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Miscellanea

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The Whole Counsel of God *

The Place of Biblical Doctrine in Preaching

By Arthur John Gossip

Protestant worship ought to begin, and often does begin, with the reverent carrying of the Word of God into the pulpit; and the laying of it upon the lectern there in full sight of the waiting people; and the opening of it, and the leaving of it open — all of which is a dramatically expressive symbol of the fact that the ancient commission, given to the disciples at the first, still holds: "Go and stand in the temple, and speak to the people all the words of this Life"; that the man who is to preach to us is not about to hand on certain of his notions, for what they may be worth; but is going to try to bring home to us something of the mind of Christ concerning God, and man, and life, and sin, and judgment, and destiny, and the amazing salvation which God has offered us in him.

That is the ideal. But how often his ambassadors, standing there "in Christ's stead," with a great and urgent message to deliver, turn aside from it to trivialities; sometimes because they know nothing better and have nothing more to say; sometimes even to unseemly stunts and sheer buffoonery, or little more — anything to gather in some numbers. And the Word of God is not preached. And the people are not healed.

Karl Barth, for his part, finds there the fundamental reason for the decline in church going:

> Am I not at least partly right when I say that people, educated and uneducated alike, are simply disappointed in us, unspeakably disappointed? Have they been too often — perhaps for centuries — *put off*? Has the church, in spite of its very best intentions to meet their needs, too often indulged in secondary utterances?

Yet today there is a queer aloofness from doctrinal preaching, a certain odd suspicion of it. Quite seriously, it seems, the question is raised: Should it exist; and ought it to be practiced? Has not experience proved how heavy, and damping, and even dangerous it is?

As if anyone could preach at all; or, for that matter, speak on any subject, without letting slip what he thinks and believes about it. And that is doctrine. When Anatole France, with unwonted heat, declared that "Balzac showed us with extreme pre-

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cision all the functions of the claw, the jaw, and the stomach; all the habits of the man of prey," he was denouncing Balzac's doctrine of human nature. I myself have heard a clergyman remark offhandedly in a sermon, "I need not pause, my friends, to show you that in this matter our Lord was wholly and entirely wrong." For what it was worth, that too was doctrine of a kind. We speak of the Gospel according to Matthew, and according to Mark, and Luke, and John. Each of them has its own atmosphere. The incidents that each writer selects, his mode of telling them, and how he is himself affected by them, show what the author thinks of Christ. And the gospel according to you makes clear, and must make clear, how you in turn stand to him; or whether you stand to him at all, and are not, rather, on your face before him in a hush and awe of spirit — my Lord, and my God. We cannot avoid doctrine of some kind. The very effort to avoid it is itself a doctrine.

Hence, the business of a loyal follower of Christ called to the ministry is to dwell deep and much in the secret of the presence, listening for the voice of God, heard in that quiet place more easily than in the press and din outside; to ask earnestly for the Holy Spirit's guidance, and to take it; to keep learning to know the real Christ as he really is; and then to come out and share with others the revelations that have been vouchsafed to him.

For what one believes is vital, cardinal, foundational. Hinduism, indeed, that amorphous mess, declares that belief is of no importance, and glories in the fact that one can be a theist, an atheist, a polytheist or an agnostic, and many another choice, and still be an orthodox Hindu. For that chaotic faith provides strata of thought and belief for all possible tastes, and openly exults in the wisdom of that policy. Not so thought Buddha, who set down as the first step in the eightfold path that leads to the ideal, right beliefs. Till one's doctrines are right, nothing else can be right, so he maintained. And so might Jesus Christ. There are people, much considered in the Western world today, who have wholeheartedly adopted the Hindu position in this matter. Take Adams Brown's apt summary of Julian Huxley's *Religion Without Revelation*. "He told them [that is the theological students to whom he was lecturing] . . . that belief is negligible in matters of religion. Religion, he said, is a certain attitude of spirit, an emotional mood, which is compatible with every conceivable belief; and whether we choose one theology or another, or dispense with theology altogether, is, so far as the social effects of the choice are concerned, a matter of indifference."

That bland assumption, not even argued, but taken for granted as a matter of course, that the doctrines of the faith are so much needless junk and lumber, of no real use, but simply cluttering up the mind, and much better away, seems to be in the air. Yet it is difficult to reconcile it with the hard facts of history and experience. Multitudes have found the doctrines, so far from being useless and cumbersome, a first necessity and the very breath of life

to them; so far from being tedious and boring, beyond all computation, more thrilling and exciting than anything else in the round world. To take the first random instances that rush to mind: it was because a doctrine broke in upon him, beaten and at his wit's end, that Augustine, at long last, became enabled to lift himself above himself, to do what he could never do, and be what he could never be, and so shook off shames that had seemed an inalienable part of himself. It was a doctrine — again suddenly coming home to him — that liberated Luther from his spiritual servitude, and made him a freeman in Christ. It was the doctrine of vicarious suffering that aroused Bosanquet's enthusiasm for a Christianity that stands so strenuously for that central truth in life. It was the doctrine of justification by faith, to which Bradley clung as a man's sole hope, and a sufficient one. It was the doctrine of the resurrection of our Lord, rushing in on Dale, no longer as a notion but as a fact, one day, when he, already a leader in English Nonconformity, was writing an Easter sermon, that made him a denizen of a new world.

Christ is alive! I said to myself, and then I paused; — Alive! Can that really be true: Living as really as I myself am living? I got up and walked about repeating Christ is living! Christ is living! At first it seemed strange and hardly true, but at last it came upon me as a burst of sudden glory; yes, Christ is living. It was to me a new discovery. I thought that all along I had believed it; but not till that moment did I feel sure about it. I then said, "My people shall know it; I shall preach about it again and again until they believe it, as I now do." Then began the custom at Carrs Lane on every Sunday morning of singing an Easter hymn.

And because, standing upon Calvary, they have grasped the amazing truth that "he loved me and gave himself for me," souls the world over have become new creatures, living in a new way.

Just where the power that dogmatic Christianity undoubtedly possesses, and has used so markedly, is to be generated, apart from the doctrines that have hitherto given it birth, is not easy to see.

Yet, these days, many preachers fight shy of doctrine. They think that the masses of men are allergic to it; that it only confuses and stumbles them; that this whole side of things had better be kept out of sight, as the internals of the body are no doubt necessary, and yet we do not speak of them; and it seems a pity that they have to be at all. If so, the argument runs, we are to get the people in these days, we must be content to get them on their own terms; must watchfully keep in step with them; must speak to them about the things that interest them and about which they are willing to hear. But these musty doctrines leave them cold. They come from another world from that in which they live. Such matters never cross their minds. As Bagehot put it, "Few cultivated persons willingly think of the spiritual dogmas of theology. They do not deny them; but they live apart from them. They do not question the existence of Kamchatka, but they have no call to busy themselves about it." And to talk of such matters

in church leaves the impression on the hearers that religion is out of their whole line of country; and that they themselves have not been made for it. Paul, it is pointed out triumphantly, was a masterly strategist; and he declared that he was willing to be all things to all men if, by so doing, he could win some of them. And, to reach folk today, what we must be is to be willing to lay aside the doctrines which may suit us, and preach what suits them — a cheery message, slipping discreetly over the darker matters about which people do not care to hear, and giving them the gratifying assurance that they do not need to worry over much, since, happily God is an amiable Being, who does not really bother about our bits of sins, but whatever he may have said, will let us off, and pass us through.

It seems a rather desperate expedient to attempt to make people Christian by carefully eliminating everything from Christianity that is original, or that historically has given it its power. Always the great preachers have been great because they preached a mighty gospel. As they declared it, it is no shallow pond, round which one can stroll in half an hour or so, but an illimitable ocean with the surgings of eternity in it, and deep calling unto deep. The tendency to substitute mere attractiveness, and "brief, bright, brotherly" services, for the awed worship of God; the inclination of the church to which has been committed the ministry of reconciliation, to stoop, as George Jackson put it none too savagely, to "forsake its high calling in order to peddle in the small wares of the politician and social reformer," — these spell certain failure. This nondescript Christianity is not big enough to attract men, to hold men, to inspire men, to redeem men. Why should it? And how can it?

Indeed, it has already failed. Nor is there any answer to Bishop Barry's finding that the facts of our own time make it clear "that we cannot have the Christian way of living apart from the Christian religion. No doubt the tree is known by its fruits; but there cannot be any fruits without the tree, and the assumption that the Christian moral principles would always hold the allegiance of men, even though dogmatic Christianity might not survive in the climate of modernity — that genial expectation has been falsified. And we cannot reconstruct Christian ethics save on the basis of Christian faith." Meantime, the ignorance of Christianity in so-called Christian countries is colossal, and grievously widespread. Here, for example, is one illustration. Some years ago twelve young people published a book of essays, giving their views upon God. They asked Archbishop Temple to write a preface for their volume. He wrote it. And they printed it. Here are some extracts from it. "They write about religion from outside, and their description of it is such as a blind man would give of a picture gallery. The result is in many cases a startling childishness. The sort of difficulty, for example, about the doctrine of the Trinity, which occurs to most intelligent Christians in their teens, is put forward as a valid reason for rejecting it. It is apparently never

contemplated that if what Christians mean by the doctrine were so easily refuted, it would hardly have developed as a summary of Christians' experiences, and would have long ago disappeared. What should inspire self-criticism in all of us is the spectacle of their victorious overthrow of Aunt Sallies, in the belief that they are repudiating the venerable doctrines and practices of the Christian church."

So far so good. But I cannot share in the Archbishop's complacent assumption, "I do not suppose the religious instruction given to these eager and alert minds was either insufficient in quantity, or indefinite in quality."

The ministry cannot escape a share of the blame for the unhappy state of matters. Either they have been neglecting that vital part of their office, to build up their people in the most holy faith; or they have sadly bungled in their endeavors so to do, have done the right thing in the wrong way. Not since Wesley has there been a British preacher with such a glowing gospel, or one who swept so many souls into fellowship with Christ, as Spurgeon. Yet he declared, "The most fervent revivalism will wear itself out in mere smoke, if it be not maintained by the fuel of teaching." And sorrowfully he added — and the thing is too true still — "that while attendance at even a short course of lectures will convey a real impression of what the speaker's views are on the subject with which he is dealing, if you listen, not only for twelve months, but for twelve years, to the common run of preachers, you will not arrive at anything like an idea of their system of theology." Well, if we have been doing the right thing in the wrong way, the remedy for that is, surely, not to throw aside the right thing, and to dispense with doctrinal preaching altogether, but to try to learn to do the right thing in the right way.

Could we begin to feel some few steps toward that; or, at least, to turn and face in the direction in which it were wise to travel?

To begin with, what is a Christian doctrine? It is an attempt to put into words, and to share with others, actual experience of Jesus Christ; it is an effort to set down what those who have really tried and tested him have found him to be. Father John of the Greek Church, that deep and arresting writer, has a habit of ending all his sappiest passages with the phrase, "This also is experience." That is to say, he is not offering us simply a notion that he thinks might possibly be true. He guarantees what he says, because, he claims, "It has happened to me."

And all the amazing assertions of the Scriptures about Jesus Christ flow from that same source. At the end of every one of them discerning eyes can read, "This also is experience. I say this because I have tried it, and have proved it, and cannot doubt the indisputable facts of my own life."

It is, indeed, a profitable study to watch how Jesus Christ kept looming up greater before the disciples' minds. At first he was a friend and teacher; and then, surely, a prophet; yes, certainly, the greatest of the prophets; and then, could this be the

Messiah, long foretold, come at last? And, in the end, they were down upon their faces before the Lord God Incarnate. And it was not simply that they had dreamed it, or imagined it, or thought it possible. They had experienced it; experienced what could only be explained on these tremendous assumptions. And, as we Protestants believe, all real doctrinal teaching, worthy of the name, is the child of such personal experience, and of the burning and unshakeable conviction that it gives. All which being so, since the preacher is building on and recounting the tremendous discoveries and adventures of the saints in Christ, which, in some degree, he has himself shared and corroborated, we should expect doctrinal preaching to be passionate, enthusiastic, a thing on fire, red hot indeed, like the preaching of the men of the New Testament, as they burst in upon us, with glowing faces and exultant hearts, crying aloud to others what they can't keep to themselves, "We have found it! The thing for which mankind has been seeking! And it works!"

So Miss Dorothy Sayers says, "We are constantly told that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine — dull dogma as people call it. The fact is the exact opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man — and the dogma is the drama." And, after a vivid summary of what the church has the sheer unthinkable audacity to believe, she adds in bewilderment, "If this is dull, then what, in heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting?" What, indeed! Yet preachers, like everybody else, are faced by the fact of nature that the most amazing things, by mere repetition, lose much of their staggering effect upon the human mind; and come, in time, to be taken for granted. I watched the very first plane that ever flew over the city of Glasgow. People ran out of the shops, and stood gazing excitedly up into the sky. But, now, who notices a plane; or spares more than a passing glance for it, if even that? And we have heard the Gospel so often that we have come to accept it as a matter of course, as just the way of things, and as what God is like. And, composedly, we leave it at that. As Rainy said, we preach it, and in a way we really believe it; but "we are no longer astonished at it in our own minds." That fact has to be faced. Still, in part at least, the instinctive revolt which we are told many minds feel against doctrinal preaching must mean that our methods have been faulty. Wherein have they been wrong? And how can we amend them?

Here is one pointer. When Dale was called to Birmingham, he announced that he was going to preach doctrinal sermons. "But they won't stand it," he was told. To which he replied, "They will have to stand it." And stand it, literally, they did, for years and years, in a crowded church.

Yet, looking back over his ministry, he confessed that he had failed as a preacher, because, as he put it, he was more interested in subjects than in people. That was a shrewd diagnosis; and

that is a too common disease in the pulpit. There is an intellectual pleasure in the working out of a theme, and in the following of it through to a conclusion. Moreover, there is a type of mind to which truth, and the pursuit of truth, are what beauty is to the artist, or righteousness to the prophet: an unfailing interest, a consuming passion. They are earnest to serve the Lord God with all their mind, as Christ demands of all men. And so far, they are to be commended. But if the people are forgotten, then preaching is not preaching; and the sermon is no sermon, but merely an essay, which is a very different type of thing — the consideration of some subject in the abstract. What is being offered in the pulpit, as if it were the finished article, is only what ought to have been thought out in the study, and then made the basis of the real sermon, superimposed on that, and flowing out of that; the truth of the passage, or the doctrine, being then treated, not simply as a theme, but applied to the needs and sins and sores and souls of men.

I was, at one time, an elder in a church sunk in the slums of Glasgow. The worshipers were a fine upstanding people; but most of them came from pinched circumstances, and a bleak looking life. One forenoon the minister announced that he was going to preach on "The Religious Value to You of the Doctrine of the Trinity." That seemed a difficult task. And he did not make it easier by starting off with a somewhat abstract quotation from Hegel! That, thought I, has torn it. But it had not. Since, for fifty minutes, closely followed by a people, still and hushed and rapt in attention, he showed the difference it made to them at their wash tubs and daily drudgeries, that there is God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and that these three are one God. And he so succeeded because it was not a theological dissertation in the air, but theology applied to life; because the speaker was intensely interested not in the subject only, but also, and in a sense, even more, in the people.

James Black, speaking to theological students, let slip how he makes a sermon. After prolonged work and meditation on his subject, he at length starts to write. And, before he begins, he, in thought, ranges beyond his desk the three most tried and needy folk whom he has encountered in that week's visiting. And, having written the first paragraph, or head, or the like, he looks across at them, and asks, "Is that any help to you? It cannot be." If he so feels, then, however satisfactory it may be as a piece of thinking, it must go. And that attempt is cast aside. A second effort: "Does that bring anything to you? Not likely." And it too is scrapped. He is never satisfied until he thinks that in what he has written there is not only a correct statement of the truth with which he is dealing, but a pertinent application of it to poor troubled souls, with difficulties to face, and sores upon their hearts, who are there because they want to see Jesus Christ, to be assured he is remembering them, to touch the hem of his garment, and be strengthened and healed.

Without that instinct, doctrinal preaching can become formal, abstract, doctrinaire, far away from life. In which case it does not make things clearer, but is apt to obscure them. It is as when a botanist takes a flower, and pulls it to pieces. "These," says he, "are the stamens, and these the petals," and so on. And then, looking down at the little withering heap, he adds confidently, "And that is all." But it is not all. The something that made the gracious thing is gone, has completely evaded him. So, doctrinal preaching of a kind can take the wonderful, moving, irresistible gospel of God's love, and reduce it to something that is coldly intellectual, that does not reach, and touch, and win the heart of all.

When that staidly and even primly proper person Mr. Wortley died, they found the love letters to him from his charming wife, carefully docketed, and with a synopsis of each of them written on the outside! The synopsis of a love letter! The thing is obviously nonsense. And certain kinds of doctrinal preaching are no more than that. But that is the fault, not of doctrinal preaching in itself, but of the fashion in which it has been done.

After all, there never was a doctrinal preacher to be compared to Jesus Christ. He was always preaching doctrine. Yet everyone could follow him; and, to this day, what he said moves and thrills, and forces one to love a God shown to be so lovable. But then, as Deissmann said, "Jesus did not lecture *de Deo;* he bore witness to God. His teaching is a testimony born out of his inner experience. Jesus preached what has been experienced, what has been given, what has been striven for; not what has been brooded over and studied. It is not his system that he gives, but his soul." You want to know what God is really like, he said; and told them a story about a father and two sons; and how one of them went wrong, and the other was hard and bitter toward him; and how the former stupid lad bethought himself, and ventured home; and of the eager welcome his father gave him; and of the correction of his brother's churlishness toward him. It is all pure doctrine. And yet could anything be simpler? And how it moves! Unto this day, it is not easy to read it without tears.

Or, one day, perhaps, Christ sensed that someone in the little cluster of listeners had made a mess of things, and had lost heart, felt that now it was too late, and no use trying any further. And so he told a little tale about a woman who had lost a coin. It was crammed full of doctrine. And the man must have understood; and, surely, taken heart again. The lost coin, that is me; it can do nothing for itself, no more can I; but hands are groping for it, searching nearer and nearer; God has missed me, wants me, keeps looking for me. It is all pure doctrine, applied to troubled, downcast, beaten souls. There is nothing repelling in doctrinal preaching of the right kind.

Above all, it is a terrible mistake if, in our preaching, we are more interested in Christ as a subject than in Christ as a person; if, as Phillips Brooks puts it, in as fine a book on the subject as was

ever written, we keep not preaching Christ, but merely preaching about Christ. Dale's own amazement over his discovery, far on in life, of the risen Lord seems to imply that, until then, he cannot have been walking with that risen Master day by day; that largely, Christ must have been a theme rather than a personal Friend and Lord, that to him religion was an intellectual idea rather than a daily communion with One ever present with him. If our doctrinal preaching does not induce, and indeed force, men to close with Christ, to learn to know him more and more, better and better, as the years slip by, as their Friend to whom they can go freely and with utter frankness, as their King whose word for them is law, as the Judge before whom, and by whom, the value of their lives will be assessed, as the Savior in whom lies their only hope, our preaching, doctrinal or no, has missed its object, and not reached its end.

Further, to make doctrinal preaching effective for the mass of people, we must appeal to them through the imagination. All the mighty teachers have so done — Buddha, Plato, Mohammed, the Lord Christ himself.

Roman Catholics criticize us Protestants on the ground that our sole approach to men has been through the intellect. And, say they, few ordinary people can claim to have much of that. But they possess other faculties; and, among them, the power to see things, if they are made seeable. That is true. And a lesson worth learning.

There is no more consummate doctrinal preacher than the fourth evangelist; and it is instructive to watch how he gets his immense results. He loves to take a miracle, something vivid and visible, an object lesson there before the reader's eyes. He sets it down with detailed clearness; without hesitation, he accepts it as a fact. Yet he gives the impression that he is far more interested in the spiritual lessons of which the miracle itself is an illustration and a symbol and a proof. The feeding of the five thousand has for him its chief significance as a vivid picture of how Jesus is the bread of life, and can feed needy souls. He tells the tale of the raising of Lazarus; and then, with that wonder set visibly before our eyes, he impresses on us with assurance that for us, too, Christ is the resurrection and the life; and that us also he can raise to newness of being. It is great doctrinal preaching. And it reaches us by way of the eye.

So, were I, for one, seeking to bring home to a congregation what Christian salvation means and is, and how it is accomplished, I should not, naturally, start even from one of Paul's profound disquisitions on the subject, but would rather choose a passage where one can see the Savior in action; actually saving a soul. And, as the people watch what is taking place before their eyes, they will take in for themselves what it all means, and how it is brought about. Here, given to our hand, for instance, is the story of Zacchaeus. When that awakened soul broke with his past, made public confession, announced that he was ready to make the most

generous restitution, that he was done with the old life, and had embarked on a new and very different one; Christ said to the people, "Now, that is what I call a saved man." "This day is salvation come to this house." There, then, is the thing salvation, as he defined it, and approved it.

And how did it come about? By keeping close to Christ, by allowing his character and influence to play upon him. It was when Christ had risked much for him; and they two were moving on in that shocked, tense silence, suddenly fallen on the outraged crowds, no longer cheering, but grown hostile and resentful, that Zacchaeus, thinking the thing out, felt that if Jesus was to be his friend, the old life would not do; and in that friendship found a power that enabled him to break with it. Doctrinal preaching! And yet, because it reaches us through the eyes, and the imagination, because we can see it all, how utterly simple and easy it is to follow, and to understand! That means, for one thing, that technical thought, and technical language must be rigorously eschewed.

A. J. Balfour, the British Prime Minister, was himself no mean philosopher. Yet it was he who wrote, "Outside Scotland, philosophers, I fear, do not stand high in popular estimation. They are supposed to question what nobody doubts and to explain what everybody understands. Obscure thoughts couched in uncouth language, subtle argumentations which convince no one, and lead nowhere, constitute (so it is believed) their principal stock in trade. And, though the traditions of culture may require them to be treated with some measure of respect, this is by no means inconsistent with the most perfect neglect of anything they may have to say."

That is often true, not of philosophers alone, but of doctrinal preachers also. And this because what Balfour adds concerning logic is as apposite concerning them. "It always seems to me to be telling us in language quite unnecessarily technical, what we understood better before it was explained."

So, too, Sully the psychologist has an illustration of a little child who, when her mother passed over a certain Bible story, on the ground that it was too difficult for her, remonstrated, "I can understand them all perfectly well, if only you would not explain them to me." Alas, if we have only darkened counsel; and made dimmer to men's minds the Christ whom we were seeking to bring near to them! On that much might be said. Enough, perhaps, to adduce Coffin's delightful example in his *What to Preach*, "A compression of the closed cavity of the mouth by the cheeks, giving a slight sound when the rounded contact of the lips with one another is broken" — that, it seems, is the *Century Dictionary's* definition of a kiss. Whether it makes things clearer to the average girl or boy seems doubtful. But they know what a kiss means, by nature, and of themselves. And Christianity, in essence, must be a very simple thing. For Christ expected that anyone, even a child, could grasp it and live it.

Another matter that seems clear is this: that, if we would successfully commend the gospel to any day and generation, we must preach to it in its own mental language. That is where the church often slips up and fails, lagging half a generation in the rear. Of course, the mighty spirits are not of an age, but for all time. But most of us are dated; and soon pass out of date. What we said may remain eternally true. But our mode of expressing it soon becomes obsolete and no longer helpful. There is no use preaching to the England of today in Anglo-Saxon. Once that was, there, the universal speech. Everyone understood it. Hardly anyone does now. And it is a mistake to make the gospel masquerade, tricked out in the obsolete garments of outmoded thought. That is to give people the impression that it is old-fashioned and out of date. And it is not; but far ahead of us, and beckoning to us to mend our pace, and come on, and up to it. For God is not dead, a Figure of long ago, who used to help men, but, of course, not now. God is alive. And, if we are prepared to listen, he has much still to teach us in and through Christ.

In any case, to confuse a doctrine, and some particular statement of that doctrine, as if these were one and the same is silliness. To suppose that the Holy Spirit did come to us, and did guide us, up to the Council of Nicea, or the Assembly at Westminster, and the like, and then abandoned us, because there was no more to be learned about Christ and God and our wonderful gospel, is blasphemy. There is far more in Christ than his church has grasped as yet. And it must keep pressing on, further and further, deeper and deeper, higher and higher.

A tragic illustration of the danger of tying oneself to one particular statement or doctrine is furnished by the unhappy plight of the Church of Rome. It happened to formulate its dogma of the Lord's Supper at a time when men were thinking in terms of the substance and the accidents of matter, as, thirty years ago, everyone thought instinctively in terms of evolution, the mode of that moment. Quite naturally it tried blunderingly enough, to state its doctrine in the mental speech then current. But that philosophy is dead. Yet, by its claim of infallibility, the Roman church finds itself tied to a corpse.

But we too must be careful; or, in degree, we may suffer, and perhaps are suffering, a like fate. It was James Denney, that most evangelical of evangelicals, who wrote of our own people, unnecessarily puzzled, as he thought, "The vast majority of the members of the evangelical churches are loyal to Christ. Their attitude to him is essentially the New Testament attitude. They acknowledge that in their spiritual life it is his to determine everything, and that they are infinitely and forever his debtors. But, to a large extent, they have lost interest in the traditional theology. It is not that they actually disapprove of it, or dissent from it. They do not think of it. It is not their own. And they have a dim or a clear conviction that anything of this kind, if it is to have interest or value for them must be their own. It must be their own faith that inspires it; the action of their own mind which is em-

bodied in it. It cannot simply be lifted as an inheritance, or submitted to as a law."

And, therefore, he wanted to help such people by making the creed expected from all members of the church less philosophical, less metaphysical, and more directly religious. Wise doctrinal preaching would help such minds as he described. Unwise would lead them astray. But, certainly, on the day of Pentecost, everyone heard the gospel each in his own native speech. There are few who can follow it in any other.

Again, doctrinal preaching should be positive, not negative. We have had far too much of Christianity defensively stated. The dogmas may have been originally, in one sense, trenches cut in the face of attack. But, in substance and essence, they are exultant statements, to be shouted out in triumph. "What is wrong with the ministry these days," said Lord Lindsay, the Master of Balliol, "is that it is arguing in the pulpit. And no one wants its arguments. It should be witnessing. What people seek to know is, Does this thing really work?" It does. And the doctrines are the statements of what men have actually found in Christ; some indication of the riches that there are in him.

Hence, for doctrinal preaching with the unmistakably authentic note, one must keep within the circle of one's own experience. So, at least, we Protestants believe. The *locus classicus* on that is, of course, Bunyan's account of how he learned to preach — and a supreme preacher he was — at first with only a meagre and sombre message; but, as his knowledge and experience of Christ grew and expanded, so it too grew, so it too became rich and full and many-sided.

"The terrors of the law . . . lay heavy on my conscience. I preached what I felt, what I smartingly did feel . . . I went, myself in chains, to preach to them in chains. . . . Thus I went for the space of two years. . . . After which, the Lord came in upon my own soul, with some sure peace and comfort through Christ. . . . Wherefore now I altered in my preaching; for still I preached what I saw and felt. Now, therefore I did much labor to hold forth Jesus Christ in all his offices. . . . After this, God led me into something of the mystery of the union of Christ; wherefore that I discovered, and showed to them also." And hence the extraordinary conviction with which he preached, and the persuasion of his ministry!

But Roman Catholics denounce all that with passion. So Moehler declares bluntly, "He who says, This is my faith, hath no faith." That is to say, he ought to believe what the church believes, and tells him to believe. But, to the Protestant, that seems mere intellectual assent, active or passive, and not real faith at all. For as Keats put it in one of his letters, "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced. Even a Proverb is no Proverb to you till your life has illustrated it."

The Epistle of John agrees with Bunyan. Its standpoint is his standpoint, its guarantee his guarantee. It is what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we ourselves have looked upon and handled; and, again reiterating it, it is what

we have seen and heard that we proclaim to you. Keep within your own experience, and you will have that note of firsthand evidence which is difficult to resist. But when men wander beyond that, they are apt to bring trouble on themselves, and on the church.

The Calvinists felt with an awed humility that they had been chosen of God. Fools put that down to spiritual pride. But, in reality, it was the very opposite. These men could find no explanation whatsoever in themselves for God's immeasurable grace and kindness toward them, and were forced back on the conclusion that, for some divine reason they could not begin to understand, God had stooped to them in their unworthiness and called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. That was experience, and they had the right to take their stand upon it. But certain thinkers went further, and sought to round off the idea into a tidy whole. If some are chosen, what about the others? They must have been reprobated. But that is not experience. It is merely supposition. And it cannot be taught or held with the assurance of experience. Or, Cyprian, that father of high churchism, had a remarkable look forward when he was being baptized. His old life fell away from him, and a new life began. Hence, with conviction, he preached that the saving grace of God comes through the sacraments, as he had every right to do. For he was founding on the unchallengeable faith of his own life, and could justly say, "I know that this is true, because it happened to me." But when that, too, was rounded off into the theory and tenet that, except in exceptional cases, saving grace comes to man only through the sacraments, that is no longer experience, but at the most and best, only logic; and a poor logic at that, that breaks down before palpable facts.

But, you object, surely to preach only what our own personal experience can corroborate shuts one up, by far too straitly, into a narrow, cramped, limited gospel, instead of the spaciousness that there is offered us in Jesus Christ. Am I not to preach upon immortality, till I myself have actual knowledge of the further life? Can I not warn men of the judgment seat, till I myself have stood before it? But, in Christ, here and now one can have absolute conviction of these things. Did not he himself in the upper room affirm that the Holy Spirit would convince, not believers only, but the very world, of judgment to come? Moreover, we can in our preaching stretch out wistful hands to the treasures of the gospel which are not really ours as yet. And that, too, is true preaching with moving effects. When John Kelman was a young minister, he was called to a fairly empty church in Edinburgh. A few weeks later a friend told me she had deserted her own crowded congregation and famous minister to be one of his members. And she explained it on the ground that in a sermon Kelman had carried them as far as his experience could reach, and there stopped, though clearly indicating that there were other and far greater things which the saints had won. "But it is not for me to speak of these as yet," said he, "I who have not yet reached them; though, please God, I one day may." The wistfulness, the honesty of that

had won her heart. "This," she said, "is an honest preacher; and I can trust him absolutely."

Still, "Don't coop your soul up in a corner," said Santa Teresa to the women under her. Too many ministers are apt to do that in their preaching; to run in a rut, to confine themselves to such parts of the Master's teaching as immediately appeal to them, leaving the rest in shadow. That is a stupid thing to do. It is unlikely that one fussy little human soul has grasped all that there is in Christ, for itself, and for its people. It takes "all the saints" pooling their experiences, to know Christ as he really is, even a little. Hence Gore advised us to balance the natural bias of our particular mind; high churchmen by studying the outstanding evangelical passages of Scripture, and evangelical the churchly ones. And that is sound advice. The experts are not likely to be all wrong. The church has had a long experience in Christ, and has amassed far more than our little individual mind can do. And nothing in the Master's teaching can be omitted without dangerous lopsidedness, and grievous loss. So Orchard, explaining the influence he wielded over so many, says, "I had become convinced that all catholic doctrine mattered for human life. So far from it being remote and unintelligible, I was persuaded that it alone made existence intelligible; that it provided the only light by which one can dare to think, and the power by which alone one could endure; and that there was not a syllable of the church's hard-fought fight for sound doctrine which had not a definite bearing on intellectual integrity, personal liberation, and social stability. I always tried to show how reasonable and practical and helpful all the great doctrines were; for, I held that, instead of being restrictive, they gave a sanction, kept the mind open to all truth, and provided the greatest inspiration for thought; they also liberated the will and satisfied the heart."

At all events, if we neglect them in our preaching, we shall not easily be able to declare, at the close of our ministry, as Paul did to the Ephesian elders, "I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."

"The Jews and Their Lies"

DEAR PASTOR:

Your inquiry regarding a recent circular announcing the iminent publication of Luther's tract "The Jews and Their Lies" has reached my desk along with several others. Because many of our brethren seem confused and disturbed by this announcement, a brief exposition of historical facts may be welcomed.

Luther's first published statement regarding the Jews (1514) followed the persecution of John Reuchlin when a wave of anti-Semitism spread over Central Europe which was shared by Luther. (Enders I, 15 ff.) As he matured in his theological studies, his tolerance increased. He learned how much the Papal Church had abused the Jewish race, and he knew from bitter personal experience what such treatment could mean. Therefore, in 1523,

he decided to write a tract on the virgin birth of Christ by means of which he hoped to convert the erring race to the Christian religion. The result was his beautiful tract "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew." (*Weimar Ausgabe*, XI, 314 ff.) The tract had a secondary purpose, which was to refute the charges being made at that time that Luther's teaching denied Christ's miraculous birth.

In this tract Luther displayed a real humanitarian spirit, hoping to show the Jews what Christianity was really like. He pointed out that no one would have been a Christian without this race of Christ. He also gave an Old Testament exegesis of Genesis 3:15 ff. to show that in a sense Abraham and his followers were Christians in that they believed in the coming Messiah. In Abraham's seed all the nations would be blessed. If the Jews returned to Christianity, they would but be accepting the faith of the Old Testament fathers. Luther further pointed out that the Old Testament prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem which was to follow the coming of the Messiah had been fulfilled; therefore it was foolish to continue to await the Messiah. Mackinnon quotes the conclusion in *Luther and the Reformation*, IV, 194—195:

If we would gain them, we must treat them not after the Pope's law, but exercise towards them the law of Christian love and show them a friendly spirit; allow them liberty to work and earn, and leave them scope to live with and among us and hear and see our Christian teaching and life. If some are obstinate, what does it matter? We also are not all good Christians. I will leave it at this until I see what I have effected. God grant us all His grace. Amen.

His kindness did not meet with a like reception. Rather, the Jews walked in their old ways, paying little attention to the invitation to fellowship in the Gospel. Gradually, as Luther learned about their greed, their high rates of interest, and their devious ways, his kindly feelings turned to distrust. In 1532 he heard of their missionary efforts among the Moravians and received other evidence of their unrelenting antagonism to Christianity. The Table Talks of this period record several outbursts against the practices of some of them. He was greatly shocked to learn that three Rabbis whom he had shown special favors had insultingly referred to his Christ as a "crucified bandit." In another instance, Joseph Rosheim, the leader of the Jews in Saxony, tried to enlist Luther's sympathy and support to prevail upon the Elector of Saxony to relax his mandate of 1536 forbidding Jews in his territory. Luther then commented (1537):

What use is there favoring these rascals who are always working mischief among the people in materials and body and attempt to win many Christians to their superstitious teachings.

His next written material on the subject appeared in 1538 in the form of a letter to a friend and titled *Against the Sabbatarians*. While still hopeful of converting the Jews, the article was more argumentative than conciliatory. (Enders, XI, 340.) The article evoked a reply which Luther received in 1542. According to the Weimar edition, in the article "A Jew in a dialog with a Christian

twisted the Scriptures and recast them to destroy the foundation of the Christian faith." Luther was very angry, and, as was consistently the case with him whenever Christ was vilified or the Gospel denied, his anger boiled over in righteous indignation. He dashed off a rejoinder, *On the Jews and Their Lies,* which appeared in January, 1543.

According to Mackinnon, Luther "gave full blast to his wrath, and lapsed into his most vituperative style." His article reveals that Luther had now abandoned all hope of reclaiming the Jews and wrote solely to warn the Christians against the dangers of association with the Jews. This outburst was followed by another in March, 1543, which sought to refute the Jewish claims that Christ performed His miracles by the aid of magic and that He was not a descendant of David.

A third article appeared that same year, *On the Last Words of David* (W. A., 54, 28 ff.), in which Luther again treated in calm and scholarly fashion the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. This was to be his last publication on the subject of the Jews, for, already old and ill, he died three years later.

The claim that any of these works is rare is not supported by fact. The first German edition of the tract *On the Jews and Their Lies* was printed by Hans Lufft in 1543. Two copies, which were run misdated as 1542, are in *Hof- und Staatsbibliothek* in Munich. The work is also in the *Knaakesche Sammlung;* in Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Heidelberg, Munich, Stuttgart, Wernigerode, Wolfenbuettel, Zuerich, and London. This text was reprinted in the *Erlangen Ausgabe,* 32, 99 ff. A second edition is also available in many places, Berlin, Dresden, Wernigerode, Hamburg, Koenigsberg, Wittenberg, Wolfenbuettel, and London. A third edition appeared in 1613. The Latin translation is also in Berlin, Dresden, Greifswald, and Hamburg. The document has been reprinted in editions of Luther's works from the very first collection, in the *Wittenberger Ausgabe* (1552), 5, 454—509; *Jena Ausgabe* (1558), 8, 54—117; *Altenburg,* 8, 208—274; *Leipzig Ausgabe,* 21, 544—614; Walch, 20, 2312—2528; *Erlangen Ausgabe,* 32, 99 ff.; and *Weimar Ausgabe,* 53, 417—552. For those who do not have access to these volumes or who do not read German and Latin, a very good and fairly detailed exposition of Luther's views on the Jewish problem is given in English by James Mackinnon, *Luther and the Reformation,* IV, published by Longmans, Green, and Company, 1930.

It has been a pleasure to be of service to you, and I hope I have been able to clear up some of your questions. One of the purposes of our Society is to supply competent authorities to deal with problems such as this. We also hope to provide reliable well-edited translations of some of the more pertinent of Luther's works. We welcome your questions, your suggestions, and your support. Yours most sincerely,

E. G. Schwiebert, *President*
The American Society for Reformation Research
March 1, 1948, Wittenberg College, Springfield, Ohio