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## The Christian Faith and Mental Health

The First Article in a New Series on This Subject

By the REV. EDWARD HEEREMA

Spiritual Advisor at the Christian Sanatorium, Midland Park, New Jersey

Encourage the fainthearted, support the weak (I Thess. 5:14).

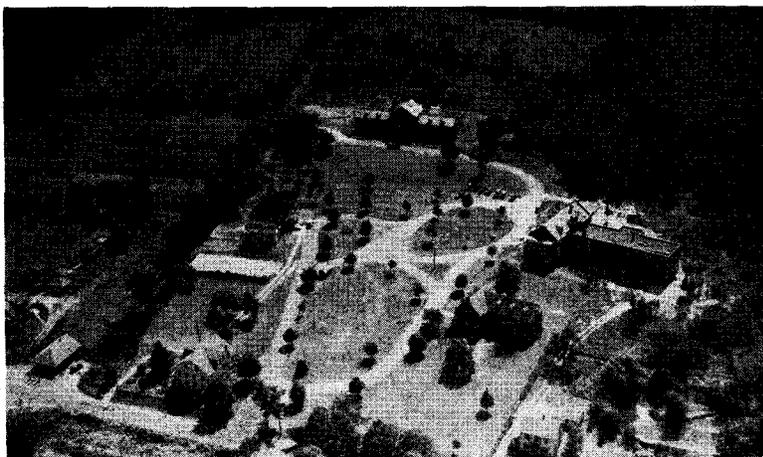
ON THE sloping side of one of the wooded hills of northern New Jersey is a compound of buildings dedicated to a unique and noble purpose. The restful sweeping lawns, the silver birches and the clear invigorating air of the hills all suggest the nature of that purpose. Here, aloof from the clatter of commerce and the trying tempo of industry, Christian men and women are seeking to bring rest and healing to sick minds and shaken nerves.

Hardly a visitor to the Christian Sanatorium of Midland Park, New Jersey, fails to experience the thrill afforded by the vista that unfolds before him as he stands on the steps of the building situated highest on the slope of Goffle Hill. In the summertime a luxuriant carpet of green stretches out before him over the valley floor and reaches to the Ramapo Mountains some ten miles

distant. Employees of years' service must pause a moment to feast their eyes on the far hills. Very clear comes the voice of the psalmist in the words of the well-known psalter, "Unto the hills around will I lift up my longing eyes".

This scene and its inspiration I mention because it illustrates aptly the foundation principle which governs the work at this place where troubled souls come for help. By God's grace the soul must be given a new direction and a new dynamic. Its eyes must be taken from self and from the maze of a garbled experience.

The soul must be directed to the enduring hills, to the God of the hills, to the ever-living God who formed and who keeps the hills, to the God of whom the psalmist also wrote: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting thou art God".



An Aerial View of the Christian Sanatorium, Midland Park, N. J.

# The Presbyterian Guardian

## EDITORIAL

### The Word of God and the Present Return to Religion

IN 1936 Henry C. Link wrote his popular book *The Return to Religion*. If there was a return to religion in America already six or seven years ago, there surely is one today. The dire distress which is inseparable from war has greatly accelerated it. The wide use of the motto "God bless America", the oft-repeated saying of one of our soldiers on Bataan that there are no atheists in fox-holes, the stirring story of Captain Eddie Rickenbacker's conversion, and the prominence of the religious note in President Roosevelt's recent addresses—these are bits of evidence that come to mind readily and can without much effort be multiplied tenfold.

To evaluate the present return to religion requires great care. Especially when reflecting on individual instances, it behooves one to be mindful of the Saviour's warning, "Judge not that ye be not judged". Only God omniscient knows the hearts of men. On the other hand, to jump to the conclusion that a major religious revival is in the making would give evidence of extreme credulity. Who knows, time may prove the present return to religion a mere flash in the pan.

Man is constitutionally religious. His creation in God's image accounts for this. Seriously corrupted though that image was by the fall, traces of it remain in the most perverted of men. Down deep in every human soul dwells the conviction that there is a supreme being, and, try as one will, no man can uproot that conviction. For that reason it is natural for man, when he despairs of extricating himself from distress, to call upon God for deliverance. The story is told of a blatant atheist who was sentenced to death for a crime he had committed. When the fateful moment arrived, he cried out: "O God, if there be a God, save my soul if I have a

soul". Who dares to say that this prayer—if prayer it may be called—gave proof of genuine conversion?

The book of Judges tells us that, when the Israelites forgot God, He would deliver them to the will of their enemies. Then, in their extremity, they would turn to God for help and He would succor them. But hardly had they been rescued when they would again turn their backs on Jehovah. That process was repeated over and over again. In the days of Eli, when the Philistines seemed ready to swallow Israel up, someone got the pious idea of carrying the ark of the covenant into battle. In spite of the fact that it was borne by as wicked a pair of priests as ever disgraced the tabernacle, that too may have been hailed, and no doubt was, as a return to religion. But God spewed that return to religion out of His mouth and permitted the very symbol of His presence to fall into the hands of uncircumcised heathen.

There is a valid way of judging the merits of the present return to religion. That way is to view it in the light of what, according to Holy Scripture, constitutes a genuine return to religion. By that standard the revived religiosity of our day must be measured. In these balances it must be weighed.

The Bible tells us that the following are essential features of a true return to religion:

1. *A true return to religion is invariably mediated by the Word of God.*

Scripture teaches that there are means of grace; that is to say, means which God is wont to employ in imparting saving grace to men or in sustaining that grace. The first and foremost of them is the Word of God. Whatever other means there may be, they are inseparable from the Word. In Romans 10, Paul makes the sweeping statement: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved". But immediately he adds: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" That is an unmistakable way of declaring the Word indispensable.

It is quite the vogue today to substitute religious experience for the Word of God. Therefore the expectation is widespread that a religious

revival will be ushered in by the trying experiences of war, apart from the Word. But that is wishful thinking of the most unwarranted kind. To be sure, God often uses the trials of life to plow up, as it were, the soil of men's souls, but an undeniable prerequisite of the bringing forth of fruit is the sowing of the seed of the Word. Plowing alone never produced a single blade of grass or grain of wheat. The shocking experience of an earthquake contributed to the Philippian jailer's inquiring anxiously what he should do to be saved, but the Word of God had to be taught him before he could believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. A thousand earthquakes cannot make one believer.

The rich man of one of Jesus' parables, finding himself in hell, beseeches Abraham to send Lazarus from his bosom back to earth, there to testify to his five surviving brothers. Abraham replies: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". Dives pleads: "Nay, father Abraham: but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent". But Abraham insists with absolute finality: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead". How emphatically our Lord here teaches that not even the most startling experience can take the place of the Bible as a means of conversion!

2. *A true return to religion will invariably manifest itself in a deep interest in the Word of God.*

The evidences of a genuine conversion are, no doubt, numerous. A regret for past sins, a resolve to turn from sin, a delight in the doing of good works, and a renewed interest in prayer are some of the most obvious. But all these evidences must be validated by another. That other is a revival of interest in the Word of God. A religious revival not accompanied by a revival of Bible study not only falls short of being a great revival, it falls far short of being a true revival. It is no real religious revival at all.

In the wake of the return of the Jews from Babylon came a remarkable return to religion. One of its prominent aspects was a return to the Bible of that day. The eighth chapter of the book of Nehemiah tells us: "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man unto the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe

to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Jehovah had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women, and of those that could understand, and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law". We are told further that a number of men assisted Ezra in reading, "and they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading".

The greatest revival in the history of the New Testament church is known as the Protestant Reformation. Its most outstanding characteristic was an unprecedented hunger for the Word of God. The Reformers translated Holy Scripture into the language of the common people, and men everywhere willingly risked their lives—nay, gave their very lives—for the possession of a Bible.

The first article in the January, 1943, issue of *The Reader's Digest* is entitled "Grace for This Day". It tells how families in which the altar has long since fallen into decay are today, under the pressure of war, resuming the custom of saying grace at meals. That is indeed a hopeful sign. But it is good only so far as it goes. Not even a return to prayer is evidence of a genuine return to religion, if it is not accompanied by a return to the Word of God. What God has said to man is of far greater importance than what man may say to God. Nor can man address God aright unless he has first been taught by God through His Word. He who lifts his own voice to God in time of trouble but ignores the voice of God is self-centered. However, religion is God-centered.

3. A true return to religion invariably consists in a return to the God of the Word.

The God of the Bible is the only true God. All other gods are idols. Hence only a return to the God of the Bible is a genuine return to religion. Any other return to religion so-called is actually a turn in the direction of idolatry.

We Americans are often guilty of

using religious language loosely. And of all religious terms not one is used as loosely among us as is the name God. When speaking of God we may mean almost anything. Perhaps we mean the Creator of the universe, perhaps the universe itself. Perhaps we mean a personal being, perhaps a mere influence. Perhaps we mean Him who differs infinitely from us, perhaps our better selves. Perhaps we mean the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and of those who for Christ's sake have been adopted into the divine family, perhaps a Father of all mankind. Perhaps we mean a being of absolute justice as well as perfect love, perhaps a glorified Santa Claus. And so, whenever we hear it said that our age is one of return to God, it behooves us to ask, *What God?*

Today as never before we must be on our guard against a prevalent conception of God which is completely at variance with what God has told us of Himself in His Word. According to the Bible, God does not exist for the sake of man, but man, as well as every other creature, exists for the sake of God; God owes man nothing, but man owes God everything; God is not a means to the end of man's happiness, but man is a means to the end of God's glory. The popular theology of our day completely reverses this fundamental teaching of Holy Writ. Therefore the danger is exceedingly great in these troublous times, when men are aroused to a realization that they need more than human help, that they will flee for deliverance, not to the God of the Bible, but to that other God, who really is non-existent. If that constitutes the present return to religion, it is safe to predict that it will not last. As soon as war-clouds begin to lift, God will be forgotten. He will have served His purpose.

4. A true return to religion is invariably a return to God by way of the personal Word, Jesus Christ.

Man is sinful, but God is perfect in justice and holiness. Only when the barrier of sin between God and man has been removed can they have communion with each other. Woe to the sinner who dares to approach to God as he is in himself! He will experience that God is a consuming fire. But in infinite grace God has sent His Son into the world to atone for sin by the accursed death of the cross. In Him God and sinners are recon-

ciled. Whosoever believes in Him may boldly draw near to God. In a word, the one and only way for man to return to God is by Him who declared: "I am the way . . . ; no man cometh unto the Father but by me".

No one will care to come to God by that way who has not learned to see himself as an undone sinner. Therefore repentance, heart-felt repentance, is a prerequisite of every true revival of religion. Again, no one will care to come to God by that way who has not learned to shudder at the thought of the awful justice of God. A vision of eternal punishment is a prerequisite of a religious revival worthy of its name. The Great Awakening in America was the fruit of the vigorous preaching of sin and hell. As long as men make light of sin and hell they are not returning to religion.

Then too, no one who trusts for salvation in his own works or character will feel the need of coming to God by Christ. Only he who despairs utterly of saving himself will abandon himself for salvation to the crucified Redeemer. It follows that a true return to religion is infinitely more than a sincere and firm resolve to practice the golden rule. Only he returns to religion who cries from the depths:

"Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die".

\* \* \* \* \*

Let us not be gullible. Not everything that announces itself as a return to religion is really that. In the light of the Scriptural requirements for a genuine return to religion, much of the present return to religion cuts a sorry figure, indeed. Let us try the spirits whether they be of God. The only norm by which to try them is the Word of God.

But neither let us be pessimistic. Who knows, even now God may be plowing the souls of men with a view to the early sowing of the seed which is the Word of God.

Nor let us be idle. If true revivals of religion are always mediated by the Word, it is the solemn duty of us Christians zealously to teach men

the Word of God.

Least of all let us be pharisaic. If there is to be a genuine return to religion, it will have to begin at the

house of God. As never before, the members of Christ's church must honor the Word of God. For Jehovah has said: "To this man will I look,

even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my Word".

—R. B. K.

## God's Faithfulness

It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness (Lam. 3:21, 22).

IT WAS not a pleasant task to which Jeremiah had been called by God. It was his to proclaim woe and destruction and punishment for sin. Unlike Isaiah he could hold forth no hope for the deliverance of Jerusalem. He suffered both in body and soul. He was persecuted from without; he was broken-hearted within.

Out of the depth of sorrow for his people, Jeremiah wrote his Lamentations. There he poured forth his sadness, and the picture is dark indeed. Yet, set in this dark background, we find perfect gems of glorious truth shining forth in their splendor. The passage before us is one of these. The chapter begins: "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath", and the verses which follow are fearful indeed. But suddenly the prophet soars to the very heavenlies: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness". What was it that lifted Jeremiah out of the depth of gloom and despair? It was the very thought of the faithfulness of his God. Even though all around him was sorrow and destruction, even though he was misunderstood and mistreated, even though there was no human reason for encouragement, the thought of the faithfulness of God overbalanced everything else.

We live in times which are in many respects similar to those of Jeremiah. It would be a blessing for every Christian to consider again and more deeply God's faithfulness.

### The Object of God's Faithfulness

"Great is thy faithfulness". It is one of God's own people speaking here—His true servant Jeremiah. His was

the testimony of experience, the experience of one who belonged to God. This testimony will be echoed by every heart that has been given over to God. The sinner saved by grace will know whereof Jeremiah speaks; all others will find it strange language. "Great is thy faithfulness". Faithfulness to whom? To those who have been born from above, to those who have been washed from their sins in the blood of Christ, to those who have entered the household of God by faith.

Now in a certain sense it is true that all men enjoy the faithfulness of God. God has even made a definite promise to mankind in general. "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). How much this one promise means to the human race, and how much men depend upon it! Surely all men everywhere ought to cry out, "Great is thy faithfulness"! Nor do we need to stop with this one promise. The working of any one of God's natural laws is a revelation of His faithfulness. We see this in the gravity which holds us to the earth and in the chemistry which keeps our bodies healthy. Thus in God's common grace He reveals His faithfulness even to the unsaved.

Jeremiah, however, is speaking here especially of God's faithfulness to His own people. He means the faithfulness of God's special or saving grace. This faithfulness is just as exclusive and particular as the electing love of God. John wrote: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God". There is a sense in which God loves all men, but there is also a sense in which He loves in a peculiar way His own. He is faithful to all mankind in the respects mentioned, but He is faithful in a pecu-

By the REV. CARL A. AHLFELDT

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liar way to His people. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9).

Thus the believer stands in a peculiar relationship to the mighty God. The believer is the object of His faithfulness, and he can bank on that faithfulness as an unsaved person cannot. Thus there is no more vital question for you to ask than this: Am I a child of God? Am I a member of the family of God? We cannot be too careful at this point. It is perfectly possible to have been raised in a Christian home, to have been baptized, to belong to a church (yes, even The Orthodox Presbyterian Church) and yet never to have been truly saved. Have I passed from death to life? Have I evidence in my life that I have been born again? Then the great faithfulness of God is unto me and I may rejoice in it.

### The Revelation of God's Faithfulness

Wherein do we see this faithfulness revealed? It is in the mercies of His grace. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness". The grace of our God is too great, too wonderful to describe. From this grace, this unmerited favor, flow a thousand mercies, tender compassions from our God. This is especially true of His attitude toward us in our sins and failings. We are all of us utterly unworthy of His faithfulness. It might be conceivable that He should be faithful to His unfallen creatures, the angels pure and holy. But it is the marvel of marvels that He should be faithful to us miserable sinners!

He is faithful to us in His long-