



The Princeton Theological Review

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OSWALD T. ALLIS

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The Princeton Theological Review

JULY, 1922

THE HEROISM OF THE MINISTRY IN THE HOUR OF CHRISTIANITY'S PERIL*

The reading of the Church Fathers is not infrequently a dreary and disappointing labor. One is forced to wonder how it came that the authors of these tedious commonplaces and pious irrelevancies rose to so high a place when they were alive and achieved so imperishable a renown when dead. This is true even of him who is reputed to have been the most eloquent of them all, Chrysostom. Yet in the conclusion to his homilies on the Letter to the Romans there is a passage which sustains any reputation which Chrysostom had for eloquence, then, or in succeeding ages. He says that of all the cities he loves Rome the most because there Paul died, there his dust reposes and there he will be raised up to meet the Lord. In his enthusiasm he prays that he might be permitted to throw himself about the body of Paul and be riveted to his tomb; "to see the dust of Paul's body that sowed the Gospel everywhere; the dust of that mouth which lifted the truth on high, and through which Christ spake the great and secret things, and greater than in his own person; the dust of those hands off which the serpent fell into the fire and through which the sacred writings were written; the dust of those feet which ran through the world and were not weary; the dust of those eyes which were blinded gloriously, but which recovered their sight again for the salvation of the world; the dust of that heart which a man would not do wrong to call the heart of the world, so enlarged that it could take in cities and nations and peo-

* An Address delivered at the 110th Commencement of Princeton Theological Seminary.

ples, which burned at each one that was lost, which despised both death and hell, and yet was broken down by a brother's tears."

Christianity is in greater peril today than ever before in its long history. It is not the peril of this world's hatred and persecution, for the world is too indifferent to the Church to hate her and persecute her; it is not the peril of corrupt and immoral living, eating like a canker within her breast; it is not the peril of sectarian strife and violence, and the madness of the theologians; nor is it the peril of current ideas about the nature of man and the order of the world which, if true, evacuate Christianity of its meaning. It is the peril of abandoning Jesus Christ as the Redeemer from sin. There are those who would not agree with me in saying that this is a peril; they say that it is a disaster which has already come. "There seems to be an effort," writes one of my correspondents, the rector of an Episcopal church in New England, "to explain Christianity without Christ." Another, associated with one of our Boards, and confessing himself as being from his days as a Fellow at Harvard anything but a conservative, says, "Something has eaten the heart out of Protestant Christendom and we have only the husk or the ghost of the shadow of it left." And another, a distinguished minister of the Congregational church writes: "The Protestant pulpit, with rare and fine exceptions, has ceased to preach the absolute need of redemption through the Cross of Christ." These things are said of the Protestant Church, and by ministers in the Protestant Church, that Church which came into being because it had or claimed to have, a great answer to a great question, "What must I do to be saved?" This is the reason why the Church needs today as never before a Christian ministry heroic in thought and life; and why as these young men go forth this day to take up the work of the ministry, that cause which might fill an angel's heart, and once filled the Saviour's hands, I call their attention to three things in the ministry

of St. Paul, whose heroic traits of mind and of heart are so nobly summarized in the passage just quoted from the eloquent preacher of Constantinople. These three things are: First, the heroism of his conception of the meaning of Christianity, as a unique, distinctive and original message of Redemption from sin; second, the heroism of the life with which he supported and vindicated the preaching of such a message; and third, the rewards of such a ministry.

THE HEROISM OF PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY

The Heroism of Paul's conception of Christianity as a unique, distinctive and original message of Redemption from sin through faith in a tremendous person, Jesus Christ! One would get the impression today that the chief effort is to show how like Christianity is to something else, and how all its doctrines have had their adumbration in ancient altar, or code, or literature. But however that may be, no one can doubt for a moment that Christianity got its first foothold in the world upon an altogether different theory; nor is it conceivable that it could have established itself in the world at all, had it proceeded upon any other plan. It started with the idea that it was totally unlike anything else that the world then knew, or had known, or could have known. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the mind of man the things which God hath prepared for those that love Him," said St. Paul in that lovely passage which we often quote in our prayers when speaking of the life to come or when standing by the still form of the Christian dead. I would not tear that saying away from the tender and sacred association which time and tradition have given them. But it will do no harm to remember that what Paul had in mind when he quoted those words of Isaiah was that the Gospel which he was preaching was a divine revelation, a truth at which none of the natural faculties of man, such as seeing, or hearing, or meditating,

could ever have arrived. In keeping with this was his favorite name for the Gospel as the "mystery" of God or of Christ, not the occult or enigmatic, or inexplicable, but God's great secret of redemption from sin, hid from times eternal, but now revealed unto the humblest Christian and by him to be made known unto all the nations. The sad thing about so much of the so-called Christian writing and teaching and preaching of the day is that a great part of it might have been done just as well by one who was not a Christian. We must get back into the Christian pulpit that note of independence and enthusiasm, that consciousness of having a truth to proclaim different from anything the world knows, or can know, or the Christian church will be merged and sunk in the currents of this world's thought.

Dr. Chalmers in his splendid way used to speak of the "grand particularities" of the Christian religion. That in our day those "grand particularities" have become dim and clouded, no man can doubt. The real menace today is not the open assault upon Christian doctrines, nor the wresting and distorting of them, and emptying them of their true and original meaning, for in this very process of repudiation and denial the doctrines themselves must be stated and thus attention called to them. The real menace is the total neglect of, or avoidance of, distinctive Christian truth. The alarming thing is the quiet oblivion into which Redemptive Christianity is sinking. I read recently a book of sermons, selected sermons, preached by a distinguished Congregational minister before university congregations. From beginning to end there was not a sermon or a paragraph or sentence which proclaimed Christ as the Saviour from sin. One could say of them what Dr. McCosh once said of the sermons of the minister who baptized him, "They are gracefully written, in short and well constructed sentences, and they have fine sentiment; but they do not contain one sentence of Gospel truth, that is, of Jesus set forth as the Redeemer of sinners."

In the *Confessions of an Opium Eater* Thomas De Quincey describes the preacher of his school days at Manchester as a man who was "sincere but not earnest." That struck me as a very odd thing to say, until he went on and explained that the topics of his sermons rarely rose above the low level of prudential ethics, and that while such topics might make a man sincere in his preaching, believing what he said as far as it went, they have no power to produce earnestness, either in the preacher or in those to whom he preaches. There is a vast amount of what an able English preacher has called "suburban" preaching, that is, preaching which dwells on the fringes and outskirts of Christian truth rather than at its citadel and center. The effect of this periphery preaching is to leave the center and heart of Christian truth, redemption through Christ, untouched. Thus it is that Christian preaching has lost its tone, its pleading earnestness and also its authority, so much so, that it is no exaggeration to repeat the words quoted by Bishop Gore in his recently published book, *Belief in God*, "There is nothing which is not both affirmed and denied in Christian pulpits." Therefore it is that the one great need today is for a ministry which shall do something to arrest the appalling dechristianization of Protestant preaching, which can pronounce an everlasting Yea and an everlasting Nay, and which shall re-discover and re-establish the almost obliterated line of distinction between belief and unbelief.

I know there are those who say we trouble ourselves unduly and tell us that all this is only a "new emphasis," that we are passing through a "transition stage." Yes, but transition to what? We know *from what* we are passing, but what is that *to which* we are passing? A larger Christianity, we are told; but we are not told how a Christianity which has left redemption through faith in Jesus behind it will be a larger Christianity. It would not be incorrect to say that a neo-Christianity is already being preached and taught. The drift in the direction of this neo-Christianity

is becoming stronger and stronger, and there is not a man in this graduating class who will not soon feel the powerful grip of that current. There are two considerations which tempt the minister to abandon the "grand particularities" of Christianity and dwell only on its incidentals. I recall them now as many another minister will when I mention them. First, the natural inclination of men to take the easier course. It is far easier to preach on the themes that lie along the low levels of prudential ethics or biographical sketching, than it is to preach on such topics as the Trinity, the Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Eternal Intercession, the second Epiphany, and Eternal Retribution. The second consideration is the haunting fear lest the preaching which centers on the cardinal truths of Christianity should prove less popular, and secure a more limited hearing than the other kind of preaching. Every minister, and especially the young minister, wishes to succeed, and to have the favor of the many to help him and encourage him like strong wine in his work. Perhaps personality has more to do with popularity than either orthodoxy or heterodoxy. But granted that the popular and acclaimed preaching of the day is the 'suburban' and 'periphery' preaching, the preaching which leaves out Jesus as the redeemer from sin, still, the heroic minister of Christ will not hesitate for a moment. Some years ago a graduate of this seminary went to call on a classmate in the study of his church, a very conspicuous and much spoken of church. The two men talked together for a little over old times and friends. Then the pastor of this wealthy and numerous congregation, well known throughout the Church, said to his friend, "What are you giving the people, anyway?" As the other hesitated before answering, he went on and said, "If you give them that old stuff they taught us at Princeton, you will preach to empty pews!" His friend then asked him what he gave the people. "Oh," he answered, "literature, history, poetry, humanity!"

I believe that the man who preaches the redemptive truth

of Christianity as against literature, history and poetry, stands, in the long run, a better chance for full pews than any other kind of a preacher. But even were he to preach to empty pews, it were better so to do, and still preach the Gospel, than to preach to a crowded auditory and give them only literature, history and poetry. Whether, then, your lot be cast in the midst of the great city, where the footsteps beat the sidewalks like drops of rain, and always in your ears the hoarse din of commerce and industry, or whether it be in some quiet white-towered village church, with the dead generations who have accomplished their warfare clustering close about the holy House as if yearning even in their dark graves to hear again the words of life,—wherever your lot is cast of God, let it be your solemn vow that your preaching shall be the kind which will help to hand down to the next generation the grand and peculiar traditions of the Christian's faith. On the northwest tower of St. Paul's in London hangs the great bell known as "Great Paul." The bell bears this inscription from the Vulgate: *Vae mihi si non evangelisavero!*"—"Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

On a recent Sabbath, free of duty, I worshipped in three New York churches. In the morning I attended the thronged services where the most popular preacher just now in New York preaches in the pulpit of a Presbyterian church, though himself a Baptist; in the afternoon I worshipped at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and in the evening at a Congregational church where a distinguished British visitor preached. The music was magnificent and the sermons, with the exception of the one at the Cathedral, markedly able and nobly delivered. I "heard the doctors," though I did not ask them questions. But as I came down Broadway after the evening sermon, and saw that street thronged with men and women passing in and out of the theatres and picture palaces, I asked myself a few questions. I said to myself, "I have heard three able sermons today.

But suppose that we turn back the clock of time nineteen centuries, and think of this Sunday as the first Sunday after the Resurrection, and these three ministers are the men sent forth by Jesus to give his Gospel to the world, pagan still as I saw it on the crowded New York thoroughfare that night, but still more hard and pagan when the first disciples went forth to preach Christ. Is it conceivable, by any stretch of the imagination, that the kind of preaching which these three New York ministers gave the people, and which I have heard today, could have made any impression upon the minds of that heathen world or gained the slightest foothold for Christianity in that pagan civilization?" To such a question there can be but one answer—It could not! However it may please and entertain Christian people and ministers today, the sort of preaching to which I have listened could never in any age have established on this earth a Christian church. The more serious question is, How long will such preaching keep the church in the world? How long can we run on the capital of past ages of faith?

That same day I visited the beautiful Roman Catholic Chapel built for the devotions of Spanish people in New York. The church was empty. I saw no man there; I heard no hymn, or prayer or sermon. Yet, at the end of the day I felt that I had heard more of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Catholic chapel, than in all three Protestant Churches, because along the walls of the chapel were the beautiful paintings of a Spanish artist representing the 'stations' of the Cross, and these paintings told of One who was wounded for my transgressions and bruised for my iniquities, One who loved me and gave Himself for me.

A few days before this Sabbath in New York I went to visit a venerable Presbyterian church in the heart of the Virginia mountains. All about the grey walled church were the tombs of the hardy God-fearing pioneers who with catechism, Bible and psalm book, axe and rifle, had conquered the wilderness. Over the doorway was a large stone on which was cut the legend:

THIS CHURCH WAS BUILT IN 1796 BY A FEW
GOD FEARING INHABITANTS OF THIS PLACE
AS A TOKEN OF THEIR LOVE FOR THE HOLY
GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
READER IF YOU WOULD PRAISE THEIR
VIRTUE, GIVE GOD THE GLORY.

After my Sabbath's experience in New York, where I had heard scarcely a sentence of the language of Canaan spoken by the ministers of Christ, my thought kept going back to that little church in the wilderness with that inscription over its doorway about men who "loved the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Is it possible, I said to myself, that the day of which Our Lord spake has come—the day when the 'love of many shall wax cold'? Can it be true that the race of men who love the Holy Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is passing away?

THE HEROISM OF THE LIFE WITH WHICH PAUL
SUPPORTED HIS MESSAGE AND GOSPEL

It goes without saying that this kind of preaching makes its stern demand upon the life of the preacher. In St. Paul's life there were three things that show the heroism of the Life with which he vindicated his preaching. First, his tireless energy. "In labours oft," he once said of himself. Wherever we see him his face is eagerly set toward some great goal for Christ and for man.

Christ's, I am Christ's! And let the name suffice you,
Paul has no honour and no friend but Christ.

* * * *

Lone on the land and homeless on the water
Pass I in patience till the work be done.

Hard by the gate in yonder venerable cemetery, you will see the grave of a student in this seminary who died ere his course of student had been completed. You count on a long ministry, and may God grant it you. You expect in your day to come back here with half a century of labour behind you. May God keep you that long in the vineyard. But unless the history of this class is to be unlike that of every

other class, then there are some here today who have only a few sermons to preach and but a few hours to work in the vineyard ere the night cometh. Therefore whatever good and noble things you plan for your ministry, put them into execution now, at once. Do not wait for ten or twenty years as so many of us waited. The night cometh! In the words with which Dr. Roswell D. Hitchcock took leave of a class at Union Seminary, "At whatever cost, accept the service offered you, high or low, far or near. Then burn to the socket!"

The second element in Paul's heroic life which supported his Gospel was his readiness to suffer with and for Christ. We hear much today about ministers being paid less than motormen and conductors, of wealthy dictators, of character assassins, of petty persecutions, of being cast aside at fifty. Suppose it were all true! Are ministers no longer able to suffer with Christ? Are they no longer able to drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism? Has the servant suddenly become greater, in our day, than his Lord? When they were drowning those Scotch sisters in the Solway Firth, they fastened the younger much further in than the elder; and expecting that when she saw the struggles of her sister she would be terrified and recant, they cried out to her, "Look, what seest thou?" Slowly she turned her head and saw the death struggles of her sister as the hungry tide came swirling in about her head. Then she made answer: "What do I see? I see the Lord Jesus Christ suffering in one of His members!"

The third element in Paul's life which backed up his preaching was his personal integrity, his purity of life. When he stood before Christ it was always Paul, "the chief of sinners," but when he confronted men who opposed his preaching and assailed his character he said "I know nothing against myself." The truth that we ministers preach is so grand a truth that even debatable things we can well afford to let go by, if perchance thereby we shall declare the truth with greater enthusiasm and power and influence.

For their sakes, for those now unknown men and women and little children who are going to love you and trust you, sanctify yourselves. There are men who once sat where you sit today, with the same hopes and expectations. Years have passed by, but they never come back to these commencement scenes and reunions. They never will come back! Their sword has fallen from their hand and their shield has been vilely cast away as though it had not been anointed with oil. Their places are empty and their pulpits are silent. In Carlyle's *Past and Present* there is a piercing parable of the truth how any act of dishonor or sin lays its heavy hand of bondage, weakness and self-accusation upon the future. This knight, Henry of Essex, had once done a great wrong to Gilbert de Cereville. Long after he himself had forgotten the wrong, he engaged in a desperate encounter with a knight on an island in the Thames. Hard pressed, Henry gave way a little and looking around, lo, at the rim of the horizon in shining armour there stood a knight of gigantic stature, casting wrongful eyes at him. When he beheld this adversary, the knight he once had wronged, Henry lost all heart and was soon vanquished. "Thus does the conscience of man project itself athwart whatsoever of knowledge, or surmise or imagination, or understanding faculty, or natural disposition he has in him, and like the light through colored glass, paint strange pictures on the rim of the horizon's edge, in shining armour, threaten the misdoer in his hour of extremest need." Remember that solemn asseveration of the Apostle, "I know nothing against myself." Strive to live with a conscience void of offense, so that when you go into the battle for Christ and the truth no minatory shadow hangs on your horizon to take the nerve out of your arm and the light out of your eye. Live so that when you get up to preach all your enemies will be there in front of you, and here, behind you, no mocking, accusing, taunting voice, no galling speech and thought impelling recollection, but only friends—the good wishes and prayers of those who love you, the thronging memories of good deeds

done for Christ, the recollection of your own hours of prayer and consecration, the silent but mighty encouragement of the cloud of invisible witnesses who hold you in full survey and tell you that every blow struck for God on this battle field of earth where light and darkness meet in combat has an echo in heaven forever; that

Never a sigh of anguish or of pity,
Never a wail for weakness or for wrong,
Hath not its archives in the angels' city,
Finds not its echo in the endless song.

THE REWARDS OF SUCH A MINISTRY

The ministry with the heroic message of Christianity supported by the pure and heroic life has its labours and its sorrows, its fightings within and its fears without; but it has also its exceeding great rewards. One of these is the satisfaction of feeling that in your ministry you have been building no summer house of temporary stay and delight, unfitted to meet the storms and gales of life, but a house founded upon the sure foundation in Christ, and in which some storm beaten pilgrim through life may find refuge and peace. Paul did not boast at the end of his ministry of churches founded, of new currents of thought which he had started, but he did mention a few people here and there whose names he had helped to write in the Book of Life. Chalmers, on a visit to Anwoth, Samuel Rutherford's first parish, tells of seeing on the hillside the two stones upon which that great lover of Christ called to witness to his desire to win his people for Christ. As the sunset of his life drew on, this was his prayer and his hope:

Oh, Anwoth by the Solway,
To me thou still art dear;
E'en from the ports of heaven
For thee I'll drop a tear.

Oh, if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God's right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens,
In Immanuel's Land.

Paul's ministry had also the reward of friendship. Listen to those forget-me-nots of his letters: Salute Archippus, Nymphas, Mary, Andronicus, Junia, Amplias, Herodion, Narcissus, Rufus, his mother and mine, Julia and Olympas. These melodious Latin names are as fresh and frequent as the violets which on this May day grow on yonder campus. Your path will not be smooth and easy; very often it will be rough and steep and stony, but ever by its border there will grow and smile for you the flowers of Christian friendship, like the wild flowers which I saw last week by the side of the path which, steep and stony, wound its way to the top of the mountain. Passages and names in the Bible which today are mere rhetoric to you, such as "Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm," will one day be more than rhetoric; they will be illuminated and burn with the light of intense reality. But be not dismayed. That kind of friend will be more than matched by the presence and help and prayers of friends in Christ who will make you take new faith in human nature and wonder at the depth of the riches of even the humblest soul.

Best of all, chiefest reward of all will be the friendship of Christ. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." To whom did Christ speak those words? To men who were going to preach the Gospel. The faithful preacher of the Gospel can claim the presence of Christ. True to his promise, Christ will ever be with you. But there will be times when you will be more conscious of that Presence than at other times. It may come to you after a period of desert dullness, or windless calm, when no voice seems to speak and no light burns; or when your path has led you into the dark shadows of Gethesemane and for a moment you are tempted to feel that He has forgotten His promise to be with you. Then will come that manifestation of the Saviour, which, like His appearance long ago to Peter, is beyond all words to describe, but which having been granted, will immediately be recognized as the great reward of the

minister and will leave the heart brave and the arm strong again. During the Sepoy mutiny a native Christian was being tortured by his foes. At length their hands grew weary of applying the instruments of torture, and pausing in his savage labours, one of his tormentors leaned over the lacerated and bleeding body and shouted, "Now where is your Lord Jesus Christ?" Immediately, like the radiant smile upon the face of the dying Stephen, came back the faint but clear reply, "He is in my heart!" There is the secret of the minister's strength, his safety, and reward—Christ in his heart.

The poet who wrote the Book of Genesis tells how a river went out of Eden to water the garden and from thence was divided into four heads, and how the first compasseth the whole land of Havilah where there is gold; "and the gold of that land is good." You are going out today into the land of the Christian ministry, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good. You will have to search for it, and dig for it, and toil for it, and suffer for it; but the gold is there, and the gold of that land is good.

Philadelphia, Pa. CLARENCE EDWARD MACARTNEY.