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EDITORIALS

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THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXIX.

APRIL, 1918.

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THE SOCIETY OF MISSIONARY INQUIRY.

1818—Centennial Celebration—1918.

The celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Society of Missionary Inquiry is one of the notable events in the history of Union Theological Seminary. It is impossible to convey to the printed page all of the information and inspiration which was brought to us during the four days through which the program extended. But we feel that we owe to the future to preserve in printed form as many of the addresses delivered on that occasion as we can. It has been possible for us to secure in written form all of the addresses but three, and we are taxing our space to the utmost limit in order to include all the manuscripts which have come into our hands. With the exception of the book department this whole issue is given over to the Centennial Addresses.

Below will be found an exact copy of the program which was planned for the Centennial. This program was carried out as printed with the exception that the last speaker, President Charles W. Dabney, LL. D., of the University of Cincinnati, found it impossible at the last moment to be present. This was a matter of great regret to us, as there are so many ties that bind Dr. Dabney to Union Seminary. All of the sermons and addresses were of an unusually high order and produced an impression upon the hearers which will not be soon forgotten.

THE SUPREME ELEMENT OF THE MINISTER'S MESSAGE.

BY THE REV. EGBERT W. SMITH, D. D.

Executive Secretary of Foreign Missions, Nashville, Tenn.

I esteem it a privilege to have a part in celebrating the completion by a men's missionary society of a hundred years of continuous existence, an event, so far as I know, without parallel on this hemisphere. It gives me sincere pleasure also to extend my congratulations upon the splendid prosperity and fruitfulness of this institution, to its faculty, its governing board, and especially its gifted and beloved President, whose first year as a professor was my first year as a student. We were fresh-men together. But I esteem it a yet greater privilege to be permitted to address a few words of elder-brotherly counsel to these young men who are looking forward humbly, yet I trust eagerly, to the ministerial office.

The importance and power of that office have been growing upon me with every year of my ministry. The helplessness of the average congregation, its almost childlike dependence for guidance and inspiration upon its minister, is pathetic. In church life, in national life, in all matters of moment and magnitude, people need strong and intelligent leadership. They long for it. As a rule they are eager to follow it.

How often have I had a pastor explain to me the peculiar circumstances that made it unreasonable to expect his church to do anything worth-while for missions. And how often have I observed that a change of pastors would be followed by a splendid development of missionary spirit, just as if those prohibitive circumstances had been nonexistent. The old Romans were the master-fighters of the world. They had a proverb which sums up the results of their observation: "Better is an army of stags led by a lion than an army of lions led by a stag."

This teaching of experience is confirmed by scripture. It is

not a mere human opinion, it is the judgment of God Himself, that the prime responsibility for success or failure is on the minister. A few months ago in preparing a sermon on Stewardship, I came upon a fact which I had never properly appreciated and which I wish to pass on to you. I knew very well that covetousness, or the greed of gain, was the prevailing sin of the Old Testament church, as it certainly is of the modern church. But I had never before observed how uniformly and impressively, nay, how startingly, God laid the responsibility for this sin's prevalence upon the spiritual leaders of the people.

In Jeremiah we read, "For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness." And where lies the blame? In the very next sentence God points us to prophet and to priest, both of whom, He declares, "deal falsely. They heal the hurt of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."

In Isaiah we have a terrific catalogue of the people's sins. The prophet compares these sins to ravenous beasts coming up out of field and forest and devouring God's flock. And where does he place the blame? "His watchmen are blind; they are all without knowledge; they are all dumb dogs; they cannot bark; they are shepherds that cannot understand."

In Ezekiel God gives His prophet a vivid picture of a decorous and highly respectable congregation. "They come unto thee as the people cometh; and they sit before thee as my people; and they hear thy words, but do them not. With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their gain." And what next? "The word of Jehovah came unto me saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, forasmuch as my sheep became a prey to all the beasts of the field, therefore, thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand."

It is easy to explain away our failures. It is easy to show that we have done everything possible for the flock. The ten spies of Israel took no blame to themselves. They found the way into the Promised Land blocked. The enemy soldiers were sons of Anak. The enemy cities were walled up to heaven.

The circumstances were beyond their control. Excuse-making is the easiest business under heaven. It was the first business started by man after the fall. It has been his biggest industry ever since. But let it never blind us to this most solemn truth, that to every under-shepherd God is saying, "I will require my sheep at thy hand."

That is the first fact, that the supreme responsibility is on the minister. And now a second fact, the supreme element of the minister's responsibility is his message.

What makes the prophet is not ordination, or holiness, or zeal, or learning, or all these combined. What makes the prophet is his authentic sense of a message, his commission to be God's mouthpiece to men.

Therefore the world will never outgrow the need of him. With the widening triumph of the Prince of Peace the soldier may one day lose his job, and even the lawyer find his profession precarious. Of the saloon-keeper's business the end is already in sight. Many occupations will no doubt sink forever below the horizon as the tribes of men pursue their solemn march through the centuries. But as long as man has a conscience that needs cleansing, a will that needs renewing, an imagination that paints the misty walls of this prison-house with awful shapes that terrify and faint hopes that mock, a heart that hungers for love, and a reason that pines for light; as long as man's mortal environment is this fateful triangle of sin and suffering and death, his deepest need and longing will be for some authentic word of God to his soul. Therefore our Lord said that man's real life is "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Therefore also will remain, central and commanding in human life, the prophetic office, for through that office is mediated the message of God to men.

We have seen that on the minister is the supreme responsibility, that the supreme element of that responsibility is his message; consider now that the supreme element of that message is his conception of God.

You recall how the great prophets of the Old Testament on the threshold of their office were given, in some form, a vision or revelation of God. So it was with Paul. "It pleased God to

reveal his Son in me that I might preach him." And not preaching only, but all Christian doctrine, Christian ethics, Christian experience, are determined by our conception of God. Our idea of God is the stamp. Press it down on the intellect, and the result is theology; on the conscience, and the result is duty; on the feelings and will, and the result is spiritual experience. The one regnant thing in a man's religion is his conception of God. I do not mean his lip conception. I mean what in his inmost soul he understands God to be. An error there means just that much darkness in the mind, that much sin, weakness, suffering, failure, in the life.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the first great controversies in the development of Christian truth concerned the nature of God. At once you think of the little dwarf of Alexandria with his squat figure and his straw-colored hair. But important as it is to know what Athanasius stood for in the fourth century, it is vastly more essential to know what Christ and Paul stood for in the first century, with the very same end in view, to establish a right conception of God. In homiletic and spiritual value the study of the Arian controversy is as dust and ashes compared to the study of the Pharisaic and the Judaistic controversies which together fill so large a portion of the New Testament. The one concerned the constitution of the Godhead, the other two concern the character of God. The one is in large degree ancient history, the other two are just as vital and burning questions to-day as when Christ and Paul faced murderous audiences in defense of the truth.

In the Pharisaic controversy Christ is showing that God is not a class God, that He loves the outcast as well as the high caste, the bad as well as the good, the unchurched as well as the en-churched. In the Judaistic controversy Christ and Paul are showing that God is not a tribal God, that He loves not one race, but all races, that He is the great Saviour-God of all the families of men.

In this wonderful moving-picture of scripture I see two men sulking. One is the elder brother in the parable. The other is Jonah. They are united by the bond of a common grouch and a tragic misconception. One is sulking outside of a house,

the other outside of a city. The one sulks because the father is showing love to a prodigal, the other because the great Father is showing love to foreigners. The one thinks of God as loving the good only. The other thinks of God as loving one nation only. The most distinctive thing about God, the greatness of His heart, both are ignorant of. Yet both are specialists in religion, and one is a prophet.

Do you call this ancient history? I tell you nay. In these two scripture figures you find the explanation of the two most faith-staggering spectacles presented by our modern Christianity.

The first is seen in every big city in Christendom. You will recall that Christ's disciples are to be the salt of human society, and that salt to do its work must come in contact with what it is to purify and save. Yet in every large city you will find the salt of the community gathered into a number of self-respecting piles called congregations, expensively housed, preached to, and sung to; while across a gulf, if not impassable, certainly unpassed except by a few individuals here and there, lie the city's masses, in their sin and vice and poverty and misery, upon whom the influence of the churches is well-nigh imperceptible. And the explanation is that, to an extent undreamed of, the God who is adored in the pews and preached in the pulpits is a Pharisee God. I wish I could pause on this subject to expand and illustrate, but I leave it to your own earnest study.

The other spectacle is this. Although the Son of God commanded his disciples to go into all the world, to make disciples of all the nations, to preach the gospel to every creature; although he organized his Church for the express purpose of this world-wide propagation; yet nineteen centuries later we find ninety-seven per cent. of all Christian ministers and churches crowded into a few favored countries while the majority of the human race are left in spiritual darkness. And the explanation is that all over these favored lands, to an extent undreamed of, the God who is adored in the pews and preached in the pulpits is a provincial God.

This defect in the conception of God it is supremely difficult to correct.

The tribal instinct, the tribal point of view, the tribal limita-

tion of sympathy and outlook, is so bred in the bone that for the most part we are utterly unconscious of its dominance or even its presence. A few weeks ago Mr. Morganthau, our Ex-Ambassador to Turkey, made this statement: "There are less than one hundred men in America who are capable of thinking internationally."

But the minister must be capable of doing this. He must have an international conception of God, not in his head only, but permeating every fibre of his heart. Otherwise his message is maimed, his stream is tainted at its source, and his ministry, in vital respects, misrepresents God and misleads men. Without an adequate sense of God's Fatherhood there can be no adequate feeling of human brotherhood. When we realize with our hearts that God is the loving Father of all men everywhere, that He sent His Son to be the Saviour of them all, then only we begin to love man as man, regardless of whether he is bad or good, rich or poor, brown or white, near or far.

It is no accident that John G. Paton, the apostle of the New Hebrides, was first the apostle of the slums of Glasgow; that Mary Slessor, the saviour of the savages of Calabar, began her work among the toughs of Dundee. The missionary spirit is simply the spirit of universal brotherhood, reaching out to save wherever lost men are to be found. As the converted prize-fighter, in John Masefield's poem, cries out,

"I thought that Christ had given me birth
To brother all the souls of earth."

When the Assembly met in my church in Louisville in 1911, among the commissioners came an old college classmate whom I had not seen since we graduated. I took him to a cafe in the city where he and I could dine together, just we two, and talk over old college friends and experiences. But to my amazement I found he did not care to talk about these things. The one thing he wanted to talk about was the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. I could not but exclaim, "What has happened to you?" "Yes," he said, "something has happened to me. You remember the Birmingham Foreign Mission Convention of 1909? My pastor compelled me to attend, and there for the first time in my life

I caught the world vision. I saw with my heart that Christ had died for all men just the same as for me." This man was not a lawyer or public speaker. He was a plain business man. "From Birmingham," he said, "I went back home and stumped my county for Christ. And I have done more work for Christ since that Convention than in all the rest of my life put together." A year or so later he wrote me with joy that one of his daughters had volunteered for the foreign field.

Such transformations I have often seen. Give a man the world vision, let him see with his heart, as Faber says,

"What God is like,"

and the instant response is a longing

"To brother all the souls of earth."

That is why Christ and Paul deliberately risked their lives to displace this tribal conception of God with the true conception. They knew it had to be done if the people were ever to be spiritually developed.

I see Christ in the pulpit at Nazareth. He opens at Isaiah. He chooses a text that contains the missionary message without advertising it, a plan we do well to follow. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." The first part of his sermon is the announcement of the present fulfilment of this scripture with no doubt an amplification of the blessings mentioned in the text. His hearers wonder at the gracious words that proceed out of his mouth. The second part of his sermon is the proof that these blessings are not for Jews only, but that God's love overleaps national boundaries and embraces the outside nations. "I tell you of a truth," he declares, "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land, but unto none of them was Elijah sent. God sent him unto a foreigner, a widow of Sarepta in the land of Sidon. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none

of them was cleansed. But the leper that God healed was a man of another land and race, Naaman the Syrian."

And how do they like seeing their own national God pulled down from the throne and his place taken by a missionary God who goes on errands of love to outside nations? They are filled with wrath. They seize him. They rush him out of the city up to the brow of the cliff on which the town is built, intending to cast him down headlong.

If any man ever knew the tribal spirit, how narrow and stubborn it is, Paul knew it. Does he adapt himself to it? Does he preach a little God to please men's little hearts? I see him at Jerusalem. His pulpit is the castle stairs. His audience is the mob from which he has just been rescued. He addresses them in their sacred Hebrew tongue. Silence falls. As his sermon progresses he holds them in the hollow of his hand. Their fixed attention you and I would not have broken by introducing an unpopular theme, would we? But that fixed attention Paul looks upon as his God-given opportunity for introducing it. As they hang upon his lips, suddenly, like a thunderbolt smiting their rock-bound prejudice, comes the tremendous declaration that by the command of God Himself Paul is going far away as a missionary to preach their Messiah-Saviour to foreign nations. At that the storm breaks. "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live." But Paul had shot his bolt. He had borne his witness to the world-love and world-purpose of his Lord. And that Lord himself stands by him in the night and says, "Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so thou must bear witness also at Rome."

"As thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem." Paul had testified of him as a world-Saviour; he had testified of his purpose of love to those other nations; he had testified thus at the risk of popularity and life itself; and so, my friends, must you and I bear witness, if we would follow in the steps of Paul and Paul's Master.

That is the supreme element of our message, God, not a class God, not a tribal God, but God who "so loved the WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

That is what you are to preach. Where you are to preach, in what land you are to deliver your message, I do not know. But this I know, that when you are willing to preach Christ anywhere, the way will be made clear. When the eye is lifted up to his face, and the life is laid down at his feet, light shines on the path. "He that followeth me," not self, not personal ease, not future place or fame, "He that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

"Laid on Thy altar, O my Lord Divine,
Accept this gift to-day, for Jesus' sake;
I have no jewels to adorn Thy shrine,
Nor any world-famed sacrifice to make,
But here I bring within my trembling hand
This will of mine—a thing that seemeth small,
But Thou alone, O Lord, canst understand,
How, when I yield Thee this—I yield my all.

"Take it, O Father, ere my courage fail,
And merge it so in Thine own will that even
If, in some desperate hour, my cries prevail
And Thou give back my gift, it may have been
So changed, so purified, so fair have grown,
So one with Thee, so filled with peace Divine,
I may not know, or feel it as my own,
But gaining back my will may find it Thine."