

## XI. *Christian Life and Duty.*

We believe that the Christian life is the life lived in fellowship with Christ and His Church. It begins with repentance and faith. In repentance men turn from sin to serve the holy and forgiving God with new and glad obedience. In faith they entrust themselves to Christ and rest upon Him alone for salvation.

We believe that by the teaching and example of Jesus the Holy Spirit shows men the way and the end of the Christian life, what it means to love God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves.

We believe that Christian men are called to abide within the fellowship of the Church, to maintain its peace and unity, and to give diligent heed to prayer, to the reading of Scripture, to common worship and the sacraments.

We believe that they are likewise called to live as those who are of the Kingdom of God, and to seek His righteousness both in individual and social life, serving their fellow-men in love for Christ's sake, and striving and waiting in prayer for an ordered common life where the will of God for the well-being and peace of men shall be done over all the earth.

We believe that in denying themselves and in following Christ men are enabled by the spirit of God more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness; that they are, under the hand of a faithful Father, in labour, love, and duty, in suffering, sorrow and defeat, renewed in the inner man after the image of the crucified and victorious Christ; and that they receive in this life a foretaste of the final redemption, assurance of the divine favour, peace and joy, and the confidence that He is able to keep them to the end.

So we acknowledge the Christian life as the life lived within the family of God, with the graces and privileges, the duties and discipline, through which the Christian man grows up in all things into Christ.

## CHAPTER XI. CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DUTY

*In Fellowship with Christ and His Church.* John 15: 1-5; Col. 3: 1-4; Eph. 2: 18-22.

"Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." That is the Christian ideal of conduct. But it is a formidable, indeed an impossible, challenge. That, however, is not where Jesus sets us to begin the race. He does not leave us to toil and moil at the oars unassisted. There is a sail at the disposal of the Christian, and it is with a power that blows upon us out of the unseen that we have to make the venture.

Jesus does not open His message with the words of command, "Repent ye!" That might be John Baptist's way; but Jesus has a prelude: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1: 15). Grace is always in the field ahead of Christian endeavour. The unseen forces of the King of kings have taken the field before the Christian hears the call. The Beatitudes do not frame a command to *be* lowly, meek, peace-loving: they describe the fact that those upon whom the Spirit of God has come with benediction are and shall be lowly and meek and peace-loving. We share a life that opened with Christ and continues in His fellowship. In his magnificent letters Paul does not launch out into a flood of exhortation: he first reaffirms his joyous faith in the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who has already done great things for men, breaking from their shoulders the yoke of sin and death, and leading many into the light and liberty of the Gospel. It is in view of what has been accomplished once and for all on the Cross that the Apostle summons his converts confidently to leave behind them the dead delights of paganism and set their affection on things above. Even in the Epistle to the Galatians, where he is pursuing a heresy in hot haste, he pauses first to exult in the God who has called him to be an apostle, and in Christ who gave Himself that He might deliver us from the present evil world. So Peter, writing to exhort those who are suffering bitter persecution, pilgrims scattered and lonely in an evil world, first thrills them with the possession already assured them in the heavens, the inheritance of eternal life.

*It Begins with Repentance.* Is. 55: 6-9; Matt. 5: 3-16; Matt. 18: 1-4; John 3: 5-8; Acts 2: 37-39.

The Christian life as we are called to know it is rooted in an experience of the grace of God. That may come upon us in a sudden dramatic encounter such as Paul had on the Damascus Road: after long resisting of the patience of God and the playing of a "thrown Janet" attitude towards all divine approaches, our human stubbornness may collapse without warning. Or it may be like the quiet opening of the bud which the sun and rain of the Spirit and the gracious influences of the Christian home have for long been maturing: there is a drawing of us with cords of love—the Christian love of a father or mother or friend—a daily teaching us to walk until of our own choice we make decision for the Christian way of life. However it come, there is a conviction that must be common to all who would essay the narrow road—the sense of a measureless gratitude towards the Christ "who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*." One thing that war has done for us is to hallow and solemnize the privilege of living by awakening in us a sense of indebtedness beyond all calculation to those who have died for us: "Never was so much owed by so many to so few." A gripping reverence comes over any thoughtful person as he takes at the breakfast table foods that have come across the seas at peril of men's lives. Our freedom to pursue our ways of liberty and democracy has been purchased before our eyes at a great cost. If only in like measure we could awaken to what has been done for us in a sphere even more sublime, the work of Christ in revealing the gracious God in action and so making known to us the face of Him who holds all lives and liberties in His hands, before whom in the last resort we all must come for judgment and final destiny! Until that majestic truth has dawned upon us and stilled our hearts to awe and wonder we can hardly hope to experience the joy of the Christian life. The tree must first send its roots down before it can breast the storms that will inevitably bear down upon it: so must the Christian sink his roots in the depths of the riches of the love of God. And he will be most likely to learn of the truth and power of the Gospel who links his life to the fellowship of his Church.

The *Shorter Catechism* has a memorable definition of repentance: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner,

out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience." These classic words sum up the truth of the matter—we must sense our sin and realize God's mercy—but the order is wrong. What breaks an obdurate heart is not the horror of sin, but, as we have stressed, the mercifulness of the God against whom we have sinned. As Dr. T. W. Manson has written: "Repentance is not striving to bring one's conduct into line with the Law or with the higher righteousness demanded by Jesus. Neither is it a painful scrutiny of one's motives with a view to substituting, let us say, unselfish for selfish motives. It is a return of the whole personality to God, a submission of the will to His will, the acceptance of His sovereignty. . . . The change itself is made possible by the new experience of God as Jesus reveals Him, that is, as the merciful loving Father who seeks and saves the lost." We need to flood our minds with the light that Jesus casts on the character of God and of His Kingdom. Most illuminating are those characterizations in the parables and sayings of Jesus. Woe unto those who falsify the character of God—those who put the letter of His law above care for human beings He has created, who offer Him meticulousness in externals in place of charity, nicely proper tenths instead of mercy! He pillories the one-talent man who excuses his own craven timidity by slander against the divine nature, the envious one who questions the fairness of His generosity to the eleventh hour labourers, the unforgiving servant who abuses the grace of His pity, the Pharisee who in His Temple substitutes self-praise for the contrite heart before the throne.

But the old Catechism answer is wise in the fine phrase "repentance *unto life*." This is no vain wringing of hands over the irreparable past. Nothing is irreparable with God. It is a forward movement that is here begun into a new and richer existence. Hosea has set it down in this way according to the Septuagint: "Let us follow on to know the Lord, and we *shall find Him as a dawn prepared*," as Dr. W. M. Macgregor comments, "a delightful phrase, which is a little gospel in itself. . . . Our day is nearly done, men say, and we now are bound to travel on in deepening gloom, to darkness and eclipse and defeat. It is not so,

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Manson, in *The Mission and Message of Jesus*, p. 328.

says Hosea; I tell you of One who can give you the dew of the morning again, and an outlook over the radiant possibilities of a whole new day. . . . His prevailing mercy admits of no delay, and is not checked even by the gathered power of years of evil living."<sup>2</sup> The divine appeal is always with us: "Son, give me thine heart" (Prov. 23: 26). But that Old Testament word is supplemented by the New Testament assurance that the Father has first given us His heart, as the prodigal experienced and the elder brother with all his churlishness could not forfeit: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

That life to which we are called is pictured before us in the words of Jesus. They draw us as the everlasting hills draw the fascinated traveller. So lofty these snow-capped peaks that kiss the clouds, so far away from us! But there is One who has climbed before us and He accompanies us all the way. And the air is tonic on the hills. We grow in strength as we breathe His grace. Out of such a facing of the heights comes the brave and humble spirit acceptable to Almighty God.

*And Faith.* Mark 5: 25-34; Mark 11: 20-25; Gal. 15-3: 7; Rom. 3: 21-26; Phil 3: 8-12; Heb. 11.

Faith is a word of manifold meaning. It has its place in the language of the common man and also in the systems of the theologian. We see it as a charming gift in the little child: it is that which for him holds open the door of the wonderland. That is a form of the gift we wish the years did not take away. It lingers in souls of rare spirituality, enabling them to look out upon the world with an undying expectancy: they never lose the child's eyes of wonder; so generous is their trust in the unplumbed mysteries of this engaging universe that they move through the dubieties and disillusion of the scientific and materialistic age with an undimmed ardour of outlook. There is moreover a measure of faith interpenetrating all our life's relationships, whether we are conscious of it or not. "Trust," wrote Dr. Robert Law, "is the key to life. In the end all our great certainties are rooted and grounded in trust. We take each other on trust. It is the bond by which human society subsists; our loves and friendships live by the mystic sense of trust. We take nature and its laws ultimately on

<sup>2</sup> *Repentance unto Life*, p. 17f.

trust."<sup>3</sup> In *The Winds of God* Dr. John A. Hutton sets out on one of his whimsical excursions of thought. Resolving not to believe, he plays with the dreadful idea that there is no God over us. "We set out upon our life tomorrow, as usual. But stop now. In the first place it is not as usual. . . . Indeed, I don't see why, if I take my own denial seriously, I should set out at all. Why should a man set out for anything, in a world which means nothing? To me it is clear that a man who thoroughly denies God, to be consistent should stay in bed. For, the moment he gets up, he accepts the whole idea of purpose in life: and if you are going to allow purpose at all you open the door once again to the Great Purpose—the Purpose which has for its end the Will of God."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the plain man thinks chiefly of faith as "trusting God in the dark." Faith in the Christian sense passes out of the region of a vague and mystic hope and becomes the form of knowledge that is held with conviction. It is a fire of assurance and certainty, an actual "seeing Him who is invisible."

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11: 1). Or, as Dr. Moffatt has finely rendered it, "Now faith means that we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see." "Faith is a certitude without proof," says Amiel. "Being a certitude, it is an energetic principle of action."<sup>5</sup> In Hebrews that is displayed in a long roll of the men of action—Gideon, Barak, and the rest of them. But faith in the general theological acceptance of the term is derived rather from the Gospels and the letters of Paul.

Faith is a quality that Jesus required of those upon whom He sought to do any good work. It was said of certain cities that there He could do no mighty works because of their lack of faith. It was necessary to show an open-mindedness and confidence in Him before He could release upon any soul the power that lay within Him. The centurion had it, pagan though he was: accustomed by his profession to rely upon arms and force, he yet recognized there was a region where a power not material had sway; as a man moved by love for his servant he had touched the margin of that world, and in Jesus he recognized one who had authority within that realm. To people like the woman with the issue of

<sup>3</sup> *Optimism and other Sermons*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> P. 85.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal*, 7th Feb., 1872.

blood healing was possible because there was sensitivity to an overworld of the spiritual of which Jesus was the incarnation. Thus faith in the New Testament is not so much the intellect's acceptance of certain statements of truth as the personal self-committal of a man to the gracious unseen power that was revealed in Jesus. So also in Paul faith is that in man which answers to the grace of God: it is the soul's outreaching to receive and accept the love of God that approaches us in and through Jesus Christ. The prodigal son in coming home with the desire to be received back as a hired servant was casting himself on the love and goodness of the Father. So with us in our revulsion from sin and desire for amendment: we cast ourselves without reserve on that exceeding love of God made known to us in Jesus especially in His self-giving on the Cross. We recognize we have no merit of our own, no deserving, but we trust the Christ who, expressing God's mind alway, ever went out in pity and solicitude and healing to meet any soul in need or sorrow. In Christ alone God declared His will to redeem us, and to Him alone we look for salvation. As the *Shorter Catechism* finely expresses it: "Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel." Dr. Alexander Whyte in his commentary adds a word of John Ruskin: "I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered, has been the effort of man to earn rather than to receive his salvation."

*The Teaching and Example of Jesus.* Matt. 5: 7, 13; Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 13.

Christians inevitably turn to the perfect life of their Master for inspiration and guidance. There surely was manhood at its highest excellence, human powers directed to holy purposes by a will disciplined and consecrated, the nature God had designed coming to flower at last in a flame of glory. To meditate on the Gospel story is to be awakened to the beauty and potency of grace and pity, purity and peace, love and sacrifice. The flavour of character portrayed in the Beatitudes, the integrity demanded of mind and motive, the appeal to sincerity in prayer and action—all these in the Sermon on the Mount strike home upon the sensitive soul. Where else is there such a ringing certitude that God in His

mercy and majesty is fashioning His Kingdom among men, that the doors of man's prison house are open, that the gladness and liberty now available on the human plane are but a foretaste of the grandeur to come? In the light of that knowledge a man sets his face to the field of human endeavour, knowing that this earthly warfare is not fought at his own charges nor for his own petty interests. Recognizing that his chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever, he sets his course by the eternal principles of love and righteousness. Unequal in his own strength to the perils of the way, he yet remembers that, having risen with Christ and set his affection on things above, he is able through grace to mortify the fleshly members and to present himself as a living sacrifice in the service of his Father and brethren.

But how shall a man translate the ideal into the concrete? How far can a life and teaching belonging to the first century amid conditions of a simpler society and in a slave state supply the guidance needed for the complex texture of industrial and international civilization in the twentieth century? If every man is to sell all and give to the poor, to lend to anyone who asks him expecting nothing in return, to be a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake, will not society pass through chaos to extinction? The individual can turn the other cheek; but what if the nation cannot be persuaded to that policy? If according to the parable God Himself does not forgive the unforgiving servant, but hands him over to the tormentors (Matt. 18: 34), how shall it be wise or possible to forgive seventy times seven an individual or a nation that brings ruin and desolation on the innocent, and how can there be punishment except by methods of force? The practice of lending without interest, in obedience to Luke 6: 35, may be the delight of a good man without nearer responsibilities, but can trade and commerce be organized without the principle of fair returns for capital involved? If "Go not into the way of the Samaritans" (Matt. 10: 5) had been erected into a dogma, how would the early Church have heard the call to make disciples of all nations?

We must remember in the first place that Jesus often spoke to concrete situations to meet the needs of particular individuals and in times of immediate crisis, and never intended such utterances to be treated as general laws. Secondly, His continual campaign was against the oral tradition of the Rabbis that was

being erected into a hard and fast legalism; and surely then it is betraying Him to convert His utterances into a system of law. How often He makes clear by His handling of a situation that it is the letter which killeth and the spirit which giveth life. The very fact that He never wrote out any dictates, but met each case as the Spirit of God gave Him utterance, can only mean that the same illumination is at hand for us: it was expedient that He should go away, but the Spirit was to come to guide us into all truth. Is it not remarkable that the greatest of all His disciples, the Apostle Paul, makes but few quotations from the actual words of Jesus, but yet carried out His ideals and principles with unexampled loyalty? If human life were static and could be carried out by a set of rules, God would have made robots and not men. It is of the very essence of our nature as spiritual beings that conditions must be fluid and infinitely various. As our muscles without exercise become flaccid and useless, so our moral sense would atrophy did we not have continually to use our discernment and conceptions of value and choose everlastingly under the guiding of the Spirit between right and wrong.

The Indian trail that led by forest and marsh, lake and portage, is not the road that best fits the automobile or the aeroplane: routes change as conditions alter. As the centuries pass and the forest rushes back where settlements once thrived, the treasure marked on the map by the old trail of long ago would be hard to find. But, given guiding by the unchanging stars and the sun, the directions would hold for all time. Jesus left men not an ordnance map, but a compass, not a path that could be charted only if life remained the same as in Syria of long ago, but a set of guiding principles that are changeless as the stars and the sun. First He set down the law of love towards God—and that meant putting foremost in our affections the Kingdom and its righteousness; then He set next the law of love towards our brethren. Thus centred immovably, believers must, in accord with His teaching and within the fellowship of the Church, follow the Spirit's guiding, so that Paul facing the Romans and their peculiar problems had one counsel to give, and writing to the Colossians in Asia had other warnings and exhortations—yet all according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus his Lord. The Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us.

*To Abide Within the Fellowship*, Acts 2: 42-47; Eph. 4: 1-6; 1 Cor. 1: 9-13.

As God the Creator set men in families, so God the Spirit has gathered the redeemed into fellowship. The Christian is not intended to be a lone ranger. As his characteristic quality is love, the unit of the Christian organism is a company knit by the closest of spiritual ties. The first disciples had to break with their families and friends: ostracised by official religion, they had to seek a new association. The book of Acts describes this assembly most distinctively by the word *koinōnia*, which signifies a partnership or sharing. The sharing of the material goods of life was but symbolic of a sharing of their whole life, social and spiritual, and this sense of togetherness has ever marked the Christian Church. As Jesus confronted individuals and claimed men one by one for the Kingdom, so He also called brothers, pairs of them, into the first band, as if to carry family affection into a larger fraternity. But these first Twelve were singularly diverse in character and attainments, a doubting Thomas alongside a passionate Son of Thunder, an impetuous Peter beside a guileless Nathanael; for the test of love is to hold in fellowship the unlike and dissimilar. There is a richness in the society that can maintain unity in diversity: there is the continual interflow and exchange of qualities and properties that ripens and enlarges the individual and that in combination enhances the range of the whole.

The Christian society must ever retain that genius by introducing to each other and holding together in strengthening bonds of understanding the butcher, the baker, and the candlestickmaker. Often in a community the Church is the one meetingplace for the stolid builder and the clever watchmaker, the cultured librarian and the unlettered but Spirit-filled tailor, the shrewd banker and the working gardener. As a cross-section of trades and professions it is but carrying on the first tradition of Jew and Greek, barbarian and Scythian, bond and free. All join together in the common knowledge of their need and sin and their indebtedness to the one Lord and Saviour. As modern invention has abolished distance, and by radio, telephone and plane made one society throughout the earth, so in a deeper unity the ecumenical movement of the Christian Church binds all nations and continents. How much misunderstanding would pass out of the

relationship of labour and capital and out of the bitter hates of race and race, East and West, if only the Christian fellowship drew still closer its professing membership throughout the continents and the islands of the sea! The fellowship of individual churches has made possible the missionary enterprise, and the missionary enterprise has built bridges across many yawning chasms of misunderstanding. Each Christian Church has enriched the civilization of its age and continent, infusing throughout its home and family life the spirit of love and promising eventually to displace the ruthless competition of commerce by goodwill and co-operation.

The individual, however great his gifts or graces, cannot make effective his contribution to the whole if he tries to work as a lone prophet. For a few such there may be a place, but for the many it is by sending their roots deep into the soil of the Church that they will yield a harvest for humankind. The Spirit can work through the individual, but the peculiar sphere of the Spirit is the Church. Recall the counsel of "a serious man" given to John Wesley in his early manhood, when he had been greatly affected by the *Imitatio Christi* and Law's *Serious Call*: "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember, you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." Within the fellowship of the Church have grown up the golden Scriptures, the glories of the hymnody, the soul-stirring music of Johann Sebastian Bach, the treasured liturgies, the books of devotion, the whole language and piety and testimony of the religious life. And how much the spread of education, the arts and sciences, owed in pioneer stages to the Church! The Church is the Jerusalem that is the mother of us all, and it is from membership in her that we can draw most fruitfully from the gathered traditions of the past, and share most lavishly in the comradeship and joy of the spiritual life of today. Within her fellowship we are kindled to devotion to whatsoever things are true and honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report; we are moved to emulate every spiritual excellence, and, sharing in the necessities and anxieties of the saints, we come to know the height and breadth and depth of Christian faith and hope and love. Rubbing shoulders with all sorts and conditions of men, we

\* Quoted by A. Birrell, in *Collected Essays*, p. 118.

broaden our sympathies and deepen our social aspirations, eschew division and class antagonism. We come to know ourselves and seek to promote in others the joy of peace and unity.

*Give Heed to Prayer.* Luke 11: 1-13; Luke 18: 1-14; Luke 22: 39-46; Luke 23: 34; Phil. 4: 6; Eph. 3: 14-20; James 5: 16.

Prayer is in one aspect the loneliest of human acts. A man removes himself like the Master, as it were, a stone's throw from his closest friends, and casts himself down in the presence of God alone. The unseen ladder where the ministering angels ascend and descend touches the pillow of the solitary. It is of the essence of religion that the individual soul communes in deepest intimacy with the God who calls each one by name. Our creatureliness demands that link with the Creator and Lord of our life. This is no mockery of mere self-persuasion, the bringing of the rebellious self into harmony with an inscrutable will that knows no change. It is a truly personal God who in the silence meets us, hears our plea, and ministers the grace the expectant soul requires. It is a real encounter with the Almighty who is also the All-Merciful. One whose ear is open and whose hand is ready to heal and to help as was the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry. By this act strength is given from above and more things are wrought than this world dreams of. Did not Heraclitus say that you cannot find the boundaries of the soul by travelling in any direction? He who, in faith, asks, seeks, knocks, receives bread, power, entrance. Importunity is encouraged by the same Jesus who had sometimes, as in Gethsemane, to be content to say: "Thy will, not mine, be done." As flowers open receptive to the sun, so in prayer the spiritual awaken to the inflow of a divine energy. "We must not conceive of prayer as an overcoming of God's reluctance, but as a laying hold of His highest willingness."

But solitary prayer is quickened and enlarged by the intercession of the many. The Lord's Prayer forms no chain out of "my" and "mine", but out of "our" and "us." If Jesus often prayed alone all night, He went as was His wont on the Sabbath day to the synagogue and shared there in the fellowship of common prayer. Jesus cleansed the Temple that the Father's house might be the house of prayer for all nations. He pictured His society as

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Trench

a Temple in which we are all living stones; and if He thought of the very stones of the earthly house as breaking into praise (Luke 19: 40), then surely we living stones must be vibrant with prayer and praise. We cannot read the letters of Paul without realizing with what intensity Paul had prayed with and for his converts.

Intercessory prayer is the life blood of the Church. It sweeps into our consciousness the needs of all men everywhere, and especially focuses our thought on those upon whom the burden of life has fallen most heavily, earth's countless sufferers and mourners. By its mere repetition we thus come to an awareness of and sensitivity to the wider human realities with the resultant deepening and enriching of our sympathy and sense of responsibility. Once we have set the world's heartbreak before God, we have been compelled to face the call of duty or obligation as it falls upon us. To lift up before the divine pity the warring world of our time is to sharpen our own conscience in relation to the rights of our cause and at the same time to challenge the Christ-likeness of our attitude towards those who are our enemies. Rightly conceived, prayer is not the partisan appeal of two sides to the same God to give incompatible victory to each, but rather the purging of both contestants in the divine sight and the acceptance of that wisdom and righteousness that is higher and nobler than our limited conception.

Moreover intercession is never merely a chorus of human voices. "The Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8: 26). We have our Great High Priest: "Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7: 25). "Nowhere is the Church so literally the Body of Christ as when she offers Intercession. No act more closely unites her with her Lord than when, vitalized by His life, instructed by His mind, and guided by His spirit, she pours forth her soul in entreating God's blessing for mankind. She is there indeed the representative of the seeking Saviour. She is there with all the company of the Saints before the Altar of God, offering her own life for the life of the world, that the world may be reconciled to God."

Thus intercession is not to be valued merely by its reaction on ourselves: that is less than half its virtue. "The effectual fervent

\* O. B. Milligan, *The Ministry of Worship*, p. 39.

prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5: 16), and how much more the unified supplication of the many, laden with the anguish of bitter need! We believe that by prayer the windows of heaven may be opened and a blessing poured forth that outreaches the range of our thought and expectation. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? On Calvary it might have been argued that God could not by the same act bless persecutors and persecuted, and yet in the final disposal of that tragic event did He not both answer the cry of dereliction and transmute the desire of Caiaphas that one man should die for the nation?

#### *To the Reading of Scripture.*

"From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3: 15-16).

Such is the classical definition of the value of Scripture. The records in the Old Testament of how God has spoken and still wills to speak to those who have ears to hear, the pages of the New Testament in which Christ becomes alive again to the believer, those writings in which the Spirit has harvested so discerningly of the faith and love and hope of the early Church—such is the treasure trove given into the hand of every Christian for his nourishment and growth in grace. Read in large tracts, the Bible fires the imagination with the splendour and awe of the righteous acts of God; read intensively, as psalm by psalm, or parable by parable, or pondered verse by verse, passage by passage, it confronts us with challenge, rebuke, consolation, as the Spirit ministers to our varying need. There are times when the words fall on deaf ears, times when we misconstrue and even pervert the teaching; for human unreason leads us astray: we must be in the spirit if we are to handle rightly the Word of God. To appreciate, *e.g.*, a prophetic passage or a letter of Paul, we need the patient study that fills in the background and lights up the historical situation, and to that must be added the Spirit's guiding

that makes the episode of long ago contemporary to us. The anger of Jonah at the sparing of repentant Nineveh becomes at the touch of the Spirit our own resentment at the suggestion of forgiveness for the national enemies of today. Paul's counsel to those who are troubled about meats offered to idols becomes apt and modern as we are confronted with the problem of alcoholic beverages in the society around us. The pacifist teaching of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah shines out as strangely disturbing when we see it suggested for the India of today. The experiences of the Psalmists marvellously parallel our own oftentimes, and their greater faith rebukes us of the twentieth century who have the larger light of the New Testament and the example of Christian martyrs to strengthen us. There is no mood of the soul, hardly a problem of living in this complex age, that cannot be illuminated and resolved by an encounter with the Word that the Spirit makes alive. Inspiration, condemnation, light and power for daily living—all are there for the student who is willing to be taught of God. But, lest ignorance and partisan blindness betray us, let us use all the aids that modern scholarship can give us to explicate the text of Scripture, and let us turn to the open page only after we have sought the receptive heart and the guiding light of the Spirit.

Those who are not orthodox believers sometimes exhibit an appreciation of the grandeur of our Bible that might well put us to shame. In a preface to a series of Scripture "passages chosen for their literary beauty and interest" these words occur from the pen of Sir James Frazer, a scholar who had an unequalled knowledge of the world's religions: "The reading of it breaks into the dull round of common life like a shaft of sunlight on a cloudy day, or a strain of solemn music heard in a mean street. It seems to lift us for a while out of ourselves, our little cares and little sorrows, into communion with those higher powers, whatever they are, which existed before man began to be, and which will exist when the whole human race, as we are daily reminded by the cataclysms and convulsions of nature, shall be swept out of existence for ever. It strengthens in us the blind conviction, or the trembling hope, that somewhere, beyond these earthly shadows, there is a world of light eternal, where the obstinate questionings of the mind will be answered, and the heart find rest."

\* Quoted in J. H. Moulton, *The Christian Religion in the Study and the Street*, p. 226.

The reading of Scripture in church is sometimes taken as a convenient opportunity to look round and let the thoughts go wool-gathering. That is an appalling irreverence. Read appropriately in all the dignity and beauty of the Authorized Version, what passage is there that cannot touch the mind or imagination? This is an appointed act in the worship of God. It is the soul seeking after God if haply he may find Him, as in a psalm like the forty-second, or it is God speaking His momentous truth for us men and our salvation—as in John 3. Let the reader fall out of view, the pulpit and every object that meets the eye, and conceive that out of a great silence, out of the heart of the sanctuary, a divine voice is breaking forth to declare, to plead, to protest, to console, to convict. Let us concentrate all our soul's power to listen and to wait with expectation, and it may be with us there in the holy place as it was with Isaiah in the year that King Uzziah died, or as it was with John of Patmos when he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day. There is a momentum behind the hallowed Word, a glory that springs forth from the sacred page, a mystery that enthalls the questing soul where divine grace reaches out to touch and transform our human need. That is a supreme moment in the sanctuary when in an atmosphere electric with expectation to the thousand listening souls the preacher, borne of the Spirit to a higher plane, speaks the healing and uplifting Word of God.

*To Common Worship.* Is. 6; Luke 4: 16; Mark 11: 17; Acts 16: 13; John 4: 24; Heb. 10: 25.

Worship is at once the unveiling of the Divine Presence and the response of the human soul. It is a movement from God to man and from man to God. The sanctuary is the place that *God* has appointed, the place where He comes in all the plenitude of His grace to meet face to face with those who are constrained to acknowledge Him as the Author and Redeemer of all life. The Creator has ever been minded to communicate Himself to His creatures. In the beauty of the garden, in the loneliness of Bethel, in the glory of the burning bush, in the heights of desolate Sinai, He chose to confront men and let them hear a whisper of His voice. From the golden sunrise and red lingering sunset, from the vastness of the flaming firmament, from the terror of the thunderbolt and the flash of the lightning, from the splendour that is spread as a garment on river and lake, meadow and forest, on the



cloud-capped mountain and the restless stretching sea, God has spoken mystery and has constrained man to draw near and seek communion with the power behind the glory. Within the soul He has spoken in the still small voice, in the quickening of the moral conscience, in the need that must have speech with One higher and holier. In the joys and sorrows of individual lives, in national movements, even in the midst of war and tumult, out of the crises of history, the divine voice is ever calling demandingly. Thus comes that face to face of the Creator God and the created man that is worship. We must needs acknowledge the hand that has fashioned us, the wisdom that has guided us, the love that has redeemed us. Our nature cries out for that hallowing contact, and God in His mercy has drawn near and given us foretaste in worship of the final glory that is to come.

From the worship of the Hebrews we derive the rich legacy of the Psalms; in such a glimpse as Isaiah 6, we see the wonder and the glory of the throne on high, the mystery and the majesty of the God of the Old Testament. In the vision of the Apocalypse, chaps. 4, 5, we stand in awe before the praise and honour ascribed in the heavenly heights to the Author of our salvation and to the Lamb that was slain. The letters of Paul, the Magnificat in Luke, the prologue of the Fourth Gospel, radiate the spirit and language of worship in the early Church. With our coming together on the Lord's Day we enter into that heritage and join our voices to the cry of all creation in homage to the Lord God Almighty which was and is and is to come and to Him who has the keys of life and of death.

These are days when men have a new community conscience. Our lives are so interwoven that we stand or fall together: the war and its unnumbered perils brought home to us all this unity and interdependence. Must not that common life be lifted up to the God who is the Creator, Preserver, and sole Redeemer of its life? Are there not social sins, community plague spots, calls upon our common conscience and joint endeavour, which should be laid before the holy altar of the God of Righteousness? Does not the common weal depend on the integrity, devotion, self-giving, unselfishness, love, charity, and goodwill of all its members, and can that spiritual linkage be sustained in strength unless it is sanctified, dedicated, baptized into the spirit of Christ? Common worship is surely the consummation of the community life and spirit. Where

there is no vision the people perish; and how shall a man see visions and dream dreams except he be found in the spirit on the Lord's Day?

There is always the odd person who claims that he can worship alone, and there are the many who prefer the sanctuary of the maples to any regular service of worship. Those who thus cut themselves off from the Christian communion would be surprised to be branded as graceless borrowers, and yet such they are in that they really carry into their solitary or their individualistic worship emotions and intimations of reality they have derived from the common Christian heritage. To ponder a Bible under the birches or to sing a hymn on sunset point is really to borrow from the ordered tradition of the Church. To let the soul outreach in prayer seeking Him who made the beauty of earth and air and sky is not *full* Christian worship unless it go on to sing the praise of Him who died. By all means let us seek God alone sometimes under the cathedral of the woods or in the music of the lake shore; but let us not forget that it was in the old country church or in the city congregation that we learned the imperishable truths of our religion, and that we thus have a debt to pay to our fellow-believers, and especially to those who come after us, that we share in and fully maintain the regular worship of the sanctuary. Would any one who loves his country wish to absent himself from those grand community assemblies of worship when dire peril threatens the state or when solemn national occasions like a coronation call all men to give thanks and supplication to Almighty God? Then why should any devout soul care to absent himself from the regular service when the redeeming acts of the Gracious Father are remembered and His cause the world over is borne up in prayer before Him? Then the community should best realize its oneness and rise to the height of its living experience when it makes solemn acknowledgment of the Over-ruling Majesty on high.

*And the Sacraments.* Luke 24: 30, 35; Acts 20: 7, 11.

The climax of common worship is found in the Sacraments. In baptism is declared that amazing grace of God that comes to meet us at the threshold of life and will sustain us to the end. Every baptism is an occasion when we must be stirred anew to give thanks for that grace and take our share of responsibility

that that grace be mediated through the fellowship of the Church. The fitting place for that taking and renewing of pledges is the sanctuary of God. In the Lord's Supper the central act of God's redemption through the Cross of Christ is set forth in symbol and the Redeemer Himself is Host at His table. Surely every soul that acknowledges its own salvation and every one who realizes his own need must be there to give thanks and to receive anew. Opinion will differ as to how often the rite should be observed; but all who know the human heart with its truancy and its lapses into worldly ways will confess the need for seeking the Living Presence of the Saviour and renewing with thanksgiving our vows and prayers at His table. It is good to be recalled to the central reality of the faith—the Love that has condescended to tabernacle among us and redeem us from our sin—and there is no other way so effectual for bringing us back to the centre as this public celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Do we not often notice that as the saints leave the act of worship there is a trail of glory on their faces?

*As Those Who are of the Kingdom of God.* Luke 4: 16-21; Luke 6: 20-37; Mark 12: 13-17; Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Pet. 2: 13-17.

The Christian citizen has a very definite call to service in this world order. As a colony of heaven we are not removed from this present order, but rather have a responsibility heightened by our membership in a spiritual order. The poet with a song in his soul must needs sing it out through the imperfect medium of words. As the individual has set before him the imperative "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect," so the community is laid upon our conscience by the simple petition "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in *earth* as it is in heaven." It is not in human power to bring the Kingdom; but, having in our heart a picture of the heavenly realm, we cannot but strive to realize for men upon earth some foretaste of that perfect life to come. As sons of God we are called to live here and now in the spirit of love and righteousness that befits our final destiny.

Too often the Church has been betrayed into an otherworldly policy of indifference to this age and time. Many in the days of the early Church looked for the sudden coming from heaven of the Kingdom that marks the end of the age, and they felt in consequence divorced from earthly and temporal obligations. More-

over, the early Church was a feeble few in a great world of heathendom, and in the hands of a despotic Rome which allowed no democratic rights to her subjects. Yet even under that limitation Jesus did not despair of citizenship: He said "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." Paul made full use of his Roman citizenship to forward his missionary activity. He even set up the counsel of loyalty: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13: 1). So also even in the midst of persecution the author of 1 Peter urges: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him . . . for so is the will of God" (1 Pet. 2: 13ff.).

In estimating social duty Jewish piety made much of works of pity and charity; and there is an obvious appeal to us Christians likewise in the care of the needy, the widow and the orphan, the unfortunates of every class. But Jesus did not merely stop holes in an old order. He rather set in motion forces creative of a new order. In modern states, furthermore, we are free citizens under the liberty of the Spirit of God. Constructive citizenship therefore is the Christian obligation. Man is a spiritual being: his interests must have precedence over profits or machines. Man is a person, not a mere "hand" or chattel to be hired at will and thrown on the discard without care for his welfare or the well-being of those dependent on him. Man is a brother for whom Christ died: therefore the state, the employing corporation, the individual trader, must give heed to the fact that immortal creatures are not mere market commodities to be bought and sold. Over little children Jesus cast a protecting shield; so must the Christian state. Education and child welfare are central, not peripheral, concerns. In the Christian view there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, male nor female, bond nor free. Those racial distinctions, class or cultural distinctions, sex differentiations, must go. On such principles as these the Christian citizen must ever be urging betterment of conditions in the society of which he is a voting member. The principles of Jesus cannot recognize man-made barriers at any frontier of human life. We are called on to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10: 5.)

The reformer must remember the warning of Amiel that

“right apart from duty is a compass with one leg.” Engrossed with thoughts of what society owes to him, he must not forget what he owes to society. And the Christian must not be the impractical saint in a hurry. He must admit that there are more ways than one of achieving social ends, and fellow-citizens equally sincere may stand for other ways of procedure. There are always genuine believers in the dictum: Improve the character of your citizens, and conditions will improve of themselves without legislation. The Church, it must be remembered, is a spiritual organism, and is not to be harnessed to the machinery of any party; it is a powerhouse which supplies light and heat, not the factory which turns the raw material into goods. There will always be differences of opinion as to how far the Church should be related to the political world. Some will point to the Lutheran Church in Germany and claim that there is a church which has kept strictly to a narrow spiritual function, eschewing political action, and see the result today—in a people that has needed leadership and has not found it in men of goodwill. Others will point to the political machinations of the Roman Church and show how that has depreciated her religious influence and led her into spheres of worldly intrigue. Really it is a matter where it will often be hard to draw the line between moral testimony and political activity. In our impatience it will be well to remember that our Lord Himself was more tolerant and large-minded than His disciples, and so be willing to grant the rightness of motive of those who do not go with us all the way (Luke 9: 49, 50). Already it seems evident that the post-war world will be minded for a more drastic reconstruction of the social order than has before been attempted; and, if we may judge from the Malvern report, the Scottish *God's Will in our Time*, and similar utterances, the Church is determined to set Christian principles in the vanguard. Yet there is the counter demand: Let the Church be the Church.

Our world rings from end to end today with the call to this new social order, and we hear loud and clear the watchwords of democracy and freedom: liberty, equality, fraternity. There is a willing and ardent responsiveness everywhere to this challenge from the disinherited and the sufferers of many lands. Blue prints of a fairer society are placarded before our eyes, and hopes spring freely from the disasters and frustrations of the yesterdays. War and competition abolished from the life of nations as peace and co-

operation possess the stage under international agreement! Gardens to bloom profusely where now stand the “dark Satanic mills” where human labour has been cheap to hire and honest toil has been a soulless drudgery! New standards of food and health, and spacious homes in place of crowded, evil-smelling tenements! No youth denied its larger opportunity, no old age a prey to the terrors of want and loneliness!

But by what power can these mansions of promise be built and on what foundations? Victory alone cannot make a true peace nor equality a real brotherhood, nor will bricks and mortar and state subsidies create a New Jerusalem. A society that dissolves its Lord's Day into a weekly frolic can know no true rest. A society which loosens the marriage tie for frivolous oddities of temper cannot know the love that creates a home. Humanity that is made in the image of God cannot live its life off centre. Manhood cannot reach its full stature without the Christ, and womanhood has a passion of devotion that the Man of Nazareth alone can satisfy. Political organizations are empty frames until they own allegiance to eternal principles.

Where is there a social conscience that can rise above the national and racial except in the Church of Christ? Where is there a power by which to lift the mass of human clay except the power of God? Where is there a hope that will still live when the fashions of the passing hour die away except the Christian Gospel?

“We are to oppose the new paganism in the name of humanity, justice, liberty, brotherhood, and the indefeasible value of the individual human soul. That answer is well enough, so far as it goes, but I am sure that it must go further. These indeed are the ideals of the Christian ages, or some of them, or at least they sound very like them, but in the Christian ages they were all deeply rooted in something bigger and grander, in something that was no mere ideal but an eternal reality. They were rooted in the love of God as manifest in Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . It was Christ who taught us the indefeasible value of the individual soul. It was Christ who taught us the meaning of *fraternité* when He said, ‘One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren’ (Matt. 23: 8); and St. Paul when he said that ‘we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another’ (Rom. 12: 5).”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> John Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, p. 125f.

That new democracy we envisage with peace and plenty, freedom and the liberal arts, must needs remember the way by which she has come into her inheritance. I have heard tell of a pushful spider that heard the call to live a larger life than a cold and leaky roof supplied, and so he spun out his fine filament one morning and slid down to a lower level, where there was good prospect of many winged passers-by. There he spread his net large and wide, and soon he grew plump and prosperous on the folly of poor flies. Overfed and sleepy to the point of forgetfulness, one day he was roving round his estate, when he lighted upon the gossamer thread on which it swung. "What's the use of that?" he asked and snapped the filament. So perished a good home and good hunting.

There is one sphere where Christian statesmanship is now overwhelmingly imperative—the international sphere. Guarantees must be devised which will secure peace among the nations, and that end so much desired will require standards of equity and freedom from vindictive passion that the Church can best proclaim. It is not too much to say that the sanity and righteousness and goodwill of the new order will depend on the realism with which Christian principles are asserted and applied.

*A Foretaste of Final Redemption.* Col. 1: 12-13, 27; Eph. 2: 4-10.

The Christian who thus disciplines himself in the fellowship of the Church and the service of the Kingdom becomes himself under the hand of God a transfigured personality. As Saul the proud Pharisee became Paul the slave of Christ, and the impetuous opinionated Peter became the martyr who turned back into the city of death, so the common self-seeker undergoes sanctification. Following Christ and entering into the spirit of His living, we may by grace grow towards the fulness of His stature. Not that we all keep on the way of progress or all attain to the heights. But there is the beginning of life on a higher scale with finer values and a richer content. We enter into that serenity that only they can know who have sought and found in God the Father who does not fail.

Is sanctification the end of the story? That old theological word does not mean "perfection." It describes rather a state or process. When Paul addressed the Corinthian Christians as saints he did not mean that they had attained: he knew only too

well that they were at most "old strugglers" or halting beginners. As "saints" they were those whom the Spirit of God had chosen, separated from the thralldom of pagan gods, and set facing Christwards. Before them was a long and arduous process. The *Shorter Catechism* defined sanctification as a "work of God's free grace," as distinct from a single "act" like justification. It is not the triumph of a moment "to die unto sin and live unto righteousness." Sins are not easily mastered: they cannot be eliminated one by one by painful concentration of *human* effort. The method is rather indicated by the counsel: "When thoughts of sin press on thee, look over their shoulder seeking another thing, the which thing is God."<sup>11</sup> Victory comes by "the expulsive power of a new affection." He who keeps before him "the image of the crucified and victorious Christ" appropriates to himself a force that draws him onwards. He is marked for sanctification who keeps open the lines of communication with the eternal world, feeling the impact on his life of a great deed of redemption and the constraining grasp of the Holy Spirit. Love and prayer are the power lines. The true pattern of life is triangular: God, myself, and my neighbour. "Sanctification is essentially the return of man from the exile of . . . individualism and his incorporation in the triangle of relations to God and to his neighbour to which his life belongs."<sup>12</sup> Such a life never loses wholesome contact with the concrete, the tragic, and the real, and yet it has by reason of the inflow from above the foretaste of redemption.

<sup>11</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ch. 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Expository Times*, vol. li. p. 275b (1940).