

"If we could only realize it, this is our most potential hour for the interpretation of Christ and His cross to an awakened world."—D. C. Lilly.

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CONTENTS

The Coming Creative Period.	
By Rev. D. Clay Lilly, D. D., Pastor Reynolda Presbyterian Church, Reynolda, N. C.....	347
Freedom and Restraint.	
By Rev. LeRoy Gresham, D. D., Pastor Salem Presbyterian Church, Salem, Va.....	360
The Reality and Living Presence of Jesus Christ.	
By Rev. Dunbar H. Ogden, D. D., Pastor Government Street Presby- terian Church, Mobile, Ala.....	366
The Quest for Certainty.	
By Rev. Willis Thompson, Pastor Armstrong Memorial Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, Va.....	375
What Next in Foreign Missions?	
By Rev. Charles H. Pratt, D. D., LL. D., Professor of Missions and Evan- gelism, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, Louisville, Ky.....	387
The Church for the New Age.	
By Rev. R. A. Lapsley, Jr., D. D., Pastor First Presbyterian Church, Co- lumbia, S. C.....	396
The Message of the Bethel Pulpit.	
By Rev. R. A. Lapsley, D. D., Member of Editorial Staff, Presbyterian Committee of Publication, Richmond, Va.....	406
Reviews of Current Theological and Religious Books.....	414
Index to Volume XLI.....	451

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THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

Vol. XLI.

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THE COMING CREATIVE PERIOD.

*Address to the Graduating Class of Union Theological
Seminary, Richmond, Va., May 7, 1930.*

BY REV. D. CLAY LILLY, D. D.,
Pastor Reynolda Presbyterian Church, Reynolda, N. C.

[The following notable address is a challenge to our whole Church, and indeed to Christian men and women everywhere, to think, and to think deeply and seriously. The important matter of the next fifty years, says Dr. Lilly, will be to re-state our fundamentals of religion. For this "we will need scholars, we will need thinkers, we will need prophets, we will need apostles, we will need martyrs".]

Many thinking people are saying that we are at the end of an era. Many more are talking confidently of a new era which we are about to enter. Rev. Dr. George W. Truett, in a recent address to a great company of young people, said, "I would rather be living during the next fifty years than to have lived any five hundred years of the past." To this agree many prophets of our day. Dr. Walter W. Moore said practically the same thing some years before his translation. There is on record a conversation between Roger Babson, the expert statistician, and Charles Steinmetz, the wizard of electricity. Babson asked Steinmetz what line of research would see the greatest development within the next fifty years. As this is the electrical age and we feel that we are only at the beginning of it, we would naturally expect Steinmetz to answer that

THE MESSAGE OF THE BETHEL PULPIT.

BY REV. R. A. LAPSLEY, D. D.,
*Member of the Editorial Staff, Presbyterian Committee of
Religious Education, Richmond, Va.*

[On Saturday and Sunday, August 17 and 18, 1929, Bethel Church, Augusta county, Va., celebrated its One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary. The principal address on Saturday morning was made by Rev. R. A. Lapsley, D. D., a former pastor of the church. The closing address Sunday night was made by Rev. R. A. Lapsley, Jr., D. D., a son of the church. These two addresses are published in this issue of THE REVIEW. Lack of space has compelled the omission of large parts of the address by Rev. R. A. Lapsley, D. D., on "The Message of the Bethel Pulpit", much to the regret of the Editor.]

I stand before you today in a somewhat unique position. So far as the Bethel pulpit is concerned, I am living link between the present and a past which stretches back one hundred and six years. Dr. Francis McFarland became pastor of Bethel Church on September 12, 1823; Dr. Murray succeeded him in 1871; and I succeeded Dr. Murray in 1892. I never heard Dr. McFarland preach; he died while I was yet in college. But all the older membership of Bethel Church when I became its pastor were reared under Dr. McFarland's ministry; two of the members of the session were ordained by him. Of course I knew my immediate predecessor, Dr. Murray, quite well, and I often had him to preach for me. It is also true that I have been most happily associated with my successors in the Bethel pulpit in the past twenty-five years—Dr. Altfather, Mr. Denham and Dr. Turner; so that I speak for them as well as for the venerable men who preceded us. These facts are stated simply to show that my subject, "The Message of the Bethel Pulpit", is based upon first-hand information and personal knowledge of the past.

To come directly to my subject—what has been and still is the message of the Bethel pulpit? I might answer in a general way that the message of this pulpit has always been the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. There has never stood in this pulpit during these one hundred and six years a man who was not able to say, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

But there are four points in which we believe that the message of the Bible, and so of this pulpit, may be briefly summed up:

1. The first point is, an inspired Bible and a supernatural religion.
2. Second, a divine Christ and a triune God.
3. A threefold gospel—Ruin by the fall, Redemption by the blood, Regeneration by the Spirit.
4. An everlasting hereafter—a heaven of unending happiness, a hell of endless woe.

First, then, there is proclaimed from this pulpit an inspired Bible and a supernatural religion. When we preach an inspired Bible, we mean not only that it contains the Word of God, but that it *is* the Word of God. Therefore, it makes no mistake; it is free from all error, in doctrine or in fact. This Book, when it came from the men who originally wrote it, possessed a unique quality which no other book ever has had, or ever will have; so that the “whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence, may be deduced from Scripture”. The Bible is not only the inspired Word of God, but it contains the record of a divine and supernatural series of events. From end to end it records events and happenings which are miraculous, and which could only be performed by the almighty power of God. It begins with the divine creation of an unfallen world; and it ends with a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Second, our message also holds up a divine Christ and a triune God. We believe and preach a divine Christ. We do

not believe only in Jesus, the best man and the greatest teacher that ever lived; we believe that, and much more. We proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as God manifest in the flesh. We even go back in imagination to that point in the ages past before the world was, and there we see Christ in the beginning, as the Word who was with God and was God. We see him taking part in the creation of the world, for "all things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made". We recognize, however, that in the incarnation, the coming of the Son of God into this world to take on him our nature and to be made in all things like unto his brethren, there is something which neither you nor I can explain. But while we do not understand this mystery, we reverently accept it. If you call on me to explain how Jesus Christ can be both God and man, in two natures and only one person, I call on you to explain *yourself*, body and spirit in two distinct natures, and yet one person from the day you were born until this present moment.

We confront a similar mystery when we pass from a divine Christ to a triune God. "There are three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." How can three be one?—the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the Unitarian cry. We meet their challenge boldly—three things cannot be one thing *of the same kind*. Three eggs cannot be one egg, three trees cannot be one tree, three men cannot be one man; but three eggs can be one omelet, three trees can furnish timber for one house, three men can be partners in one firm. So, three gods cannot be one god, nor three persons one person; but three persons can be one God.

Here again is a great mystery. I cannot explain it, but I can illustrate it. Here I have in this pulpit a paraffin candle. I light it, and you all see the flame of this candle. Now in that flame you have *three in one*; two of these elements you can see, there is the wick, black, partly charred, there is the white paraffin. But there is also something else, oxygen, a thing which you cannot see and which makes combustion pos-

sible. Three elements—wick, paraffin, oxygen—one flame. Three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—one God over all, blessed forever.

The message of the Bethel pulpit, therefore, is always a divine Christ and a triune God.

Third, the message of the Bethel pulpit is a threefold gospel. Rowland Hill, as quoted by Spurgeon, used to say that there were three R's in an old-fashioned common school education—Readin', Ritin', Rithmetic'—and so there are three R's in all faithful preaching of the gospel—Ruin by the fall, Redemption by the blood, Regeneration by the Spirit. The message of this pulpit has always contained these three R's.

First of all, the men who have spoken from this pulpit have always been profoundly convinced of a sinner's lost and ruined condition, and so his desperate need of a divine salvation. We have believed, and so have preached, that "all mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever". As we look abroad upon the heathen world we see that the vast multitudes of mankind are "without God and without hope in the world". As we look into the face of any unsaved man or woman, boy or girl, we confront a soul over whom hangs the sentence of eternal death. The Scriptures expressly teach us that the unsaved sinner is dead in trespasses and in sin. He is not only dead, but he is corrupt: "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head here is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores." Yet while the sinner is dead to God and holiness, he is alive to sin, and in a state of active rebellion against God. "The carnal mind"—or, as the Revised Version puts it, "the mind of the flesh", the mind and disposition of every unsaved sinner—"is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

The Bethel pulpit has always held up the Cross of Jesus Christ as the one hope of lost and ruined men. We have

preached that great fundamental truth of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, "who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree". While we have seen on Calvary an amazing exhibition of the love of God for man, we have seen there something deeper and more fundamental. We preach Christ crucified as a sacrifice for sin. We see in his Cross a real substitution, Christ taking our place, bearing our guilt, suffering our shame, enduring our punishment. "The wages of sin is death," therefore Jesus died, "the just for the unjust", that He might be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.

And side by side with Redemption by the blood is Regeneration by the Spirit. When God redeems, He regenerates. He not only cleanses from the guilt of sin, but also delivers us from its power. And this deliverance is accomplished by that inward work of the Holy Spirit to which the fathers of our church were accustomed to give the name of "effectual calling". If men were left to themselves, they would trust their own goodness, and not the blood and righteousness of Christ; they would make light of sin, and never feel its awful guilt and heinousness in God's sight; and they would neglect, if they did not reject, His salvation. When men are saved it is not by their own might or power, but by the Holy Spirit of God. How the Spirit of God works in Regeneration, we do not know. But while a change of heart by Regeneration is a mystery, it is none the less a blessed fact. As I today proclaim from the Bethel pulpit Regeneration by the Spirit, I can look over this congregation and see numbers whom I know to be living witnesses to this blessed change.

This pulpit has always stood for the doctrine of the new birth, for the necessity of Regeneration by the Spirit.

Fourth, there remains just one more point to be discussed. This pulpit has always proclaimed an eternal hereafter—a heaven which is unspeakably glorious, in its unending happiness; a hell which is inexpressibly terrible, in its endless woe. And here we cut right across the current of the age in which we live, which does not want heaven, and mocks and scoffs at

hell. I once heard Dr. Fraser say in a sermon preached perhaps in this pulpit this striking thing: "Heaven is next to the last place to which most men want to go." Do you see the point? What men want is to stay in this world. As they can't stay here, they only want to go to heaven to keep out of hell. In this age of jazz, of radio and airplanes, of million-dollar fortunes and billion-dollar corporations, what do we want with heaven? Let us get into our Pierce-Arrow or Packard, or, better still, our monoplane or biplane, and ride and ride and ride, until the crash comes and we drop into—nobody knows where! But that's the very point—we do know where. You go to Washington to the Pennsylvania Station and you take the Congressional Limited, and you know that in three hours you will be in New York. Or you take the Liberty Limited, and you know that in nineteen hours it will land you in Chicago. And when you come to die and pass out into eternity, you know with absolute certainty that your destiny is fixed. You are bound either for glory or despair. And on this solemn issue the Bethel pulpit has given no uncertain sound.

Our scientific age has much to say about natural laws, with their unvarying forces, and the inexorable penalties which follow if you break these laws. A workman on the steel frame of a skyscraper in process of construction slips and falls from the seventeenth story, and you know what the law of gravitation does to him. A man steps from behind a car in the track of another car moving at a high rate of speed, and he is hurled into eternity, because he has run against the laws of motion. The same God who makes these laws of the natural world has also made the laws of the spiritual world, and he has told you most plainly what those laws are. Here are some of them: "The wages of sin is death"; "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"; "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

The Bethel pulpit has always planted itself upon the plain declaration of God's Word in this matter. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting

life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The men who have stood in this pulpit have been faithful, but they have also been tender and loving. While they have told you of the terrors of the law, they have opened to you the happy gates of gospel grace. Yes, they have warned you to escape for your life from this doomed world, but they have wooed you to come to Him who is "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him", and who has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." And because of this message, which is both faithful in warning and tender in invitation, during one hundred and six years of the past there has come into the membership of this church a steady stream of those "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them" in the gospel. As for most of them, their bodies rest in yonder churchyard. They themselves are to be found among the great multitude who are before the throne of God, clothed in robes which are made white in the blood of the Lamb, and with the palms of victory in their hands. We believe in, and therefore preach, an eternal hereafter—a heaven unspeakably glorious, with a fulness of rest and peace and unending joy; and a hell that is unutterably terrible, with a punishment that shall never end.

And now my task is nearly done. Against a background largely of personal knowledge which goes back beyond the century mark, I have set forth in its four main outlines what I conceive to have been, and what still is, the message of the Bethel pulpit: an inspired Bible and a supernatural religion; a divine Christ and a triune God; a threefold gospel—Ruin by the fall, Redemption by the blood, Regeneration by the Spirit; an eternal hereafter—a glorious heaven of unending joy, a dreadful hell of endless woe.