all the debt, provided only it be offered with the right feeling?" We can safely say that no class of writers more satisfactorily and earnestly set forth the love of God in the redemption of men than the class of writers to whom Prof. Bruce makes so unpleasing an allusion; and we know of few things so stimulating and helpful, so adapted to reveal to the patient student the glory of God and to awaken in his heart a sentiment of adoration and praise, as the diligent study of the volumes which they have written for our edification. We think that it will be a sad day for the Church when her sons turn away from the clear thinking, logical exactness, reverence for God and every utterance of his Word, as well as love for men, which characterize the writings of the class of theologians to which Shedd belongs.

Parables as Illustrations.

By Rev. C. H. Wetherbe.

I have before me an editorial in a religious paper concerning the use of illustrations in sermons. Here are a few words: "The majority of the people need to have the mind quickened and interest stimulated by a proper amount of concrete illustration. 'The common people heard him gladly' because his parables made every truth luminous." This editor seems to have overlooked a fact or two concerning the effect of Christ's use of parables. I question his statement that Christ's parables made "every truth luminous." A little observation will show that the parables, in many instances at least, needed to be explained to the hearers by Christ, so that they could be understood.

Take the parable of the sower, as found in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. At the close of Christ's giving it he was asked to explain what he meant by it. We read: "And the disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? And he answered and said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Further on, Christ said: "Therefore speak I to them in parables, because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." Then he privately explained to the disciples the meaning of the parable. Surely this parable did not make the "truth luminous" to "the common people," nor even to the favored disciples, just as it was delivered. The parable itself needed to be illuminated in order to be understood.

Then in the same chapter there is a record of the parable of the tares, which Christ used in the presence of the multitude. Observe these words: "Then he left the multitudes and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field." Certainly, if this parable had been an illustration, designed by Christ to make "truth luminous," it would not have required a special explanation by him. And this reminds me to say that the illustrations which some preachers use in their sermons are of such a composition and character that they greatly need explanation, which is the same as saying that they do not actually illustrate any truth, nor scarcely anything else, except a lack of appropriateness. True sermon illustrations, if they serve the right purpose, must illuminate obscure truth immediately during their delivery.