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TENNYSON'S RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

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Alfred Tennyson is the most representative English poet of the nineteenth century. For this reason the religious beliefs held by him and expressed in his poetry are of peculiar interest to any student of religious thought. But let us endeavor to understand what his beliefs were before undertaking to measure the significance of his holding and teaching them.

We turn first to one of his earliest poems, *The Palace of Art*. Opening with the statement,

"I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house,
Wherein at ease for aye to dwell,"

he proceeds to describe this lordly pleasure-house of his soul as furnished with all the treasures of literature and art from all the ages. Then the soul in "Godlike isolation," separating herself from God and from men, whom she despises as "droves of swine," says at last:

"I take possession of man's mind and deed,
I care not what the sects may brawl.
I sit as God holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all."

THE COMFORTER

BY REV. JAMES I. VANCE, D. D.

TEXT: "*It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*"—John 16: 7.

Christ promised his disciples that he would not leave them comfortless. He did not promise that he would not leave them poor or sad or persecuted or afflicted or distressed or sorrowful, but he did say: "I will not leave you comfortless." He did say: "Whatever your lot, however hard your conditions, however great your sorrows and sore your bereavements, you shall have comfort and consolation and cheer and moral strength and spiritual fortitude and holy hope and triumphant confidence, for I will not leave you comfortless."

Precious promise!

Christ fulfilled it by sending the Comforter. His plan was not to relieve his disciples of the things which tried them. It was not to destroy their enemies and diminish their difficulties and reduce their work. It was not to give them a new world to live in. The world was to stand, but he was to send them in the world the Comforter. This Comforter is the Holy Spirit, the third person in the blessed Trinity. Christ's name for the Holy Spirit is the "Comforter," and so great and glorious and complete, so permanent and pre-eminent and divine is his ministry, that he has pre-empted the name. He is not a comforter, but the Comforter, the blessed Paraclete.

In the text Christ declares his estimate of the ministry of the Comforter. He says: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you." That statement must have staggered his disciples. How was it possible for anyone to take Christ's place? Nevertheless, Christ is saying that there is

one who can do better for them than he has done or can do; so much better that for their sakes he is going to leave them.

It was hard for the disciples to understand such a saying. It is hard for us to understand it. Yet Christ says it and he must know. It is his deliberate conviction. As he looked into the faces of the men he loved, with a break in his voice which told of his affection for them and with a light in his eye which told that this affection was so great he would put himself aside, Jesus said: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you: but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

THE VALUE OF THE COMFORTER.

Could there be a stronger statement of the value of the ministry of the Holy Spirit than this declaration by the Saviour?

Jesus seems to say that the highest blessing he can conceive of for his disciples is not for them to have him with them, but for them to have the Holy Spirit with them. How could anything be better than Christ? If these men only have him with them, they can stand anything. If they may see his face and hear his voice and be blessed with his safe counsel and inspiring leadership and hallowed fellowship, all will be well.

There are Christians to-day who feel this way about the bodily presence of Christ. They are looking for Christ's return to earth in bodily form as the consummation of Christian hope. They feel that little can be done under existing conditions. The world is to grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Their prayer is: "O Lord, tarry not, but come." The most that the Church can do at present is to protest and witness. Only when Christ returns and leads his Church in person against the enemy can the victory be won.

Yet Christ is saying that there is something better than this, something better for the Church than to have him. It is for the Church to have the Holy Spirit, and so much better, that he is going away in order that the Holy Spirit may come.

Christ measured the blessing of the Comforter by the greatest blessing the world had received. He says that it is greater

than the greatest. It was something when "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." That seemed to exhaust all the resources in the treasury of divine love. That gave the world a Saviour. Christ is saying that a greater blessing remains. God's highest gift to man is still to be shed forth. It is the gift of the Comforter which the Father will send in His Son's name.

Let us try to measure the worth of the Comforter by some of the blessings Christ has brought the world. What would the world be if Christ had not come and lived in it? We have grown so used to our blessings that we take them for granted. We forget that they came with Christ and are the products of his ministry among men.

Among the cards which came to my table last Christmas was one from my publishers, entitled, "The Birthday of Hope." It is the story of a minister's dream on Christmas Eve. He is seated in his study and hears in the street below his window a band playing the old Christmas hymn, "O come, all ye faithful." His New Testament is open before him and he has read in the gospel of the beloved disciple to the line "If I had not come," when he falls asleep and dreams of a Christless world. The first thing to impress him about this world into which Christ had not come was that it was a world without Christmas. He steps into the street, but there is no Christmas cheer in the air. Instead of the salutations of good will, there are the curt nods and hurried greetings of people who are absorbed in their own plans. He enters the homes of the people and finds that the children have not hung up their stockings in glad anticipation of Christmas morning. He looks in upon the poor and finds that no one else has been there with baskets of good things for the Christmas dinner. The faces of the children are pinched by poverty and pale with want. Turning to the street again he sees a great bare spot on the top of the hill where had stood the splendid cathedral overlooking the town with its protecting benediction. It had disappeared, for it was a world into which Christ had not come.

As he went on, he came upon other vacant spaces, where had stood other churches, as well as the hospital, the orphanage, the asylum, the dispensary and various other buildings erected as an expression of faith in the Man of Galilee.

The people whom he met seemed anxious and weary, and as he looked closer he discovered that each carried on his shoulder a burden. One man as he passed him was saying: "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He was about to tell him of the cross where burdens roll away, when he remembered that there was no cross, for it was a world into which Christ had not come.

Sick at heart, he entered his study again, to find that during his absence, a great change had taken place. Whole rows of books had disappeared from his library shelves. Every book about Christ was gone. He opened his Bible and found that it ended with Malachi. There was no New Testament, for Christ had not come. He took down his Browning and Milton and found many blank spaces in these poets. He discovered that everything in his books prompted or inspired by Christ and his teachings had vanished. He turned to find an empty space over the mantel where had hung a picture he dearly loved. It was the picture of a man, blood-stained, foot-sore, in torn garments, bearing in his arms a tired lamb.

Often, when worn and weary in his work as an under-shepherd of the flock, he had gone to this picture of the Good Shepherd and thought of his Master and been comforted. Now it was gone, and as his eye went round the room, he found that almost every picture he had loved had disappeared.

With tears of disappointment, he sank in his chair, when a tap at the door told him that a child below was asking to see him. He went down to find a little girl, her eyes swollen with weeping, who said: "Won't you come to see father, he is very ill?" Hand in hand, they went through the night to the home where the lights in the upper windows told of sickness. When he reached the bedside, the dying man said: "Can't you help me?" "I think I can," he replied, and put his hand in his pocket for

his New Testament to find that there was no New Testament and that he had no gospel with which to comfort the last hours of a dying man. The man died a Christless death. At the funeral, there was no song of hope, no blessed promises of the resurrection, no message of the mansions prepared for them that love him.

The only words of the funeral service were, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." As the hard clods fell on the coffin lid, he awoke from his horrible dream to find that this cruel, pitiless, Christless world was false, and to hear the band, a little further up the street still playing the old hymn:

"O come, all ye faithful, joyfully triumphant."

It was only a dream, and yet there is a sense in which the dream is true, for if Christ had not come the world would be all and worse than the dream. Society would go back to chaos and existence would become intolerable.

Yet Christ declares there is something better than all the blessings which have come by reason of his presence among men. He seems to say: Gather together all that I have brought; all changes in government and school and home and society; all philanthropies and charities and humanities; all merciful deeds and tender loves and immortal hopes, and compute their worth. Tax the mathematics of the universe to cast up the sum total. Beggar the values of time and eternity to express the result. And when at last you have reached it, know there is something better, higher, diviner than for the world to have me. It is for the world to have my Spirit. It is for my people to have the Comforter. This is so much better that it is expedient for me to go away, "for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Amazing statement! The value of a gift measured on such a scale bewilders us.

Christ speaks as if the coming of the Comforter depended on his departure. Why? Why must Christ go that the Comforter may come? It is a mystery whose secret we must doubt-

less wait for eternity to disclose. Is Jesus saying that heaven has claims on Godhead, too? Is he intimating that the concerns of that vast realm are such that it can not surrender two persons of the Holy Trinity to earth at the same time and for the same dispensation?

Whatever the explanation may be, we can have no doubt as to the value of the Comforter's mission. In characters as high as the highest heavens Christ announces the blessedness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Surely we can not afford to neglect so great a gift.

The promise has been fulfilled. From the slopes of Olivet, Christ went away in ascension glory, and at Pentecost, forty days later, the Comforter came and the disciples, tarrying in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, were baptized with the Holy Ghost.

THE MISSION OF THE COMFORTER.

How does the Comforter fulfill his mission? What does he do that makes his mission the crowning consummation of Christ's career? How does he comfort us?

He applies all that Christ did. He makes the principles for which Christ died victorious. He establishes the Kingdom. This is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Christ accomplished salvation, the Holy Spirit applies it. Christ made salvation possible, the Holy Spirit makes it actual. Christ made salvation sufficient, the Holy Spirit makes it efficient.

He does this by glorifying Christ. Christ said: "He shall not speak of himself," and again: "He shall testify of me." The Comforter reveals the glory of Christ. The mission of a stereopticon light is not to display itself, but, as far as possible to conceal itself, and throw on the canvas a picture, and make the picture large and distinct and vivid. This is the mission of the Holy Spirit in revealing Christ. He throws on human life a great, luminous, radiant, lovely revelation of the Saviour.

He also communicates Christ. In regeneration Christ is born within us by the Holy Spirit, and in sanctification Christ is developed within us by the self-same Spirit.

The Comforter also reproves the world, producing conviction. This is definitely referred to by Christ in immediate connection with the text.

He reproves the world of sin; not of the sin of violating the law—any one can convict of that kind of sin; but of the sin of not believing on Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can convict men of this sin.

He reproves the world of righteousness; not of the righteousness which is of the law, the righteousness of morality—any one can convince of that kind of righteousness; but of the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness Christ imputes and whose power is certified by Christ's ascension to the Father. Only the Holy Spirit can convict and convince of this righteousness.

He reproves the world of judgment; not of the judgment against the violation of law—any one can convict of that judgment; but of the judgment of evil, of the condemnation of iniquity, of the defeat and final overthrow of all that is wrong. Only the Holy Spirit can convict in this judgment. He shows men that Christ has won the victory. He reveals the prince of this world in chains, beggared and dethroned; and, exalted in his place, he reveals Christ, the blessed Prince of Peace.

Such, in part, is the mission of the Comforter. He constructs the kingdom. He lifts the name of the despised Nazarene above every name. To the natural eye, when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him; but when revealed by the Comforter, Christ becomes the chiefest among ten thousand and the one altogether lovely. No character is so stainless as his, no sacrifice so holy, no love so resistless. With the Comforter, we need not fail. With Him, we have all that is needed to establish the kingdom. There is no room for pessimism. We do not need to wait for our Lord's return in bodily presence to the earth. The Holy Spirit possesses all power for conquest. Because of a peculiar interpretation of an unfulfilled prophecy, to throw up our hands in despair and declare the present dispensation impossible of results is far from honoring Christ. It is rather treason to Christ.

This, however, is not all the Comforter does. It was a great thing for the disciples to have the success of their mission underwritten by the third person of the Holy Trinity and to be absolutely assured of ultimate victory; but this was not all. There would come times of loneliness and trial and persecution and martyrdom. He was to be the Comforter for these hours also.

The Holy Spirit comforts the Christian with two great blessings.

One is strength. The promise is, "You shall have power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you." It makes little difference as to the size of our task or the weight of our burden or the extent of our field if only we have the power. We do not want to reduce our work, but to increase our power. We do not want to become less efficient, but more useful. This Christ gives us through his Spirit. Strength is a great comfort. If only we may have strength enough, we can resist, endure, and do so as not to grow tired or despairing. Through the power of the Holy Ghost one may double, treble, quadruple himself. O for the power!

The other blessing is knowledge. The Comforter is to lead us into all truth. He shall teach us all things, and bring all things to our remembrance that Christ has said. He lights up dark problems and gives spiritual illumination. He does not give us a scientific explanation of the mysteries of time and eternity, but He does give us that higher soul perception by which one can say, "I know whom I have believed."

Are we cast down with a sense of guilt? The Comforter takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He takes the word which says, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," and we are comforted.

Is it an hour of loneliness and depression, of heart-sickness and home-sickness? The Comforter brings to our remembrance that Christ said, "I will not leave you comfortless," and our hearts have rest. Is it a time of anxiety? Is the mind tossed by perplexity and worried with the friction of trifles? The Comforter brings to our remembrance that Christ said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth,

give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," and we are comforted.

Is sorrow our portion? Does bereavement come and break our hearts? Then once more the Comforter takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He reminds us of the word which says, "In my Father's house are many mansions, I go to prepare a place for you." Sorrow has become sacramental. We begin to understand what our Lord meant when he said, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Bereavement has become an open door through which we pass into the secret of the divine presence. No, Christ made no mistake when he gave to his disciples this highest proof of his love. We are wont to think of his death on the cross as the highest proof, but was it not a loftier devotion even than the cross when he put his own love aside and went away that his disciples might have the Comforter?

How do we esteem the gift? Let us place our treatment of the Holy Ghost alongside of Christ's estimate. When we think of our neglect of the Spirit, of our indifference toward him, of our unbelief and lack of interest, of our disposition to regard him merely as a vague and mystical influence, do we not convict ourselves of deep ingratitude for the gift Christ purchased with a price more precious than his life?

The result is, we are un comforted. We are discouraged. We lack consolation and cheer and moral strength and spiritual fortitude and holy hope and triumphant confidence.

Let us receive the Comforter.

THE CONDITIONS.

To do so, it is not necessary to persuade God. We do not need to pray God to send the Comforter. Christ has prayed that prayer and it has been answered. The Holy Spirit has been shed forth.

The man who wants fresh air does not need to go down on his knees and pray God to send it. He needs only to throw open his

window and breathe it in. God has provided as amply for the soul as for the lungs.

"His greatness flows around our incompleteness
Around our restlessness, His rest!"

Let us claim the Comforter.

Nevertheless, before we can do so, we must comply with the conditions for the indwelling of the Spirit.

Christ may send the Holy Ghost, but he cannot comfort you if you are living in known sin. Sin grieves the Spirit. This is the awful thing about sin. Its ruin is vastly more than the legal penalty inflicted by a violated law. Sin makes it impossible for the soul to receive Christ's ascension gift. Are you living a double life? You cannot have the Comforter while that goes on. "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off!"

The other condition is the surrender of the will to God. God's people must be willing in the day of His power. It is an easy thing to talk about complete surrender, but when it comes to the doing, nothing is more difficult. Yet before Christ can give us his best blessing our will must lie broken and surrendered at his feet. God's will must rule ours not because He has crushed us, but because like Jacob at the brook we have ceased to contend and begun to cling. This is the great victory. It is what God wanted of Abraham on Mount Moriah. He did not want the old patriarch to slay his son. He did want him to slay his will. Job was nowhere greater than when, looking across the barren waste of his desolate life, he cried, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." David was never more a king than when he turned from the dead face of his child, and "changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord and worshipped." Indeed, Christ had no holier hour than there in Gethsemane when in his agony he was caught up into the very heart of God, and said "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt."

This is the surrender God wants of you and me, and He must have it, if we are to have the Comforter.

Are you finding Christian experience barren? Is there little of joy and peace and strength? It is because you are not giving God a chance to comfort you. You are trying to comfort yourself with some cheap formula, some quack recipe for spiritual health, some shallow human expedient for happiness; and all time the Comforter whom Christ went to the highest heavens to send down to this troubled, sorrowing, sin-sick world is saying, "Let me comfort you." Dear friend, let him.

He is here. You may not see him, nor feel the glory of his presence. You may be gazing into the distant heavens, as if Christ had forgotten, but the Comforter has come.

Last summer, on the Santa Fe Railroad, I went through the San Bernardino country, where recently gold was discovered yielding \$120 to the ton, and into which men are pouring by the hundreds and the thousands with the lust for gain. As I looked out of the car window last summer on those brown and barren stretches of desert, devoid of any sign of life, I saw only the glare of the blistering sun on the gaunt rocks and hot sands. And yet there before my eyes, within three miles of the railroad track was one of the richest gold fields in this country.

"It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." There is a promise of treasure richer than all the gold of the Klondike and all the diamonds of the Transvaal and all the money in all the mints and all the treasuries of all the nations of the world. But our eyes are holden. We look out on life as upon a bare and barren stretch of sun-baked desert sand. We are discouraged and pessimistic and unbelieving. Yet besides us stands One who can change the desert into a garden. O for sight! For opened eyes! The Comforter has come, the blessed Paraclete. He can make you happy. He can comfort you. Dear brothers, let Him. Let Him comfort you.