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THE RESURRECTION AND THE ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM.

There are various ways of approaching the study of early Christianity. One way is to begin with Paul. The writings that have come down to us in the New Testament under his name, so far as they are genuine, are primary sources for the history of the apostolic age. Pfleiderer, for example, begins his *Urchristentum* with the words: "One can only regret that we know so little that is certain about the first beginnings of the Christian Church, but the fact itself can not well be contested. Only from the time of the emergence of the Apostle Paul, in whose Epistles authentic information is preserved, does the historical darkness become in a measure illuminated; concerning the first beginnings of the Church, however, Paul gives but scanty hints (1 Cor. 15: 3ff.), from which a distinct conception of the process can not be obtained. This lack, moreover, is not fully supplied by the Gospels and Acts which were written later." [2] A more common way, however, even among those who share Pflei-

[1] An address delivered in substance at the opening of the ninety-fifth session of Princeton Theological Seminary on Friday, September 21, 1906.

[2] *Urchristentum*[3] I, p. 1. Man mag es bedauern, dass wir über die ersten Anfänge der christlichen Kirche so wenig Sicheres wissen, aber die Tatsache selbst ist nicht wohl zu bestreiten. Erst vom Auftreten des Apostels Paulus an, in dessen Briefen authentische Nachrichten

RELATIONS OF CHURCH HISTORY TO PREACHING.[1]

I shall make some remarks this morning on the connection between the course of study in Church History you have been pursuing and the work you are soon to take up as preachers of the Gospel in the Church. It may be taken for granted by you that Church History sustains important and intimate relations to the work of preaching, just because it has been given so large a place in the theological curriculum. Coördinated as it is with the other departments of theological instruction, all of which are intended chiefly to prepare the student to become a teacher of Christianity to the people, and occupying this position in every theological institution, we may expect to find that it exerts an important homiletical influence on the student. At the same time, it is a fact which all of us no doubt have observed, that ministers—certainly our Presbyterian ministers—employ scarcely at all, in the ministrations of the pulpit, the knowledge of the history of the Church they have obtained during their years of preparation. In this respect, the chair of History is in striking contrast to the chairs of Exegesis and Systematic Theology. Whether or not the preacher endeavors to preserve and to increase his knowledge of the original languages of the Bible whose words he is engaged in interpreting, at least by the use he makes of commentaries and expository sermons he continues, during his professional life, the exegetical studies which he began in the Seminary. I am happy in the belief that, from year to year, an increasing number of our ministers engage in the study of the Greek Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures. And I am confident that the sermon of the future, if this belief is correct, will possess a

[1] Informal address delivered to the Senior Class of Princeton Theological Seminary.

freshness and originality and authority far in advance of the sermon of the present day or of the last generation. For as one of the best of all writers on homiletics has said: "No study gives to the sermon of the preacher such a degree of authority and such an originality as does the study of the Bible."

It seems singular, at first sight, that one should speak of originality in connection particularly with interpretation.[2] The two would seem rather to be contrasted than associated. When we speak of originality, we are apt to think, not of the man who interprets the thoughts of others, but of the man who evokes from the recesses of his own mind thoughts peculiarly his own, as most likely to proclaim truth in an individual or original form. But the writer from whom I have quoted begins the profound and striking address in which he asserts Exegesis to be the great source of originality, with the statement that the one absolute originator and creator is God Himself; that He alone evolves or calls from nothing into being both thought and thing. Starting with this great truth, he directs attention to the statement with which Bacon opens the *Novum Organum*, in these words: "The opening of one of the most sagacious and significant of modern treatises in philosophy reads as follows: 'Man, as the minister and interpreter of nature, does and understands as much as his observations on the order of nature with regard either to matter or to mind permit him, and neither knows nor is capable of more.' "

What Bacon thus asserts is that man can be original in his statements with regard to nature only as he studies it and correctly interprets it; only as, by careful observation and classification of its phenomena, he comes more and more to understand it, that is, to penetrate beneath its appearances to its original elements. In the same way, unless man studies and classifies the elements of Revelation by careful scrutiny of its phenomena in the languages in which it was first given,

[2] Read Dr. Shedd's admirable discussion of this subject in his chapter on Eloquence and Exegesis. *Homiletics,* pp. 7ff.

he cannot interpret it or be original in his preaching. For there is a profound difference between individuality and originality. Individuality is the mere peculiarity of the individual mind as compared with other minds. But originality, like that of Bacon himself or that of Plato, is the quality that emerges upon the close and continuous study by the individual mind of the original elements of truth. And as a quality of discourse, it is such a statement of common and underlying principles as will attract the attention and command the assent of those whom the speaker addresses, because these original elements of truth are, in a sense, the common possession of both. Hence, it is just in the proportion in which one deeply, earnestly, continuously studies the words of God—words of the Word of God—and is able accurately to interpret them, that his preaching will be fresh and striking and commanding, and in the profoundest sense of the term original. This originality and the authority of which I have already spoken are the peculiar qualities which that part of the Seminary curriculum, embraced under the title Old Testament and New Testament Literature, imparts to pulpit discourse.

The relations between Systematic Theology and preaching are somewhat different. Systematic Theology is truth in a system, a system of truth. It is truth organized by means of a formal principle and correlated to other truths. The aim of the systematic theologian is not merely to unfold the truths of Scripture, but to unfold them according to the laws of thought, and to correlate them to those *a priori* elements which the Bible itself presupposes. Hence Systematic Theology presents Scriptural truth in a series of articulated propositions—propositions that we call doctrines. Systematic Theology is Biblical truth in a logically correlated form. So our symbols, expressing as they do the systematized beliefs of the Church with regard to the statements of the Bible, are theologically constructed. To put it in another form, Systematic Theology is the Bible presented in a discursive way. And it is perhaps for this reason,

namely that Theology itself is constructed according to the laws of discourse, that that department of the Seminary seems most closely related to the sermon or the discourse itself.

In this country, and particularly in our Church, the study of Systematic Theology is perhaps the most popular, at all events, it is the most influential, of the studies in the Theological Seminary. And it is the study most uninterruptedly and faithfully continued after the Seminary course has been completed. Certainly this was true when I was a student in the Seminary; and though an era of theological indifferentism appears to have begun, I have the impression that it must always be and, therefore, is still true. If it is, I can go on to say, that every minister—and particularly every Presbyterian minister—feels obliged to have a theology of his own, and to be able to state it and defend it. I suppose there is no minister of our Church who has not made up his mind upon most of the commonplaces, *loci communes,* of theology; who is not able to state with more or less of distinctness his own view of the being of God and the modes of his subsistence, of the relations of God to man, of the state of man as created and as fallen, of the nature and the design of the atonement, of the application of salvation, of the sacraments, and of eschatology or the last things. But one could not so confidently affirm that all ministers of our Church have adopted an intelligent view of the constitution of the Pentateuch, or of the resulting theory of the history of the religion of Israel, or of the propriety of retaining the conclusion of the Gospel according to Mark in the New Testament, or of the interpretation of the parable of the unjust steward, or of the right of the verse concerning the three witnesses to a place in the first Epistle of John. Our ministers for the most part are systematic theologians, and their sermons are prevailingly theological productions. They are not so generally exegetes as they should be for the purpose of securing freshness, vitality, originality, and authority for their sermons.

But if in preaching they have sacrificed Exegesis to Systematic Theology, they have sacrificed History to both of these departments. I mean by this, that the use of the history of the Church in the preaching of our ministers has been far less conspicuous than the use of either Theology or Exegesis. If you will look, as I have done, over the published sermons of the ministers of the English-speaking pulpits, you will find that most of them have done very little in the way of historical preaching on the historical portions of the Bible, and almost nothing at all on the post-Biblical portions of the history of the Church of Christ. Occasionally a volume of sermons on some of the characters of the Old Testament or of the New is printed. But in the most even of these cases the sermons are substantially doctrinal or practical, and only nominally historical.

Take for example, to refer to sermons that are well-known, the sermon of Bishop Butler on Balaam. I think that sermon one of the finest pieces of homiletical composition in the range of the English pulpit in the eighteenth century. But the sermon upon Balaam is not upon the history of Balaam but upon his character. It does not deal with him in his historical relations in any large way. It does not even tell his story. It is simply an endeavor—a successful one indeed—to unfold the lessons which the obvious character of such a man should teach those whom at the time Bishop Butler was addressing. Or take Robertson's sermon on the character of Eli. It is a discourse of the same kind. Though Eli is made the subject of the discourse, no one would think of going to the sermon of Robertson, with that title, for the purpose of learning anything at all concerning the priests of Israel during the period of the Judges. Of course, all sermons on the history of the Church of the Old Testament or of the New are not of this character. Some of the biographical sermons of the late Dr. W. M. Taylor of the Broadway Tabernacle have infused into them a large historical or narrative element. But even these sermons, on the whole, are doctrinal and expository

and not historical. Now no one values sermons of this kind more highly than I do. I believe them to be most useful, most interesting, most impressive. But only a moment's reflection will convince you that their superior freshness and impressiveness, as compared with abstract or doctrinal sermons, are due to their historical or narrative element. While they are not historical sermons, they derive no little part of the value which they possess as orations or discourses from this historical or narrative element, however small comparatively it may be. This fact ought to make us ponder carefully the question whether, after all, History may not with profit be far more largely employed in pulpit discourse.

To return, then, to the Seminary course and to repeat what I have already said, namely, that those who organized the curriculum evidently intended History to be used by the preacher as a preacher; let us consider for a moment the relation History sustains to the student during the course. What place does History occupy in the curriculum? What is the peculiar and distinctive influence which the founders of our Seminaries intended that it should exert upon the student's mind?

In answer to this question, let me begin with the statement that History is the least indispensable of the departments of the course. If it were necessary to give up one of the chairs in this Seminary or any other, and I should be asked the question; which chair, Hebrew, Greek, Systematic Theology including Apologetics and Dogmatics, Practical Theology, or History could we best dispense with, I should, without a moment's hesitation, answer: we can not give up the study of the Word of God in the Old Testament; we can not give up the study of the Word of God in the New New Testament; we can not give up that great department which seeks to correlate the truth of God to other truths that lie embodied in the human mind, and which by means of them organizes the truth of God into a system; we can not give up the practical department which combines the truths derived from the studies of these other departments into the

form required by the minister as a teacher and guide of men. If we must omit one study, the one study that can be omitted is History. But this is not a necessity. We are not called upon to give up any of these chairs. The question before us is what is the influence which History, as a part of the course, is intended to exert upon the student? And to this question I answer: it is the influence of generous culture. History is the broadening, the cultivating, the catholicizing department of the Seminary. It is the study that correlates the Christian life to all life, that presents Christianity not as a system but as a great historical force energizing in and on the life of the world. It presents Christianity in its contact with the world as modifying the world. It is, therefore, the most encyclopædic, the most general and least specialized of all the studies in the Seminary. It is the department in the study of which one is brought into contact with most subjects and most books. The result is that more than any other it cultivates the student on his literary and humane side. Hence, while if one department had to be dispensed with, History would be selected; yet, being present in the course, there is no more useful department in the Seminary. And if useful in the Seminary to the student, it ought to be just as useful to the preacher himself after his Seminary career is closed, because the studies he pursues are largely the studies he will pursue hereafter. And the need of a humanizing, broadening, cultivating course of studies will be no less necessary to him after his active work has been begun than it is during his Seminary life. If for no other reason than this, I seriously urge you to continue throughout life upon the basis of the course you have been studying here, the earnest study of History.

But I desire particularly to bring before you at this time some of the considerations which will justify you in preaching Christianity in a historical form. In justification of sermons, which I shall later describe at length and which I will now simply call historical sermons, let me call your attention to the composition of the Bible itself. What is

the form in which God's Revelation has been given to us, or, in other words, what is the Bible prevailingly? Is it theology? Is it the exposition of older documents? Or is it history? Take the Old Testament and the New Testament together, regarding them as a single book; and you will find that more than one-half of the Bible is history. In other words, the original form in which the Revelation of God was given to man is not the theological form, not the expository form, not the systematic form, but the narrative or historical form. In God's Revelation truth is embodied; it is given in the concrete; it is made known in the career of a people, or is incarnated and exemplified in the life of an individual. And if you were asked what portion of the Bible, if all the other parts were to be destroyed, you would wish saved; you would unhesitatingly say, let even the Psalms of David and the Prophecies of Isaiah and the Epistles of John and the great Apostle to the Gentiles go, if they must go; but save above all else the four Gospels that preserve the history of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For from these Gospels we can construct a theology for ourselves; but without them we must fail because we can construct our theology only upon the basis of the Christian history.

Moreover, I ask you to note the fact that Christianity among the religions of the world is peculiar in that it is founded on historical facts in the sense that its great doctrines are the interpretations of historical facts. What, for example, is the fall but history? What but history are the incarnation and atonement and the descent of the Holy Ghost? What but historical processes are the work of sanctification and the conquest of the world by the Church; and what are the general judgment and the consummation of all things but the climax of the history of the Church and the world? I am sure that the more you reflect on the peculiar sense in which Christianity, even in its doctrines, is a historical religion, the more you will be convinced of the wisdom of the fathers in giving so large a place to History

in the curriculum of the Seminary; and the more rational you will regard my urgency in calling you to continue the historical studies you have begun during your Seminary life.

But to come to the historical sermon itself; there are many reasons of a homiletical or oratorical kind which justify and, I may say, even demand that the preacher from time to time employ this mode of discourse. These reasons I can state only in the briefest manner. And the first is the catholic and irenic character which the element of history gives to the sermon. In the discussion of a great doctrine a decided advantage is gained when the preacher presents the doctrine in a way that does not excite opposition. The best irenic presentation of the doctrine of justification by faith is a sermon on that doctrine presented in connection with the circumstances which led to its revival in the sixteenth century. Moreover, it is a well recognized law of discourse that the impact of truth concretely stated is far more powerful than the impact of the same truth when stated in abstract terms; and if this is true of every form of discourse it is true especially of the Christian sermon of which the end is to arouse the will to vigorous evangelical action. Nor is this all. A study of the idea of the sermon will lead you to the conclusion that it is not merely a lecture and not merely an oration. It combines in itself both didactic and oratorical elements. The preacher must not only present the truth clearly but he must present it dynamically. The sermon is a didactic oration. And history, just because it exhibits the living and dramatic movements of the truth, is the mode which most naturally yields itself to the construction of such a discourse. It is also true that the doctrines both of Biblical and of Systematic Theology derive from their careers in the life of the Church as narrated by Church History striking confirmation—confirmation indeed of the very kind which the orator can most favorably employ. And, finally, an individual doctrine can not be unfolded more forcibly in an oratorical manner than in closest association with the historical personage who illustrated or

defended it; so that even when the sermon is substantially theological it may well be formally historical. The mystery of the Trinity can not be presented in a form more profoundly interesting than in association with the heroic life of Athanasius the Great. And what is true of the doctrine of the Trinity as associated with Athanasius is true of the doctrines of the Sovereignty of God and of Justification by faith as associated with the lives and work of John Calvin and Martin Luther.

Justified by the considerations I have presented you may very properly, as I think, begin as soon as you become pastors the preparation of sermons of this kind. Your knowledge of the history of the Church derived from your studies in the Seminary, whatever may be its incompleteness and fragmentary character, is both fresh and far beyond the knowledge possessed by the congregations to which most of you will be called. You are in a position to teach them the history of Christianity. The knowledge and the cultivation you possess. And the department of Practical Theology has shown you how to put your knowledge into homiletical form. You will be denying yourselves the exercise of a great power and the exertion of a great influence if you hesitate and procrastinate. You should not postpone the writing of such sermons until your knowledge of history were enlarged; for you may be sure that you will study history very much in the proportion in which in the form of sermons you produce it.

Supposing you to be ready to adopt this mode of preaching, the first question which will naturally arise is one of proportion; what shall be the proportion between the number of sermons in which you shall preach the Gospel in the historical mode and the number of sermons in which you shall preach the Gospel in other modes? In reply to this question, I should say, that because the sermon of history will require wider reading and larger if not more minute study than your other sermons, you will do well not to think of preaching more than twelve during a year. These twelve you would

better preach in two courses of six; occupying six successive Sunday mornings or evenings at one period of the year, and six others at another period of the year.

As to the structure of the sermons; remember that in the first place they are to be sermons not lectures; that, as in every other sermon, so in these sermons the end is to move the will of the audience to action. The main object of the historical sermon is not to teach history, as the main object of the theological sermon is not to teach theology. Of all sermons the end is to move the will religiously. Hence the narrative or historical portion of the sermons should be written with reference to the movement of the will at the close of the sermon, or, as we say, by means directly of the application.

My experience leads me to believe that in sermons, history can best be employed in its biographic form. The historical sermons which I would commend to you are for the most part historico-biographical sermons; that is to say, the discussion of subjects of a historical character which easily connect themselves with a great personage in whom some great Christian movement is centered or some great doctrine or great element of character is embodied. For the purpose of presenting the life of Christianity in the world to a popular audience no method is so good as that of selecting an individual and making him stand vividly before the congregation in relation to the great movement or doctrine with which he is historically connected. You should tell the story of his life, relating him to the times in which he lived. Take a text and in language, always lofty, never familiar, describe the man and narrate his life; and then with oratorical vigor press home upon the people the evangelical lessons which such a life should teach.

Such a character is Athanasius. I remember that the first historical sermon I preached was on Athanasius. I endeavored to tell the story and describe the character of Athanasius, relating him to his times and to the great doctrine of the Deity of the Son of God. My text was the

opening verse of the first chapter of John: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The introduction set forth briefly the fact that while the Christian Church from the beginning worshipped Christ, paying him divine honors and looking up to Him as the Lord of the Universe, the doctrines of his Deity was not scientifically formulated by the Church until the fourth century. I went rapidly over the tentative efforts of individual theologians to formulate this great doctrine of the Church's primitive belief. In this way I was led naturally to the address made by Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, to a synod of his clergy in the city of Alexandria in the fourth century in which he affirmed the essential Deity of the preëxistent Logos. This brought me to the fact that he was antagonized by one of his presbyters, Arius, who charged the bishop with holding Sabellianism. The mention of Arius led me to state his views, and to call attention not only to the controversy which ensued between Arius the presbyter, and Alexander, the bishop, but also to the fact that in this controversy Alexander derived great aid from his archdeacon Athanasius. The mention of the name Athanasius gave me a good opportunity to tell the story of his early life. At that point then I took up his birth in Alexandria, the story of his early years, his entrance into the family of Alexander the bishop, his studies in Alexandria. The mention of Alexandria in connection with this subject and with Athanasius led me to speak of its library, its relations to the conflict that had occurred between Christianity and expiring Heathenism in the Diocletian persecution not long before ended, and in this way I brought the story of Athanasius up to the time at which the controversy between Arius and Alexander began. Having thus brought Arius and Athanasius into opposition to one another, it was not difficult to tell the story of their conflict, and of the widespread interest throughout the Eastern world which the controversy caused. Coming to great Council of Nicea in 325 I described the Council, the gathering of bishops from

all quarters—from Mesopotamia on the East to Spain on the West. There is no incident in the early Church history more exciting and dramatic, more interesting than the gathering of the Council of Nicea and its meetings under Constantine and Hosius. It was easy to carry the audience's attention as I moved forward to the result of the Council; and I remember that the attention which the audience gave to the repetition of the Creed of Nicea which announces the Deity of the Logos and the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son as well as the anathema upon all those who say that there was when the Logos was not—I remember, I say, that the attention the audience gave me at that point was more intense than the attention any audience had, up to that time, ever given to a sermon that I preached. Having told the story of the definition of the essential Diety of the Logos, I narrated the subsequent life of Athanasius himself as successor to Alexander. There is no more romantic and dramatic life than his during that time. Again and again he was exiled during the Arian reaction. After concluding the narrative of the life of Athanasius in relation to his times, and especially in relation to the doctrine of the Deity of the Son of God, I turned in conclusion to the lessons of the narrative. As I now recall them they were the following: First the narrative shows how the Church of God has been led to formulate the doctrines of Revelation. After the portrayal of the life of Athanasius in connection with the labors of the Church on the Trinity an opportunity was given me to eulogize the theology of the Church such as I never had before, and to attack those who supposed that within the limits of a brief popular article they could show contradiction in the terms of this great doctrine, upon which the ablest Greek minds had labored for centuries. The second lesson was that of Athanasius' life, his self-sacrifice for the truth. And in this connection, I remember, I quoted an eloquent eulogy upon Athanasius written by Hooker and to be found in his *Ecclesiastical Polity*. The third inference was the great truth, that the Saviour whom

the New Testament presents, is no creature, but the living and eternal God.

Historical sermons do not yield themselves readily to variety of plan; but there is no need of monotony, because variety comes from the variety of subject. The chapters of biography are constructed upon the same chronological plan, and all historical sermons must be constructed in the same way. After having written one sermon you will have no difficulty, if you possess the historical knowledge, in writing others.

In order to write historical sermons well, one must read the great historical writers, particularly those who have made the biographical essay or oration a severe study. I know no better essays for you to read than the well-known essays of Macaulay and some of the early essays of Carlyle, as the essay of Carlyle on Robert Burns and the essays of Macaulay on Macchiavelli, Warren Hastings, Lord Clive. Frederick the Great, the Earl of Chatham and others that will occur to you. Of course, I do not mean that you shall follow Macaulay or any other single writer in a servile fashion. I recommend you to study these essays for the purpose of learning how, in an oratorical manner, to tell the story of a life graphically, and to portray character vividly. Remember that this must be done in a large way. The man who dwells on small dates and small details, and does not learn to paint with broad strokes will fall short of reaching the point of excellence which he should strive to attain. One thing you need not fear. Do not fear, in telling the story of such a life as that of Athanasius, to take the time of your audience. There is nothing to which the people will listen interestedly for a longer time than the story of the life of a great and good man, who, with a heart that throbbed as their hearts throb, a man with passions like theirs, gave himself through life and to death in behalf of a great principle or a great truth or a great movement in the love of God. Be sure that, no matter what time you consume, your audience will be as attentive and alert at the

close as at the beginning and they will be in a frame of mind that will enable you to press home, with a power that will surprise yourself, the Gospel of Christ.

Finally, your people will respect you. They all think they know theology, and they all think they can interpret the Bible. But very few of them think they know history. In this mode of preaching you will be real teachers; you will have docile and delighted pupils; and you will teach your congregation, among other things, a lesson which all congregations need to learn; the lesson, namely, not to despise your youth.

Princeton. JOHN DEWITT.