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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

A New Book and the "Old Doctrines."

By Rev. Henry Collin Minton, D.D.

Browsing around in a favorite book-shop a few days ago, we came across a new book on the shelf, of which we recalled having seen the publisher's announcement a little while before. It had a curiously personal look. Doubtless many of the intelligent readers of "The Presbyterian" have seen it and some have read it. Its name is this: "What is Left of the Old Doctrines?" by the Rev. Washington Gladden, D.D.

Now, if this title is meant as a question, of course, we can scarcely answer it accurately without having read the book; though, from what we know in general of the distinguished "leaver" some of us might venture a guess. We may recall Dean Swift's notion of the work of a literary editor. He insisted that he should always write his review of a book before he read the book; otherwise, his judgment might be prejudiced.

We do not propose to review this book; neither, at the present moment, are we conscious of having been seized with an insane desire to read it. We once knew a brilliant literary church-goer who insisted that of most preachers it was true that, after he had heard them preach half-a-dozen times, he could invariably frame a mental outline of their sermon as soon as he heard them announce their text. He argued that there are certain types of mental temperament and homiletical treatment, and of thought and creed and piety, and, having once classified the preacher, he could predict the sermon from the text. He conceded that some men are original, capricious and lawless; these could successfully defy his prognosis.

Well, we suspect that such a prognosticator could judge this book pretty fairly without turning over its leaves very slowly. Most men have only one word to say, and it were well if that is not a borrowed one. John the Baptist was a "Voice" crying out in the wilderness; there are a thousand echoes in the world for every voice.

Blessed is the man who knows what books to read. One of the arguments that the Deity is omniscient is that He must first know all things in order to decide what things are so small and trifling as to be not worth knowing. We have heard of a reader of "David Harum" who took exception to some of the coarser things in the venerable banker's speech and mode of life; still, he had to read it all in order to know what he should discountenance.

We have intimated that we are disposed to resist the temptation to read this particular new book. And yet, we must confess to a mixture of motives in that matter. There is a very comfortable feeling of self-complacency in knowing that one has been among the first to cut the leaves of a book, fresh from the moisture of its morning dew. We envied the omnivorous friend of college days who boasted that he had read Shakespeare when it first came out. Mr. Emerson had it for one of his three rules never to read a book till it was a year old; the other two rules will be easily recalled—the book must be famed and it must be one that he "liked." We always wondered how he could know whether he liked a book till he had read it, and how a book could be "famed" if everyone should follow his example and not read it until it became so. But

Emerson always boasted that logic was not his major study.

But we are not yet saying anything about that book. We could wish that the distinguished gentleman, to whom the task of "leaving" seems to have been entrusted, would be as tender with the dear old doctrines as he can find it in his heart to be. We confess that we are not as hopeful in that matter as we would have been if some other man had been selected to do the leaving. Dwight L. Moody would have been generous. Charles H. Spurgeon would have left a large remnant. These were the greatest preachers of their time, but they had no ax for the old doctrines. They knew a good deal about men and things and they were expert soul winners; and they were always kind to the old doctrines. The missionaries to Asia and Africa and the Islands of the sea are not petitioning to have the old doctrines cut down.

The old doctrines will stand or fall with the old Book. The acknowledged leader of American Unitarianism twenty years ago said in public that if he accepted the Bible as true, he would cordially accept the evangelical doctrines of the orthodox Churches. His position was, at least, more consistent than that of those who accept the Bible as the Word of God and then believe so much of it as suits their taste or purpose. There is, of course, another consistent position; it is to reject the Bible and then the old doctrines will share the fate of the rejected Book.

Coleridge said he would believe the New Testament if every book in it were proved a forgery. But Coleridge was a baptized philosopher. He said that he believed *ad normam Platonis*. Dr. De Witt has shown us that if the Bible leaves us, it must be either Rationalism or Rome. Whatever else may happen, this is sure, that when Protestantism loses its Bible, it will cease to be what it has been.

But what of the book? Possibly, after all, it only tells us what is left—for its writer. He must be a kind man; surely he would not rob us of our cherished faith. However much he may hate the old doctrines, we know of no reason why he should hate us. Let him renounce them for himself if he must; only, please let us have them a little while longer. They have served us well. They work well in all climates and in all seasons. We know of nothing to take their place and do their work. They are "old," to be sure, but that only shows that they have good wearing, good staying qualities.

Nay, rather, let the woodman cut and hew; the old doctrines are here to stay. The people of God have not been drivelling dupes nor wild-eyed fanatics. Even the martyrs and Covenanters, the Puritans and Huguenots, knew a thing or two. The Spirit of All Truth has not been unmindful of the Blessed Master's promise. God's truth is changeless, dateless, invincible, impregnable. Its maximum for any age is its minimum for every age. "The Word of God is an anvil that has worn out many a hammer." The old doctrines are strong in root and tough of fiber; they have withstood many a cruel axman's stroke and still stand, firm and unmoved, majestic and divine, as ever.

—The time to consecrate your purse to God is when you have but little to give. If you put it off till you are wealthy you will probably never give it at all.