

REVELATION  
OLD AND NEW

Sermons and Addresses

by

P. T. FORSYTH

EDITED BY JOHN HUXTABLE



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## PREFACE

P. T. FORSYTH was a great preacher; but not many of his sermons survive, since it was his practice to reproduce what he valued in them more lastingly in his theological works. Some cuttings or proofs, however, have survived, and I have had the great privilege of going over them in the hope that I might be able to edit a volume which should serve a double purpose: to allow the many who never saw or heard Forsyth in the pulpit to have some savour of his power as a preacher, and, still more important, to give those ministers and layfolk who feel overawed by Forsyth's larger works the opportunity to grasp, in this somewhat simpler form, the main features of his message.

I have divided these sermons and addresses into two unequal parts. The first includes sermons preached on various occasions, in which a good many of Forsyth's deepest theological convictions find expression. Some of them are much slighter than the massive utterance to the Primitive Methodist Conference in 1909. *The Goodness of God*, *The Mystery and the Mercy of God*, and *Suffering* are included as examples of the preaching Forsyth gave to his students at Hackney College. Many of those who heard such sermons still testify to their abiding influence and power. The second part includes pieces which deal with aspects of the ministry. They represent a theme to which Forsyth frequently returned, and are essentially as applicable today as when they were prepared. With the exception of *Suffering*, which was reproduced—not without some difficulty!—from Forsyth's own notes, all these sermons and addresses are reproduced as originally published, save where the author's own corrections have been incorporated, or a few contemporary references excised.

Mrs. Jessie Forsyth Andrews has kindly allowed me access to her most valuable collection of her father's literary remains. I could not have undertaken this work without her permission, nor should I have completed it without her encouragement and advice. I record here my cordial thanks to her.

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I

## REVELATION, OLD AND NEW

(delivered under the auspices of the Guilds of St Cuthbert's Parish Church, Edinburgh, 1911.)

"But God commendeth His own love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." ROM. v. 8.

**M**AY I at the outset be a little theological? I must be, to be fair to my text. I promise to be quite religious and quite humane before I am done. But theology is to religion what principle is to life.

First, I would say, Revelation is really Redemption. The light was the life of men. The new light was the new life.

Second, Redemption is a thing of heart and soul and will and mind. Our thought of it must be humanized to the hungry heart, and it must be moralized to the guilty conscience.

I

First, then, Revelation is really Redemption.  
And here note three things.

### I. GOD IN CHRIST DOES HIS OWN LOVING, GIVING, SACRIFICING, AND SAVING.

Two mistakes are made about Revelation. It is treated either as mere display of God or as mere statement of Him. We think of God either as allowing Himself to be seen or as allowing Himself to be explained. We think of Revelation either as a picture of God or as a truth about Him. He is regarded either as an object of contemplation or as an object of discussion, as a beatific vision or a dialectic theme, as the object either of a mysticism or of an orthodoxy. We

are agreed that, if there be a revelation, it is God's gift, but we are not agreed about what He gives; whether it is a theophany of Himself or a declaration about Himself or something else. Some say Christ came to show us the Father, to show us His portrait, or sketch His character; others that He came to tell us of the Father, to give us His truth, His theology. In either case we have but portrayal. And it is hard to say which mistake has done more mischief—the notion that God's great gift is a picture of Himself to be admired, or the notion that it is a truth about Himself to be credited.

What God gave us was neither His portrait nor His principle; He gave us Himself—His presence, His life, His action. He did more than show us Himself, more than teach us about Himself—He gave us Himself, He sacrificed Himself. It is ourselves He seeks, therefore it was Himself He gave, life for life and soul for soul. He asks us for life-committal, because it was His life He committed to us. He gave us love by giving us Himself to love. He does not make His love and goodness just to pass before us in a panorama; nor does He lay it out parcelled so that we may readily just take it or leave it. Where would then be the urgency of Christ—His final and awful dilemma put to us? God carries His love home to us. He will not let us alone with it. He invades us with it. He “commends” it to us—not in the sense of praising it, but of committing it into our hands. He takes the last pains to get it home to us; nay, He carries it home Himself, does it all Himself. He “commends His own love”. He does not woo us by proxy. Christ was no mere messenger, but present God. The divine Lover is His own apostle. He did not simply send His Son; He came in His Son, and in His Son's cross. God was in Christ's reconciling. He did not simply make use of death, of His Son's death—He died. Surely what the Son suffered cost the Father even more. When Paul spoke to the Galatians about his preaching of Christ, he says he “placarded Christ” before them (Gal.

iii. 1), made a great exhibition of Him, writ Him large, made a show of Him, and glorified Him openly. That was an apostle's work. He depicted Christ, and pointed to Christ, and commended Christ. He said “Hear me,”—not, “Look to me,” but “Look to Christ,” “Receive Christ.” He preached not himself. No apostle did. They preached Christ, and were Christ's apostles. But Christ *did* say “Look to me.” In Christ God was His own apostle. God directed Himself, nay, sped Himself, to the human heart in Christ. He did not employ another. God was not to Christ as Christ was to Paul. Paul was sacramental to us for Christ, but Christ was mediatorial to us for God. Christ is not vicarious for God as He is for us. He was continuous with God as He is not with us. He did not represent God to us on the same principle as He does us to God. Christ dying therefore was God commending His own love to us. The Cross was no mere assurance of God's love, but its action. Christ was the love of God giving itself to us, the grace of God bestowing, spending, pouring itself out on us, the holiness of God reclaiming us to holiness, not turning us toward it, but replacing us in it. God does not love us by deputy; He does not give us by deputy; He does not save us by deputy. He brings and wings His own love. His holiness takes its own consequences in an evil world. He does His own suffering and saving. He is a jealous God. None but Himself shall redeem us for Himself. He is a monopolist of sacrifice. He does not part with the agony and glory of the Cross to any creature. None shall outdo Him in sacrifice. No creature has a right to sit with God on the throne of the Cross. It was no created being that died for us. Creatures as we are, it is in no created Spirit that we can live. Our Redemption is too costly for any but our Creator, and a creature must let it alone for ever.

In a word Revelation is Redemption. The new light is new life. God reveals His own self to us sinners in that

Christ dies for us. We are not sages, we are sinners. Already by its intelligence the world knew not God. And there is no other way of revealing God to sinners but by redeeming them. We must be redeemed into the power of understanding a holy revelation. Does it not come to that? The Revelation is not a glorification of love as a poet might do it. It is not an illustration of it like a parable. The Son of God was not a mere symbol of God, an illustration. God's revelation of love is the bestowal of love as a lover does. It is not a show but a sacrament. Nay, it is more. It is not the donation of love as a thing—as something which God could detach, hand over, pour out, and part with. God's love is God loving. It is the gift of Himself who is love, given in the only way that love could give itself to loveless men, by the way of death. God's answer to us is the word of reconciliation. And we answer it not by being impressed, and not by being convinced, but by being conciliated, by being reconciled,—by an eternal life of communion. For it was a revelation once for all and for ever. Do I carry you with me?

## 2. LET US MOVE ANOTHER STAGE FORWARD.

Revelation to sinners must be redemption, not chiefly because it is love, but because it is holy love. "His own love." God Himself, I have said, does His own revealing of Himself as Saviour without prophet or deputy. But that word "His own" has another shade of meaning. God's love in Christ was not only not vicarious: it was His own in another sense. It was unique in kind. There was, there is, nothing like it anywhere. It is holy love, a love peculiar to Him. God so loved—not so intensely but so peculiarly, in such a special way, so holily. He did not come with even the best human love lifted and made infinite. That is sacred but not holy. He came with another kind altogether, of which the love of mortals, however intense and tender, is but a symbol.

Do you ask what love is when it rises as high as God?

Here it is. Herein is love, not that we loved passionately, but that He loved holily. Do you want to know what love really is and does at its height? You must not go to love in sinful men who, being evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, but to love in holy God, who gives His native holiness. You must not go to lovable men and women, nor to those who are the great lovers of each other in fact or in romance, but to the love of the evil world by the holy historic God. You want to know what fatherhood is? You must not magnify and cast upon the heavens the image of the best of mortal fathers. You must not go to a deduced fatherhood—deduced from man and imported into God. You must not import fatherhood into God, nor goodness, patience, pity, sacrifice. That would be working in quite the wrong way, moving in quite the wrong direction for religion. Religion begins with a revelation that comes down, not a passion that goes up. We must not reverse the divine current. It would be what is called anthropomorphism. It is imposing man on God instead of revealing God through man. Our love is God's speech but not His Word.

No. We do not understand God from religion but religion from God. But where is He, you say, if not in my heart? He is in history. We must go to history, to Christ, and find the fountal Father there, the absolute Father, from whom all fatherhood is named in heaven and earth. He is in our experience but not of it. We must go to Christ's Holy Father. Christianity is not fatherhood but holy fatherhood. We must go to the Father whose love is holiness going out to love men back to itself, and whose grace is holiness going down to love them up to itself. His own love means it is holy love.

## 3. AND ONE STEP MORE

How is holy love to be revealed to unholy men? How is

the outgoing holiness to reach them? How but by death God knew what He had to expect when He committed His holy self among evil men. It was shame and death. There is no way but the Cross of committing a holy love to such a world as this. The gospel of a holy God is not soon popular. The holier your love of men is the more you will suffer and be rejected with it. God Almighty knew, for Himself even, no way but the Cross to the hearts and wills of evil men. Nature is to be sanctified by no genial grace, by no loving charm, but by suffering grace. It only sanctifies because it redeems, it only redeems because it atones, it only atones because it dies in holy obedience, it only dies to rise, and it rises, as it died, by the spirit of holiness (Rom. i. 4). God's holiness makes in Christ its own atonement, commends its own love as grace, does its own justification, and redeems us into its own communion.

## II

But you misdoubt me, you pursue me, you press me. And you accuse me of theology. Revelation is a great word, you say. It suggests great things and powers—sea, hill, and sky, a world of living passionate men and women. And Redemption suggests old folios, dead and done with. You ask to know if we must confine revelation to Christ and the Cross with their systems and sermons, if it means but redemption, if it come home but by justification. Must we use these dry old schemes and names? Is there no language, no action of a more human and hearty kind for God and His ways, none of a kind more literary, and poetic, and sympathetic? Is revelation not a word too large for these shrunk theological terms? Is not all illumination revelation—the light of nature, of reason, of the heart? Is there no revelation in earth's daily splendour around us, in heaven's mighty

glory above us, in the heart's tender or tragic voice within us? The lover, the mother, the child, the poet, the thinker, the hero—is there no revelation there? Oh, surely! It would be heartless and soulless to deny it. It would disqualify any man for discussing the subject. The inhuman heart is no expositor of the love of God. To sear our affections is no way to commend God's. But after all, these things are but as moonlight unto sunlight.

“The sun at noon  
To God is moon.”

They reveal a borrowed light. The light they have comes from their reflection of the Sun of the soul—the Saviour. For, in the first place, they but suggest God rather than they assure Him to us. And what we want for our faith, to stake our eternal soul on, is absolute certainty. The matter of religion is God Himself in the soul; the result of it is certainty. And again, they suggest Him to individuals rather than make Him sure to a world. They appeal also to the pure in heart rather than to the sinful soul, soiled and dark and outside God. You will come to a pass one day when the glorious world falls from you, the dearest must leave you, your nerve perhaps is broken, you have no witness of a good conscience, and your self-respect no more sustains you. Poetry and happiness, knowledge and sensibility, end perhaps in moral wreck. That is the time for real revelation. Man's extremity is God's great opportunity. Then, as never before, you need a light that does not fail. You need the revelation indeed, the one certainty for which you would exchange all the mere impressions you ever felt. And then, as when the first light arose, it rises with a new creation. God made us in order to understand His creative love; and so He must make us over again if we are to understand anything so tremendous, so incredible as His redeeming love, the gift of Himself and His mercy. It is beyond human power to

believe in the mercy of a holy God when we need it most. Just when you most need it, you cannot rise to it. If you could, you would not need it. It is a miracle. But when you do arrive there, then everything is a revelation. It is a new heaven—and a new earth. You go down to your new house justified.

True enough, we are led on from revelation to revelation as life presses and opens on us. But it is the final revelation that carries the secret and fixes the colours of them all. And is it not your justification?

What is the word to your conscience and its collapse? What moral reserves are you laying up?

Do we not know the passion of knowledge, its joy, its glow; and the knowledge of passion, its fire and sting? Are the young among you not in the midst of it all? Have we not heard the message of the dim woods? And silent upon a peak have we never felt the appeal of the whole world lying in light at our feet? From a sunset the new Jerusalem has descended on us, adorned with all manner of precious stones. The breath of the breeze and the bloom of the flowers, dews in the valley and mist on the hill, cloud shadows lying lightly on long braes and murmuring stripies hidden among the heather—were such things no revelations to us of a kind in their time? Again, do we not know the joy of new truth, poetic beauty, the spell of grand ideals? Was the world not once crystalline for us in Shelley, opal in Tennyson, ruby in Rossetti? Was life not newly intimate for us in Shakespeare, and greatness majestic in Milton? Are we not touched any more by the divine thing in love's young dream? Are we ignorant how it transfigures all the world and uplifts all the soul—all the colour of life in the heart of one pearl, all the wonder of it in the heart of one girl? Do we want to forget the wholeheartedness of our young hero-worship, when we found one man who seemed either to eclipse or glorify all the rest of Humanity? Or again, in the

clash of living wills, the successful sense of power, the ruling word of conscience, had we no revelation of the crushing sense of loss and failure, does there come no suggestion of the Cross by which that mastery was won for ever? In the long tale of human history—its romance, its tragedy, its achievement, its fascination—is there no light that leaps out on us from there, nothing that makes us other men, nothing that opens up divine reaches of being? Is there no call of fife, clarion and trumpet, that takes us from the sensual world and an age without a name, and makes us thrill to the crowded hours of glorious life?

To come quite near home. How many a youth in the years of romance feeds his imagination in this, the loveliest and most romantic city in the world? But the romance of Edinburgh is not in its beauty only, it is in its history, and all its history stands for. The glamour and tragedy of our Scottish past is there—a romantic Queen-Mariolatry it becomes to some who do not feel the mystic Mariolatry of the Queen of Rome at all. Such things enlarge and humanize the spell laid on us by the witchery of this city. All Scotland's past is in it. And chiefly there is in it the Church of our people, which has made Scotland the best that she is, and sent out from Scotland the best she has done. Our sense of Scotland's beauty rises to the sense of its old romance; and its historic romance passes upwards into its historic faith. The charm of earth turns the power of God. Nature rises to history and history to religion.

That is a parable of the way of the soul and its history—the revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Thus. We begin with a romantic revelation. We go on to a historic. We end in a moral and spiritual. We begin with a romantic religion. We cherish an idealism for which nothing is too good to be true. All geese are swans, and every maid a queen. Every father must surely be to his children what ours is to us. And above all the Father of all.

We readily see a generous All-fatherhood brooding over the whole world. Nothing we think could be true which gave that the lie. And then, as our mind grows, our range grows. Knowledge comes of a vaster world. Idealism and poetry and all their glamour are enlarged by real contact with history, with life. Our idolatry of one or two people becomes the idealizing of the race. The charm of nature yields to the spell of all Humanity. Some people could take you to the very spot where at a certain hour the love of nature and home became love of humanity. The revelation is no more in the family but in history. And in the heart of history stands Christ, now more than the Jesus of heart and home. We believed in a universal Father; we now believe also in the Son. We believe in the Christ of the race, the Son of Man, the Man Divine. But we do not stop there. He becomes more than historic, he becomes a Son Eternal, the Son of God, a Son who never dies, never leaves us, a Son brought home in a Church. The Lord is the Spirit. The Holy God of Israel becomes the Holy Spirit of Christ, which makes me a sinner. We believe in a Father and Son who come down in the Spirit to our little door, in our Baptism, and home to our very soul by the saving Word. I perceive a message, a power, a salvation *for me*, individualized to me. We believe in the Holy Ghost. We believe in the will of the Eternal Father, the work of the historic Son, the Word, the Church of the Holy Ghost. The heart is no revelation for itself. It is too fickle, treacherous.

“The best of what we are and feel,  
Just God forgive.”

History is no revelation, with its awful anomalies, its cruel passions, its egoisms, its barren conflicts and their uncertain ends. Man realizes God more than Nature does, only to defy Him more.

“I saw Him in the flowering of the field,  
I marked Him in the shining of the stars,  
But in his ways with men I found Him not.”

And Newman found history a scroll written over with mourning and lamentation and woe. The Revelation is not history, though it is in history. It is historic in the Son and in the Church, it is near and searching in the Holy Ghost.

We began seeking God, because we felt so able and so sure to find Him. We end by serving Him, because He has sought and found us, disabled and unsure. We began with a love of justice, we end with a prayer for justification. We begin by willing and knowing, we end by being willed and known. “His will is our peace.”

### III

If people tell me, as they sometimes do, that all creation and all life is one vast revelation, one vast miracle, teeming at every particle and pore, that so far from denying revelation they see nothing else, I have a suspicion of the vague, the grandiose, the forced note, those colours that crack in life's heat, and that run in the swellings of Jordan. Truly revelation is the greatest of miracles, and the spiritual life is one vast miracle of revelation, because of the Holy Ghost. But it is not a miracle diffused over creation. The Omnipresence of God is not yet His nearness. Immanence is not yet communion. To know that God is there is one thing, to know that we are known of God is another. And that is true religion. The historic is not for religion the course of history but its core. Revelation is not something out of the everywhere into the here. That ends nowhere. It is a miracle condensed at a moral centre where life has a fierce crisis, not an outspread calm. There is more than the miracle of creation.

And it is the miracle of the creation within creation, of the new creation, the miracle of the Redemption. In all the cosmic ranges of space, in all the long reaches of crowded history, there is nothing so marvellous, so majestic as God's mercy in Christ to me a sinner. That is the revelation in all revelation. That is the new moral life, the new Humanity. That is what makes a religion a GREAT thing. If nature and history be so great and mighty as we now know them to be, what are we to say of the greatness of their God? It is too high, we cannot attain to it. Nature exhausts our imagination; how shall it compass God? If the mind flags and the heart fails in the effort to conceive the boundless power and tragic glory of creation, what strength have we left to pursue that way till it land us in the God of it all? We have none. And we must take another way. Or rather God takes another way with us. We cannot find Him in His world, and He must find us. But not there. He reveals His heart of grace neither in the cosmic scale of things nor in the demonic force of heroes, supermen, who are more ready perhaps to ravage than to heal, who are not shepherds of the people but wolves. The greatness of power He changes to another order of greatness. The Almighty reveals Himself as the All Holy. A dreadful, crushing revelation, unless the holy God is revealed also as the God of all grace; unless revelation be redemption, unless it be God's self-justification in ours.

Because He is holy to see, I must not approach Him, but because He is holy to save, He must come to me, that no speck of His world remain which is not covered, claimed, and cured by Him; no soul which is not judged and redeemed into His fellowship. This holy, judging, redeeming, tender love of the awful God is the miracle of the moral world. Nothing is so miraculous in Christ as that union of infinite majesty and intimate mercy.

I began with a text, let me draw to a close with one. Some of the greatest texts of the Bible are not in the Bible but in

the Apocrypha. And here is one from Sirach, "As is His majesty, so is His mercy." What a phrase to make music in the night! There is no such majesty conceivable as the holiness of God; and in Christ's Cross, its judgment all comes down in mercy. It comes down, down, down to a poor bent rheumatic figure of a woman creeping and shaking along mean streets with a little old bonnet, a little old basket, and a pennyworth of stale bread in it. And one day the crooked shall be made straight, and her rough life plain. And it comes, that mercy comes down, if we could but get it to her, to that still poorer creature, dishevelled and unsexed, shot cursing of a Saturday night from a dram-shop in the Canongate. If such things lie somehow within the majesty of an immanent, patient, silent God, they are not outside His mercy. But it is a light thing that God should have mercy where we have pity. To such ruins our own pity flows promptly, and it is not God's crowning mercy that He should pity and restore these. Does His majesty go as far as mercy on Mephistopheles? Has He any mercy on those blackmailers and panders who batten on men's vices like vultures, spend their life jeering at goodness, and drink down souls like wine? Has He any mercy on those who grow rich by hounding on the nations to war? Any of those who ravage continents in the sheer lust of power? We can have none. Nor should we. If there be any, it is God's alone. True, the revelation is a world's redemption; but must these creatures survive to complete the world?

And yet there are times when we who judge thus can and should have no mercy on ourselves. There are dreadful hours, in souls of whom you would never think it, who do not argue "if God be merciful to that poor wreck, He can be merciful to me." The greatest hour is not reached till we have come to say, with him who called himself the chief of sinners, "If God has been merciful to me, there are none to whom He cannot."

That is the revelation of the Lord which is the beginning of heavenly wisdom. And with it the Church underlies the University and the State.

The Revelation we need most is that which comes to our darkest and most terrible hour, to man's centre in the conscience, and to the conscience in its impotent despair. It comes to the hour of our guilt. And what makes our guilt? Our guilt is made, and especially our best repentance is made, when we see the holiness of God, and care more that that should be made good than for our own salvation. And nothing else can save or quiet us but more revelation of more holiness, and that is redemption, the last revelation. The coming of perfect holiness is in the cross of Christ, which at once confounds, crowns, and recreates our moral world.

## 2

## THE IDEAL CITY

(preached at the Congregational Church, Llandrindod Wells, on 20th July, 1913, on an occasion when the Urban District Council Association Conference attended the service.)

REV. XXI, "The City of God."

Is. lx, 21, "Thy people shall also be all righteous."

WHEN the saintly Baxter died, he humbly congratulated himself on having cherished what he called "a public mind." And says Goodwin, "Godly men have public spirits." It has been the glory of many English Christians that they have been citizen saints. They cherished the public and practical pieties, not the rapt or recluse type of sainthood. They have been the backbone of our municipal institutions, and that means, of our English freedom and constitutional stability.

Two great currents meet in Western history, represented by two well-known terms, Church and State. The State is the contribution of the ancient Paganism to the modern world. The Church is the Hebrew contribution. In Greece, the Church vanished before the State. In Judaism, the State vanished before the Church. But Christianity restored the civic idea of Hebrew faith, blended them on a new level, and produced the greatest imaginative reality history knows in the City of God, the Heavenly Kingdom.

What are the marks of a Christian City? Broadly they are three—ideas, justice, and kindness.

The mark of a Greek city was pervasion by ideas,—by large ideas. The city was the centre of the best culture and the best devotion of the time. It was so also with the mediæval city. It was small, yet led by men of mind and force.

But in Christian history, a town used to be technically a city if it had a cathedral and was the seat of a bishop, the capital of an ecclesiastical province. That once meant a great deal. It meant being lifted out of mere local and humdrum politics into the larger life of Europe. The Church in these days was the depository of the great world-ideas. She was the great representative of the widest and noblest human interests.

But we do not now make a see a condition of a city. We can make a town a city by wealth and enterprise, by large ideas, by dignity of interest, by the culture of its citizens, by the possession of a University—now more important than a Cathedral for civic purposes,—by the conduct of municipal affairs in more than a vestry spirit, and by drawing that stamp of man into affairs. Otherwise, a town sinks to be a large village, and its council becomes the object of vulgar little ambitions and the scene of intrigue or jobbery. We make a town a Christian city by the presence of the largest Christian ideas and the rule of the most just and Christian principles. It is not alone by possessing many Christian institutions like churches or hospitals; but by the abundance and prominence of large, bold, worthy, and able men who honour Christian intelligence, principle, and sympathy above all else. They are able men, and they have practical sagacity, but also they have moral sagacity. The rarest of all wisdom is moral wisdom. They love righteousness for its own sake. They are above the temptations of popularity, because they are filled with the sense of duty. They are free from the vulgarities of the pushing self-seeker. They are therefore proof against fits of popular passion or ingratitude. They are answerable to conscience more than to the public. They are sometimes familiar with the higher culture, yet they freely spend time, money, care and labour in far less tasteful service. They can surrender chances of private gain when these collide with public good. They say, "I will vote for this. It

will hurt me, but it will be for the public good." If we have only men who push particular interests, sectional class interests, or personal, we have no city. A city is not a huge mass of egoists; it depends for its dignity on the number of men in it who can take the largest views of public good, and give them effect. A time is coming, I hope, when mere self-seekers in public places shall be boycotted in some telling form. We should exclude from public life all who regard the community as an orange to suck instead of a trust to discharge. "Do unto the public as you would the public should do unto you". That spirit in general makes a town a city. It used to be a maxim of one of the great citizens of Birmingham, "elect nobody to your council whom you would not like to see as Mayor."

Further, a community has the spirit of a city when it makes a real contribution to national liberty. It is only by the development of local government that a spirit of liberty can be maintained in a nation. Municipal spirit of the right kind is the condition of national freedom. Rotten boroughs mean a corrupt realm. It has been one of the perils of military Empire that municipal life was arrested, and local freedom was repressed. We cannot exaggerate the value of free thought and free speech and free action,—especially in local affairs. "Local assemblies of citizens," says the great publicist, de Tocqueville, "constitute the strength of free nations. Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach them how to use and how to enjoy it. A nation may establish a system of free government, but, without the spirit of municipal institutions, it cannot have the spirit of liberty." Every candidate for Parliament should, when possible, serve his time to local government first. It would be strange if, in a mixed assembly, all admired Chamberlain; but who can fail to see that this was the secret of his career.

I have spoken of the Christian city as the sphere of ideas, the field of ability, the arena of conscience, and the nursery of liberty. I wish to speak of it further as the field of love, and the sphere of mutual help of a just and considered kind. For neither ideas, abilities, nor liberty makes Christianity, but faith and love. "Thy people also shall be all righteous." That is the goal of the Christian city. If any young man is in doubt what side to take in public affairs, let him take the side of general justice and public righteousness. But the Bible means much by righteousness; more than personal probity or legal justice. It is a word of more imagination, more depth, more kindness than that.

The Christian city in the first place is one where the civic virtue, whatever it is, is common to all. The people are all righteous. That is true of civic property; it should also be true of civic manhood and virtue. And, in the next place, that righteousness means a conscience warmed with heart. It is not only just, but helpful. Now what is our current idea of heart in connection with righteousness? Is it not the idea of making exceptions from the law, easing its pressure, granting immunities for hard cases? But surely the true idea is to suffuse the law itself with the spirit of help, so that its own effect is the true order, kindness and blessing. God's law is but one expression of His person and its love. There is no Divine righteousness which is mere justice; it is at least equity. And Divine equity goes always with final kindness. God's public righteousness is His public kindness no less. He is a just God and a Saviour. The city, therefore, will not be Christian if it does not foster a kind and wise care of the less fortunate majority. And it must put the souls, the characters, of the many before the property of the few, when a real collision arises. Men are more than money; person is more than property. The moving spirit must be love. "All sentiment!" says one. But there is a better form of love than sentiment. There is service and sacrifice. The mother that

caresses and neglects her child is no mother. The form that Christian love takes in public affairs is not sentiment. It is righteousness. Mere charity honeycombs a society. No town can thrive on doles, or tips, or cheap sympathies which flow after dinner, and ebb after sleep. Love is here sympathetic justice,—justice like God's to us, where the judge is on the culprit's side, and is his Saviour. To illustrate, the city soldier is the policeman, and the policeman's duty is not merely to guard property, and seize offenders; it is also to regulate traffic; to ease progress; and help women and children at dangerous crossings. He never looks better than at such work. Has our public policy nothing to do with helping the weak side of society through its perilous places?

A city is a focus of sound, social energy and service whether corporate or voluntary. It makes much of the housing of the poor, as a first condition of their helping themselves. It ought rigorously to help the poor and weak by enforcing the law against publicans who make people drunk or drunker. It is not new laws we need here so much as power and will and public spirit to enforce existing laws. The city ought by education to soften manners, and destroy church or class antagonism, as well as instruct children. The city should be on a large scale what a family is on a small,—a sphere for the cultivation of service and even sacrifice for the common good! How many examples of this we have had! Unpaid work is often slovenly, I know. But I am not sure whether the best work done for the world is not its unpaid work, whose chief reward is with posterity or eternity. What a debt we owe to the public voluntary service of many a citizen,—some in connection with churches, some with societies, others with our civic institutions. Some, it is true, may do it for ambition. I do not object to some ambition in public affairs. Others, from lower motives (jobbery or snobbery) hoping for the meaner sorts of gain. But

the best, most respected and most remembered men do it from a sense of duty and public spirit. They return to the city some of the advantages which the city gave them. Others do it from real heart love of the people they meet in the streets. There is no point, in which the difference between the ancient citizen and the Christian is more marked than in the nature and extent of this self-denial. We take the whole public into account, not a class.

Christianity gives infinite moral value to every soul, and from that follows in the end equal political value. If he is not worthy, yet he can be made so. Make him responsible. The great mass must be taken into account in the modern city if it is Christian. How difficult without demoralizing them! Yet what opportunity! How much richer is Christian citizenship than Greek, in scope, living interest, and living problems. The Athenian made his sacrifices for a caste. He saw in the mass only hands, slaves, a supply of needful labour; we see in them men, souls, with great possibilities and the right to be anything they can. They are free men like the rest. They have a claim on the public conscience to institutions which shall give them all the help possible for a career. We have therefore what the cultured Greeks had not,—people who sacrificed pleasure and leisure and class prejudices for the Christian task of making things better for the million at a later day. The good old Greek denied himself the lower pleasures for the higher. The good new Christian renounces many of the higher pleasures themselves for others' welfare, for social duty, and brotherly love. For a city we need more than culture, we need sacrifice, not only for one class but for the whole, and especially for the ignorant and the out of the way. The only effective inspiration for this is the Christian. Christ alone can control the egoism, sectionalism, professionalism, and trades-unionism of a complex, prosperous, and heedless age.

Again, the service of the town is a sphere for the application of Christian principles by men who believe in a church, and are made and fed by it, but who are not fitted for Church forms of "Christian work." Do not limit that to excellent things like village preaching or district visitation, or anything in connection with religious organization. The man who so, by his public life, has raised the standard of public virtue, has done what the churches may sometimes fail to do. Civic work is just as indispensable for the goodness of society as religious. Civic duty is part of applied Christianity. Our education in cities is part of our education in Christ. It answers the question, "What must I do when I am saved?" Otherwise we fall into monasticism, sectarianism, clericalism, conventionalism, cliquism, other-worldliness, and trivial pietism.

But the true civic spirit is to be shown not only in measures or enterprises of a beneficent sort. We cannot hope to carry all the measure we think right, useful, and good. But one thing we can do, we can always carry the Christian spirit into the conflict and out of it. We can take it into our manner of discussing and conducting public business. If we must fight, let us fight like gentlemen. Fight clean. Let us not attribute mean motives until we can prove them. And motives are difficult to prove. There are many right-minded men on both sides. Little places may exhibit low-bred scenes. But the spirit of a great city is the spirit of the Christian gentleman. It is eager, forcible, earnest. It may take the gloves off; yet it is reasonable, temperate, conciliatory, magnanimous. It has good sense, good fellowship, good temper. It enters into the give and take of affairs like neighbours who have to meet each other daily, or whose families do. Rival politicians need not always cease to be friends. The man of bitter and irritating temper may do far more by his tongue to ban society than by his measures to bless it. His bitterness may do more to dissolve society than

his reforms to unite it. The raspy reformer is really an obstructive. Large affairs are defiled by mean methods. The common good is degraded and poisoned by ill-conditioned men who put volumes of passion into matters of mere pence. They may sometimes be men of a certain ability. But a man of incurably bitter tongue, with a weakness for insinuation, an acuteness of suspicion, and a propensity to sneer, is, as a public example, dear at any price of ability. He lowers the public standard and debases the social coin. The true blessing is the man from whom we cannot differ without respect.

The religion of Jesus Christ has greatly enlarged and enriched the sphere of active manhood. The gospel of the city of God makes men, and the real wealth of a city is men. The great purpose after all of a city with common and corporate life is not to promote business, but to make men. The old States reared splendid buildings; let us not neglect anything so noble; but let us aim chiefly at building a city of living stones, a true community, a moral fabric. Let us do all we can to give scope for developing the possibilities of human nature, national and moral. English cities are for the creation of English citizens. They are to enable such men to enrich their national heritage of freedom, and their soul's destiny of dignity. But we soon find that civic institutions will not of themselves make good citizens. Men do more to make the city than the city to make men. "Governments," says the great Christian statesman, William Penn, "depend on men, rather than men upon governments. Like clocks, they go from the motion men give them. Let men be good, and the government cannot be bad. If it be ill, they will cure it. But, if men be bad, let the government be ever so good, they will endeavour to warp and spoil it to their turn. Some are of opinion that, if they had good laws, it was no matter what sort of men they were who executed them, but such ought to consider that, though good laws did well, good men did

much better; for good laws might want good men, and be abolished or altered by ill men; but good men would never want good laws, nor suffer ill ones." We shall not be the best citizens unless we are more. The State cannot be separated from the Churches. See how the ancient cities fell because their men were citizens and no more. They had no heavenly citizenship. They were not kindled by the vision of the righteous city of God, growing up through all the cities of men. They did not seek first the Kingdom of God. What have we among us to make men, to make good men and discredit bad ones? What is to protect us from that anti-social passion for sport and pleasure, for instance, which is breeding gamblers and bleeding citizenship, which throngs to football but cannot be dragged to vote? We are in more danger from the slow perdition of subtle selfishness and popular materialism than from gross and palpable wickedness. The one is the soil in which the other thrives. On what is our citizenship, our public spirit to live in future? The men, who have done most for our cities in the past, have been moved by the faith, brotherhood, and Kingdom of God. What are we trusting to, to keep that flame alive and burning in time to come? What is the tendency of our creed, the prospect of our religion? It is making men or mere religionists, citizens or sectarians, mere Churchmen on one side and mere Dissenters on the other, mere delegates of interests, mere self-seekers even in their Salvation, mere fugitives from Hell? "The sheep of my pasture are men, saith the Lord." What a text! And when God would save the world, He sent it a Man to set up a Divine Kingdom out of all the cities of earth. And if our public life is not made by men who are made by Christ, we have nothing to look for but the doom of the old Empires. The men we need are men who are not only unashamed of a Christian faith but men who consult the will of God in private about every great public movement or step in which they are engaged.

They are men whose conscience is educated by the conscience of the gospel.

May God, who set up the Kingdom of His Grace in a true and holy Man, send us true men always to build our cities. But, if we be left with cities inhabited only by pushing egotists, then we shall need all His mercy, for we shall have neither beauty, worth, power, nor prosperity in the end.

## 3

## THE CHURCH AS THE CORPORATE MISSIONARY OF THE GOSPEL

(preached in part at the Primitive Methodist Conference,  
June, 1909.)

In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.  
GEN. 26 : 4.

## I

YOU are all familiar with the use which St Paul makes of this word of the promised seed in Galatians. You remember it as one of those examples of Rabbinical argument which have for us lost all the force they may once have had to Jewish minds. The apostle is trying to prove to Jews that the promise concerned not the nation alone but Christ. And he seizes on the fact that the Septuagint of the Old Testament text has seed in the singular and not seeds in the plural. There is no doubt that he is doing violence to the Old Testament passage as it was meant by its writer and understood by his readers. The Hebrew word never intended to distinguish a singular from a plurality. It is always a plurality.

But there is at least this amount of truth in Paul's artificial use of the passage. The plurality was a unity, a collective unity, if not a personal. The promise was to a unity, it was not to a mere multitude. It was to a race, and not to a mere muster of individuals. It was to a nation, and not to a mere crowd or a mere posterity. It was to a corporate unity, with a common life, history, and destiny, it was not to a mere group of people. And still further, it was to a unity gathered about an election and purpose of God; it was not to a mere religious association of a voluntary optional kind. For

salvation is not optional. Nor is the Church. Nothing is optional which God has already set up and committed the world to. Nothing is optional whose rejection carries eternal consequences. It is true that Paul found, as the whole Church did, that the national and corporate unity culminated in what used to be called the "federal" person of Christ. The nation's moral purpose took shape in the collective personality of Christ. That rests on another line of thought than the text supplies. And I let that alone. I do not propose to preach on the corporate personality of Christ, but on the Church as the corporate missionary to the world. Even in Paul's use of the text he was right so far as this, that the promise was made to a social whole, to a society. It was not to any number of mere individuals, a mere convention of saints. It was to a community as it was for the race, for a universal purpose. Only a solid nation could evangelize all nations. Only a society could save society.

But you know what happened. The Jewish nation made the great and fatal refusal of Christ. It failed to see its real vocation and destiny in Him. Then He who was its crowning soul became its final doom. And its work passed to a new nation, a landless nation, a universal nation, a spiritual Israel, united by the blood of Christ and not of Abraham. The grand purpose of God ceased to be the trust of any nation. It passed to the Church of Christ, the nation above all nationality—the nation of the soul. The Church became the soul's mother country, the grand missionary and benefactor of the world.

And what made the Church? Was it not the Cross? And the Cross as no mere martyrdom. The Church was created by an act of God, which, in wrecking national particularism, saved the world. It saved the world (I urge in the first place), and not a selection from the world, not a section of it. And it saved it (I further urge) in a complete and finished salvation. It did not merely make a great contribution to religious

history which might or might not issue in the world's salvation according as men used it. God's purpose is not at the mercy of man's caprice. Christ's salvation is set out in the New Testament as the finished salvation of the race, and not the tentative salvation of an indefinite group of individuals. Let me stop for one moment and avert two misunderstandings. Do not misunderstand me if I say to the Evangelicals that they cannot get a saved world by adding together any number of conversions merely individual; and if I say to the Unitarians that they too cannot get a saved world out of any number of souls brought into individual and theistic relation to God by Christ the prophet. And do not go away with the hasty conclusion that the salvation of the race must necessarily mean the salvation at last of every soul in it. You have first to settle the question whether every soul ever born is required for the unity of the race as a whole.

But let me return. God so loved the world that he was in Christ reconciling the world. One God, one Saviour, one World, one Church. Everything moves among vast unities, moves on the great universal eternal scale. It is a social salvation, and it is a final salvation. It was the world that lay on God's heart, and not only the rebels or unfortunates within it. He came to save the good as well as the bad. And the world was saved, redeemed, reconciled once for all when Christ died and rose. Its relation to God was changed as a whole. We are each one of us saved in Christ's Cross as members of a saved race, and not by private bargain with God on personal terms. What says Luther in his famous catechism, "In the Christian Church God daily and freely forgives me and all believers." That does not mean that none are forgiven but church members. But it does mean that whoever is forgiven is forgiven by what made the Church; and if he keep outside the Church the forgiveness fades. My soul is a thing so great that it is saved only by the act that saved the world. And it is no true salvation that I have

if it permit me to be indifferent to the salvation of the race.

I am saved into a Church with a mission to the race. The human race is therefore committed to salvation in advance. It is earmarked for Christ's redemption. It was a doomed race, and it is still a mortgaged race. It was mortgaged to Christ in his death. From being sold under sin it is now sold under salvation. In Christ's death for all, all died. The human race is baptised into Christ's death. Before it could choose it received an infant baptism, so to speak, in Christ's death and resurrection. There the race had a baptismal regeneration. God (says Peter 1, 3), regenerated us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His Church is but a kind of first fruits of His creatures (James i. 18). The seal and claim of Christ was set on the race there, and all that the Church now does with mankind is just what we do with the children we baptize. It brings home to men what the race's baptism into Christ involved. It makes them realize their early committal to God's prevenient grace, and choose accordingly. In converting them it rouses them to what God has done for them, and not merely to what he is willing to do. It revives in their experience the baptismal bond. It induces them to take up their spiritual obligations and enter on their historic inheritance. "That the residue of men might seek after the Lord," says James in a missionary speech in Acts xv. 17, "and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doeth all these things." And if you object that to speak of all men as thus redeemed prevents you from taking a strong line with them and preaching with the note of judgment and warning on occasion, remember that judgment begins at the House of God, and that the severest judgment of the world is the Cross that saves it. An unsaved world that refuses an offer of salvation might be indifferent; but a saved world that refuses its salvation is worse—it is false to itself.

We live, therefore, in a redeemed world, not in a world which is only being redeemed as the number of believers grow. The Kingdom of God is set up; it is not just being set up, or trying to get set up, in the arbitrary degree in which individual men declare themselves for Christ. There can be no uncertainty whether it will succeed, as there is about every human enterprise. It is not an enterprise; it is entering on possession. All the souls we bring in are the earnest of an inheritance, the instalment of a whole world due to Christ, his purchased possession. The only world-religion is the religion of a saved world, of a world already saved.

Already saved! For a saved world there are two parties, God and man. And the active party, the effectual party, the final party in the matter is God. And God has done His part. And that is the part. The effectual thing is done. Whatever more He does is to only carry home what he has done; and all we can do is to take it home. We can but appropriate his gift of a final, a complete Christ.

I am afraid some types of religion do not think of the world, but only of little bits of it. We think, perhaps, of its sectional grievances till we lose all power to realize its general lostness. And so what we find in the Cross is not really the solution of the world and the settled conquest of everything there. Thus the Cross becomes a small and common thing. We live in a little way, and we have but a little Christ. We do not realize that it was the cross alone that made Christianity universal, that what that lever was lifting was a world. We do not realize that the death of that hour was the world's eternal life, and in that brief act man's destiny was sealed for ever.

Even the Reformers did not quite realize that it was a world Saviour and a world redemption on the Cross. They thought it involved but a section of the world; and that is one reason why they had no missions while the Jesuits had. For in them the old Church kept the note and the passion

of Christ's Universal Empire. The bane of so much of our popular religion, what belittles it, and lays it open to the best sceptics, is that we do not think in worlds, and that even the single soul is sometimes saved but in a section of it. It is not the man that is saved, but something in him called his soul.

This finished work of Christ, which in saving a whole world created a whole Church, you perceive is the root of Missions. Jews and sects make proselytes. But they need not. They do; but they need not. Whereas the Church must mission. If it mission it is a true Church and not a sect. It is the missionary succession and not the episcopal that makes a Church. The apostles were much more missionaries than bishops. The Church must mission, being made by such a Gospel, the Gospel of a world already reconciled, already put right by God towards Him, already God's by His act and waiting only our appropriation. And we appropriate it when we reproduce as individuals the great world crisis and change in Christ. The Church, with such a Gospel, must mission. It is its new nature to do so, just as it is the old human nature to subdue and exploit the visible world. And the world at last cannot refuse such a Gospel.

Therefore the missionary work of the Church is not an experiment. It is the Church's work, vocation, and destiny. It is not the hobby of groups of individuals in the churches who take this up as others might take up a boys' brigade or a cheap dinner fund. Those who attend to the Church's missions are the agents of the Church and its representatives; they are not faddists, tolerated and patronised within it. Indeed, as I have said, it is the one enterprise of any dimensions in all the world which can be absolutely sure of its own triumph at the end. We watch the expansive energy of our own or any other race in search of Empire, and we cannot tell if it will at last be a success or a failure. But we can be sure not only that missions are essential to the Church, but

that they are as sure of success as God liveth—God who redeemed the world in Christ and gave His Church the Word and power of reconciliation.

The one missionary of the world then is a Missionary Society. And that Society is the Church. And the Church, owing its existence and its daily life to the Cross, goes with that finished work in its hand. The Cross makes it a Church, and makes it missionary. And it makes really missionary the Church alone.

## II

What is the chief contribution of the home minister to foreign missions?

The first thing I would point out is that the contribution must be through His Church. His Church is the minister's first concern. And by His Church I mean more particularly his congregation, his care of souls. I hope the days are gone, or going, when a man may use his Church as a mere pedestal for public works—a mere means of support—while his heart, his energies are outside the Church in social efforts of a political cast, or literary work, of a non-religious kind.

It is through his Church that the minister must work outwards. It is his intensive effect on the smaller area that is the vital spring of their extensive action together on the large scale. The minister grows into his Church, and his Church into him, in such a way that they act upon the public as one. And this is especially so in regard to missions. As I say, the missionary upon earth is the Church. The work even of a Livingstone was done by the Church still more than by the man.

There have been three types of missionary work developed in the course of Christ's history—that of individuals, that of special societies, that of the Church itself organized for this purpose.

1. In the infancy of missions they owed much to individual pioneers; in which connection we need but to remember the apostles themselves. But that is not a permanent state of things. If the influence of such pioneers did not die out it was bound to extend to the Church. And where it succeeded its effect has been almost as great on the home churches as on the foreign field. It has converted the Church to the heathen as well as the heathen to the Church. It has inspired the Church with a new sense of its missionary duty. And, indeed, in the case of modern missions a century ago, it had to create that sense. I need only remind you, without discussion, of the neglect of missions by Protestantism up to the end of the eighteenth century, and the antagonism of the Church to the inspiration of Carey, Marshman, Ward, and the rest of the great band one hundred years ago.

2. The second form is that of a separate society. There are several of these abroad, like the Basle Society, or the American Board. At home we have the Church Missionary Society or the London Missionary Society. The drawbacks of that arrangement are considerable, and seem to increase. At least the number grows of those who wish to see the Congregational Union, like the Baptist, directly responsible for the missionary work of Congregationalists. The society might come to represent not so much the general faith of the contributory Churches as that of their missionary elite. Hence its undertakings might become larger than the Churches can carry which form its financial base. Hence again there would be constant appeals to the Churches and often reproaches (Cf. Col. iii. 21). The Society ceases to be the organ of the Church in the sense of being their spending partner.

3. But the proper, the ideal state of things is, that each great Church should be its own missionary society; and this for the sake both of the Church, its missions, and its Gospels.

We come back to our principle of the Gospel, that the Church is Christ's missionary upon earth. It began as a mission. Christ's only tangible legacy to the world was His missionaries. It was not an episcopate—but an apostolate. It was not a Church, but a society; which became a Church in the Holy Ghost. He did not leave a Church, but men who made a Church. They were its founders; think of Peter on Pentecost, and Paul with his organizing genius. They were its founders; He was and is its foundation. They were the rock on which He built the Church, but He was the builder who chose the rock and crowned it with His kingdom. The Church is not Christian unless it be thus apostolic.

It has been a besetting sin of Protestantism, especially in the extreme forms, to ignore the Church. If its earliest forms ignored the world its later forms ignore the Church. We have tended to approach Christ, and to work from Christ, much too individually. We have overlooked the sacramental value that was given to the Church by the Providence which made Christianity historic. We have been apt to use it only as a fraternity, or a public lever for social purposes, or a mine of funds for various enterprises. We have not treated it as the grand spiritual mother of the generations, the agent and vicar of Christ on earth, giving to us all one place and function. It is the commonest thing to hear preachers even speaking of the Reformation as the Charter of individualism, with its right of private judgment. But the Charter of that, for what it is worth, is not there. It is rather to be found in the Rationalist movement and the French Revolution. Individualism means rationalism. And what Reformation preached was not individual religion; for it insisted on the necessary place of a true Church, and of a communal faith. What it preached was not individualist religion, in contrast to social, but it was personal religion, as released from institutional—released, but not banished. The

work of Christianity in the world cannot be done by the optional association of any number of earnest individuals, but only by the living unity of a Church, made by Christ's act before it was made by man's consent. Human society is a very complex affair; and it can only be evangelized, converted and captured for the kingdom of God by a society more mighty and subtle still, by a society organized, indeed, only not as an Empire, but as an Economy of the Spirit. Society is too highly organized and too securely entrenched on the egoist basis to succumb to the efforts of any number of earnest individuals if they are merely associated egoists of a religious kind. They must be built into a compelling spiritual unity still more powerful and subtle—like the Church. Only the spiritual kingdom of God can cope with the kingdom of the unspiritual world.

Let us make much, very much, of the Church. The Christian Church is the greatest product of human history. Do not be afraid. If we have a real grasp of the real Gospel we need never be afraid of ecclesiasticism. To distrust the Church is to distrust the Gospel's power to keep the Church. It is to distrust the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Gospel will keep the Church if we keep the Gospel. The Gospel will keep the Church in its place. If our Gospel does not protect us from priest or Pope nothing will—not all our vigilance, suspicion, Orangeism, Rationalism, Radicalism will. Distrust the "no popery" people, and plunge deeper into your Gospel. A true Gospel will both make and keep a Church true. Only a Church it must have, for a mouth and a mark on the world. A real Church made, moved, and managed by the Gospel is the first essential for the progress of missions. Why did the inception of modern missions a century ago fall to individuals? It was because the Church had lost that Gospel. These men had to save the Church at home as well as spread it abroad by falling back on the Gospel. You will often hear it said now that the State of the

Church at home is so unsatisfactory, so unchristian, that we ought to revise that, remoralize that, before we turn to the Gentiles, or even before we can get steam up to go. But the action of the missionary pioneers 100 years ago answers that. It was their going out to the Gentiles with the Gospel, and without the Church, that did so much to wake the Church to its low and lost state at home.

### III

The minister, then, must feed and consolidate his Church. But I would now press the next step. He must realize always that the Gospel is more than church or preacher; the food is more to the patient than the physician, and the constitution does more than the nurse. That is to say, everything depends on the kind of Gospel which is habitually preached as the true vitality of the Church. If the missionary machinery go slow, it is because the fires of the Gospel burn low. Without these you may extend your machinery, multiply your devices, and whip up effort; but it is all climbing up a climbing wave.

In the missionary interest, therefore, I would lay great stress on the pervasive ubiquity of a real Gospel in the preaching of the Church. What is habitually preached to the Church will be steadily preached by the Church. It need not be obtruded, but it must be everywhere. What tells in the long run is not our sermons, but our Word.

I could almost wish that the annual missionary sermon and its concomitants were improved out of use. Special sermons are disliked by most preachers that I know—naturally excepting the present sermon. They are apt to be more or less artificial, and have the air of being got up, apt to give the impression that the preacher is briefed. He is not free to be himself in the Lord. He moves in armour. He feels

crustacean. He speaks like a secretary, not to say a treasurer, and not like an apostle or a saint. I have never made such failures in the pulpit as with special sermons—some of them missionary.

Moreover, there are the missionaries to consider. It is demanded, by even small Churches, that on the annual occasion a missionary deputation shall be present; and the poor men, during their furlough from a hot country, are moved about the rural parts of this unspeakable climate in slow trains, or they face east winds in open traps, or they crawl through fogs to their danger and sometimes death. They have to repeat at place after place the same story, till it is a wonder they can keep any sense of reality about it at all. Consider sometimes the lonely and perilous conditions of the missionary's life and its danger of spiritual hebetude. Ought they not to have far more freedom on furlough to take advantage of the opportunities which home offers—opportunities for bracing the spiritual and mental slackness that comes from being so much out of things where things are moving? They often wish to repair defects in their own education by attending the lectures of our best teachers during furlough, but they cannot be spared from deputation work. And what does that deputation work mean? It means—does it not?—that the Churches or the ministers cannot be trusted to feed the missionary ardour properly by their Gospel, but they must have live missionaries to make the cause more lively and more near. If we preached a missionary Gospel more we should need to advertise missions less.

But chiefly in the interest of the congregation is the Annual Missionary Sunday of doubtful value. For in a multitude of cases it means that when the occasion is over there is no reference to missions till it comes round again. Of course that need not be so, but as a matter of fact it tends to become so. And it is quite impossible to sustain missionary health, to say nothing of ardour, on one surfeit of missions a year, with

missionary indigestion for most of the interval. Nor can the defect be made good by devices like prayer-groups, or monthly missionary information at a week night meeting. All such things may have their uses, but only within a much more effective atmosphere. And the missionary atmosphere in the Church can only be created and preserved by a Gospel which is missionary in its genius and its effect when not a word about missions is said. The standing ministry from the pulpit must be saturated with a real Gospel.

And what is that? First, as to what it is not. By a real Gospel I do not mean one which just exploits with fervency the evangelical phrases. And I also mean more than one which is real to the preacher himself. I mean one which is true to the New Testament on one side, and on the other is real and relevant to the religious, moral, and intellectual situation of the hour in which we live. What is the use of pleading for missions if you ignore entirely the modern relations between civilization and the lower races; if you ignore the huge egotistic mission, plied by commerce to the ends of the earth; if you ignore the effects of our military conquest or occupation; if you ignore the unsettlement at home of theological belief; or if you ignore the new situation created by the sympathetic study of other religions than our own? We need a gospel, not given us by these situations or religions, but yet relevant to them, one real still in the face of them, and one speaking with all the passion of a dear and small old world the larger language of the new time.

But still it is only the language of the Age that we must speak, not its Gospel. We must not spread our interests so that we cannot rally at call. Of course we must let our thought and our sympathy go out to other religions and interests, but still more must we call our faith in, and unite our heart in the faith and fear of God. And the time has come when we must concentrate in the region of religion if we are to spread in the region of the Church. For long

now the public heart and mind have been invited to go out and ramble in a growing world of knowledge and resource. What is the result? The result is that we feel confronted with a world which has more power on us than we have on it. We feel the pressure, the solicitation, the distraction of our wondrous age more than we feel the reaction and the lift against it from the inner world that must control it. What upward pressure of life within us sustains the soul against the downward pressure and load of things without? The extent of our knowledge and the variety of our interests have done so much to shake and dissipate the intense certainty in which alone we can overcome a world that grows larger every day. We cannot do the work of Christ without, because we are too distraught and unsure as to the stay of Christ within. We do not learn to feel that our real without is within. We do not go up our soul and view the world. We do not get us to our high tower and watch. We do not go as high as the Cross.

#### IV

Must it be the Cross? That dwarf cross for the last destiny of this high and mighty world? The cross and not culture? We have now to face the plea that culture can now take the work from the hands of missions. The humane influences of the higher civilization, it is said, may now be trusted to do the elevating work needful for other races, and do it better than if we obtruded our positive Christ. We may be told that God is really more interested in the higher aspects of the world than he is in the Church, and in progress more than redemption. And we shall hear the suggestion that if other religions are taken at their best they would be better fitted than ours for the people that bred them.

Well, missionaries of all men ought to know other religions, and know them with sympathy. But you will never

get an inspiration for philanthropy, to say nothing of missions, from a mere belief in human nature, and from the thought, how good men are after all, and how good and fine their religions may be made or shown to be. There is nothing missionary in the apotheosis of humanity. And creeds that are mainly seeking creeds cannot find men. Mere humanism falls into sets, not into churches. It pursues research, but not missions. It tends to seek secrets rather than souls, and comfort rather than welfare, and finally the comfort of nice Dives rather than the welfare of squalid Lazarus.

Some forms of culture however are willing to allow that we do need religion to go with any good effect to heathen anywhere, but they plead that it must be a genial and minimalist religion, because that alone can be the religion of civilization. They say, "A religion is really the spiritual action of one civilization on another. We must adapt religion to civilization. And we must do it in two ways. We must adapt our religion, our Christianity, to the lower civilization we go to. And we must adapt it also to our own high civilization. Now look (it is said) at the modern conditions of our civilization. Look especially at its religious differences and their free expression. Surely its religion must be of the very simplest humanest kind. And your positive and dogmatic Christianity, your theologies of Incarnation, Atonement, sacraments and the like are of no use—even were it Christian which some of yourselves deny".

Well, when we hear that, what are we to say? There are three or four things we may say.

1. We may ask, Is Christianity, even in a somewhat simple form, the religion of civilization? Do the chief public agents of civilization, say in the Chancellories of Europe, not freely renounce it in effect, or else practice but the meagrest version even of their reduced creed? Is not the aggrandisement of the State the supreme law? Does religion become, in

some trading circles abroad, for instance, more than a better Judaism, with the Christian elements left out, even when it is there at all? Is not the religion of the actual-minded layman, the able journalist, even if he still go to Church, becoming a very different thing from the faith of the people of Christ? Even if the pitch of the religion is not so low as that, are not its principles very different from the ethics of the civilization to which it is attached? Is there not a constant friction and malaise between them, between civilization and religion?

2. Further we may go on to ask, Do the Pagans think so much of our civilization that it helps to commend our religion to them? If we offer a Bible to one of a subject race, and tell him that there lies the secret of the greatness which enabled us to defeat and exploit his people, is that the way to the heart and faith of the kind of Pagan we should most wish to win? Or if we force into a country whose authorities resent it cargoes of opium, gin, powder, and vice, can we hope they will welcome our creed, however simple? If the plain object of Western civilization is to exploit Eastern nations, can we be surprised if they think we only want to proselytize with our religion? The finest things in our civilization do not appeal to them. Our art does not. What do they care for our pictures and music? Our forms of government do not. They do not crave in China, I believe, for our civil freedom. Our careful justice seems often but weakness. Our social manners do not attract them. Anglo-Indians do not treat Indian gentlemen in any missionary spirit. And a Chinese gentleman's dignity does not in the least understand the easy and intimate style which we associate with good society. Civilization can hardly give the entree abroad to such faith as it does profess.

3. Again, civilization may need a religion; how are we sure that it needs ours? Why the Christian? Why not the Budd-

hist? Why should not Buddhism, with its kind simplicity, commend itself to lay minds who ask for some great alternative for their own rough energy, and who are too spent with mastering the world to give thought to anything but a religion too simple to be true? How if China came to the West world with a yellow mission of reverence for parents and elders? Are all religions good, and all one, when you get down to their simplest elements?

And may it be, as the world goes on, that the small quantity of spiritual precipitate left at the bottom of the crucible of the creeds shall be enough to meet the needs and heal the wounds of civilization. Is Christianity to go into that crucible with the rest, and contribute its minute quota to the residuum at the bottom? Or is it God's last word to the race, the key to all other religions, and the answer to all their prayers? "Whom ye worship without knowing it, Him declare I unto you."

4. If Christianity be that last word, what kind of Christianity is it—the Christianity of the modern man or the Christianity of the Church? Is it a Christianity that worked to ameliorate, elevate and socialize, or to convert and save? Pray observe, I am not asking whether every address or effort of the missionary, any more than of the minister, should aim at producing conviction or conversion. That is a matter of tactics, of approach. We must educate as well as evangelize. The question is whether the Christianity that is in the missionary's trust is, in its inmost nature and final effect, the one thing or the other? Is it at bottom educative and civilizing or regenerative and sanctifying? Is it a Christianity that just carries human religion a huge step forward, or one that embodies God's last word and work to the soul? It will really make a great difference to the missionary action of a Church both in amount and in kind which view you take of the gospel. What do we mean by Redemption?

The heathen often long for some redemption. Buddhism lives on one form of it—escape from life's ache.

“Far and wide, though all unknowing,  
Longs for thee each laden breast.”

But for what do they long? Do they long most—do most of us at home long most—for that which our Gospel came chiefly to bring? Is it help or salvation they want? Relief from oppression or from sin? Do they want a Redemption from the upper classes, from the untowardness of the world, from the heavy fate and harsh necessity that stifle life, or is it from the load of conscience and the burden of guilt? Is it from the consequences of sin or from the guilt of it? Is what they long for but earthly happiness taken to a higher place and baptised with God's benediction?

Now, let us use any strategy we think wise in putting our Gospel, but let us not mistake that the Christian Redemption is from guilt before God to communion with him in Christ. It is the creation or the restoration of personal relations with a personal and holy God by His initiative, His revelation, His gospel, by His own act of grace. We have to preach, first or last, a God who makes men guilty in the very act of saving them from guilt. In all the other religions there are, of course, points of attachment for this Gospel. These abound in human nature. But do not mistake these, as many to-day are doing, for the foundations of the new structure. Trust the stability of the new fabric to the new foundations laid in the Cross alone; and not to its grip of the tongues or the slots in the end of the old building; else, without a foundation of its own, the new must subside. And it can only strain the old house as it sinks, and both will fall in a heap. Our foundations are quite different from those of Islam, with its deistic type of God, or of Hinduism, with its pantheistic type, or of Buddhism, with no God at all.

## V

When we face other religions we have several questions to answer to ourselves.

1. Is Christianity better than other religions? That is not a question we shall have much trouble with in a Christian country. And it is not that question which makes some in our churches cool to missions. Of course, we cannot hope to have it admitted at once by the representatives of other faiths. But the first thing is to be sure ourselves. It is a higher, better, more ethical and spiritual creed than any other, we believe.

2. The next question is this. Granting that Christianity is better than all other faiths has it a future? Or has it served its day? Is it moribund? It will not do to say that for Europe it may be, but for the East it is not, and that there it may yet have a career. We cannot hope that if our barque sinks here it sinks to another sea there, that Christianity can repeat there the triumphs it has outlived here. How can we hope for that when one side of the world knows the same day what is going on on the other? How can we go to these peoples with a dying faith? It could not even impel us to go. For a dying faith makes no martyrs, and few confessors. And it could not arrest those to whom we took it. How can a dying faith make living men? Will they accept one moribund creed for another? Will they in China, Japan, or India consent to replace their native spiritual attire with the cast-off clothing of Europe? However we dress up the rags of our old faith, will they take our shoddy for their own silk, frayed as that may be? Can we act like the agnostic who finds the Church not good enough for him, but very useful for the wife and children and the servants? As soon as the suspicion enters the Church that Christianity is really exhausted and that we are

waiting for a new revelation, the extension of the Church is stopped, the aggressive impulse is chilled, and the hope of conquest is paralysed. And nothing can arrest that suspicion once it is suggested; but our own experience in a Church, how inexhaustible is the New Creation in Jesus Christ.

3. So the third and great question is, Is Christianity final? That is the great issue of the hour. Not is Christ a revelation, but is he the revelation? Is it not enough to say that there is plenty of life in Christianity yet? Can it ever be otherwise? Is it taken out of the company of other religions which face God and placed in a class by itself as the religion where God faces man? That is to say, is it the religion of revelation in a sense true of no other, and of revelation by redemption for good and all?

We may take it as certain, I think, that unless we believe our gospel to be final we break the back of missions. That belief in Christ's finality will affect every truth of Christianity, and every way we take our truth, and press our truth. It affects the whole note and tone of the Church's word in many subtle ways, which influence us more than we know. It sets a whole type of preaching and tunes the whole temper of a church or a congregation. The difficulties of missions are very great to-day, but the worst are within the Church and not without. I trace them back to the one root, that the churches are individually and collectively less sure than they should be about the crucial nature and eternal fidelity of their own Gospel. Some of the most active members of our churches, who should carry the Church's missionary zeal, are less sure about this than those who were equally active half a century ago. They have a weaker grasp of the eternal finality of Christ, and Christ alone, for their own souls. We have gained in sympathy, in compassion, in kindness. We are prompt to meet the ills that these teach us

to feel. We live in an age of Apologists, who are engrossed in presenting Christianity as a divine philosophy, in reducing the friction between Christ and current society or thought, and in making the offence of the Cross to the natural man to cease. And we are obscure (as the old Apologists of the second century were) about the centrality of redemption, or we treat redemption as amelioration. And unless that note of redemption return (as in the fourth-century Church it did return) Christianity can have no more spread and future for us than it would have had with the Apologists and their Gospel of an *anima naturaliter Christiana*. Already we hear "A man can be a Christian without faith in Jesus Christ." But these things, these ameliorations and sympathies, and compromises cannot carry the Church's missions. These must rest on the evangelical basis of God's final dealing with the soul in Christ, and on the cross's break with the world to save it. Christ can make the most of us for Humanity, by compelling us in a crisis to choose between Him and Humanity. So the minister's effect upon missions will depend in the long run upon the kind of Gospel he preaches—not to his own people only, but, as the trustee and representative of his Church, to his age. After all it is not the missionaries, nor the ministers, nor the people that are to convert the world. It is the Gospel, and our certainty of it.

You ask, perhaps, why I do not say the Holy Spirit? Because it is a weakness, and almost a bane, of our Christian time to have detached the Holy Spirit too much from its base and source in an objective, saving act of God; and to have associated it too much with the subjective experiences and pieties which ebb and flow in the Church as in the soul. Of such things or such men we will not glory, even if we are taken up among unutterable things in the third heaven; but we will glory in the Cross and its final grace, its insuperable effect and its finished work. We will not rejoice that the spirits are subject to us, or that movements follow us

wherever we go; but that our names are written where they keep the books of the Kingdom of God, and where there are inscribed many apostles preserved by the godly fear of being castaways.

We believe in the human future because we believe in the Eternal God. We believe in the Eternal God because we believe in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. We believe in Him because he has passed us from death to life by the Cross which saved a world and made a Church. We so believe as to live in that Church for that world. We believe that the Church the Gospel makes is the engine of the Salvation the world needs. It is a vast world, but it is a vaster Salvation. Great is man, but chiefly because of the greatness of his Saviour. Great are the demands and hopes of the growing race, but greater are the claims and promises of its redeeming God. Great and glorious is the civilization we inherit and transmit, but still more great and glorious is the Kingdom which God has set up among all nations. Great is the struggle by which civilization emerges from a rude old-time, but still greater is the conflict between civilization and the Kingdom of God. And all the power and greatness of the Kingdom is derived from the King. We do not make him our King, but he did make us his realm. We are not our own. And our Gift of his Grace is also our trust. It is not in our choice to spread his Gospel or not. It is our death if we do not. We are a holy seed and in charge of the holy future. May our blessing not fail by any slackness of ours to enrich all the nations of the world; lest the Kingdom be taken from us and given in trust to another people who are better servants of the Gospel of the high and holy Lord.

## 4

## THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

(appeared in *The Examiner*, 11th April, 1901.)

WHAT we have most to complain of in the Christianity of the day is lack of power. There is much interest, much charm, much zeal, much activity; there is a certain increase of reverence, of public respect for religion; people believe in the establishment of the Church who believe in nothing else about it; there is a commendable ardour for evangelizing the outsider, for Church extension, for bracing up our Church organization. There is, moreover, an unprecedented sense of the beauty of Christ's character, of the depths of His words, of their ethical pressure upon us in particular. Yet I venture to say that behind it all there is a sense of impotence of which we are often but semi-conscious. A great part of our effort seems to go in the flogging up of power, in the application of stimulants, in scolding, sometimes, because the power does not come, sometimes in cheering people on and insisting they could run if they would believe they could. Whereas the proper state of things is that our public efforts should go to the distributing of our power, and not to the acquiring of it or the working of it up. That should be done elsewhere, and not much in public. Power should inspire our collective effort instead of being the object of it.

We lack power because we do not experience our personal religion as a power. Religion is any or all of the things I have said, and we feel sincerely that it is so. Only it is not a power with us. Its experience is much that is admirable, not only the one thing that is commanding. There are so many powers that we feel in practical effects to be greater.

In admission, of course, the greatest of all powers is God, is faith, is the Cross. We concede that without saying, and we believe we believe it. But practically we retract the admission. In the retrospect of a single day of our life we are bound to admit that the things which have been practically recognized and effective with us, both in our conduct and in our view of life, have been different. We feel and own intensely the power of armies, states, and organizations. We organize force, equity, and industry, and we believe in organization more than it was ever believed in. We are forced to admit what an immense power it is and is going to be. We are offered our choice between organization and ineffectiveness. The objects we are most set on for the time are such as organization alone can reach. At least they cannot be reached without it. Again, we feel easily the power of heroes, emperors, geniuses, even when we have more of the imperial than of the heroic, or the inspired. We feel the power of personality, of eloquence, of sentiment. We recognize the vast power of money, the unprecedented part played by finance in the social economy and the modern time. We have a momentary and reactionary passion of belief in institutions, in institutional politics or piety. We know the power of science and its organization of knowledge. We have a sense never before given to the world of cosmos power, the collective force and energy of a perfectly coherent universe. These are but examples of power on the vast scale which we all feel, and they are in striking contrast with our sense of power which we associate with faith, or answer in it. Yet if in our faith we do not feel and own a power infinitely greater than any of the historic or cosmic forces of the time, our religion has but a limited future, and every effort we make to organize it into line with the powers which we secretly and practically call most effective, is bound to end in deep disappointment. We need organization, but it is very far

from being the thing we most need, or need most immediately.

From the New Testament point of view the seat of chief power and authority in the universe is the cross of resurrection of Jesus Christ. And there are many signs that we do not realize this, that we do not take such statements seriously, or in any other than in some figurative and moral way. For Paul the omnipotence of God was chiefly shown in raising Christ from the dead. But for the average modern Christian there is practically and experimentally more power in the processes of astronomy and evolution than he can by any effort feel to underlie either the death or the resurrection of Christ. The latter especially he associates with ease rather than effort, just as his conception of fatherhood has become joined with the affection rather than the judgments of God, with the child Jesus rather than with the Cross. We have largely lost the idea that there is a greater power at work even in the natural world than the might of cosmic process, glorious states, or brilliant genius. And that is the power of sin, which has it in it to bring all these things to dust with the alliance of time. We think that there are powers which meet us hourly to-day, of which Paul knew nothing—like the cosmic power of which I spoke. And we have a latent sense, that had he known of our modern forces, he would not have spoken so freely and with so little gratification about the resurrection of Christ, as the supreme exhibition of the power of God. And it is true that there are powers familiar to us which were unknown to him. But there were powers, and greater powers, familiar to him which are being forgotten by us. And chief of these is the power of sin. In these moral measurements of the universe which give us final values, this is the ruling power unless it find its master. The power which masters the world's sin is the real omnipotence of the universe. And the true sense of what power is, comes home to us only in our sense of forgiveness and

## FORGIVENESS THROUGH ATONEMENT THE ESSENTIAL OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

(abstract of a paper read at the International Congregational Council in Edinburgh, 1st July, 1908, as reported in *The British Congregationalist*, 2nd July, 1908.)

IN our modern psychology we start from the primacy of the will and we bring everything to the test of man's practical and ethical life. And so, also, we start ethically from the Holiness of God as the supreme interest in the Christian revelation.

By the Atonement, therefore, is meant that action of Christ's death which has a prime regard to God's holiness, and finds man's reconciliation impossible except as that holiness is divinely satisfied once for all. In regard to Christ's Cross, we are face to face with a new situation. We are called upon to set Jesus against Paul and to choose. The issue comes to a crisis in the interpretation of the death of Christ. To treat that death as more than a martyrdom is called a gratuitous piece of theology. Every man must make his own atonement, and Jesus did the same, only on a scale corresponding to the undeniable greatness of his personality. Such teaching is, in my humble judgment, foreign to Congregationalism. The Atonement which raises that death above the greatest martyrdom, or the greatest object-lesson of God's love, is for us no piece of Paulinism. Paul says he received it from the Lord. It was part of the Christian instruction he received at Damascus. He delivered to the churches what he received among the fundamentals (I. Cor. ii. 23) from earlier Christians, that Christ died for our sins. How came the Apostolic circle to have this view of

Christ's death? Must they not have been taught by Christ so to view it in such words as are echoed in the ransom passage, and at the Last Supper?

We have been warned against the idea that Christ taught about Himself or His work, as an essential element of His own gospel. But let us leave the question whether He taught Himself, and go back to the prior question, "Is the Gospel primarily what Jesus taught?" Those He taught never understood Him so. If they had, could they have done anything else than go about retailing that teaching, with a lament at its premature arrest? But the prime thing we know about their teaching is that Christ crowned Israel by dying for our sins. He was all to them in the Cross. That was the starting point of the Gospel, and it is the content of the Gospel. And it is always to these that the Church must come back to take its bearings and be given its course.

It is reported in most quarters in England that there is a serious decline in church membership. It is well to face the situation and to avoid extenuation. And if we do, we shall admit to ourselves that the real cause is not the decay in religious interests or sympathies, but in personal religion of a positive and experienced kind. The sense of sin can hardly be appealed to by the preacher, and to preach grace is, in many even orthodox circles, regarded as theological obsession and the wrong language for the hour. It is said in reply that the sense of sin has not departed, but has only changed its form. We are more dull to individual sin because we are more alive to social sin. I would say in answer: (1) Public compunction does not move to ask forgiveness, which is the prime righteousness of the Kingdom of God. (2) The tendency is welcome insofar as this. The more sin is socialized, so much the more imperative becomes the necessity of an Atonement. If it is man that is wronged, it is man that has wronged him; it is man that has sinned; man

that is condemned. Surely, therefore, the wrong inflicted on man sets up a corresponding responsibility on man at this centre. That seems inevitable if we believe in responsibility, and also believe in the unity of the human race. But it comes home far more mightily and solemnly from a belief in another unity, the belief in the absolute and moral unity of God—in a word, a real belief and a real sense of God's holiness.

This holiness of God is the real foundation of religion; Love is but its outgoing; sin is but its defiance; grace is but its action on sin; the cross is but its victory; faith is but its worship. This holiness is no attribute of God, but his very essence. The moral is the real. It is not a quality in God, but the being of God, in which all else inheres. God is Holy Love. To bring sin home and grace home, then the Holy must be brought home. But that, again, can be done on the scale of the Church, and the world, only by replacing the atoning Cross at the centre of Christian faith and life. What is our problem to-day? It is to take the mass of men, inert and hopeless some, others indifferent, others hostile to God, and to reconcile them with God's holy will and righteous kingdom. It is to destroy our national and social dislike of that new enthusiasm, supplant lust by a higher ardour, bend the strongest wills to the obedience of the Holiest, and by moral regeneration restore men both physically and socially. It is the grand object of history. And the more we are pre-occupied with social righteousness, so much the more we are driven to that centre where the whole righteousness of God and man found consummation and adjustment, and a principle and a career in the saving judgment of Christ's Cross. It is the cross that makes moral worth an infectious power, and keeps character from being self-contained, and gives a moral guarantee of a social future.

It is sometimes said: "There are several theories of the Atonement, but we have to do with the fact, and not with

our understanding of it". The one thing we need is to understand the Atonement. Such a fact as Christ or his Atonement only exists as it is intelligible, as it comes home to us with a moral meaning or a moral nature. When preachers denounce Theology, or a Church despises it for literary or social charm, that is to sell the Cross to be a pendant at the neck of the handsome world. It is spiritual poverty and baldness; it is not the simplicity in Christ, to be sick of grace, judgment, atonement, or redemption.

A moral order of the world is our one modern certainty, among those who are certain of anything. And if, as we Christians believe, this moral order reflects the nature of a holy God, without exhausting His being, then the supreme interest of the world lies there. Christianity is only true if it deal with this, and only final if it comes to final terms with this. This it does by the consummation of God's judgment in the central act of mercy. Now a judgment upon man alone would have destroyed him. And a judgment borne by God alone would be *manqué*. But borne by God in man, in such a racial experience as the cross of Christ, it is the condition of a new conscience and of a new ethic of the race. When the cross goes out of the centre of religion, religion goes out of the centre of man's moral energy. The pathos of Christ takes the place of His power. We tend to overprize the subdued, composed and vespertinal type of religion whose patron saints are outside the Evangelical succession with Francis or Fra Angelico, or we are engrossed with the genial brotherly and hustling type, and all the time the Church is dropping into a vague Arianism: it is losing faith in the real presence of the redeeming God, and therefore in a strenuous ethic. The idea we are offered is a kingdom of man with God to serve it, rather than a kingdom of God, with man to serve it. We do not so much owe our soul to the fact of Christ, we impose on that fact the soul within us, the humane soul, crude but very capable, dim but unlost,

## 6

## THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF THEOLOGY

(a paper read to the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches at Birmingham, as reported in *The Christian World Pulpit*, 21st March, 1906.)

**M**EDIAEVAL Christianity took its stand upon the authority of the Church, the Reformers on the authority of the Bible, and late Protestantism on the authority of the Confessions. The appeal from all these to the godly consciousness of Christendom was inaugurated by the great regenerative genius of modern theology—Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher founded as a theologian upon the religion of Pietism which he inherited. And it is at this stage on the whole that our Free Church communities stand at the present moment. They make their appeal for the truth of Christianity to Christian experience. They do not quite realize how far it is from final.

It was an immense step forward. It was a great contribution to the intimacy and the reality of the Christian life, and to the efficacy of the Christian Church. It was largely associated with the Evangelical movement and with Methodism. It was the saving of vital Christianity in this country at least. It was an indispensable reaction from the formalism, literalism, and confessionalism that had settled down to blight the Church. It was a rediscovery of the treasure buried in the Christian field. It translated the opinionated right of private judgment into the modest duty of personal experience. It tempered the hardness of private judgment, and it furnished the key of Christianity to many whose judgment was but ill equipped. It gave the believer a right to

speak not only on faith but on central theology. It gave him a new and personal interest in theology no less than in faith.

How then is it that in those very circles in the Churches of the Evangelical experience a distaste and a distrust of theology has begun to spread, and in many quarters has gone much farther than that? How is it that the appeal to experience which served the orthodox Methodist so well is now serving equally well the mere humanist, who has no patience with positive Christianity, who swears by spiritual evolution and sneers at Christian doctrine, who refers everything to the native pieties of the heart, of which Christ was the classic case, with the refining and cultivating effect that every classic has? How do we account for that negative phenomenon? And there is a positive. The appeal to experience is being fast replaced by an appeal to the Gospel. The old interest in inspiration gives way to the interest in revelation. What has driven us in that direction? It is the discovery of the weakness of the merely experimental, inspirational basis for either theology or life. Schleiermacher must be corrected by Ritschl.

### THE WEAKNESS OF EXPERIMENTALISM

There are many who feel that the Churches most dominated by the experimental method, though they have gained in force, are not gaining to the same extent in the power which sustains the force. They can carry an election with men easier than rest in an election of God. The God of our fathers chose us; ours is a God offered to our choice, and our vote hesitates. The inner certainty is not what it was. The objective security is not what it was. The note of authority is not what it was. The note of humility is not what it was. Faith as it has gained in the matter of experience has lost in the note of obedience. I do not speak of the obedience that flows from faith, but of the obedience which faith itself is, which is the natural feature and seal of faith. We are all for

love as the nature of faith, and not obedience. Faith has gained in personal sincerity, but it has lost in personal humility. It is more vivid, but it is not more reverent. It is more decorous, but it is not more worshipful. The old informality of worship has gone, but is often replaced by the informality of irreverence. Faith is more sympathetic, but is not more awed. It does not betray a soul sanctified so much as consecrated, and often it shows a soul no more than impressed. It responds to the spirit of Christ, but it is not abased before the majesty, the holiness of Christ. Active religion becomes bustling and jaunty religion. It acclaim Christ the King, especially in public matters more than it seems to feel Him pleading in the inner unspeakable soul. It cheers the King's procession more than it inhabits the Saviour's Church. Our type of religion seems to carry the note of experience, I repeat, rather than the note of essential obedience. Our faith is a responsive thrill rather than an absolute submission. It is a self-denial, a self-surrender, a self-mortification, rather than a falling at His feet as one dead and rising at His touch. The old assent of the intellect becomes the new assent of the heart, but it remains assent rather than fealty. The heart acclaim God oftener than the will bows. And some seem more enthusiastic about Christ than re-created. They are His vouchers rather than His property. But surely, if there be such a thing as revelation at all, a spontaneous and definite announcement of Himself by God in His grace, our first attitude to it is not mere sympathetic response. We offer that to any hero or genius from among ourselves. Surely it must be, once for all, obedience. Surely faith is an obedience, or it is nothing. If it is everything it is the obedience, from which all else flows. Our first attitude to God's gracious revelation of Himself is not even the sense of liberty. That is secondary. For freedom is not an end in itself. And in the next place it comes to Christians only by their redemption and their practical obedience to it.

## FAITH AND DEVOTION

Appeals are made to us not to omit in all our activity to cultivate the spirit of devotion. Appeals of the kind are useless. Devotion which is cultivated to preserve our balance is not devotion. The only devotion worth having is that which is made inevitable by the nature of faith as itself the fountal devotion, an act of obedience far more than a state of experience, a submission to a real objective with a native right and power to rule us from the centre.

In like manner we are familiar with pulpit appeals for more love, more trust, more sympathy, more of the whole gamut of Christian ethic and piety. We are told what Christianity means. It is not presented to us as Christ. I know we are told it is Christ, and we are to imitate Him. But imitation is not obedience. It is rather independence. And even while we are told that Christianity is Christ, the method of the preaching does not correspond to that phrase. "Believe, believe", is the whole tone of many a fruitless preacher. It is bound to be fruitless. It is asking, urging people to lift themselves by their own waistband. It is ignoring the fact that both faith and repentance and all Christian experiences are supernatural things, are the gift of God. Let us cease imploring or commanding people in a forcible, feeble way to believe and to love. These things are not at our volition. Let us offer men not appeals but gifts. Let us come with the gift of a real Gospel. Look to the Gospel and it will see to the experiences. Don't beg men to believe in Christ; put before men a Christ that they cannot help believe. It is not so easy. It is easy enough to utter appeals with more or less ardour—I will not say passion. It is easy, though not so easy, to impress men with the spell or fervour of our own enthusiasm, or even our own real experience. But it is not so easy to take home the gift of God to ourselves in Christ that we may carry it to others with its native and exclusive power to stir the love, the trust, the penitence which we try to flog up in

vain. To preach Christ is not to declare our experience of Christ only or chiefly. It is so to study Christ and His Gospel, so to wind ourselves into His slow, yielding secret, that from a problem He becomes a power to us, and we become not only His witnesses, but His sacraments. Propagandists have faith as an ardour, and prophets have it as an insight. But the apostles have it as personal obedience to a personal revelation of a Gospel. And there are more propagandists and prophets than apostles. Little of your preaching lacks religiosity, but some of it does lack religion, which loses the inspiration of the man in the revelation of the message. It has every other grace, but lacks faith.

#### FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

I fear I am forgetting the text set me by the power here, which I have not only to experience, but to obey. I am speaking about preaching when I am charged to speak about theology. Well, to tell the truth, I find it hard to speak of theology to an audience like this, and in twenty minutes. Strict theology is a matter of lectures more than of addresses. And no lecture is of any use under an hour. But I have not really lost my bearings. When I say that the type of faith which was engrossed with subjective experience is making way for a type which centres in objective obedience, I am saying, in other words, this—that in religion experience comes to the ground if it be not sustained by a theology. I mean more than historic facts. I mean facts which are theological even more than historic. You can have a godly soul without much theology, but you cannot for long have a godly Church. It will become a feeble Church, and then a worldly Church; it will not have grit enough to resist the externalism of the world, its clear definitions and its positive ways. The inner man which really copes with the world is not merely the pious sympathetic man, but the man permeated with the power of an objective Gospel and its facts

and truths. It is our objective base that the formidable critics assail; and we shall never secure our case against them by escaping into the subjective piety of a Christian consciousness. It must be clear that by theology I do not mean something distilled from experience, but something presented, revealed to experience as its source, however condensed or implicit. The theology of experience is one thing—that is Schleiermacher; it is the theology which explicates the Christian consciousness. But the experience of theology is another thing, and it is the experience which explicates the Christian Gospel. And the great movement which arose out of Schleiermacher to correct Schleiermacher, the movement associated with the principle of Ritschl (and going far beyond his system), is the movement to an objective Gospel carrying a theology that does not arise in experience, but only makes its appeal to experience.

#### SCHLEIERMACHER AND RITSCHL

I said that Schleiermacher had to be corrected by Ritschl. (I am prepared to be accused of throwing about names that have an interest only for the technical theologian, but I should be sorry to come here to do that. These names represent great movements, and movements not confined to Germany, but going on in a subconscious way among us. The difference is that we blunder through our religious life in an agnostic fashion—rude people might call it stupid—as we do with our political, whereas the Germans know where faith is going with clear eyes, and they see it half a century and more before us.) Well, I say Schleiermacher had to be corrected by Ritschl. It is quite true that Ritschl was on the line of Schleiermacher and not of Hegel; he was evangelical and not speculative. But he had to outgrow Schleiermacher, and he had to do so to secure an objective base for both theology and religion. That objective base Hegel found in the nature of thought; but the solvent work of the Tübingen

left, where Ritschl was bred, forbade him that stay. He found the base in history, in a positive act of revelation. From the nettle danger in the Tübingen treatment of the historic Bible he plucked the flower of safety in a historic Gospel. It is one-sided to say that Ritschl's great work was to cast us anew upon Christian experience. He cast us upon the experience of revelation, of an objective, historic, positive Gospel as the soul of the Bible and its reason for being. Schleiermacher said that religion was the sense of dependence. The result of that is mere impressionism; it does not make enough of revelation; it does not make it the first thing. Ritschl moved at least two steps forward and outward. He said faith was an act of judgment—a judgment of our whole man on a certain fact's value, its effect and worth for us, and not on its mere existence. And he further said it was an act of obedience, of total submission corresponding to the absolute nature of the Gospel fact and its demand. A religion of impressionism goes for little; it becomes aesthetic and romantic. A religion of judgment means more; it meets revelation with the assent of satisfaction; it lets volition find us. But volition must bind us; and a religion which is a standing obedience is the most powerful and permanent of all.

#### AN OBEDIENT EXPERIENCE

What we need is a theology that creates an obedient experience rather than experience that creates an interpretive theology. What is created from Christian experience is theologoumena rather than theology. Of course I understand by any experience which is used as the basis of theology the positively Christian experience of the regenerate man, and not mere experience of the world, or of life, or of the humanist pieties and ideals. But even the positively Christian experience of a quite new life cannot be the basis either of a gospel or of a theology. What can be such a basis is Christ's

experience and that of those in first and direct contact with His person and work. The value of our experience as a base, or even as a test, is small; it is too narrow, it is too variable, it is too impure. The fundamental thing is not experience, but the *à priori* element in experience; the thing of which we have experience; the datum revealed in it and to it; the thing which produces our experience, the object of our faith. Faith is the great thing; and faith is not an experience in the sense of a mood, but as response to a revelation. It is there in great measure to save us from our experiences as subjective states, and to enable us to do without them on occasion, as our Lord did in the world-saving moment of the dereliction on the cross. Besides, some of the greatest convictions of our faith are beyond the range of our possible experience. What can experience tell us of the pre-existence of Christ? What can it tell us of the final victory of Christianity in history, and the consummation of all things in the coming kingdom of God? Can any experience assure us that all things work together for good to love except an experimental faith in the love that has reconciled all things to Himself, and constantly sees in Christ a reconciliation hidden to us? The reconciliation of faith and experience exists but in the object of our faith—the Reconciler. What we need is, not to see a reconciliation by Christ, but to experience heartily Christ as the reconciliation. Again, is Christianity the highest we have come to? Experience says Yes; comparative religion says Yes; the historic-religious method says Yes. But is it the highest we can come to? Is it a final revelation? Is it absolute? To that question what can experience say? But is there any doubt that New Testament Christianity claims to be final and absolute? It does not contemplate the possibility of another and more adequate gospel. Such was the experience of Christ, and, through Him, of the apostles. But was Christ's experience here a mere part (though the highest part) of human experience Godward? The Christian

contention has been that Christ's experience was not man's so much as God's in man. He is a revelation in terms of human experience, but not a revelation of the resources of human experience. We go back to history not only to correct the Christian experience, but to found it, and to give it something to crystallize on. And we have this in the historic Christ, who is now neither debris left by the pyrrhonist critics on the one hand nor a mere part of history on the other, but an eternal reality in history. Christ corresponds in history to the *à priori* element given in individual experience. He is above the relativity of comparative methods. These and such things belong to our faith and not our experience, to the grand venture and not to the verification. Faith, indeed, is experimental or nothing. But we have surely got beyond the error which confuses faith with experience. A faith merely experimental becomes merely empirical, and at last dies of secularity.

#### THE SENSE OF GUILT

The essential thing is the object of faith, not the subject of the experience. I may have a vivid and varied experience of the rich contents of my justification in Christ. I may exhibit pieties which stir admiration, ardour, and envy. I may even infect others with the glow and be a contagious influence. But all that is not yet the work of an evangelist. What is it all worth for the greatest purposes of the Church, whether in Gospel or theology, if I cannot make clear and irresistible what it is in Christ, and in no other, that lifts us beyond the presumptions or despairs, the pride or the poverty of my experience, rouses personal trust in God's grace, and gives me footing and freedom among all the crises of thought or life? What, I say, is the spiritual worth of my experience if it only speak of itself and do not become the mere channel of the Gospel, or the atmosphere in which it glows? Let us say less about our private experiences and

more about the mind and work of Christ, more of His experience, more of God's experience, opened and conveyed to us in Him. Preach an objective Word, and leave It to handle saint and sinner as it will. Do not, for instance, force the sense of guilt till it become an unconscious hypocrisy. Do not say it is an indispensable condition of coming to Christ effectually and do not therefore flog it up. That is not the only avenue to Christ, though it is a sure result of Christ. It is on the whole more true that Christ brings us to the sense of guilt than that the sense of guilt brings us to Christ. The repentance of the mature Christian is a more precious and Christian thing than the repentance of his callow years. The Baptist bade people repent, the Christ made them repent. He was exalted to give repentance and so remission—not to save us from a repentance otherwise produced.

#### THE HEART AND THE THEOLOGIAN

If this were an academic address I should have to go into the defects of an experimental basis more deeply; as I should also be more detailed about that value of experience which we all know. I should ruin the sniping of the sharp critics who are lying, like sin, at my door, by covering myself in advance against every shot they will make as I come out. I should try to distinguish between the false and true in the much abused phrase, *pectus fecit theologium*. I should point out in that connection that the *pectus* must be there, because theology is not like philosophy—an academic study. I should go on to say that the *pectus* which is there is far more than heart in the popular sense. And I should enlarge the fact that it means the whole man in relation to God. The man makes the theology. And I should further say in consequence that if a Church has no theology it has no Christian manhood, and no spirit interior, but only a viscous core which may easily become unctuous. I should try to point out that if you make experience the basis of Christian thought or work, you

commend the Church to the world on the strength of what it has gone through instead of what it has believed, and what it has in trust. And to do that would be to make works its hope instead of faith. And it would justify those who refuse Christianity because of the Church's practice instead of its preaching. The Church is a preacher not a saint, and it stands or falls by its Gospel, not its exploits; its word, not its feats. It is not the practice of the Church but the preaching of the Church, its message, not its results, that is the main matter. God help us if the future of Christ in the world depends on the extent to which we realize Him instead of the extent to which we bear witness of Him. What did they of the first generation in Christ rely on who trusted the world to Him before there was any Church history, any marvellous exploits, any sifted experience? I should have to point out how a basis of experience alone lands us in individualism, subjectivism, and romantic temperamental theology. Or, if you say our basis must be the Christian experience not of the individual but of the whole Church, I should have to indicate how that lands us in Catholicism, and a Catholicism which puts not only tradition but the most recent tradition alongside the Bible, and not only alongside it but above it. I should have to show how you cannot, from the experience even of the Church, get anything universal or final, but something more or less eccentric, fantastic, or at most temporal and personal. We know how eccentric and even absurd the views of many saints can be. I should admit, of course, that the truths which matter most are those that appeal to experience, and can be verified there. I should say how valuable, therefore, the miracle of Christ's resurrection is compared with that of His truth. And I should confess how different and how poor my views of the Cross were in my youthful theologizing days till God taught me what sin was and the theology of its cure. But I should try to show that what makes these central is something far beyond experience

—as I have said, no experience can guarantee the final triumph of the cross. It can show its beauty, but it cannot assure its mastery.

#### AN EDUCATED MINISTRY

But I must leave many points alone in order to touch on two in particular as I close. If experience is an insufficient basis for either Gospel or theology, if the base must be something more objective, then, in the first place, we may be more convinced than ever of the absolute necessity for the Church of an educated ministry. If the burden of our preaching be our experience any fluent and facile religionist may claim his place in the ministry. But if our burden be an objective gospel, which descends on our experience both to kindle and to correct it, then we need that those set apart to be bearers of the Gospel should undergo the discipline of mastering their master, and becoming at home in the nature and history of that which can never be given by any experience, but is given to it.

And in the second place the preachers so educated should withdraw much of their attention not only from their own experience, but from the books, booklets, and prints that contain but the experience of others; and they should bestow themselves upon the serious and resolute study of the Bible in the best and fullest light as the standing creator of Christian experience. They should guard against the fantastic treatment of the Bible which so easily besets the preacher, and they so should devote themselves to the historical, and not to the historical alone, but to its objective spiritual message, equally valid for every age and experience. The Bible is not our standard simply but our source. It is not there to prove doctrine, but to create the faith that produces doctrine. The trophies of a true minister of the Gospel are not only the precious souls he has saved, but they should include his interleaved Greek Testament packed with notes.

It is not the Bible we preach; but what we have to preach is to be found nowhere but in the Bible. And it is hid in that field, which must be bought at much cost and dug with much toil. Do not let us preach our experience, but a Christ and a Gospel familiar to our experience. We preach our experience best when people infer it.

Christianity is nothing if it do not end in experience. But it is also nothing if it only begin there. Experience is its medium and its product, but it is neither its base nor its limit. It is its form, but not its matter. And the experience even of an objective Gospel will fade and die if it remain mere impression and sensibility. It must wake our judgment and compel our obedience. And whatever will do that will change the note of popular religion as well as regenerate unpopular theology. Nothing but some such change can give us the power to sway to God's will the new democracy.

## THE GOODNESS OF GOD

(A College Communion address, as reported in *The British Congregationalist*, 10th August, 1911.)

"The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."  
ROM. ii. 4.

THE goodness of God is the old way of saying the love of God. Against the Shorter Catechism it is sometimes charged that we hear nothing of love in the definition of God. That is a hasty error. He is "Holiness, Justice, Goodness (that is, Love), and Truth." You will find it borne in on you as you come into real pastoral contact with the sin of the world, and borne in with the more force as your work searches you with revelations about yourself, that repentance is a ground tone of the Christian life. And you will further find that repentance is produced by God's love far more than by His severity. You will, still further, be driven I trust, to find the supreme expression of God's love to be the Cross of Christ; and you will come to rest in the experience that the Cross of Christ is much more than a refuge from the repentance produced by God's holy law—it is the great and constant source of the truest repentance we can know. As the Cross retires from religion it becomes a religion more and more emptied of repentance.

All that law makes is the sorrow of the world, which works death. The age which is now closing is the age which has seen the reign of law established for the natural world as it never was before; and concurrently the favourite type of religion is divested of the sense of sin, or guilt, in an unprecedented way; and this even though the action of law has been traced and pressed deep into the windings of the moral world, and the automatic action of Nemesis in

character. Culture, even moral culture, ousts theology, and its retreat goes with the abeyance of repentance. A humanist Christianity brings no repentance, or but a sentimental at most. There is a great phrase of Luther's which says "Theology makes sinners." Theology does. Orthodoxy does not, and philosophy does not, and *litterae humaniores* do not, nor does social reform. But theology does. It makes—not pedants (it is too near life), and not saints (it is too near the burning bush)—but it makes sinners (for God's love there makes repentance).

False culture says "No repentance. Sin is a superstition, a nightmare, the fancy of moral neurotics, the fiction of moral rigorists." False religion says "No more repentance. With your conversion, and your forgiveness, and your new sense that God is love, repentance has done its part. It is a frost to the blossom of Christian trust if it come again. Beware, for the sake of your healthy Christian growth, beware of a habit of repentance. Because some need grace, you may not. Or you may not need it all your life."

But you do not think that the prodigal settled in at home to a life of enjoyable religious interests; that he became a cheery and delightful optimist, of the sympathetic kind, which can be so devoid of any moral insight or measure of guilt. You do not think that he settled into his new spiritual place as dully as he found his brother settled in his social place. You do not think he was prepared to love everybody who was interesting enough to be loved, or important enough for him to wish to love, even if they laughed at the moral regulations of the old man's home or the costly passion of his grace. You do not think that he would settle down to hold his brother's view of their father to be as right in its way as his own, and as deserving of publication to the world.

When was his repentance deepest—on the way back, or in the new home? Was it while he expected his father's

word of rebuke, or when he was overwhelmed by having no word of rebuke? Was it under the fear of condemnation, or under the experience of "no condemnation"? Was it in bracing himself for the penalty, or in his shock and bewilderment to find that there was none? Was it not, then, when he was taken aback by the absence of all censure, that he knew what guilt really was—when love was given him liberally, without upbraiding, without parade, or even indication, of its cost?

That is the word of the Cross. "I have seen to the judgment. I can provide for my own holiness. Let us not dwell on that now. That has been seen to. Thy sins are forgiven thee. Abide in My peace."

God says little of what His mercy cost Him—what it cost Him not to make it mercy, but because it was mercy. And in our wicked hours we say that if it had cost Him so much as some believe, He would not have been silent about it. How ignoble! If you did a fine thing which you paid for heavily, how would you regard the person who rasped out that if it had cost you so much we should soon all have heard of it? God is too great and royal to parade what it cost Him to save, and thrust His outlay in our face with His gift. But we cannot let it alone—the full mercy, the dreadful cost. His confessors, apostles, martyrs, say it for Him. The immeasurable love becomes the measure of our guilt. The prayer in an agony means the cost. The love which could find no utterance but the healing heartbreak of the Cross becomes an awful mercy. It is the goodness of God, His holy love, as it sinks in, that brings home to us what Schiller teaches, that "the greatest bane of life is guilt"; because it makes us first know and feel that the greatest boon of life is grace. Only the good know how bad they were. There are no pessimists like those who read the old ruin in the regenerating light. "Repent, for the kingdom of God is here." "Be confounded, for your Holy One is your Re-

deemer." Our greatest hope is our greatest humiliation. And where grace abounds there does sin abound. The Christian life is repentant praise; if much praise, much grief; if much good labour, also much deep sorrow; if much confidence, much amazement. And sin is always the more deeply confessed for ourselves and our world, because we confess much more than sin—a Saviour to our own worst depths and to the wide ends of the earth.

I found a verse of a foreign poetess once, just one verse quoted, and it set me thinking how the rest could have gone. I have translated the verse, and then gone on to continue the note.

"I was able to laugh, my heart was light,  
When I stiffened to Thy displeasure;  
But it broke me down to be forgiven  
Without rebuke or measure."

I had set my face for a grudging grace,  
My rags I was half parading;  
But I never did look for the crushing rebuke—  
To be taken without upbraiding.

To be stopped with a kiss in upbraiding myself,  
To be stript of the rags I clung to;  
To be treated as more than servant or son,  
To be fêted and fed, and sung to.

And of cost to Thee, as of wrath for me,  
Thou wert dumb, in Thy lordly way;  
Of Thyself unspared while thou sparedst me,  
Of the ransom Thyself didst pay.

But can I sit mute in my Father's house?  
Or remember without amaze?  
Can I ever live but to bless Thee and serve,  
And the deeper to grieve in praise?

Do I dream? Can I sleep under mercy deep?  
'Twas a whole world's guilt I shared.  
And my Saviour feels in me anew  
The wound we all prepared.

## THE MAJESTY AND THE MERCY OF GOD

(Notes of a sermon preached at New Court Church, Tollington Park, London, on 30th April, 1911, as reported in *The British Congregationalist*, 4th May, 1911.)

Thy mercy is great unto the heavens. PSALM lvii. 10.  
As is His majesty so is His mercy. ECCLES. ii. 18.

WE will take that word "majesty" and look at it from one or two points of view. The first notion, I suppose that comes to us in connection with the word "majesty" is the extent of its compass and vastness. But here let me ask you to remember how much more precious a thing is the mercy of God than the love of God. If the love of God is unspeakable, what must His grace be? For His grace and His mercy are one and the same thing.

The mercy of God means much more for us sinners than the love of God. If we had nothing to go upon but the love of God we might very well lose heart. Amongst ourselves we spend our love mostly on the lovable. What would your frame of mind be, how much hope do you think you could cherish if you had to feel in connection with the love of God that "God loves me because I am so lovable." Much more to us—we being what we are—than the love of God is the mercy of God. And that is endless, it is inexhaustible. God's mercy is above and beyond the whole world, above and beyond the vastness of the whole universe.

Again, when we think about majesty we think not only about the enormous compass, the height and the depth, but we think of its splendour and its glory.

Now this mercy, this grace of God is not an exception that God makes in the course of His justice, not a departure from

the righteousness which is His standing rule. Oh, the curse it has been to our religion to think of the Cross as a kind of expedient which was resorted to in order to enable God to make a departure in safety from His justice and His holiness. Is the cross an exception, a mere incident in the life of God? Is it only an episode, without real connection with the main drift of the stream of God's nature and being? Is the Cross an anecdote, as it were, in God's life? No, His mercy, His grace, is a part of His infinite greatness. It is not an exception, it is not a departure from his fixed holy rule in order that He may not be too hard upon us. "He that spared not." God is unsparing. The grace of God is part of the eternal nature and splendour and glory of God. It is part of the greatness and majesty of God. His supreme glory is His grace. His true majesty is in His mercy, the mercy shown by holy love to its bitterest foe, which is human sin.

There is something in the mercy of heaven, in that mercy which comes to us so freely, which involves effort, reverence, prayer, spiritual travail, spiritual conflict, in order to get it. That is what is lacking in a religion which is always striving to be popular and get crowds of people. They do not like to be told that they must deny themselves, labour, wrestle, suffer, pray, agonize to enter at the strait gate. If you are to come into living contact with the majesty of God you cannot dispense with these things.

One of the dangers of our present attempt to spread religion out as widely as possible is that we make it thin and we take the greatness out of it. God's majesty is subtle and elusive, so also is His mercy. Look back upon your life, and what have been its crowning mercies? Were they the things which seemed to you mercies when they came? As you look back upon your life does not the mercy of God come out upon you slowly, and you perceive it only at life's end? It takes a long schooling for the mercy of God to enable you to see itself.

And there is this mystery—it always will be mystery, in heaven as well as on earth—why God should be merciful to us at all. But if mercy could be explained it would not be mercy. The miracle of miracles is the mercy of God. Explain that and it would lose its wonder, its mystery, and its power.

When we think about the majesty of God we think of Him chiefly as a holy God. The most majestic thing about God is His holiness. And let us never forget that His mercy is holy mercy. It was because of God's holiness that Christ came. He did not come to make God merciful; He came because God was merciful. It is not a mercy extorted from God's holiness; it is holiness going out in the shape of mercy, even when it goes out in judgment.

"As is His majesty, so is His mercy." Let me turn it about, and say, "As is His mercy so is His majesty." It is like the majesty of the dawn. It is tender majesty; majesty but not force, not grandiose but humble, tender majesty because tender mercy. A king may have mercy at the time of his coronation, and grant an amnesty; but it is merely an act of clemency; it is not "tender mercy."

Now we come to the practical point—what is the effect of God's mercy upon your life? You believe in the mercy of God; how deep down does it go? Is it a mere theological belief, or is it a ruling principle in your daily life? Do you rely upon it for comfort, cheer radiance? What is the effect of God's mercy upon your life? Are you greater by your salvation than the unsaved people around you? If you are not making any proper use of His mercy, are you not in danger of turning it into judgment? God's mercy is not merely in sparing us, but in letting us glorify and serve Him. It is the greatest act of mercy that God should consent to take service from such people as we are. God did not save you in order to make you happy; He saved you in order to make you serve and worship and commune with Him. Then the happiness will come.

What is our habitual way of thinking about God? Am I thinking of Him simply as a benefactor, simply because He is an assistant of my life, simply because He is one of the greatest powers I can have for my self-aggrandisement and prosperity in the world? That is a poor God, not the Christian God. Is He your benefactor, or is He your Lord and your Master? He is much more than your benefactor; much more than your helper. You are His absolute property. The crown of His mercy is this, that He not only comforts and redeems and saves, but He is inspiring you through hardship and through calamity to pour out your soul in worship; to pour out your energy in service for His cause; to pour out your sympathy in love and compassion for those who are out of the way.

## SUFFERING

(Notes of a Sermon preached at Hackney College, January 1913, reproduced from Dr Forsyth's pencil notes.)

Martyrdom not come yet, but threatened. "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father a son in whom he delights." (PROV. iii. 11, 12): quoted also by Philo for the same end to show the blessing of adversity.

1. Do not think little of pain, denying its existence or its providence. It is not to be stoically endured only, nor denied (Christian Science). It is not simply to steel you, or make you hard (and perhaps bitter), but to educate you. It is for chastening ye endure. The object of your existence is repentance in the true sense of sanctification. The goodness and patience of God leadeth you to repentance (Rom. ii. 4): true of the soul and of history. To make us partakers of God's holiness: there are no cheap absolutions. Hold out. Do not spoil God's sculpture. Lend yourself like living marble, "living stones". Do not be stubborn to the potter, as intractable clay. God is not making casts but men. Forward the Maker's work. Rise to it, as the audience rises to the speaker who is moulding them. Yield yourselves servants of righteousness. You were hearty enough as servants to unrighteousness. If you cease to be martyrs, you cease to be sons. Suffering is bound up with the idea of sonship, nay with the idea of fatherhood. There is a true patripassianism.

2. Do not think so much of your pain as to let it crush you. Some clay is not only stiff, but under fire grows friable. Tissue overdrawn disintegrates. Do not faint under the rebuke. It is merciful visitation. God might let you alone for

only the world to press on you and capture you and shape you: "tame in earth's paddock as its prize". Pain does destroy souls. Long, dreary, drudging suffering makes people dumpy. Parents can provoke children to wrath and make them discouraged, irritate them to be sulky. So pain can take all heart out of them, and lead not to resignation but mere spiritlessness. There is even a repentance which shuts the soul up against forgiveness, a sense of guilt which makes forgiveness incredible, consequences of sin which close the heart to mercy, so that the soul cannot rise to the comfort and power of the faith that in Christ's Cross the worst sin has no power to exclude communion with God. Suffering for God is to deepen mercy. And mercy is not simply releasing but sanctifying by forgiveness. God's reaction against sin is not a flash but a glow, not punishment simply or chiefly, but recovery; not recovery only but reconciliation. "Every sin that man sins stabs the heart of God with a pain that is not only anguish but atoning and saving anguish" (Johnston Ross: *The Cross*). The punishment of sin is not mere nemesis but a help to overcome it. Mere nemesis, mere retribution, retaliation, is morally stupefying, if taken alone. It is not only not reformatory; it is not sanctifying. Amid all the consequences of sin we have ground in Christ to call forgiveness ours. Even death is not final despair.

3. Suffering is reception into sonship. "The Prodigal?" Did the reconciliation end all? Did they live happy ever after? Did the elder brother make no more trouble, no more taunts, no more trials for his brother and for the father, too? Was the restoration finished when the feast was over, and did all run smooth and joyous? Did no memories of those wild oats ever return and burn deeper in the more holy light? "One who has been loyal to the Saviour for fifty years is a far greater sinner in his own eyes than he was at the outset of his conversion" (Ritschl). How can we but suffer as we learn to

see things as God does? Love looking on a world like this must suffer; and if you love that love you will suffer too,—with it; and the more as you are partakers of his holiness. But it is not the sorrow of the world which worketh death. “In the cross all doth consist. And all consists in our dying thereon,” etc. “Our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us more and more an eternal weight of glory” (II COR. iv. 17).

4. Learn also to think of suffering without reference to your benefit, theocentrically, as an act of blind obedience to one whose purposes need it and to whom you are not blind, as required by a holiness far beyond you or your holiness, but in which your holiness is included.

## THE IDEAL MINISTRY

(as printed in *The British Congregationalist*, 18th October, 1906.)

1. An ideal ministry is one which is ideal to the Gospel not to humanity. That is, the ideal minister is not the minister of the human ideal, but of the Gospel ideal in the New Testament. The ideal minister is first the servant of the word, then of man. It is the Gospel revelation that sets up the ideal; it is not the needs, aspirations, or possibilities of human nature.

The ideal ministry is not even to be measured by the demands, dreams, or expectations of the churches. The ideal of the Church is apt to be a ministry that fills and manages large and busy buildings, undertakes much, and is kind, even to softness; whereas the dominant note of the New Testament, and especially of Christ's teaching, is love's severity. In His lifetime at least, Christ alienated far more than He drew, and made trouble for almost everybody who touched Him. The early Protestants described themselves not as servants even of the Church, but as v.d.m., *Verbi divini ministri*. They served the Gospel rather than the Church, and the Church for the Gospel's sake. A man is an ideal minister not by his success with the public but by his stewardship of the word, by his adequacy and fidelity to Him that called him. There are signs to-day as if the churches did not care for the ministry, but only for preaching stars; as if they were losing the sense of Christian truth in the taste for personal interests and impressionist effect. Accordingly the religious press has to a large extent become the arbiter of ministerial success, and has set the ideal for the young minister in a very unfortunate way, in a way which is always apt to become more

literary than evangelical. It is a wrong and unstable state of things. The assessment of its ministry is a function of the Church, which the Church must reclaim, with the Gospel for a standard. It is by the Gospel, his grasp of it, and his fidelity to it that the minister becomes ideal. That is a far more taxing standard than success with men. And yet it is more just, more wise, more merciful. How many a man who has spent himself on earnest efforts to impress his age or public has to cast himself in despair upon God and say, as he comes out with strength renewed for a certain indifference to the public, "It is better to fall into the hands of the Lord than into the hands of men."

This is a matter we shall have to take to heart in the future even more than in the past. The whole genius and drift of the Christianity of to-day is social. Its effect on Society is the chief test. We are invited to gauge the success of a minister by the extent to which he can commend himself to the democracy and canvass for its vote and interest. Well and good. We need not waste words of satisfaction that things take this general direction. But it does create for us new dangers. It certainly raises huge questions. We must have an efficient ministry. But what is ministerial efficiency? Is it the same as popularity? Of what is the ministry trustee in the first instance? Is it of the social future, of the human cause? Again, what is the ideal relation of the ministry to the democracy, the relation of the Church generally? The democracy has no low or mild ambition. Remember, it is no longer an oppressed class, a plebs. It is a world-power. It is not identical with the poor. It aspires to take the command of society and of history. Well, every -ocracy before has done that. And with every -ocracy the Church has first allied itself and then it has had to fight it for life. We are now allying ourselves with the democracy; shall we ever have to fight it for the Church's life, for the life of Christianity? I content myself here with putting the question rather than answering it. But

if we ever do come to that conflict it will be the severest of them all. It may be the great Armageddon. Are we getting ready for the possibility of it? I would recall to you this, that the ideal ministry is not called to be the leader of the democracy but its guide. We are losing sight of that grave distinction. A civilization *led* by the ministry is a Catholic idea; the Protestant idea is a civilization guided by the Gospel. It is Catholic to have our social energies under the wing, or the roof, of the Church; it means perpetual social minority; what is Protestant is to have our social life going its own way under the power of the Gospel. It is easy to lead the democracy if you accept and work its ideas judiciously. But it is very different whenever you have to rebuke the democracy, or guide it to accept the ideas of Christ. These are no more the ideas of the natural democracy than they are those of the natural aristocracy, oligarchy, or plutocracy. For the natural man is not a martyr for the things of God or the principle of His kingdom. The struggle is still greater when you press the democracy beyond the ideas of Christ, and insist on an absolute surrender and obedience to Christ. Are we making it clear that we can mean nothing less? The ideal ministry believes in the Church much more than in the democracy as the agent of the Kingdom of God. It believes in the Church whose organ it is, more than in the society of which it is a citizen. And it believes in the Church as the only hope of that society, because the Church is the trustee of the Gospel, as of the Bible. It contemplates huge changes in the Church to enable it to serve and save society, both of creed and method. But its first charge is the unchanging Gospel, its second is the helpless or the pagan poor. And it must deal with democracy so that neither of these comes short.

2. The ideal ministry must be an office in a Church quite as much as a vocation in an individual. That is to say, if we have a Church. If we have no Church, nothing which essentially

distinguishes our Christian gatherings from any religious company, humane fraternity, or social group, the question falls to the ground. But then so will Christianity. The question of the ministry is the crucial question of the Church. The greatest division among Churches, that between Catholic and non-Catholic, turns on the position of the ministry. The ministry is not simply the talking section of the Church. The minister is not simply the member detailed to speak. He is not a mere individual appointed to a certain function in a division of labour. He is not simply the brother of these dear young people who admonish him. He has a corporate and responsible position. He stands for the Church, and also for the Gospel, as no private member does. To impugn him as minister is more serious than a challenge to a private member. There are lawful things which he may not properly do because of this representative position. There are things which he alone is entitled to do for the same reason. The ministry does not constitute an order, but, for the sake of order, the ministry in any effective Church must be an office regularized by the Church. It is not a galaxy of stars, a company of preaching friars, or religious freelances. It is composed of men who are detailed for life to this service, empowered and controlled by the Church, not by subjective choice or charismatic gusts of impulse. The ideal Church must always have such an office with due regulation as to entry and recognition. And such an office in an ideal Church is an ideal ministry.

The condition of the ministry requires the attention of the Church quite as truly as the condition of the poor does. To provide a ministry equal to its own work is at least as much a concern of the Church as to provide work or play for the people. A Church that was keenly interested in technical or elementary education to the neglect of an education for its own ministry, elementary in the Bible and technical in theology, would be dying out as a Church. Many Churches are

proud of their minister; and there are many ministers of whom all the Churches are proud; but one hesitates to say that the Churches are proud of the ministry, or treat it, as an office, with due respect. But with an elective ministry does that not mean in the Church a lack of self-respect?

The ideal ministry is a part of the Church's organization and not a fruit of its inspiration alone. It is easy and captivating from a platform to talk with a vague idealism about the true ministry being a great lay host suffusing all the Churches with the spirit of Christian service, each going his several way and dropping help and blessing as he goes. God multiply their business. But so to talk is not Christian business. It is not taking a Church in earnest. The Church may be a great mistake, or now an anachronism. Christianity may be something more Tolstoian. But if so, let us be clear and explicit about it. Let us not claim to be churches, and let us not juggle with notions that belong to a Church, as distinct from a mere sympathetic fraternity. If the Church idea is obsolete let us go to the world and say so. Let us discard the notion of a ministry, in favour of stray individual prophetism. But if we take the Church idea in earnest still, let us not play pranks of spiritual interpretation with the idea of its ministry. Let us not say sweetly that it includes service of every Christian form. Let us not explain it away as no office, but a mere koinonia of professionals (which is a trades union) or a mere gathering of charismatics (which is a coterie). Where you have a real Church you must have a ministry as a real office, with a real preparation, a real devotion, and a real status, and a real respect for it.

3. We must go further and say that the ideal ministry must be a priestly ministry. That would follow from the nature of the Church whose organ the ministry is. One chief function of the Church in the world is the sacerdotal. Conceive it truly and this is as real as the Church's missionary function.

If the Church confesses it, it confesses not its own sin only but the sin of the world. It carries that sin to the presence of God. We should remember this when we stumble at expressions like "miserable sinners" in the General Confession. The Church in Christ is carrying into the sin-destroying presence the heinous, crushing sin of the world. Again, if it intercede, the Church does not intercede for its own members alone, but for the world. It is joined in a mystic communion and effect with the perpetual and universal intercession of Christ. It is united with His priesthood. Or if it labour, or suffer, it is making sacrifice in Christ (not with Christ) for the world. Its work for the world is not offered primarily to the world but to God for the world. Here again it is a priestly Church. And, above all, when it offers to God the sacrifice of Christ, which it does in every one of its sacred functions—for they are all acceptable in Christ's sacrifice alone—the Church is a priestly Church, and it is doing a priestly work for the world. And a Church is a true Church only insofar as it is doing this work and exercising this priesthood. It is a useful test for a Church to apply to itself, and it would rid us of some weak Churches that seem to be pillars. The weakest Churches are not the smallest.

Well, if such be the true Church, such also is the true ministry which is the organ of the Church. The ideal ministry is a priestly ministry. The ideal minister is three things at least. He is prophet, and he is pastor, but he is just as much priest. What he is not is king. It is the imperial element in the priesthood that is its bane. Christ alone is the Kingly Priest and Pastor. We shall never realize our true difference with the wrong priesthood of the ministry till we have grasped the right priesthood in a real sense and not in the figurative and feeble sense in which we mostly use the word. We must, of course, protest against the Catholic desecration of the word priest. Let us take care that we do not deconsecrate

ourselves in that easy process. Let us sanctify ourselves, for priests we are. The minister as prophet speaks to the people in the name of God; but he is not fulfilling the whole of the Christian Gospel unless he also speak to God as priest in the name of the people. He must pray as well as preach; and in private as in public he must carry his people into the presence of God. If he confess he confesses far more than his own sin. If he suffer it is not from personal trouble alone, but also from the sins, negligences, and ignorances of his people, which he has to bear, and, if he is a true minister, bears to God. And if he toil it is not simply with opportunities that the Church provides him, but it is along with the Church itself toiling, and suffering for men through him. Our temptation is to sacrifice the priestly side of the ministry to the prophetic, and, in consequence, to lose the stamp of the holy, and, in farther consequence, to lose command of men. Men are so made that they yield entirely to that holiness alone which is the ultimate Godhead of God.

4. The ideal ministry must be missionary. It must be in the apostolic succession. Here again it is the organ of the Church. The Church is nothing if not apostolic. But apostolic in the true sense of the word—missionary and evangelical. We are gaining clearer views than ever of what the Apostles really were. They were not bishops. They were missionaries—evangelists on the great scale. They were not organizers, administrators, hierarchs. They were heralds, preachers. They were not there to regulate enthusiasm, but rather to rouse and spread it. They were firebrands much more than fire brigades. They stirred the spirit, they did not quench it. The ideal ministry must be missionary at home or abroad. It must have the propagandist passion, the contagious secret, the universal dream, the pity, the love, and the power of faith, the pity for mankind, the love of the brotherhood, the power of the Spirit. But I will not dwell on that here. We

are all convinced of the missionary nature of the Church and its ministry.

5. The ideal ministry finds its power in its message and spirit rather than its sermons or enterprises. It is not preaching talent that makes the ideal ministry, but the power of a preached Gospel. Preaching power is a natural gift; it is there without our effort. But the power of the Gospel is a spiritual gift; and it is bestowed upon much labour, conflict, and prayer. What makes the ideal ministry is the spiritual gifts of the true succession. Ask if it has the gift of consolation. Ask if it has the gift of fervent prayer which is also effectual. "If ye abide in Me as My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7). Ask if it has any gift of healing the sick, of leaving patients with that good cheer and spiritual infection which is half the cure. Ask if it has the gift of remitting sins as Christ meant His promise to His Church. The ideal ministry has the power of remitting sins and disburdening souls. (I am purposely putting this in a sharp and provocative way to rouse attention, challenge, and in the end understanding.) We do not exist to deny that gift, that trust, but to exercise it in the true sense. Do we exercise, do we possess it in any sense (I speak not of individuals but of our ministry)? Or do we dismiss those passages as now spurious or obsolete? And the ideal ministry has further the gift of insight—what 1 John v. 20 calls "understanding", reading the past, present, and future, discerning spirits, and discerning the Lord's body, i.e., the right note of His presence and the right way of His work in any age. I wish our Churches had more of this discernment. I wish they could find out the sophists and empirics at the beginning rather than the end, when the mischief is done. The Church should have insight enough to discern whether the minister has insight—insight into the heart, but still more insight into the truth as it is in Jesus. How much more precious

is insight than ardour. The ideal minister must love and understand the people, but he must know and love still more the will and word of God, and he must escape the snare of an immoderate desire to be beloved. God does not give that to all His servants. And our Lord Himself was above it through His soul's satisfaction in the love of the Father. His attitude to men was kingly. He could bear their loss and desertion without injury to His work. He never ran after men, never coaxed them, as the Churches may do. He would fish with nets, not baits. He refused them much. He went to the dying Lazarus only when He was ready. He loved men less for their own sake than as the Father's gift to Him. He had "His own", whom He loved as He loved not the world of His pity. And His love was not there to meet the world's felt craving for love, but to meet a danger all unfelt by the world, to meet not lack but peril, and to protect us not from the tyrant, but from the judge, not from oppression, but from condemnation. It was love regardless of moral attainment. It was grace. God's greatest gift to men was not what they called love, but what He called love. It was not what the world wanted, but what it needed. God's supreme gift to the world was not His love to the prodigal but His love to His dear Son. It was something which the world's first action was to throw in His face. So also God's supreme gift to His Son was not mankind but Himself, and the communion of His own life, thought, and act. And it is in such love that the ideal ministry stands rooted at last. It is this love that wins at last, and it bears all other love in its heart.

These and such like are the marks of the ideal ministry—not eloquence, not amiability, not theological skill, not Church government or Church working. All that is well, but it is in the second rank. And if it is made first it can quench the Spirit. It is the absence of these spiritual gifts that makes a Church to fail and a ministry to be powerless with the world. Those who have them are the true ministry, and

that is the best Church which has them in most profusion and power. The actual ministry may have the Gospel for a business, the ideal has it for a life—which the business of the Gospel widely destroys. The ideal ministry is within the ordained; and it is the company of those who live to preach this Gospel, as men who have so broken with self and the world that they desire nothing for themselves. They have cut the root of Egoism, and they are there for others, for help, for redemption, for the Kingdom alone. But this they cannot attain without that complete immersion in the Bible which is the chief equipment of a ministry trained and ordained by a living Church.

I should like to add here two things. First, that the Church should include and ordain to a fitting place in its ministry those lay and local preachers that so often have the saintly touch and bring a real message to the soul. And second, I remark that if we take the ministers who are so good that they are in everybody's eye, and if we add to them those who are so good that they are not, we have a very large contribution indeed which we make to the ideal ministry.

6. The ideal ministry must have a positive, objective, and finished Gospel—not a finished system, but an achieved Gospel, something that we do not hold but it holds us, something done which encloses all we do. The old prophet said, Here am I; but my heart and help would go out to those many modern prophets who are saying, Where am I? One result of this uncertainty is an indistinct impact on the public mind. I hear public complaints of the obscurity of some who know very clearly where they are. But I fear in private there is more to be heard of the nebulosity of those who do not. Instead of the ministry standing out with a real message, we are told that the men who have a real message are the men who stand out in the ministry. Well, insofar as this is so, what do we need? It is not a dogmatic system nor a dog-

matic concord. That is not within practical politics. It is a more positive and evangelical unity—the unity, that is, not of a uniform theology, but of a common faith, of a common Gospel, and a common message, which we not only believe but realize, which not only enlarges human nature, but changes it by a new creation. Any dogmatic growth must rise from that—it can never produce it. It is a light matter having to cast about for a text to face Sunday compared with having to cast about for a message to face our world. We do hold a common Gospel, but we do not always realize it. It is not that we do not believe, it is that we do not realize the power and bearing of what we believe. Either we believe its value for the world more than we experience it for ourselves—which is mere theology—or we feel its value for ourselves without insight into its almighty power for the actual world—which is mere pietism. The former class is numerous, the mere theologians; and they often have the odd whim of girding at theology. They try with all earnestness to do things for the Gospel, or correct opinion about it or bespeak interest in it. And their result is so lean, so ineffectual, because they do not appropriate what the Gospel has done for them, and they are not broken to it. Many are touched, fewer are seized, and fewer still are broken. We are much too theological, and we need more religion. We believe in the Gospel as a piece of theology, sometimes stodgy, sometimes thin. It is part of our equipment. But is it not possible to preach ardently about Christianity and be a stranger to grace, to hold a brief for Christ ably, eloquently, and even feelingly, and not preach Christ? Do you think the disowned in the great day had said "Lord, Lord," without any feeling, as mere cold clerics? Nay, but except we repent we shall all likewise perish, feel as we may. May we not plead for Christ without preaching God's Christ, without preaching the Gospel? Is that not theologizing—whether the theology that takes the place of faith be orthodox or liberal, cold

or warm, narrow or broad? What we need is the personal cruciality of the cross, the decisive experience of the Gospel. Not religious experience (we do not lack religiosity), but the experience of the Gospel as a definite passage from death to life, an overwhelming final, comforting, kindling, subduing, irrepressible, unmistakable sense of what has for ever been positively and decisively done for us, for me, in Christ's cross—a sense far more overwhelming than the sense of anything we are doing for it. It is this latter sense that submerges and weakens the Gospel in the case of so many. Energy for the Gospel, interest in it, drowns the action of the Gospel. But in an ideal ministry it is just the other way. The energy of the Gospel carries along all our energy for the Gospel. And the reason why men are asking where they are is that they are theologizing either for or against the evangelical position instead of realizing it. They have found Christianity in Christ more than they have found themselves. They are orthodox or they are liberal; and it is all a matter of views of theological construction, for which they are more or less keen. It is not a matter of personal experience, saving experience of the Gospel. Their views have a history, perhaps, but they themselves may have little soul-history, little spiritual drama. It is a hard thing to turn a smattering theologian, positive or liberal, into a living believer. That needs a touch of real and sore and sinful life often, and the wearing out of many Bibles, and some wetting of them with strong tears. Many can be valiant for Christ for one who is really humbled to Him. Many have views, for or against an Atonement, who may not have the power, the faith, the religion of Atonement. Some say that words like Redemption or Atonement should be dropped from our Christian vocabulary because they have lost meaning for the Christian public, and doubtless for the speaker. Many discuss the living Christ as if they were not living in Christ—even when they do not plainly challenge His present life. Some of the bewildered

are zealous in exhortation, who would need to exhort far less if they succeeded in convincing more—as the Gospel understands convincing, convincing by a man whose iniquity is pardoned and his sin covered, by a man who has “the secret,” who has made his final, eternal choice, and disposed of himself to Christ. Lack of positive, inmost life-conviction is becoming the mortal sickness of the Church. The Church does not impress the world as possessing that conviction, and therefore does not produce it. There is a moral tenuity in much that is preached about Christ, an ethical rather than an evangelical note. There is more ethical taste than moral insight and regenerate experience. Sin is treated more thoughtfully than thoroughly. It is rinsed with water rather than cleansed with blood. I suppose I shall be widely misunderstood if I say there is too much preaching about Christ and too little preaching of the Gospel. But I speak as to wise men. I will cast myself on your sympathetic intelligence and take the risk.

Nothing strikes those who come much in contact with our ministry more than the general sense of unrest. A very great number wish to change their sphere. What is the reason? I write off at once many outward and local reasons which need not concern us here. I know that in a large church there are endless distractions for an earnest man; in a small there is not scope for him, and sometimes barely food. But I seem to find the real root of the matter in an inner unrest, a mental mobility, of whose real nature the victims themselves are not always quite aware. Some may have had no training; some no adequate training. Some may leave college without the love or habit of Bible study; or without the reserve principles which come out to settle things in the most dangerous period, which is middle life; and so they devote themselves to nothing beyond the weekly tale of work. In due course comes exhaustion and the “sinking feeling.” They have nothing in which they can collect

and possess themselves from the tension and distraction of the place and the hour. They never arrive. And what they read adds to the dissipating effect. It is largely the newspapers, religious or other, or it is similar fugitive products; which is like reading the commentaries before studying the passage. That is to say, their mind is being bombarded with tiny particles of fact or fancy in a constant stream; and the vibration, largely unconscious at the time, accumulates to a chronic and mysterious unrest. How many would increase their peace and power of mind if they would eschew newspapers for a year. Yet to do it postulates the very power which is desired. Or if they were driven to more deliberate prayer in order to neutralize the atmosphere of criticism and mental dissipation in which a press age plunges them. For lack of it men may easily become dilettanti not in theology only but in soul, religious amateurs instead of spiritual masters, mere seekers, and experimenters instead of experts of the Gospel and adepts of faith. And our creed may come to suffer from what the doctors now call tea-ism—tremors due to the abuse of sedatives. The ideal ministry must be a praying ministry in much more than in the coterie and convention sense, in the great and not frivolous sense, in the sense by which prayer with the Word is the chief pulpit power. It is no ideal ministry that does not impress people as thinking and working from the sure anchorage of Biblical prayer. And people are quick to feel that steadying, ruling power.

I have often found in my own case, too, that the preparation of sermon after sermon, with a constant change of subject, produced an effect of unrest. The mind loses the continuity, the self-possession, that belongs to stability and power. I have found I was apt to prepare my sermons better than myself. Is that an uncommon experience—to spend more on preparing a sermon than on preparing the message, and to spend least of all on preparing oneself for the total

work of the ministry? It is with the preaching as it is with the prayer—the great and hard thing is preparing oneself, and preparing not for the occasion but for the vocation. Should the message not be the overflow of the preacher's life experience, and the sermon the ebullition of the message? If we have not a perennial message, if we have but an ideal or a programme, how can we avoid unrest? Do not even the politicians likewise? And if we do not live in the hidden riches of the Bible how can we have a varied and perennial message? But what can you do with Churches that make experience a positive disqualification for the ministry?

I am sure the real and general secret of the unrest is spiritual, whether my diagnosis in detail be accurate or not; whether it be the case with each individual or not. The disease is secularity of interest. We imbibe much of it from the quivering age. And I fear we sometimes do more in sharing the public volatility than in controlling it. The Church generally is laudably trying to face the social situation. But it can never do so with effect unless it is master, and knows it is master, of the spiritual situation. And that situation we are not all facing, though it is our first problem as Churchmen. How many are sure they have a real spiritual message? How many have *the* message? And of those who have it, how many deliver it, preach it, send it effectually home to life, instead of merely stating it, or taking it for granted? These are questions I cannot answer, but they are not irrelevant. They must be put by somebody. They are being put by many less sympathetic than I am. It is by our own preached message in all its breadth that we stand or fall, and by nothing else. No pastoral, social, theological work will ever atone for defect in that. Nothing will atone for neglect or inability to feed the flock in the plentiful pasture of Scripture, or to speak to the world the word of God so that they shall either love or hate, trust or fear, and shall listen either unto their perdition or unto their life.

Believe me, brethren, as a son of my age I have found all that I blame in my own experience at various times quite as much as by observation. And I suppose there are few faithful preachers in a time like the present that have not had to address to themselves more searching words on this matter than they would venture to speak in public.

7. An ideal ministry must not only be positive in its gospel, it must be flexible in its thought. It must be capable of preparing a new theology for the old faith. It must learn how to express the old reality in terms of the new age. It must speak the word of God in the language of the time. It must not be "stupidly good." It must read the signs of society and the thought of civilization. The ideal minister must not only ask with some severity, "Where am I?" He must also ask with great sympathy, "Where is the world?" "Where is my generation?" He must conceive his gospel on a world scale, not on the scale of his own associates, on the scale of Lord Acton, for instance, and not Lord Halifax. Again, we come back to the necessity of realizing, of letting many books go, of arresting our mental hurry, and forcing ourselves to take as much time as to appreciate. Do we realize what it means, for instance, when we say, or hear it said, that without Christianity Theism falls, and without God civilization falls, and we have final anarchy however long deferred? Do we think, do we grasp our faith in such a way that we really see how this is so? It is not enough to believe it, or to say we do? Do we see how it must be so? Can we convince people as they can only be convinced by men who really do see their rational way through the great statements they make? Do we know how to put our gospel to the world on the scale of the great world drama?

Is it not the case that the capable people of the age tend to regard the ministry as not so much wrong (I wish they gave us that attention), but negligible, sometimes silly, the pets of

groups, or the idols of the crowd. Why is it so? Why do we not grasp those people? An ideal ministry should compel, on the one hand, more attention, and, on the other, more antagonism.

8. This implies that to be true at once to the Gospel and to the age the ministry must be an educated one. I mean as a whole. And by educated I do not mean learned, and I do mean more than merely trained. Men can be trained to preach without being educated in the Gospel. I mean they should be duly trained in the wisdom and knowledge which is the stored precipitate of past ages of earnest Christian experience. The self-educated man deserves immense individual credit, but he is an amateur product after all, and too often that is apparent. He is not adequate to a great, ancient, complex, subtle, disciplined thing like the Church. In the case of a man who has charge of others and who represents the Church we need something far more, and something that the Church should be eager to provide and encourage. It has been the vice of our college system in past years that the men it sent out were often but autodidacts after all. They had to pick up or make their own theology. What they have done in the circumstances is wonderful. But what have the Churches not lost? And what a hunger exists for a theology among preachers. They feel its need. It is part of their wide hunger for the Spirit. They feel that it needs much skill in the treatment of truth to grasp with the right hand the marrow of the Gospel and manipulate with the other the civilization of the time, to stand with one foot on the earth and the other in the infinite sea. Do not think this trained mind, this due knowledge, is a luxury of the literates. It is a necessity for the whole Church, and one which tells in many indirect ways upon the welfare of the ignorant and neglected. We should preach with more effect to the untaught if we had a world of seasoned, rational conviction behind

our Gospel—but really behind, not in front. Do not tell me of those strong men who had no professional training. Time alone will show whether they did more good with their strength or mischief with their weakness. In many cases the weaknesses were just those that a proper professional education would have cured. And do not let us profane the Bible by quotations about not many wise being called. That described the very early stage. And it left out a fact that we must take in. It left out the speaker of the words, Paul. It leaves out, moreover, the fact, now patent, that very many wise have been called—the flower of the wise—since Paul's time. And it ignores a Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. These words are too often employed in the service of evangelical ignorance and conceit rather than of Christian simplicity. To be evangelical, contemporary and adequate, a ministry must be educated. Let us by all means revise our methods of education and bring them up to date when necessary. And let us adapt them to our proper evangelical purpose. But do not let us succumb to the idea that a devout man who can speak, but cannot enter college, or be kept there if he do, is a fit man to offer a Church for its minister. Let him address us on occasion, but do not give him charge of us. It is not needful that a man for our purpose should know half the sciences, have a reputation in philosophy, or have a suite of degrees. It is not needful that he should sweep the academic board. Better on the whole he should not do that, if he but know to the bottom the few prolific truths and principles that make the soul of his faith, if he so know them that he knows their bearings, and can handle them with deftness, penetration, and power. Mere education will not give us the certainty we lack, but we cannot get it without education, nor without our own kind of education, without Bible education, that is—without theology. Indeed, it is high time that we never heard another word about the difference between religion

and theology. It is too stale. The difference is but relative, after all. At bottom it does not exist, and it means something very various from a man, according as he believes in theology or not. No minister can be religious as the ideal ministry should be, who is religious and nothing more. The preacher who sneers at theology should receive no further attention from the Church. Let the press treat him as it pays.

There are signs that we grow careless of an educated ministry and trust to milk-food, mother-wit, facile piety and amateur work. It is for the Church a fatal mistake. In every age the wisest men and councils of the Church have felt that to neglect the education of the ministry is fatal, and it ends in a priesthood. Let us lay that to heart. An amateur ministry ends in an ignorant priesthood. To dread the priesthood and yet to staff the Churches with amiable amateurs or smart smatterers is absurd. We can never thrive on a mere impressionist pulpit, which produces effects but mangles truth, and which makes conversions but no convictions. That way lies Pharisaism.

And I would lay special stress on the value of sound theological principles and methods of being taken as iron into the blood in youth. For lack of it how many have grown sceptics in age. And I have already hinted that doubt which comes late in life, from bad or shallow foundations, is a far more serious thing than the doubt of youth, which is often but the clearing of rubbish to make room for foundations that remain.

9. The ideal ministry is not charismatic but pneumatic. It is not a matter of temperamental religious facility but of trained spiritual insight. That is to say it is not a matter of mental or miraculous gifts, but of the gifts of faith, hope, and love in the Gospel. You perceive my reference is to the contrast in the first Church between the physical gifts which the Apostles had to regulate (not to say discourage), and the

graces which made them Apostles and which makes the true ministry. When we say the ministry is apostolic we mean that it is a ministry of the spirit in the moral and intelligent sense of that word. It does not turn on extraordinary manifestations or incalculable impulses, but upon the genius of the Gospel, the insight of the Gospel, and the fruit of the Gospel. You have this contrast, this conflict, pervading the New Testament. The charismatic, impulsive sections of the Church would have destroyed it had they not been taken in hand by the apostolic power, evangelical, intelligent, and ethical. I have no doubt they resented being taken in hand, and claimed a double portion of the spirit in virtue of their impressive and extravagant features. I have no doubt some of them considered themselves more inspired than Paul. I have no doubt some of the meaningless hierophants of I. Cor. xiv. thought Paul a rationalist, perverted and paganized by his much learning, when he threw tepid water on their ecstatic babble. These phenomena are good or bad as they may be turned to account by the Gospel and by a ministry wise unto salvation; as they may be made to yield the fruits of intelligence and righteousness. An ideal ministry is not one which just moves or impresses people so as to arrest notice. It does it by the power of the word, the inner nature of the Gospel, the intelligent demonstration of the spirit. Faith is not a mere frame of mind; it has a content, positive, peculiar, intelligible. We have not the Spirit merely when we have a religious experience. The men who have nothing but religious experience do not make the ideal ministry of the word. It must be an experience proper to the Gospel, a response in kind to the Gospel's proper nature. Our object is to give effect to the first Gospel, not to reproduce the subjective conditions of the first Church. The conditions of the first Church were ecstatic and temporary. True spirituality, an ideal ministry not only discerns the Spirit but thereby discriminates the spirits. It weighs religious phenomena, and

sits in judgment on the times. *Securus judicat*. For it reads them by the light of another world, a positive Gospel and a moral faith.

10. The ideal ministry is thus Pauline. Every great crisis of the Church has been marked by the revival of Pauline Christianity. There is a place, of course, for the Franciscan type now uppermost; but when we have to call out our reserves we draw on St Paul. And so it will have to be in the great crisis in which we are, and the great shaking that is to come. And when I say Pauline I am not thinking in the first instance of the revival of dogma. When shall we learn that Paul was not a dogmatist—in the sense either of Aquinas or even of Melancthon? Nor was he an idealist—a maker and merchant of ideas. For him dogmas were not ends, but modes of expression for a transcendent but positive experience. Their form was seized from here and there, from Judaism, from Gnosticism, to express under torture the unutterable reality of his redeemed Christian experience. And that again was the counterpart of prior movements within the last reality itself; it reflected the experience and action of God himself, conveyed to man in a self-revelation not dogmatic but practical and redemptive. Let us borrow the form of our doctrine where we profitably can, so long as the reality of our Christian life is the tremendous experience of redemption and not merely an illumination; so long as that experience is our central religious reality and not merely a piece of theology which we ardently preach. Any theology is sound which duly represents the experience of the Cross and the Saviour by converted and competent men.

11. The ideal ministry is in real touch with the Bible, constant and supreme touch with the Bible. This it is not certain that our ministry is. But it must be also in real touch with the people. That our ministry is certainly. I know not,

however, if in complete touch. But in this regard there are three things that an ideal ministry at the present day can never let out of sight. And with naming these I close.

- (i) That only a minor section of the able world cares for the Church. The ruling power of the age is the plutocracy. And the plutocracy is pagan and grows more so.
- (ii) That only a minor section of the Church understands the kingdom of God.
- (iii) That one in every thirty-seven in this country so plethorically rich is a pauper. The ideal ministry must let this rankle and make it rankle. We must not be impatient. Impatience is weakness. But we must never be content. And we must be vigilant—so long as we watch unto prayer, the ministration of the Word; and so long as we do not think that the only fact in a great old and complex society.

## HOW TO HELP YOUR MINISTER

(as republished in *The Christian World*, 24th August, 1950.)

**B**y great care in his selection. I do not mean merely care as to his ability and character. I mean care that he is one who increases your own faith and ministers to your own soul. It is fatal to our Protestant principle to vote for a minister because you can just tolerate him yourself, but think he will be of great use among the young or in the town. The minister is first and foremost minister to your faith; and he will not feel that he gets from you what he needs unless he feel also that you are united in the bond of a growing faith and love. Select your minister for yourself, and not for your neighbour.

Let him feel that his ministry is a real factor in the reasons which lead you to live where you do. What help can you give to the minister's work and soul if he feels that you are ready to remove to the other side of the town for better tennis, a better golf-course, or for a change merely? It is amazing that Christian people should take a house without any inquiry what the neighbourhood offers a family in the way of religious advantage. When men complain that they cannot hold their family to their faith because there is no church near they can profit by, whose fault is that?

Represent to him that it is unnecessary for him to attend every meeting held in connection with the church, that to be out most nights at such meetings is mischievous to next morning's study, and that he cannot hope to be the blessing to his people that he might be if Sunday arrive simply at the close of a jaded week. Do not forget that what starts you on a new week is for him the end of a stale one, so far as nervous condition goes.

Tell him when he first comes to see you that it will make no difference to your sympathy or your Sunday attendance if he never comes to see you at all except in some crisis. You stand some chance then of being the best-visited family in the congregation.

Tell his wife the same thing, especially if she have a family of children.

Send him a note when the sermon has done you special good; and add that if he answer it, you will not send another.

But if a text trouble you, or a problem, put it in black and white, and say that if he is at a loss for a subject at any time, you would be grateful if he would take that, or would let you talk to him about it.

Use your opportunity to practise local preaching and the conduct of a service. Few things carry home to the pew so well as that what it means to be in the pulpit every Sunday. The minister has this reason of his own for wishing that all the Lord's people were prophets. Besides, it is a great thing for a minister to know that he preaches to preachers, and is giving to givers. If you have a class, treat it not only as a teacher, but also as a pastor. Have a care of souls. That will open your eyes a little to what pastoral concern is. Faults and failings which to an outsider are mere matter of curiosity are to the pastor an anxiety and grief. You will help him to carry it if you know by experience what this divine concern is, if you have souls you watch for, and lives you train for Christ. Your family may teach you this pastoral sympathy if no other sphere does. Do not omit or neglect this pastoral office at home, as the manner of so many is. It casts on the minister a burden he was never meant to bear. The father is the true pastor of the young. You have no right to blame the minister for the indifference of your young people unless he is palpably incompetent, or worse. It seems to me sometimes that the congestion of work thrown on the church, the dispersion of its energies over trivial efforts to catch youth, the

oppressive distraction of the minister, all have their root in the general neglect of family religion. The church and the minister are called on for work which God never meant should be done by the church at all, but by the home. The church is but one organ of the Kingdom of God, and the home is another. And we know what happens when a vital organ refuses work and throws a long strain on another. The end is weakness, illness and death.

Bring to church affairs business methods, but not the business spirit. A Church Meeting is not a committee, nor is it a political assembly. It is the sphere neither of criticism nor of mere discussion, but of Christian work and fellowship in faith and love. Let all truth-telling be the telling of the truth as it is in Jesus.

When the minister asks you to do something, do it without excuses, and without deprecating yourself as compared with someone else. If you wish to escape being asked, do what you are asked and let your unfitness be proved. People will not believe it till you convince them. Then you will have peace.

Do not ask him and his wife to tea "and spend the evening". At least, do not regard it as part of his ministerial work.

Insist that he be punctual in keeping engagements, answering letters, and especially in beginning service. You can sometimes see the whole secret of an ineffectual ministry in the ten minutes after the hour at which worship should begin. A man who is systematically late at public meetings loses more influence than he knows. How can he hope to be effective with business people whom he exasperates to begin with? Besides, it is an offensive liberty to take.

It might help him if he thought there were the occasional risk of a deacon calling on some pressing business at 9 a.m.

If you are absent from church, let it be when he is there, not when he goes away. The minister supplying finds and

reports abroad a poor congregation. It is gauche flattery to say to your minister you only miss when he does.

It would be a help to some if you made it understood, in some kind way, that the minister's speech at a social meeting need not always be funny, so long as it was sunny.

Do not omit to thank him for asking a subscription. They do you a true service who suggest to you or collect from you what it is your duty to find means to give. Let him know that when he has a case of real need, he may always reckon on you according to your power. Few things are more disagreeable to most ministers than to ask for money. Remember, those who ask you for Christian money are your agents, not your duns.

Make it clear that you have a higher respect for the office of the ministry than even for the man who fills it. A minister who holds his place only in the affection of his own people carries a too heavy burden; it puts too much of the responsibility upon his personal qualities alone. After all, the church is more than the minister, and the apostolic office is more than the idiosyncrasy of its occupant. No minister should be encouraged to think that he improves his position or usefulness by what doctors or lawyers would call unprofessional or undignified conduct, or by any course that lowers the standard of his office. Your minister, to be sure, needs sympathy, and he must have it; for with us the whole ministerial bond is dissolved when sympathy ceases between pulpit and pew, and divorce should quickly ensue. But there is something that the true minister craves more than sympathy with his person, and that is sympathy with his gospel. "I believe in you, but I don't believe in your truth," is no Christian relation. It is mere personal friendship, and the minister must have a higher aim than being his people's friend; he must be their guide, teacher, and at need corrector. When he is appointed, he is appointed to this. He is not merely the representative of his own community, he is a representative

of the whole Church and a special trustee of what Christ committed to the Church. He must speak sometimes to his own church in the name of the Church universal and invisible. You should help to protect him from a frame of mind that overlooks this or makes it impossible. You will lose as well as he if he become parochial or conventiclist, if he be a mere prophetic individualist and make nothing of his office. A freelance may rouse and pique, but a lance of any kind is very apt to wound, especially when it is nothing but free.

The old-fashioned advice, "Pray for your minister", is never out of date. I would only press it into detail.

Pray with him—*i.e.* let your private prayers include what is most on his heart.

Pray for him—not generally, but in detail. Realize his position by an act of imaginative sympathy, and pray for the special things you divine he needs.

It may help him even more if you really and privately study your Bible. The minister is hampered by his people's ignorance of their Bible more than by most things. It is a joy and a power to minister to a people exercised in the Bible and hungry for its light. The more you pray over your Bible, the more you pray with and for your minister. You both work with the same textbook. What must it be for the teacher when the class is habitually unprepared?

The more you do to help your minister, the more he will feel, if he is of the right sort, that he is there to help you rather than to be helped by you. He comes not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Your help will be abundantly returned to you. Help his gospel if you would have him help your soul. But if you go on neither really helping the other, then God help you both!

## THE MINISTER'S PRAYER

(as published in *The British Congregationalist*, 6th June, 1907.)

THE work of the ministry labours under one heavy disadvantage when we regard it as a profession, and compare it with other professions. In these, experience brings facility, a sense of mastery in the subject, self-satisfaction, self-confidence; but in our subject the more we pursue it, the more we enter into it, so much the more are we cast down with the overwhelming sense, not only of our insufficiency, but of our unworthiness. Of course, in the technique of our work we acquire a certain ease. We learn to speak more or less freely and aptly. We learn the knack of handling a text, of conducting Church work, or dealing with men, and the like. If it were only texts or men we had to handle! But we have to handle the Gospel. We have to lift up Christ—a Christ who is the death of natural self-confidence—a humiliating, even a crushing Christ. We have to handle a Gospel that is a new rebuke to us every step we gain in intimacy with it. There is no real intimacy with the Gospel which does not mean a new sense of God's holiness. There is no new insight into the cross which does not bring, whatever else it bring, a deeper sense of the solemn holiness of the love that meets us there. And there is no new sense of the holy God that does not arrest His name upon our unclean lips. If our very repentance is to be repented of how shall we be proud, or even pleased, with what we may think a success in our preaching? So that we are not surprised to hear preachers who, after what the public calls a most brilliant and impressive discourse, retire to humble themselves before God to ask forgiveness for the poor message, and to call

themselves most unprofitable servants—yea, even when they knew that they had “done well”. The more we grasp our Gospel the more it abashes us.

Moreover, as we learn more of the seriousness of the Gospel for human fate, we feel the more that every time we present it we are adding to the judgment of some as well as to the salvation of others. We are not like speakers who present a matter that men can freely take or leave, and agree or differ without moral result. The deeper and surer our Gospel the more is our work a judgment on those to whom it is not a grace. This was what bore upon the Saviour's own soul, and darkened His very agony into eclipse. That He, who knew Himself, the salvation of His own beloved people, should, by His very love, become their doom. And here we watch and suffer with Him, however sleepily. There is put into our charge our dear people's life or death. And to those to whom we are not life we are death, in proportion as we truly preach, not ourselves, but the real Christ.

How solemn our place is! It is a sacramental place. We have not simply to state our case, we have to convey our Christ and to convey Him effectually. We are sacramental elements, broken, often, in the Lord's hands, as He dispenses His grace through us. We do not believe that orders are an ecclesiastical sacrament, as Rome does. But we are forced to realize the idea underlying that dogma—the sacramental nature of our person, work, and vocation for the Gospel. We are not saviours. There is only one Saviour; but we are His sacraments. We do not believe in an ecclesiastical priesthood: but we are made to feel how we stand between God and the people, as none of our flock do: we bring Christ to them, and them to Christ, in sacrificial action, in a way far more moral, inward, and taxing than official priesthood can do. We lead the sacerdotal function of the whole Church in the world—its holy confession and sacrifice for the world in Christ.

We must indeed feel the dignity of the ministry; we must present some protest against the mere fraternal conception which so easily sinks into an unspiritual familiarity. But still more than the dignity of the ministry do its elect feel its solemnity. How can it be otherwise? We have to dwell much with the everlasting burnings. We have to tend a consuming fire. We have to feed our life where all the tragedy of life is gathered to an infinite crisis. We are not the fire, but we live where it burns. Our critic, our judge is at the door. The matter we handle in our theological thought we can only handle with some due protection for our faith. It is one of the dangerous industries. It is continually acting on us, continually searching our inner selves. We cannot hold it and examine it at arms length. It enters into us. It evokes the perpetual comment of our souls, and puts us continually on self-judgment. Self-condemnation arrests denunciation. And the true apostle can never condemn but in the spirit of self-condemnation.

But our doom is our blessing. Our judge is on our side. For if humiliation be wrung from us, still more is faith, hope, and prayer. Everything that rebukes our self-satisfaction does still more to draw out our faith. He also hath given us the reconciliation. The more judgment we see in the holy cross the more we see it is judgment unto salvation. The more we are humbled, the more we "roll our souls upon Christ". And we recover our self-possession only by giving our soul again and again to Christ to keep. We win a confidence in self-despair. Prayer is given us as wings wherewith to mount, but also to shield our face when they have carried us before the great white throne. It is in prayer that the holiness comes home as love, and the love is transfigured to holiness. At every step our thought is transformed to prayer, and our prayer opens new ranges of thought. His great revelation is His holiness, always outgoing in atoning love. We receive the reconciliation, we take it home. The very wrath

of God becomes a glory. The red in the sky is the new dawn. Our self-accusation becomes a new mode of praise. Our loaded hearts spring light again. Our heavy conscience turns to grave moral power. A new love is born for our kind. A new and tender patience steals upon us. We see new ways of helping, serving, and saving. We issue into a new world. We are one with the Christ, not only on His Cross, but in His resurrection. Think, brethren, of the resurrection power and calm, of that awful final peace, that infinite satisfaction in the eternal thing eternally achieved, which filled His soul when He had emerged from death, when man's worst had been done, and God's best had been won for ever and for all. We have our times of entrance into that Christ. As we were one with Him in the likeness of His death, so we are in the likeness of His resurrection. And the same Eternal Spirit which puts the preacher's soul much upon the Cross, also raises it continually from the dead.

We overcome the world, our mistakes, negligences, sins; nay, the sin of the world, which will not let our souls be as good as they are. We overcome the world, and take courage, and are of new cheer. We are in the Spirit. And then we can preach, pray, teach, heal. And even the unclean lips then put a new thrill into our sympathy and a new tremor into our praise.

If it be not so, how shall our dangerous work not demoralize us, and we perish from our too much contact with holy things?

The ministers' holiest prayer is hardly lawful to utter. Few of his public would comprehend it. Some would dismiss it with their most opprobrious word. They would call it theological. When he calls to God in his incomprehensible extremity they would translate it into an appeal to Elijah. (Matt. xxvii., 47.) For to them theology is largely mythology.

We are called at the present day to a reconstruction of the old theology, a restatement of the old Gospel. We have to

reappropriate and remit the truth of our experienced Christianity. But what a hardship it is that this call should search us at a time when the experimental power of our Christianity has abated, and the evangelical experience is so low and so confused as it often is. It must be the minister's work to recover and deepen this experience for the Churches in the interests of faith, and of the truth in which faith renders an account. For the reformation of belief we must have a restoration of faith. And the engine for such recovery of faith is for us what it was for Luther—prayer; and it is that prayer which is the wrestling of the conscience and not merely the cry of the heart, the prayer for reconciliation and redemption and not merely for guidance and comfort, the prayer of faith and not merely of love.

I saw in a friend's house a photograph from (I think) Dürer—just two tense hands, palms, together, and lifted in prayer. It was most eloquent, most subduing. I wish I could stamp the picture on the colophon here and fit to it Milton's line: "The great two-handed engine at our door."

## LAY RELIGION

(as published in *The British Congregationalist*, 29th April, 1909.)

THE root of all theology is real religion; of all Christian theology, and even apologetic, it is Christian religion, it is saving faith in Jesus Christ. But this religion cannot be stated without theology. It is justifying faith, in the sense of faith in a forgiving God through the cross of Jesus Christ. If theology can be shown to be irrelevant to a living and evangelical faith, then the Church can afford to treat it with some indifference, and to leave its pursuit, like philosophy, to the Universities. But the Christian religion is theological or nothing. We are but vaguely and partially right in saying that Christ is the Gospel. The Gospel is a certain interpretation of Christ given in the New Testament, a mystic interpretation of a historic fact. It is the loving, redeeming grace of a holy God in Christ and His salvation alone. Theology, it is true, does not deal with thoughts but with facts. That is the great note of modern theology. But the Christian fact is not a historic fact or figure simply; it is this fact living on in the new experience which it creates. The fact on which Christian theology works is the Christ of faith and not of history only, of inspiration and not mere record, of experience and not of memory. It is the Christ of the Church's saving, justifying faith.

A Christianity without such faith is not Christianity. Spiritual sensibility is not Christianity, nor is any degree of refined unction. A spirituality without positive, and even dogmatic, content is not Christianity; nor are gropings when stated as dogmas; nor is a faith in the broad general truths of religion. Faith must dogmatize about the goodness of God

at the least. A conversion which is but a wave of spiritual experience is not the passage from death to life. Religion can only be made more real by a deepened sense of the reality of the salvation. An access of religion which does not mean, first or last, a deeper repentance and a more personal faith in Christ's salvation may be sincere enough, and it is certainly more than worldliness or unconcern; but it is not believing unto life. It is not New Testament Christianity. And, tender as we should be to it as a stage, we must be very explicit when it is offered as goal. Gentle as we may be to it as a search, we must be quite plain with those who proclaim it as the great find. If Claverhouse had developed a mystical piety which made him deeply sensitive to the devotions of his Church; or if Alva had retired into a monastery and spent his time in sincere devotion on the exercises of Loyola and beatific visions; if they forswore their old aggression, and melted to their depths at the presence of the sacrament; and if it was all unmingled with a repentance still more deep, because they had harried the Church of God, wounded His faithful saints, and crucified Christ afresh, what would there be in that to place them in the same faith as Paul, or the same spiritual company? I remember Bradlaugh and his violent iconoclastic days, so able, ardent and ignorant. And he might stand for a type of others. If such men developed one of those spiritual reactions which lead some of the unbalanced to a religiousness as extreme as their aggression had been; had a long-starved soul burst into an Indian summer of mystic sensibility and abstract piety, which all the time was little troubled about the old intellectualist arrogance and ignorant insolence, the rending of Churches, the grief caused to the old disciples, or the shipwreck made of many a young faith; if the new sense of God brought no humiliation, no crushing, and almost desperate repentance, curable only by a very positive faith and new life of forgiveness in Christ and His Cross; what were the Christian value of such a piety?

Would such a religion have much more than subjective worth, as a phase of spiritual experience, often more interesting to the psychologist than precious for the Gospel?

The essential thing in a New Testament Christianity is that it came to settle in a final way the issue between a holy God and the guilt of man. All else is secondary. All criticism is a minor matter if that be secure. The only deadly criticism is what makes that less credible. And all the beauties and charms of a temperamental religion, like Francis Newman's, for instance, or Renan's, or many a Buddhist's, are insignificant compared with a man's living attitude to that work of God's grace for the world once and for ever in Jesus Christ.

## II

A faith whose object is not such a Christ is not Christianity; at least it is not New Testament Christianity; and the great battle is now for a New Testament Christianity. It is not Christian faith when we rise no higher than "just a man, but what a man!" You cannot use the word faith in relation to a Christ like that. Faith is an attitude we can take only to God. God is the only correlate of faith, if we use words with any conscience. Faith in Christ involves the Godhead of Christ. Faith in Christ, in the positive Christian sense, means much more than a relation to God to which Christ helps us. It is a communion possible only in Christ, and Him crucified. It means that to be in Christ is to be in God. It means the experience that the action of Christ with us is God's action, that Christ does for us and in us what holy God alone can do, and in meeting with Christ we meet with God. When it comes to revelation, only God could do justice to God. Theologically, faith in Christ means that the person of Christ must be interpreted by what that saving action of God requires, that Christ's work is the master key to His person,

that His benefits interpret His nature. It means, when theologically put, that Christology is the corollary of Soteriology; for a Christology vanishes with the reduction of faith to mere religion. It means that the deity of Christ is at the centre of Christian truth for us because it is the postulate of the redemption which is Christianity, because it alone makes Christian experience possible for thought. I am not judging individuals; I speak of types of religion. The Christian experience for the Church if not for every individual maturing in it, is the evangelical experience, the new creation in atoning forgiveness. It is not mere love and admiration of Jesus, however passionate. It is not simply a hearty conviction of the Christian principle. Nor is it a temper of Christian charity. When Paul said he had the mind of Christ he did not mean the temper of Christ; he meant the theology of Christ. And by that he meant not the theology held by the earthly Christ, but that taught him by Christ in heaven. A reference to 1 Cor. ii. 16 will show this at once. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."

The theology that turns merely on the Christian principle (taken as distinct from Christ's perennial person), reduces Christ's character to a far too placid level, which does not correspond to the passionate Christ of Synoptic history. Perhaps a one-sided reading of the Johannine Christ might mislead us to think thus of Him. But his was no Phidian majesty. He was not calmly, massively, and harmoniously filled by a principle of divine sonship, whose peace was as a brimming river; for a pious sage, a Christian Goethe, might be that. The sinlessness of Jesus was not of that natural, sweet, poised, remote, and aesthetic type. It was not the harmonious development of that principle of sonship through the quietly deepening experience of life—just as His nightly communion cannot have been simply a blessed and oblivious respite from the task of each day, but its offering,

outspreading, and disentangling before the Father who prescribed it. Gethsemane was not the first agony. Each great season was a crisis, and sometimes a stormy crisis, in which the next step became clear. There is much truth in Keim's treatment of his temperament as the choleric. The sinless certainty of Jesus was the result of constant thought, passion, and conflict as to His course and victory, crowned by the crisis of all His crises in the decision and triumph of His cross. And His power was not quiescent, reserved strength alone, but conflict in mortal moral strife for the overthrow of God's enemy through the redemption of the race, the forgiveness of its guilt, and its moral re-creation.

And to such a Christ Christian faith corresponds. It is not a warm sense of sonship as the crowning form of natural religion or of a devout temperament. It is not a frame of benignant charity, patient pity, and strong repose. It is the experience of having in Christ, His crisis, and His victory, that salvation, that pardon, that new life which God alone can give. It is not looking up trustfully to a loving Father, but giving one's self thankfully to a redeeming Saviour and His Father. Again I say I am not speaking of individuals, but of that corporate, central, and classic experience which gives the type of every other, makes the Church the Church, and carries the note of the Gospel.

### III

One is tempted sometimes to speak to preachers in this vein. "Yes, the incarnation is the centre of Christianity, and you must convince people that it is so. But it is an intricate question. Its great solution is beyond the average man. Perhaps you can best accommodate it to your hearers if you take it on the experimental side, and bid them believe that Christ was God because He forgives and redeems as God only can.

But, of course, for the real grounds of the belief more deep and philosophic considerations are involved. And these are beyond you; they must be left to the Church through its theologians. And lay faith in the incarnation must be a *fides implicita*, or the acceptance of something which experience only indicates, but does not found."

The advice in its first part is good, but in its second it is bad and dangerous, and it would put Christ at the mercy of theological Brahmins. It is quite true that the scientific treatment of the question leads into regions where the lay believer is not at home. But these regions are only the hinterland of that historic Christ within our personal experience—within an experience where the believer is not only at home, but has his birth and being as a Christian. All Christology exists in the interest of the evangelical faith of the layman who has in Jesus Christ the pardon of His sins and everlasting life. It is quite misplaced patronage to condescend to lay experience with the superiority of the academic theologian or the idealist philosopher, and to treat such lay experience of the Gospel as if it were good enough for most, and the only one they are yet fit for, but if they passed through the schools they would be able to put their belief on another and better footing. It is the evangelical experience of every saved soul that is the real foundation of Christological belief anywhere. For Christ was not the epiphany of an idea, nor the epitome of a race, nor the incarnation, the precipitate, of a metaphysic—whatever metaphysic he may imply. The theology of the incarnation is necessary to explain our Christian experience and not our rational nature, nor our religious psychology. It is not a philosophical necessity, nor a metaphysical, but an evangelical. Philosophy, on the whole, is perhaps against it. And the adoption of the tone I deprecate is but a survival of the bad old time when we had to begin with a belief in the incarnation (on the authority of the Church and its metaphysical theologians

as set out in the creeds) before we could have the benefit of an evangelical faith. It is on the contrary an evangelical faith like a converted miner's that makes any belief in the incarnation necessary or possible at last. We begin with facts of experience, not with forms of thought. First the Gospel then its theology, first redemption then incarnation—that is the order of experience. That is positive Christianity, which is as distinct from rational orthodoxy on the one hand as it is from rational heterodoxy on the other. The mighty thing in Christ is His grace and not His constitution—the fact that it is God's grace that we have in Him, and no mere echo of it, witness to it, or tribute to it. That is our Christian faith. And that certainty of the saved experience is the one foundation of all theology in such Churches as are not stifled in mediaeval methods or burdened by their unconscious survival.

#### IV

It is this unique experience of a unique Saviour who is the new Creator that we have to urge in the face of every theory that makes it impossible and of every practice that would make it nugatory. And at the present day we have to make it good both in life and in thought—in life against the mere bustle of progress, and in thought against a mere procession of evolution that has no goal already latent at its centre.

The evolutionary idea is certainly compatible with Christianity; but not so long as it claims to be the supreme idea, to which Christianity must be shaped. Evolution is within Christianity, but Christianity is not within evolution. For evolution means the rule of a levelling relativism, which takes from Christ His absolute value and final place, reduces Him to be but a stage of God's revelation, or a phase of it that can be outgrown, and makes Him the less of a Creator as it ranges Him vividly in the scale of the creature. There

is no such foe to Christianity in the world of thought to-day as this idea is; and we can make no terms with it so long as it claims the throne. The danger is the greater as the theory grows more religious, as it becomes sympathetic with a Christ it does not worship, and praises a Christ to whom it does not pray. To say that evolution is God's supreme method with the world is to rule out Christ as His final revelation. It is to place Christ but at a point in the series and to find Him most valuable when He casts our thoughts forward from Himself to a greater revelation which is bound to come if evolution go on. But when Christ's finality is gone, Christianity is gone; yea, and progress itself is gone. For there is no faith in progress permanently possible without that standard of progress which we have in Christ, the earnest of the inheritance, the proleptic goal of history, the foregone sum of the whole matter of man. Progress without any certainty of the goal is as impossible in practice as it is senseless in thought. It is mere motion, mere change. We need a standard to determine whether movement be progress. And the only standard is some prevenient form or action of the final goal itself. Our claim is that for religion the standard is God's destiny for man, presented in advance in Christ—presented there, and not merely pictures presented finally there—and presented to man, not achieved by him—given us as a pure present and gift of grace. Man has in Christ the reality of his destiny, and not a prophecy of it.

## V

We are often adjured to go the whole length of our protestant principle by insisting that Christianity is a lay religion, not a priestly, and by adjusting the form of our Gospel to the lay mind. But this adjustment is coming to mean something which provokes a little doubt whether we have any positive

idea of what a lay religion means. It properly means an experienced religion of direct, individual, and forgiven faith, in which we are not at the mercy of a priestly order of men, a class of sacramental experts. It is certainly of Christ's salvation at first hand, by personal forgiveness through the Cross of Christ in the Holy Ghost. It does not mean a non-mediatorial religion, a religion stripped of the priestly order of acts or ideas. New Testament Christianity is a priestly religion or it is nothing. It gathers about a priestly Cross on earth and a Great High Priest Eternal in the heavens. The greatest function of the Church in full communion with Him is priestly. It is to confess, to sacrifice, to intercede for the whole human race in Him. We have power and commandment to declare to the world being penitent the absolution and remission of its sins in Him. It is to stand thus, with the world's sins for a load, but the word of the atoning Cross for the lifting of it. That is apostolic Christianity. That is the Gospel. Evangelical Christianity is mediatorial both in faith and function.

But, in the name of a simplicity which is not Christ's, lay Christianity is coming to be understood as the rejection of apostolic Christianity and the sanctification of natural piety—sometimes only its refinement. It is more preoccupied with ethical conduct than with moral malady, with the fundamental truths of religion than with the fontal truths of mercy. And whereas we used to be able to appeal to our laymen and their experience against a Socinian and undogmatic Christianity, we can now appeal to them only against a sacerdotal and clerical. We used to be able to take refuge from Arianism (to which the ministers of the Church might be tempted by certain philosophies), in the evangelical experience of its members. We used to think that the sense of sin which was lost from the intellectuals or the worldlings would be found among the Christian men who were in lay contact with the world, its temptations, its lapses, and its

tragedies. But experience hardly now bears out this hope. Perhaps the general conscience has succumbed to the cheap comforts and varied interests of life; or the modern stress on the sympathies has muffled the moral note; or the tendency of life has stifled the need for mercy; or Christian liberty has in the liberty lost the Christ. But, whatever the cause, the lay mind becomes only too ready to interpret sin in a softer light than God's, and to see it only under the pity of a Lord to whom judgment is quite a strange work, and who forgives all because He knows all. It is on a broken reed we too often lean when we turn from the theologian's "subtleties" to rely on the layman's faith. For the layman becomes slow to own a faith which begins in repentance rather than benevolence. He is slow to confess a sin that is more than backwardness, untowardness, or ignorance. The tendency of the lay mind is backward to the eighteenth century to a wise, humane, and urbane religion, only enlarged by the ideality and fraternity that enlarge Deism to modern Theism. It goes back to a religion of belief in human nature, of spiritual *bonhomie*, of vague and kindly optimism, of good sense, well doing, and such a sober estimate of the state of things between God and man as avoids extreme ideas like curse, perdition, mortal vigilance, or any eternally perilous edge of life. It is the type of religion which commends itself to the intelligent, sympathetic, active, and well-disposed young Christian who would like, above all things, for righteousness' sake, to be an active politician, alderman, or Member of Parliament. This is an excellent Christian ambition. May it spread! But how is it that, as Mr Macfadyen points out, there is not one of all the 200 Free Church Members of Parliament who can lift his voice on a Church Bill of any kind with the great note from the high ground? How is it that there is not one that is even an echo from the opposite side of the spiritual insight, positive conviction, and moral power which Lord Hugh Cecil compels the House to

hear, admire, and respect? The ambition I speak of is often the ambition of a type of man who tends to treat positive Christianity as theology, and to regard the theologian of an Atonement as our fathers did the priest or as the Sicilians regard a sanitary officer—to treat him, at the worst, as a gratuitous sophisticator of things very ancient, simple, and elemental, or as a mere survival, now useless or even mischievous; or it views him, at the best, as a harmless hobbyist, no better than a philosopher. Such lay religion is ceasing to regard the apostles with their priestly Gospel of Christ as laymen. It treats them as theologians, and insofar complicators. It views them as confusing the lay issue. It would eliminate the priestly and atoning element from the nature of the Gospel for a kind of religion which is but a spiritualizing of the natural man. It regards Christ as the most inspired of the prophets of God's love, the most radical of social reformers, and the noblest of elder brothers. Whereas the Church must stand on Christ the priest, His sacrifice, and His redemption; and it could not stand, as it did not arise, upon Christ the beneficent prophet or noble martyr. And the condition of our Churches shows that this is so.

## VI

I am trying to avoid the dogmatism of dogma. But I am also striving concisely to sharpen the issue, to be explicit and clear and to point the choice the Church must make, or go under, and the Free Churches the first.

Revelation did not come in a statement, but in a person; yet stated it must be. Faith must go on to specify. It must be capable of statement, else it could not be spread; for it is not an ineffable, incommunicable mysticism. It has its truth, yet it is not a mere truth but a power; its truth and the statement of it, its theology, is part of it. There is theology

and "Theology". There is the theology which is a part of the Word, and a theology which is a product of it. There is a theology which is sacramental and contains the body of Christ, so to say; and there is a theology which is but scientific and descriptive. There is a theology which quickens, and one which elucidates. There is a theology which is valuable because it is evangelical, and one which is valuable because it is scholastic. It is no Christianity which cannot say, "I believe in God the Creator, who, in Christ, is my almighty Father, Judge, and Redeemer." That is theology, but not "theology". It is pure religion and undefiled. It is worlds more precious than any freedom that forwandered spirits deify in its place. But our laity has not yet learned to distinguish between these two senses of Christian truth. They are ghost-ridden. They are obsessed by a mere tradition of the long-gone days, when the theologians made a hierarchy which only changed the form but not the spirit of the Roman; when the Reformation succumbed to a theological hierarchy instead of a sacerdotal; when the laity, who were not professional theologians, had to take an intricate system from the experts, with an implicit faith like that of Rome in the old days, or, in new days, like the implicit faith with which the inexpert readers swallow the expert critics; when the laity took over this faith provided for them, and only made it their business to see it accepted and carried through into public life by others equally unable to judge it. What the laity is suffering from is the feeble afterwash of the long past days of tests. But the ministry in the main, and the theologians in particular, have for some generations now moved forward into another world of things, another habit of thought, and another kind of authority. And our competent guides know this. But our laity to a large extent do not know it, and they are played upon by those who know just a little more. They are victims to an anachronist suspicion of an obsolete "theology", when they should be con-

fessors of personal faith and its vital theology, if Christianity is not to be lost in the sand. It would be a deadly calamity if we were to relapse to that dogmatocracy, that rule of the positive theologian, that protestant Catholicism which half-ruined Lutheran Protestantism in the seventeenth century. How great a calamity it would be, we are able to mark, when we observe the effects of our subjection to-day to the negative dogmatocracy of the critics, evolutionists, monists and socialists who take Christianity in hand in the interest of dogma, which changes its spots but not its spirit.

## VII

Lay religion tends to be simple, easy and domestic religion, with a due suspicion not only of a priesthood but of a ministry. Some sections of it are more interested in the children than in the ministry. They believe in schools, hospitals, temperance, boys' brigades, and all the excellent things the mayor can open; with sometimes but small insight and distant respect for the deeper things that dawn upon the experts of the Soul, and do not go straight home to business or bosom. It is preoccupied with righteousness as conduct more than with faith as life indeed. It thinks the holiness of God a theological term, because nothing but love appeals to the young people who must be won. If it only knew how the best of the young people sicken at such novelistic piety! And the view taken of sin corresponds. Sin is an offence against righteousness or love instead of against holiness; and it can be put straight by repentance and amendment without such artifices as atonement. It just means going wrong; it does not mean being guilty. The Cross is not a sacrifice for guilt, but a divine object-lesson in self-sacrifice for people or principles. The lay mind tends to associate a sense of sin with the morbid side of human nature, or with

the studies of men who are in more contact with a theological past than with a human present. Christ saves from misery, and wrong, and bad habits, and self distrust; but not from guilt. He reveals a Father who is but rarely a judge, and then only for corrective purposes. The idea of a soul absolutely forfeit, and of its salvation in a new creation, grows foreign to the lay mind. And the deep root of it all is the growing detachment of that mind from the Bible, and its personal disuse.

And this lay religion the pulpit is occasionally tempted to adopt, partly from wrong education, partly from poverty of belief, partly from a fear of seeming to be behind date, or out of touch with the pew. While those preachers who do not thus part with the native language of the Gospel, and to whom its specialities are the realities, are apt to be disheartened, benumbed, and paralysed in the fact of the spiritual self-satisfaction that confronts them, the this-worldliness, the at-homeness in human nature. They find no effective fulcrum in a laity like that for any protest they may make against clerical priestliness. And they begin to ask if clerical priesthood deserves all the denunciation it gets. They ask if the clerical priest by the effect he does give to the real and distinctive priestliness of Christianity, will not always be stronger than a lay anti-priestliness of the unspiritual sort. They would like in their bitter hours to tell the Free Church Council, for instance, that if it were guided with a different touch to a different tone it would spend less time and fury upon the denunciation of priesthood, and more upon an effort to make its Churches realize the priestliness they have all but lost. What shall it profit any Church to commit suicide to save itself from slaughter.

### VIII

It is only a Church of true priests that can withstand a

Church of false ones. It cannot be done by a Church of no priests, which is indeed no Church. A lay religion, alien to apostolic and evangelical belief, can never make head against the evangelical apostolicity which may lie deep but potent beneath the errors of sacerdotal Catholicism.

We have laicized the idea of the ministry by treating it simply as one of the departments of Christian work. We have been told that all forms of Christian life are equally sacred, and that just as good work can be done for Christ in the Christian pursuit of other walks of life. And the half-truth there has been so abused and overdriven that the Churches, as a layman like Mr Mott has been telling us so powerfully, send their most capable youth to these other pursuits (often to make proof how false the notion of their equal sanctity can become); and we tend, he says, to a ministry of the mentally and spiritually inferior, unable to command the strong and capable personalities. That is one result of the laicizing of belief, of the levelling of the Gospel to life instead of the lifting of life to the Gospel. It is the result of erasing the feature unique in the Gospel, and consequently in the office which preaches it.

### IX

In a word, as I say, lay religion is coming to be understood as the antithesis, not of sacerdotal religion, but of theological, of atoning religion; that is to say, really of New Testament Christianity. And so understood, it has neither power nor future. And most thorough Christians will move in the end to join to that Church, free or bond, which has most of the power, the future, the authority, and the liberty which are in the Christ of the Apostles, of the New Testament, of the Church, and of God.

The greatest of the human race is He who, as the Holy

One that came out from the Father, was a priest before all else, and who has for his chief object with the world the ordination of all men as priests in Him. He was one to whose sacrifice, atonement, and prayer mankind owes, daily and for ever owes, its moral renovation and its divine destiny. Christianity is such priestly religion; it is not what tends to be known as lay religion, or the religion that arrests the well-disposed man in the street. It is the religion of the common man who lives on the sacrifice of Christ. If the belief in a priestly Christianity came to be confined to the ministry, then spiritual command and influence would, and should, remain with that ministry, amid whatever errors beside, amid the errors even of Rome. But lay religion, in the minimalist sense of the word, affectional and ethical religion, will never save us from the perils of priestly rule. For it cannot give us our Great High Priest, eternal in the heavens. And it certainly cannot unite us with Him in the priesthood of a true Church. They are logical enough who say that Incarnation, Atonement, Priesthood, and a Church all hang together; so that having denounced an Atonement they must go on to denounce a Church. But it is more logical to say that a Church with all these implicates is indissolubly bound up with the consummation of Humanity in a Kingdom of God.

## X

There is a misunderstanding that is likely enough here. One might easily incur the charge of being a *laudator temporis acti*, and of lamenting the former days that were better than these. I would, on the contrary, state my conviction that there never was a time in the history of the world when there were so many souls bent on seeing and doing the will of God. There was never a time when spiritual sympathies and appetites were so quick and general as to-day, and never an

age when so many were set upon the Kingdom of God, and certain aspects of it were so clearly and widely seen.

A slight knowledge of the past can readily mislead us here. We too easily transfer the religious eminence of the historic saints and heroes to the Christian public of their time, which we view in the golden haze which radiates from them. But in the Middle Ages of Anselm and Bernard personal piety was almost confined to the monasteries and convents. The rest were but institutional Christians, and members of the Church without being, or professing to be, members of Christ. Men were religious in the lump, as tribes often are that are converted with their chiefs, but unchanged in their hearts. And even when the Reformation substituted personal faith for corporate religion the change was realized but by few beyond the great leaders. The passionate interests and conflict of the hour was not for personal piety, but for public liberties, for the right of Gospel preaching, for freedom of confession, or for a national church. And in all these public ardours there was the greatest danger of the Reformation burning out, and the old Church flowing back over its ashes—as public Christianity is endangering us to-day. What saved the Reformation religiously was the rise of Pietism, which rescued faith both from the politicians and the theologians. It was not till then, and but partially then, that the religion of the Reformation penetrated to masses of people. Had it done so before, the counter-Reformation would have been impossible. But before Pietism could reach the large Christian public as personal experience, the rationalism of the eighteenth century had begun to give off its widespread chill.

So I venture to say there are more spiritually-minded people in the world to-day than ever before; though I cannot stay to trace the renaissance of spirituality from the century I have named. It is largely due, in this country at least, to the Evangelical movement, the romantic or

Tractarian movement, and the idealist movement in philosophy, as these are represented by the Low Church, High, and Broad.

But after this admission I also venture to repeat that Christianity means much more than spiritual appetite or sympathy. Personal faith means much more than ideal religion or romantic. These pieties are too subjective, and they do not contain that which makes Christianity Christian. The thing that marks Christianity is the objective gift of God in Jesus Christ. What is the nature of that gift? The difference between Catholicism and Protestantism is a very deep and real one, but it does not turn upon greater or less spirituality. It is hard to say on which side of the line you find more of that. They differ upon totally different conceptions of the gift of God in Christ. Both Rome and Reformation start from the supernatural gift in Christ, as every Church must do, else it does not remain a Church. No Church is possible on a basis of religion; it must be a basis of salvation. Both Churches knew that Christianity must be something more than religious sensibility, ideal aspiration, beautiful prayers, the great general truths of our spiritual nature, or even a passion for the Kingdom of God. Both knew that a Church and a faith could rest only on a positive revelation and not a subjective inspiration. They parted when they came to describe the revelation, the gift, the way by which the Kingdom must come. That was also what parted Jesus and Judaism. Both of these lived for the Kingdom. It was their life passion. But they were a world apart in the way they believed it must come; and the difference was fatal.

And to measure truly the Christianity of an age we must ask how far it grasps God's true gift, and not how eagerly or finely it seeks one. What is the conception of salvation? What is it that makes it religious? What is the object of its religion? Do not ask, What is its dream? or, What is its programme? but, What is its Gospel? Do not ask, What is its

experience? Ask what emerges in its experience. It is not the lack of religiosity that ails the Church, it is the lack of a Gospel and a faith, the lack of a spiritual authority and a response to it.

For the leaders of the Reformation the gift was not an institution, nor was it vaguely a Christian spirit, but the Holy Spirit as personal life. It was direct personal communion with a gracious and saving God in Jesus Christ. What they presented to us was a Kingdom finally won in Christ, and not one yet to be won by any faith or work of ours. It was what they called "the finished work", and what is now called the absoluteness or the finality of Christ. And it is here that, for the hour, the Church is their inferior. It has fallen from their evangelical height. The world has gone forward in its religion, but the Church has gone back in its faith. Unhappily the thing in which the world has gone forward is of less value than the thing in which the Church has gone back. Religion is secondary, but positive faith is primary. We have more religion than ever before, sometimes more than we know what to do with; do we find more faith on the earth? We have more sensibility and more seeking, but have we more strength, footing, command, in proportion? Have we the old heroes' grasp of the sure and unspeakable gift? Have we their experience of it? Have we our fathers' experience of it? Is it as hard as it should be for us to be patient with those who deny and destroy it? Our religion understands better some aspects of the Father; does it understand the only guarantee of His fatherhood—the Redeemer? The spread of religion has cost us the depth of it. Its modern charm has cost us its power. We have vivid religious interests, but no decisive experiences. We have finer sympathies, but not a more fearless conscience; a warmer ethic, but a poorer courage; eloquence about morals, silence about holiness; much about criticism, little sense of judgment. The religious crowd has little discernment of the

spirit of its prophets. Our religion has more moral objects, but less moral interior. It wrestles with many problems between man and man, class and class, nation and nation; but it does not face the moral problem between the guilty soul and God. It pursues a high righteousness of its own, but it is too alien to the righteousness which is of God by faith. It dwells upon a growing moral adjustment, it does not centre on a foregone and final moral judgment, in which God has come for our eternal salvation. In a word, as I have said, we are more concerned with man's religion than with God's salvation. We compare and classify religions more than we grasp the massiveness of grace. And we are more tender with the green shoots of the natural soul than we are passionate about the mighty fruits of the supernatural Spirit.

But all this means that a rich soil is forming for the great new word when it pleases God to send its Apostle. Only let us be sure that when he comes, he will be an Apostle and not a Saviour, a preacher of the changeless word to the changed hour, and not a new Christ to make good something lacking in the old.

Our first business with the Gospel is to understand it. And our first business with the spiritual situation is to understand that. Let us go on to try to do both, to grasp the salvation of God in the religion of man.