

[Commencement Address at the Westminster Presbyterian Church Sabbath School, 58th St. and Chester Ave., Philadelphia, Delivered Tuesday Evening, June 28, 1932]

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit ... for to one is given thru the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge ... but all these worketh the same Spirit dividing to each one severally, even as he will.”

The pleasure I have in being with you on this occasion comes from meeting other members of the same body, other members doing the same work, and so I shall be happy this evening to “impart unto you some spiritual gift; ... that is, that I may stimulated by you, each of us by the other's faith.”

II Need of Xn Education.]

Tonight we have assembled for the Commencement services of a group of Christian teachers. To those who have directed the course of study, to your servant who is honored by your invitation, but above all to the Lord we confess, it will be gratifying if this proves to be a Commencement indeed. So great is the need for Xn instruction that no one can be too eager to begin his task. Owing to the accidents of my professional position, I have had, if not the pleasure, then the opportunity of seeing that need in its starkest reality.

Among college students, would you not expect to find some knowledge of the elements of Xty? Even if the students have not come from specifically Xn homes, still they with their families represent educated America. They constitute the acme of American civilization. In preparatory school and in two or three years of college they have learned a great deal about zoology, economics, and Italian art. They possess a bountiful fund of information, as any may determine by judicious inquiry. They are the products of our lauded educational system, and should know, not the intricacies and details perhaps, but at least the elements of the Christian religion.

For a half a dozen years now, I have thought it wise to include a course on the history of Ethics, a discussion of early Xty along with Pagan systems. When the students learn that Xty, in contrast to all pagan systems, considers that man is dead in sin, of himself incapable of pleasing God, wholly inclined to evil and therefore needs regeneration, their surprise and lack of comprehension shows that they had never before heard of the new birth. They begin to ask questions. Last term one student inquired for the most authentic sources of early Xn thought. I replied by rattling off, in one breath to the amusement of

the class, certain twenty-seven books. The student seemed a little bewildered and timidly asked again - "Did you include Paul's Epistles in that list?"

This inability to recognize the books of the N.T. is by no means an exceptional or exaggerated instance. One might refer also to an examination given some years ago to 1000 high school boys and girls. Less than one third of them were able to write the first seven words of the Lord's prayer.

But the students are not the only guilty ones. I have in mind of a certain professor in the Univ. of Chicago, I have in mind an author whose gilded paper covers in the book stores blinds our eyes, I have in mind a self styled scholar in Italy, I have in mind the President of one of our colleges. Not all their blunders are as elementary as those of the students, but being the result of a definite anti-Xn animus which has caused them to ignore well known facts, their blunders and they themselves are far more reprehensible.

Nor again, and this is a sadder part of the truth, are those outside the churches alone in their ignorance. If opportunity, position, and profession of belief bring responsibility, then the church members are the greatest offenders. May I here refer to another college student, raised in a nominally Christian home, member of a church, and even thinking of entering the ministry. Only a month ago he stated to me that religion, Xty included, was primarily an affair of the emotions. If you understand current trends of thought, you recognize that this view attempts to evade the question of the truth, the intellectual truth of Xty. A religion may have no historical basis, it may be neither true nor false, but if it produced agreeable emotions during this life, it is according to this view, a good religion. Now while what is true for one is true for all, what is agreeable for one obviously may be disagreeable for another, Indeed if Tammany and the Phil. gang have their way with Prohibition, a lot of people will suddenly become religious. Of course it won't be Xty, but since they say we sober people are limited in emotional experience what right have we to set up our subjective emotions as normative for them?

If any of us has a religion he wants all the world to accept, he cannot afford to base it on emotion.

Now, whether the emphasis on emotionalism has led to an ignorance of doctrine and truth, or whether ignorance has led to emotionalism, at any rate the two go together and the Church today does not know what the Lord has revealed for it thru Paul. Ask yourselves how many of your acquaintances, members of churches, could give an intelligible account of even one of Paul's epistles. You know as well as I, how few there are. I have heard it said that a hundred years ago, in addition to the Bible, the

members of the local churches read the Westminster Confession. But now, in spite of the subscription to it which elders are required to make how many elders, not to mention the church members, have ever read the creed of our church? And what is still worse, our church has not only forgotten the distinctive Presbyterian creed, it has noticeably departed from the Xty common to all the historic churches.

Thirteen hundred Presbyterian ministers in a signed statement, the Auburn Affirmation, have declared that Christ's death to satisfy divine justice and his resurrection from the grave, are not to be regarded as essential of our religion. Young men who wish to enter the ministry ought not to be required to believe in Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. And those who control our church either have signed that statement or are in open sympathy with it.

“For example, the gentlemen who seconded the nomination of the present Moderator of the Assembly is a signer of this Modernist Affirmation. ... Four out of eight ministerial members of the Permanent Judicial Commission, practically the supreme court of the church, are signers of the same Modernist document. So is the editor of the only official journal, the Presbyterian Magazine. So is the General Secretary of the Board of Nat'l Mission and so are six out of sixteen ministerial members of that Board. So is the Candidates Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, who has the delicate and important duty of interviewing candidates for the foreign mission field and of encouraging them or discouraging them in their purpose.”

To what greater disgrace can Presbyterians let their church fall? What more need be said to show the need of Christian instruction? In the face of the ignorance and paganism outside the church, and the ignorance and paganism inside the church, may not not plausibly conclude that our civilization is pagan, not Xn? The assumption on which nearly everyone thinks and acts today is the assumption of atheism. In business, in politics, in education, and practically in religious affairs, little or no thought is directed toward God. And when God is left out of account, we have atheism. It is not the loud mouthed atheism of the communists. One needs to be an idiot to agree with communism. But one needs to be wiser than serpents to avoid being deceived by a cultured paganism. Our civilization does not explicitly deny God, it suavely ignores him.

This picture is black, but I believe it is true. It is horrible, but it is not intended to be pessimistic. There have been times before when conditions were as bad if not worse. It is as unwise as it is un Xn so to blind ourselves with present darkness that the lessons of history and the promises of God go unheeded. Luther and Calvin, by the grace of God, effected a Reformation and God has promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church. What Luther and Calvin did, what Peter and Paul did, we can do. In the early centuries, Xty conquered paganism, and if it did it once it can do it again. We have no grounds for pessimism, the church and the gospel are not failures. God's word shall not

return unto him void but it shall accomplish what God pleases. God is sovereign, he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. A wholesome return to the Calvinistic theology, for which I am so enthusiastic, will prevent Christians from floundering in an un Xn pessimism during discouraging periods. The forces of evil cannot possibly succeed, but in looking forward to our goal, we need always to remember that there is no substitute for hard work.

Pardon for reading. If it were a less important occasion I should talk. But once in an Episc. Ch. I asked to be warned at the end of 20 min. - I had hardly begun and spoke at a great rate for 20-25 more min.

III The Purpose and Plan

By keeping the purpose clearly in mind, by carefully planning the work, our labors will not go unrewarded. To lose sight of our purpose, to work on blindly without plan, is to lose ground thru waste effort. Many of the churches and many more of the individuals have forgotten the purpose. However much financial support may be necessary in church life, the purpose of the church is not merely to meet its budget. Activity is not synonymous with progress. And if a church only goes thru the motions, no matter how energetically, its extinction would be no great loss. Part of the responsibility placed upon these graduates tonight is to point those they influence to the purpose of the Church.

Now, contrary to an opinion which widely prevails, the purpose of the Church is not education as usually understood. The church, and especially the Presbyterian Ch., has founded schools and college wherever it has gone. But its aim is not, or at least should not be the general increase of useful or pleasurable information. To sit about a table, politely to inquire concerning the principles of Hindoosim, Mohammedanism, and modern Judaism, and to stop there is of little value. Education is a tool, it can be used for good or for evil. Education makes men who are already good, better; it makes bad men worse. Those who expect by education to Christianize the social order would do well to recall the words of Dr. Patton, a former President of Princeton – Xtnize the social order, he exclaimed, one might as well try to vaccinate it. Mass education has its limitations judged even on its own standards. We must focus no longer on the mass but on the individual and with respect to him, not merely on his education but on his conversion. He needs not more information so much as a change of heart – or more exactly to translate the word repentance, a change of mind. Change not only his efficiency, but the direction in which he is going.

However while there are many who, affected by modern paganism, aim to educate only, there are a few who aim only to regenerate. Though the former group is our largest and most vicious foe, the

latter group cannot always be regarded as an assent to our cause. They are Christians, it is true, and I do not intend to obscure this fact. They are with Christ and not against him, and perhaps you think no remarks should be passed on them. But in my mind they injure the Christian cause by a onesided and superficial presentation. Considering themselves the most orthodox of all people, they are carried away with what the Reformers regarded as an unscriptural view of Christ's second coming. They hold not only that the Advent is imminent, which is may be so far as I know, but in addition they make a belief in the details and intricacies of future history necessary and indispensable for an individuals salvation. If you have not met such people, I have; and a good friend of mine, a thoroughly orthodox Bishop, made a collection of tracts preaching the need of this belief in order to be saved. I further know that their attitude affects their missionary activity. Since the end of the age is very near, they claim that permanent work and far sighted plans are useless. Argument and intellectuality are decried as the foolishness of this world. Don't argue, is the advice printed in my pocket testament. Missionaries, preachers, teachers, should traverse as much territory as possible, quickly and superficially give a *witness* to Christ, and let permanent improvement come from the personal and immediate work of him whose almighty wisdom never fails. Permit me to remark that had the Apostles and Reformers believed this they would not have been Apostles and Reformers. The purpose of the Church does not end at regeneration.

Of course, strictly speaking, regeneration, the change of mind necessary to make an educated sinner into an efficient saint, cannot be accomplished by human efforts. It is an act of God. And nothing that has been said was intended to modify this truth. Yet often God regenerates after certain preparatory work has been done by us his human servants. We are to press for a decision, we are to make the evangelistic appeal; we are to sow and water and He will give the increase.

The purpose of the Church, then, as I see it, your purpose in the work you are about to undertake, the purpose every church member should keep in mind, is twofold: Education and Evangelization, neither separated from the other. An emotional appeal is sometimes good; at any rate, some appeal must be made, but the best preparation for such an appeal is, in my humble opinion, an intellectual presentation and defence of Christianity. The people we meet are ignorant, they need to be educated, they need to be told what Xty is. They are warped by pagan ideas and philosophy, they need to be argued out of it. Those who decry argument as useless have not well studied the sermons and behaviors of the Apostles as recorded in Acts. Stephen argued in the synagogues, Paul disputed daily in the market places. Those who repudiate argument, though they call themselves orthodox Christians, have in their emotionalism and mysticism, in their tacit disregard for truth, intellectual truth, have I say, taken the first step toward Modernism. There may be times when argument is out of place, there may

be such a thing as too much argument, but our main trouble is too little. We must educate to evangelize.

But further we evangelize to educate. There is much learning which can be acquired only after regeneration. If I have not mistaken the sense of the New Testament, there comes, after the act of Justification, a long process of Sanctification. And I should like to point your attention to the fact that Sanctification is as much an intellectual process as a moral one. Once converted, we look forward to an eternity with Christ our Savior. If we expect a pleasant fellowship with him, we must be interested in his interests, we must have some knowledge of his mind. For what reason do you suppose God gave us such an extended revelation beyond what is essential for conversion, unless it was to fit us for a more satisfactory communion with him? The church members who know little about doctrine, those who are ignorant of the epistles, virtually accused God of not knowing how much he should have revealed. The Church as a whole need a large dose of doctrinal instruction. If the metaphor of a new birth implies a regeneration power above us, it also implies a new life extending from babyhood with its sincere milk of the word to maturity, progressively putting away childish things until we know even as we are known. In that great prayer preserved for us in Jn. 17. Jesus says: "This is life eternal" - and it is the best definition of eternal life I have been able to find - "This is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send even Jesus Christ."

I hope we have some accurate knowledge, and I trust we are willing, humbling but perservingly, to share what we know.